



Mitchell River impacted by Sediment from Agriculture operations Help Needed from Members

BRTU is working with Surry County residents and organizations to address the sediment flow into the Mitchell River from Agriculture operations. We are trying to work with the owners of properties, the County commissioners and the soil and water conservation board to try to resolve the issue of sediment run off. We need help to organize this communication effort with officials and education of owners on the importance of Mitchell River and the buffer zone. We need members and friends to volunteer some of their time. Please sign up ASAP by sending an email to our chapter blueridgetuws@gmail.com or sign up on our website <https://www.blueridgetu.org/mitchell-river-action.html>.

Thank you

This summer the Mitchell River has seen excess sediment flowing into the river after rain storms. This is happening due to a change in planting from no till to crops that require tilled land. This loosens the soil and brings it up to the surface. Then if you have a very narrow buffer zone, it's a recipe for lots of sediment to flow into the river when it rains. So far two agricultural operations are the major contributors just above the delayed harvest section and an agriculture field around the devotion area.

If enough sediment flows to cover the bottom of the river, that will be the death sentence for the Mitchell River. The Mitchell River is the host of wild trout in its upper region, around Devotion and is also the host for the endangered Brook-Floater mussel. NCWRC has been planting the mussel in the river in an attempt to increase its numbers and habitat range.

Surry County recognized the importance of the Mitchell River with its pure and cold water many years ago. It put in special regulation to protect the river and mandated a 75-foot buffer zone from Kapps Mill Road all the way up to the county line. Over the years this got watered down by ordinances exempting agriculture. Unfortunately, these fields run almost the whole length of the same protected section currently. The river barely has a 25-foot zone or less in many areas.

In the last two years NC has lost five trout streams due to sediment from agricultural run-off. The Mitchell may be number six.

Many in Surry County are worried about the river's health and have been voicing their concern to the County commissioners, the DWR and other state regulators. BRTU has filed complaints to DWR (department of water quality) and NC Wildlife resources asking them to investigate the source of the sediment and take action to protect the river.



However, the Department of Environmental Quality's budget has been cut consistently over the past decade and is now roughly a third smaller than it was before the 2008/09 financial crisis. This is very worrisome given the emergence of new threats to water quality and public health since that time. There are currently over 1,000 impaired rivers and streams in North Carolina, and the Department does not have the capacity to meet and help address the numerous threats that these streams are facing. Regional offices are under-resourced and desperately need more staff capacity to provide prompt customer service to citizens who are impacted directly by toxic algal blooms, PFAS/PFOA (Gen-X) contamination of drinking water supplies, excessive stormwater runoff, increased sedimentation, and deterioration of aquatic habitats." So the Mitchell River waits in line for DWR staff to go inspect the river.

Please help the Mitchell River and all our NC waters get better by protecting its buffer zones and water quality. Click the link to help us with our efforts.

<https://www.blueridgetu.org/mitchellsediment.html>

Blue Ridge TU