

Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition, Inc. Valley River Watershed Restoration Project

Landowners' Most Frequently Asked Questions...

What is the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition?

HRWC is a local, non-governmental, conservation nonprofit organization whose mission is to facilitate water quality improvements in lakes and streams throughout the upper Hiwassee River watershed within Cherokee and Clay counties in NC and Towns and Union counties in north GA. For more than a decade HRWC has provided water quality education, funding for and implementation of voluntary watershed restoration projects and watershed planning. The HRWC leadership believes that for water resources to truly be protected, citizens within a watershed must understand and participate in protection and restoration efforts; however, the organization does not get involved in legislative or political campaign advocacy.

Why are we doing this work?

The biological communities of the Valley River near Andrews have been identified by the State of NC as impaired, primarily due to sedimentation. Streambank erosion is moderate to severe throughout the watershed contributing to sedimentation that affects biological communities in many of the Valley's tributary streams as well. The watershed restoration and protection work accomplished under this grant is designed to minimize streambank erosion, reduce sedimentation and help improve riparian habitat. We feel that local communities should take care of local problems.

What is required to participate?

You must own land along the Valley River and/or one of its tributaries in Cherokee County, NC and each owner listed on the deed must agree to participate in the project. Landowners should fill out an interest form completely. The HRWC Restoration Coordinator (possibly accompanied by a technician from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and/or the Cherokee Co. Soil & Water Conservation District) will visit your property to discuss potential work that could be accomplished and a contract will be negotiated.

Will I still own the land?

Yes. A Deed of Conservation Easement between the landowners and the Cherokee Co. Soil & Water Conservation District must be negotiated for at least 30 feet of streamside riparian buffer; however, you will still own the land.

What I can do within the easement area?

You will still be able to access and use the streamside land and river for recreation purposes. The types of vegetation and the placement of trees and shrubs can be negotiated to fit your desired use of the adjacent non-riparian property. The easement area may also be planted to attract certain types of wildlife. Limited removal of undergrowth and dead limbs is allowed under the easement, but under no circumstances will the landowner be allowed to bush hog the riparian area.

The Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition is a nonprofit organization that strives to facilitate water quality improvement throughout the upper Hiwassee River watershed, across political boundaries, while honoring local initiatives. For more information contact Tony Ward by calling 837-5414 or by email at restore@hrwc.net.

How much will the project cost me?

Nothing. Not only is 100% of the project cost paid for by the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund grant; but you may be eligible for substantial tax deductions as a result of donating the Deed of Conservation Easement.

Can I still sell the property?

Yes. You are still the landowner. The terms and conditions of the easement negotiated by you will transfer with the property to the next owner. Since these measures are designed to protect land from further erosion and enhance the aquatic community of the river, your property value will likely increase as a result of the project.

Where can I get more information?

If you have access to the internet, the HRWC web site contains descriptions and photos of past restoration projects, many right here in the valley: <http://www.hrwc.net> You can also find information about the primary funding agency for this project online at <http://www.cwmtf.net>

If you don't have access to the internet, HRWC's restoration coordinator will be happy to give you a personal tour of some of the completed restoration sites. Some local landowners that have already participated in a project are also willing to talk with you about their experiences.

Why should I trust HRWC?

HRWC was incorporated in 1995 as a private nonprofit organization. Since 1999, when we received our first grant for stream restoration work, HRWC has restored 8.5 MILES of streams and rivers in the Brasstown Creek and Valley River watershed. In fact, we made so many improvements in the Brasstown Creek watershed that the State of NC removed it from the list of impaired waters in 2002. We worked with nearly 60 individual private landowners; no projects have been conducted solely on public lands. Of the more than \$5.2 million in grant funding HRWC has brought into to the upper Hiwassee River watershed for water quality improvements, nearly 90% (\$4.7 million) was spent in Cherokee and Clay counties for actual on-the-ground stream restoration projects. Further, approximately \$3.2 million went directly into the local economy to pay contractors, materials suppliers, and labor associated with the work. Although we have a long history and track record for restoration in this area, we will still work to earn *your* trust!

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