



Cullasaja River Project

Introduction: The Cullasaja River Watershed is located in southern Macon County and is part of the Little Tennessee River Basin. There are several NPDES Stormwater Permits for businesses on the river. There are also several NPDES wastewater dischargers on the river. Although point sources of pollution exist, many of the problems are due to NPS pollution, principally sediment and nutrients. Macon is now the fastest growing of the mountain counties, with a 15% increase in population between 1990 and 1996. Continuing road development has accelerated the pace of flood plain development and loss of riparian buffers. Areas of high population growth accompanied by accelerated urbanization surround this portion of the river. According to the Basinwide Water Quality Management Plan the non-point sources of pollution in the upper watershed are likely stormwater runoff, construction sites, numerous golf courses and roads.

Development has dramatically changed the runoff response and hydrology within the watershed. Degraded stream channel conditions are a result of these hydrologic changes. In addition, development to the edge of the stream has resulted in lost riparian vegetation. This project will address problems associated with streambank instability, and increase awareness within the watershed with regard to simple management alternatives that are less damaging to the stream.

Objectives: The project will inventory problem sites and implement streambank stabilization and riparian restoration over a three-year period on 2800 feet of the Cullasaja River.

Methods: Streambank stabilization and riparian restoration along the river will be administered by Save Our Rivers in collaboration with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, Trout Unlimited and other key partners. Activities will include:

1. Restoration project areas will be stabilized using bioengineering methods. The banks will be sloped to necessary ratios to contend with

- storm flows. Coconut fiber blankets will be placed on the banks for stabilization until the vegetated root system becomes established. All projects will be reviewed and permitted through the DWQ.

2. Riparian restoration techniques are based on continuous riparian zone exclusion and natural revegetation. Restoration usually occurs in conjunction with streambank stabilization projects. Only native species will be used to revegetate riparian areas.

Project funding will be setup for a 75/25 percent cost-share program. The cost-share will allow Save Our Rivers, using the 319 grant, to pay 75% of the project with the landowner paying 25% of the total costs. Successfully managing non-point source (NPS) pollution requires not only knowledge of science and technology, but also an understanding of the local resources and economy.

Output: The project funding will result in the restoration of 2800 feet of streambank and riparian area in the Cullasaja watershed. At least 60% of the restoration efforts should be concentrated in the non-supporting reaches upstream of Mirror Lake. The grantee will also

FY	1999 Incremental
Agency	Save Our Rivers, Inc.
Funding:	
	Federal: \$210,000
	Nonfederal: \$140,000
	Total: \$350,000
Contract:	
Project Area:	Macon
NC Basin:	LITTLE TENNESSEE
Subbasin:	040401
HUC-14:	06010202020
NPS Category:	700 – Hydromodification
Functional Category:	700 – Watershed Projects
Task BMPs:	580 – Stream Protection
	584 – Stream Channel Stability

hold three public meetings, three project workshops and field days, and six local watershed meetings. The contractor will be required to submit restoration plans to the DWQ. The final report should also incorporate this information with post-construction documentation of site recovery.

WRAS Consistency:

The Cullasaja River above Lake Sequoyah, and its tributary Mill Creek are included in the 1998 303 (d) list. This watershed is the highest restoration priority in the Category I-HP Upper Little Tennessee HUA. The project will accomplish targeted implementation activities, primarily streambank restoration within major portions of the upper Cullasaja River watershed, meeting Phase III of the WRAS framework. Initiation of this project coincides with grassroots efforts to strengthen local involvement and the development of a stakeholder group focused specifically on addressing issues in the Cullasaja River watershed.

There is a long history of watershed advocacy in the Little Tennessee River basin. Two major actors in this arena are the Little Tennessee Watershed Association and Save Our Rivers, Inc. Each of these groups has worked to protect and enhance the water resource values in the mountain area. Activities through these organizations have raised awareness regarding watershed protection and numerous environmental protection opportunities.

The director of the Asheville DWQ region, has initiated a stakeholder program focused on identifying and prioritizing watershed and water quality issues on the Cullasaja River. The initial set of meetings has resulted in the development of a Cullasaja steering committee to work on

issues associated with watershed and water quality protection. Members of the stakeholder group represent interest groups active in the Little Tennessee Basin. These include the Little Tennessee NPS Team, Save our Rivers, and the Upper Cullasaja River Association. The committee will also include members from the towns of Highlands and Franklin, and the county of Macon. The function of the committee is to improve communication and respect between the differing stakeholders in the watershed, and promote cooperation in achieving water quality goals. The committee will establish subcommittees to address tasks identified in the initial scoping process.

Tied in with this organizational process is the funding and implementation of the DWQ project to develop watershed restoration strategies in 11 impaired watersheds. This 3-year project, funded through the CWMTF, will facilitate watershed investigations on 11 of the highest priority impaired watersheds on the 1998 303 (d) list. The Cullasaja River is one of the three mountain watersheds where restoration assessments will be conducted.

While it is clear that more than just streambank restoration is necessary to restore water quality conditions in the Cullasaja River, the Cullasaja River Streambank Restoration Project will be implemented in conjunction with other ongoing programs as noted above. Much of the restoration work will be concentrated in the headwaters area where development is most dense, and impairment most severe. Success of this program will be the seed for additional restoration in the watershed.

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