

Haywood Waterways Awards Water Quality Stewards

By Haywood Waterways Association | Jan 13, 2014¹



Photo by: Haywood Waterways Association

Members of the Bethel Rural Community Organization receive the Pigeon River Award

Haywood Waterways Association honored two organizations and one individual for their work to protect and improve the waterways of Haywood County in 2013. The awards were given at their annual membership dinner on December 5.

The Haywood County Environmental Health Department was recognized as Partner of the Year for their work to identify and repair failing septic systems. Since 2006, the partnership has acquired \$134,000 in grants to help homeowners. In most cases, those were low to very low income households who otherwise could not afford to make the repair.

“We are very thankful for the grant money to help make many of the septic repairs at little or no cost to low income families”, said Seth Early, with the Environmental Health Department. “It is nice to help the homeowners do the right thing without breaking their bank.”

The grant funds enabled 31 septic systems repairs, which eliminated as much as 11,000 gallons of untreated waste from flushing into streams each day. Since the partnership began, bacteria levels in Richland Creek and other streams have dropped significantly.

Haywood Waterway's Volunteer of the Year was Richard Alexander. Dick received this award for his many years of service and dedication to the waterways of Haywood County. In the early 1990's, Dick saw a need for Haywood County citizens to take responsibility for keeping their waterways clean. He helped start a program called Project Pride to raise awareness of litter, which eventually gave rise to Haywood Waterways. Dick has been on the Haywood Waterways Board of Directors since day one and continues to serve.

Dick has also been a long-time volunteer in the Volunteer Water Information Network (VWIN) program. The water chemistry monitoring program was launched in 1996 and he was one of the original volunteers collecting samples. Dick believes Haywood County water quality has greatly improved in recent years and at age 96, he remains active, even helping deliver for Meals on Wheels.

The Pigeon River Award was given to the Bethel Rural Community Organization. This award is given to an individual or organization that has made a significant contribution to protecting the land and water resources of Haywood County.

Through community outreach, grant writing, and positive relationships with landowners, the organization has assisted with eight permanent conservation easements protecting 268 acres, including more than 50 acres of floodplain and 12,000 feet of stream and river frontage. They have helped landowners register more than 1,000 acres into the Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District program, which protects farmland and restricts development. They also advise landowners throughout the county about these land protection tools, in turn protecting hundreds of rural acreage throughout the Pigeon River watershed. Land protection is a valuable tool for keeping Haywood County streams healthy for all users.

David Curphey, President of the Bethel organization, said, "It is very gratifying that HWA recognizes the diligent work we do in farmland preservation and water quality improvement. The Bethel and Cruso areas are the headwaters of the Pigeon River, so the work we do has significant effect on the entire river. We are pleased that we have been able to apply our tools for improvement throughout Haywood County. In addition to the worker-bees in the organization, our success is attributable to generous sponsors who recognize the need and provide the financial means to accomplish our goals."

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