

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Richland Creek

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Richland Creek needs fish.

The Haywood County, North Carolina stream starts near the Blue Ridge Parkway at Balsam Gap and flows north, along highways 23 and 74, through Waynesville and into the Pigeon River.

A history of water pollution decimated fish populations in the stream, a story similar to the Pigeon River. In recent years, both streams have become dramatically cleaner, and the Pigeon has been the focus of an aggressive and successful effort to restore native fish species. Under normal circumstances, the success of the Pigeon River effort would rub-off on Richland Creek, with fish swimming up the creek to colonize good habitat. However, the dam at Lake Junaluska literally stands in the way.

In response, the North Carolina Division of Water Quality leads an effort to work around the dam to restore Richland Creek's diversity. Working with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, the University of Tennessee, and other partners, they're capturing native fish like rock bass, Greenfin darters, and warpaint shiners from surrounding streams and using them to stock Richland Creek.

Field work for the project began earlier this spring as biologists released thousands of fish into Richland Creek. The stocking of the native, mostly non-game fish, will continue twice a year for three years. Biologists will assess the fish populations in 2012 and periodically monitor them afterwards to gauge the success of the project.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.