

## Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

### Kudzu

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Yancey County's South Toe River is one of the most beautiful in the Southern Appalachians. Its headwaters are protected by Pisgah National Forest and Mount Mitchell State Park and it flows through a sparsely developed landscape all the way to its confluence with the North Toe River.

That isn't to say the river is without its threats. One of those is visible from the highway 19 bridge over the stream. On the south side of the bridge sits a large patch of kudzu, an invasive vine, native to Japan. Kudzu's use and spread as a tool for erosion control is well known to many Southerners. The result has been fields, forest edges, and even buildings, swamped by the vine. Unfortunately, as can be witnessed on the South Toe River, it can even fail its reputation for erosion control. During a heavy rain, soil can be seen washing into the river beneath the kudzu leaves, becoming a water pollutant and degrading the stream. A diverse mosaic of native plants would've retained the soil, and helped keep the river running clear.

Kudzu's aggressive spread also makes it a threat to Virginia spiraea, an endangered plant found beside a handful of mountain rivers. This spiraea has carved out a niche growing in stream-side areas where high-water scouring keeps other plants out. However, this challenging habitat doesn't thwart kudzu, which in places threatens to over-top the native, and imperiled spiraea.

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