

New River Conservancy working on phase 2 of a river restoration project near Brookshire Park

By Moss Brennan
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Crews work on a restoration project along the New River near Brookshire Park.
Photo by Moss Brennan

BOONE — The New River Conservancy is working on Phase 2 of a New River restoration project near the Ted Mackorell Soccer Complex and Brookshire Park in Boone off U.S. 421.

Phase 1 involved a partnership between multiple organizations to implement 2,800 linear feet — or a little more than seven-and-a-half football fields — of river restoration. Now, the NRC is partnering with Watauga County, town of Boone, Brushy Fork Environmental Consulting and a potential private land owner to expand the project another 1,700 — or four-and-a-half football fields — linear feet upstream.

“Both of these projects are aimed at improving water quality and habitat, while also providing recreational opportunities,” said Chelsea Blount, the project lead. “A river restoration project like this one is designed to prevent erosion by installing engineered rock and log structures which mimic the natural environment known as Natural Stream Channel Design.”



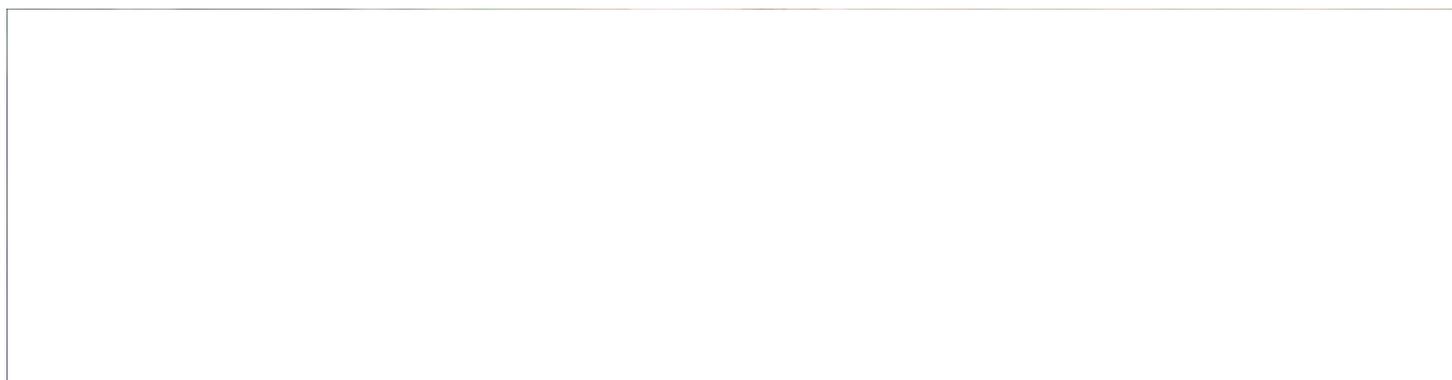
Once those structures are installed, Blount said the contractor slopes the banks to a more gentle grade to allow the river to get up into the floodplain during rain events.

“This function is vital for rivers because it gives the river a chance to expand into the surrounding floodplain, slow down and soak into the soil,” Blount said. “After sloping the banks, the vegetated strip of land along the river, also called a riparian buffer, is restored with native shrubs and trees which, to name just a few benefits, shade the water to keep it cool, keep the soil from eroding and provide habitat.”

There are also several wetlands within the land owned by the Town of Boone near where the NRC project is taking place. Blount said floodplain wetlands provide many benefits including habitats for waterfowl, recharging groundwater and reducing the negative impacts of a drought, improving water quality, storing water to prevent downstream flooding and promoting carbon sequestration.

Blount said since the restoration projects is paid for by a funding agency, it has to have some sort of land protection as required as part of the project to ensure the investment made with public dollars is protected from development.

“In this case, one side of the river is owned by Watauga County, and the other owned by the town of Boone,” Blount said. “Both entities exhibit exactly what it means to be a steward of the natural world. NRC has worked with both the County and the town on many successful projects to protect and improve water quality, so we knew that the investment in this project would be protected.”



Originally, Blount said the town of Boone had committed to protecting approximately 18 acres of bottomland along the river but went “above and beyond” to protect 30 acres. The protected bottomland will be restored with native trees with help from the High Country Audubon, and the existing wetlands will be expanded and enhanced

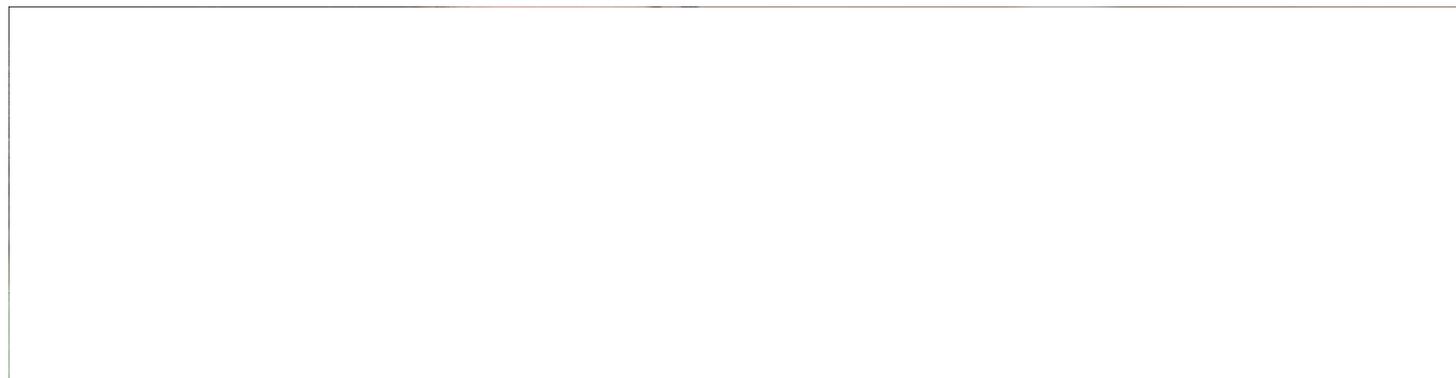
to give the New River “room to breathe” downstream of town.

“This project exhibits exactly the kind of actions that need to be taken throughout the entire watershed – from North Carolina to West Virginia,” Blount said. “Environmental restoration can have meaningful, lasting impacts on the New River if communities can come together and leverage various resources in order to protect our natural resources.”

Watauga Riverkeeper Andy Hill also said the NRC project along the New River in Boone will benefit the community as well as the river itself.

“The New River Conservancy has a long track record of successful and environmentally sound stream restoration projects,” Hill said. “Sediment flow and land disturbance are to be expected with any project and short term impacts are well worth the long term benefits. NRC has restored miles of the New River and planted many thousands of trees. I’m sure this project has been carefully planned and thoughtfully implemented.”

Blount asks that the public be mindful of the project site as there will be heavy machinery in the area during the project. The project is expected to take several weeks to complete and once the construction is complete, the vegetative buffer will be planted and NRC will work with the High Country Audubon to install mature trees on the site.



More information on the New River Conservancy can be found at www.newriverconservancy.org.

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