

319 N. Renfro St.
Mount Airy, NC 27030

1/15/08
MA NEWS

Editorial

State's 'impaired waters' list is reminder why we should protect natural resources

'Impaired waters'

At first glance the term can sound a little scary, especially when combined with "polluted." Without a clear explanation of what the state means in their semi-annual list, a layperson can easily draw the wrong conclusion, wondering in fact if there is some kind of imminent danger.

That's not the case here. The N.C. Division of Water Quality compiles the list every two years to comply with the federal Clean Waters Act, making note of bodies of water that don't meet certain water quality standards. That's the draft form that the state released last week that includes the Ararat River, Lovill's Creek and three other streams in Surry County.

Lovill's Creek was considered 'impaired' because it has excessive turbidity. In other words, the cloudy waters aren't allowing enough sunlight to penetrate the water. It's not a threat to drinking water supplies since the city treats the water before it is distributed to the public.

The other area bodies of water mentioned in the report — the Ararat River, Cody Creek, Endicott Creek and Heatherly Creek — have similar problems. Some don't meet the state's minimum requirements for sustaining aquatic life. That could be because of industrial or agricultural runoff in which pollutants or pesticides contaminate the streams, reducing its oxygen levels.

For bodies of water where there are water quality violations, the state identifies the sources of the pollutant and limits are developed to ensure that water quality standards are met.

And normally that is the end of it until the state generates another report two years from now. But since this is a draft report and environmental officials are soliciting comments, this is a chance for concerned citizens to make their voices heard and to get involved in the process.

We are fortunate to live in a county that is blessed with an abundance of natural resources. And we need only look to the Mitchell River for an excellent example of how volunteers and property owners came together to form a coalition to protect the river, acquiring land and easements to ensure there is proper erosion-control measures in place. That's why the Mitchell River is consistently ranked as an Outstanding Resource Water, considered to be the most pristine river in the Piedmont Triad.

There's no reason that similar efforts can't be made for the Ararat and Fisher Rivers and major streams such as Lovill's Creek, perhaps using the same strategy with locals adopting specific bodies of water. It's the kind of ecological project that would be extremely worthwhile for our students, introducing them to nature by collecting water samples and keeping tabs on the stream or river's water quality.

Who knows? Within a couple of years and the right kind of environmental stewardship, volunteers could take these 'impaired' bodies of water off the state's watch list.
