

https://www.themountaineer.com/outdoors/the-strong-silent-type-new-rain-garden-defends-richland-creek-from-runoff/article_76313050-5922-11ec-b0b4-536bdabc8d40.html

The strong, silent type: new rain garden defends Richland Creek from runoff

By Becky Johnson bjohnson@themountaineer.com
Dec 10, 2021



LENDING A HAND — Waynesville Planner Olga Grooman (front middle) led a crew of volunteers with Haywood Waterway to install a new rain garden along the Waynesville greenway. The plants installed in the rain garden are specifically selected to survive in wet soil and pull pollutants out of the water as it hits Richland Creek.

Becky Johnson

A newly installed rain garden along Waynesville's greenway might look like just another pretty landscaping job, but it's doing some mighty heavy lifting below the surface.

The rain garden sits at the entrance to Waynesville's greenway across from Lake Junaluska, just below U.S. 19. It will capture runoff flowing off U.S. 19 that would otherwise go straight into Richland Creek.

"The runoff is directed into the rain garden, and will then slowly infiltrate into the ground," explained Olga Grooman, a Waynesville town planner who ran point on the rain garden project. "It is a mitigation measure to capture the rain."

When runoff goes unchecked, it picks up pollutants and trash and washes it into waterways. Runoff not only impairs water quality, but the high velocity can also erode stream banks and raise the temperature of creeks, harming the aquatic ecosystem.

Christine O'Brien with Haywood Waterways Association hopes the project will serve as a model for more rain gardens to come.

"Haywood Waterways Association is partnering with the town of Waynesville to spotlight the need for rain gardens to help reduce stormwater runoff into our streams," O'Brien said. "We anticipate several more rain garden projects throughout the year."

Haywood Waterways Association tapped its connections at Western Carolina University to recruit volunteer student labor for the project. The crew of volunteers gathered at the rain garden site last Saturday to spread the final layer of soil and install the plants.

Mitch Mullin, a WCU junior majoring in environmental science, designed the plant species for the rain garden.

"I selected plants that can survive a lot of moisture, as well as what's pretty and what will survive well in this area," Mullin said, ticking off some of the species like beautyberry, elderberry, wild alder and ginger wine.

Grooman also called on Hendersonville Stormwater Administrator Michael Hauffman for design.

Before the final installation, site prep was carried out by Waynesville public works crews.

“Our public works people did an amazing job,” Grooman said. “Public works really rocked it.”

They dug out the basin, lined the bottom with large rock, then added filter fabric over the rock to keep the soil from washing through it, before filling it in with loads of soil. They also stabilized a channel with large rock that carries runoff from U.S. 19. The runoff dumps out of a large culvert into the rock channel and then flows into the rain garden.

“So instead of eroding stream banks, it flows into the rain garden and also filters out pollutants,” Mullin said.

The result is not only better water quality for Richland Creek, but also for Lake Junaluska just downstream.

“We are both controlling our runoff but also creating models for others to use on their property,” said Elizabeth Teague, Waynesville’s Development Services Director.

The rain garden is part of Waynesville’s larger stormwater management program. The town is required by the state to manage and mitigate rainwater to protect creeks and streams from runoff that flows off town streets during rainstorms. The town uses a variety of measures to capture runoff or slow it down — with the newly installed rain garden being an example of best practices.

“We are so proud of our water quality in Haywood County, and this is one very specific way as a town we try to do our part,” Teague said.
