

Comm 3600 In-Depth Reporting and Writing Final Portfolio

Sophia Hughes

1,012 words

Fly Fishing: Boone's Beloved Sport

In Boone, North Carolina, a peaceful creek runs amidst the bubbly and boisterous students spending their weekend at the locally renowned hiking destination, Laurel Creek Falls, endearingly dubbed *Trash Can Falls*. While some students plunge into the water from the towering 15 foot boulders, others like Nick Credle prefer waiting rather silently in the creek, with cat-like focus, ready to reel in an unlucky fish, which Credle will hope to be a trout.

Credle was a spin fishing fanatic of Pineola, North Carolina until he moved to Boone with high hopes of catching trout. This is how he discovered the sport beloved by Boone locals, fly fishing. Fly fishing involves casting a lightweight lure called a “fly” from a flexible rod in a whipping motion, using the weight of the line rather than the weight of the bait or lure.

“I found out about fly fishing because it was said to be the preferred method for catching trout out here,” said Credle. “When I tried it, I fell in love with the immenseness and overall aura of the waters here. It became a weekend routine for my friends and I.”

There are 25 trout waters in Watauga county, and 258 known freshwater fish overall; 234 native species plus 24 non-native species. There are several public fishing areas in the county which feature biodiversity in both plants and animals, attracting locals and tourists.

When asked what makes him keep coming back to fly fish Credle stated; “Something about feeling the line tug in my hand really does it for me. It’s addicting really.”

The mountainous regions of North Carolina which Boone is settled into are known for containing the headwaters of several popular rivers; New River, which is recognized as the second oldest river in the world, and the Yadkin River, which is one of the longest rivers in North Carolina, for example. With the abundance of freshwater, it makes sense that at Boone and at App State, fly fishing is a popular sport, class, source of income, and pastime. According to Gordon Harwell, fly fishing in Boone isn’t exclusive to your traditional outdoor fanatic audience who are brawny and burly either.

“You’re gonna find people like these kind of dudes who are big mountain men, then students, and girls like you with your style.” said Gordon Harwell, who is a cashier and charter for Boone’s Fly Shop located on King street. He works alongside local guides who take customers on charter trips to help customers try to catch the biggest game Boone has to offer.

Macy Beck, a cashier at Due South outfitters agrees; “It’s gotten more broad than you would expect as years go by. Before I fell in love with fly fishing I thought to myself ‘yuck, it’s all the old men’, and I did see a lot of that at first, but now you see a lot more college kids, and a ton

more women than there used to be who are getting into it. It's really getting popular all around these mountains.”

Mickey Bennett is one of the women who enjoy the sport. She recalls being “terrified of fish” before fishing with some friends she made in Boone after moving here from Hickory, North Carolina, despite efforts from her father to peak her interest as a child.

“For a long time, I was actually terrified of fish and wanted nothing to do with them.” she said.

After two of Bennett's friends who had already been into the sport for a while took her to their cabin to fish, she began going on more trips which led her to meet some of the local guides.

Unbeknownst to Bennett, she would eventually work alongside these guides at a female owned fly fishing shop she now spends her summers working at.

“Thankfully they had the gear and patience to teach me.” she said. “I love those women.”

Like Mickey Bennett, many tourists or people who have moved to Boone in recent years have begun fly fishing in the local waters as a sport that was completely new to them. Fly fishing is shown in Boone tour brochures such as *Explore Boone*, which has caught the attention of the tourists. Officer Devon McGuire, a North Carolina game warden with the Wildlife Resources Commission, recalls many North Carolina tourists being caught fly fishing without the required fishing license.

“It happens here quite a bit. It’s more prevalent with the tourists, people who are non-native to North Carolina because they don’t really do their research for them to say ‘Hey I need a fishing license to fish here’, there are some locals too who don’t have a fishing license because they simply don’t want to spend the money.” he said.

On September 26th, the National Weather Service announced hurricane Helene’s landfall in the southern Appalachians via weather advisory. The advisory stated that Helene’s rainfall would; “likely result in catastrophic and potentially life-threatening flash and urban flooding, along with significant river flooding...” and would produce total rain accumulation of 6 to 12 inches with isolated totals around 18 inches. Hurricane Helene significantly changed several ecosystems in Western North Carolina including fish populations.

McGuire said that Helene hit the Watauga waters hard, but there’s plenty of hope for the fish populations.

“Helene redug the whole river- one of the biggest rivers in the county- completely reshifted. There’s a whole new river bed with pockets of water that were not there before. Post hurricane it’s going to be interesting to see how everything will get back to normal after a couple heavy rains.” he said.

District Biologist Clinton Barden shared a similar perspective, “We know very little so far.” he said. “It’s going to be a long time until we know where we’re at and what the long term implications will be... A lot of impact will be to aquatic systems: creeks and rivers.”

Nick Credle shared his excitement for the next opportunity to return; “Me and a lot of my friends in the fly fishing club are really excited to get back out there.” he said.

Officer Devon McGuire- N.C. game warden (Wildlife Resources Commission Law Enforcement)- phone call interview on 11/14 at 5 p.m.- (919) 274-9372

Nick Credle- student/local fly fisher- email and text message interview on 11/5 at 12 p.m.- credlenm@appstate.edu

Macy Beck- cashier at Due South Outfitters- in person interview on 10/30 at 1 p.m.- (828) 355-9109

Mickey Bennett- student/local fly fisher- in person interview on 11/5 at 2 p.m.- (704) 792-8154

Gordon Harwell- student/cashier- in person interview on 9/23 at 12 p.m. (828) 865-3474

National Weather Service

https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/archive/2024/al09/al092024.public_a.012.shtml

Rivers.gov

<https://www.rivers.gov/north-carolina>

North Carolina Wildlife resources commission

<https://www.ncwildlife.org/fishing/trout-fishing-north-carolina>

Ncparks.gov

<https://auth1.dpr.ncparks.gov/fish/index.php>

Clinton Barden- District Biologist- 828-803-8491 clinton.barden@ncwildlife.org zoom interview on 11/20 at 1:30

Explore Boone

[request-visitors-guide](#)

Multimedia Ideas:

Students fly fishing

Student holding fish

Image of creek

Fishing poles or handmade lures

1,049 words

Sustainability at App State and Watauga County post Hurricane Helene

“The Appalachian community is living our commitment to sustainability and you are an integral part of this commitment and this community.” is a statement which students at Appalachian State University may be familiar with. Visual reminders of sustainable living can be found plastered around campus through posters, stickers, and hand-outs.

When the weather is permitting, students flock to Sanford mall to play yard games, lounge in hammocks, or promote a variety of causes; whether it be Greek life philanthropies, relevant social issues, or environmental concerns. Among these students is Angela Kirchoff, a sustainability major who has critical words for the school’s efforts when it comes to sustainability.

“In my opinion App State is ‘fake-sustainable,’” she said.

“The materials the school provides us with are often not recyclable, and the majority of money received by the school does not go to the cause of sustainability despite what the school seems to lead us to believe” Kirchoff said.

Kirchoff identifies with being a student who is environmentally cautious, and passionate about preserving the rich nature Boone has to offer.

“Being from Charlotte, I’ve seen my fair share of litter.” she said. “But the ecosystems here are so full and precious, it’s really so important to preserve what we’re given here.” She said.

When Hurricane Helene hit Boone on September 26, 2024, Kirchoff’s anxieties came to fruition, as local ecosystems experienced the effects of waste like never before.

Habitats are at high risk with the shift of plants and water making up ecosystems, and are now experiencing greater risk due to mass introduction of waste through flood waters. Local experts are keeping an eye on how waste has been carried across the terrain post-Helene, and are figuring out ways to address the issue.

“Immediately after the storm and during the storm, there was a lot of oil tanks and other things that just got washed up and tore up. And so there were certainly pollutants that were leaked into our water. So there's no doubt about it.” said George Santucci, Town of Boone’s Sustainability and Special Projects manager.

As people experienced the tragic loss of their belongings, stray chemicals made their way out of people's homes and into the waters. Hannah Woodburn, the High Country Watershed coordinator with Mountain True, recalls seeing paint cans and Anti-freeze bottles astray near waterways.

Many students like Kirchoff are eager to correct, to the best of their ability, what has been tainted by the storm. Ella Dunnivant was unable to return home in the aftermath of the storm, so she kept herself busy picking up debris in the creek next to King Street Flats, where she lives.

"It isn't a big creek, but I hated that the water looked so disgusting," she said. "I assumed that it was the flow of rainwater that was pushing stuff in there, I saw cans and different colors of liquid all down the creek...hopefully taking out the trash made somewhat of a difference."

Woodburn assures that the effort of everyday citizens surely makes a difference. She shared that students at Watauga High School are also making an effort to learn about protecting local waterways.

"Just people like you and me picking up trash helps more than you'd imagine, especially post Helene," she said. "I spoke to the highschool students on a field trip where they learned about river preservation. They were eager to learn and even help."

The students of Watauga High School also have the opportunity to join the school's Sustainability club. The club focuses on; "civic involvement, social justice, and environmental stewardship" through volunteering and fundraising, according to the school's webpage. The

Sustainability club was awarded a grant from NC Greenpower, a nonprofit organization which aims to promote clean energy sources, in 2023. Alongside Woodburn, the students participated in a small river clean-up.

According to Woodburn, some groups such as miners will use natural disasters as an opportunity to improperly dispose of chemicals, therefore negatively affecting the ecosystems of which they choose to dump into. Not as many investigations were carried out as there normally would be after Helene, but luckily a majority of the pollution was caused by runoff waters introducing septage into the waterways rather than dumping.

“With the sensitivity, loss, and destruction, we were lucky to not have many bad actors in Watauga.” Woodburn said.

Paige Patterson, a horticulture agent with the Watauga County Cooperative Extension Service, mourns the loss of cleanliness within the waterways as well as the loss of tourism in turn.

“Every segment of river is just full of parts of buildings and fuel tanks and I mean it's just going to have like who's going to be like, let's go stand out in the middle of a trash pile and fish for trout?” She said.

She expresses further concern about floodwaters bringing pollutants to crops, resulting in the spread of bacteria and issues such as E. Coli breakouts.

“If it [the crop] was contaminated with heavy metals or something like that it could be very alarming to people. What could happen with that and what steps would have to be taken to try to remediate the situation and you know not every contaminant has the possibility of being actually taken up into the plant itself.” she said.

Andy Hill, High Country Regional Director and Watauga Riverkeeper stated that luckily, many pollutants after the storm were most likely diluted by the water. Bio-accumulated water contamination is still very unfortunate however, especially for fish in those waterways.

Hill is an active member of the local government, and hopes to help prevent mass pollution in the future through weighing in on infrastructure and climate change policies. He ensured that sediment and water samples are actively being collected to identify pollutants.

“Well, we’re still fighting,” he said. “A recent success is on the creation and enforcement of surface and groundwater drinking protection, and listing 14-dioxane as a known carcinogen and banned substance,” he said.

“Sustainability is not just an academic concept,” said Jeff Biggers, a sustainability advocate and leader of The Climate Narrative Project. “It’s a way of life that requires active participation from every sector of the community.”

While some environmental efforts were put on pause due to Helene such as composting and gardening, Watauga retains a strong sense of duty towards the environment.

Angela Kirchoff- in person interview 12/5 (252) 214-7140
Conducted by myself

Ella Dunnavant- in person interview 12/5 (704) 780-0163
Conducted by myself

George Santucci, Sustainability Manager- zoom interview 12/6 (828) 268-6200
Conducted by myself

Hannah Woodburn, High Country Watershed Coordinator- in person interview 12/5 (336) 698-6204
Conducted by Jaiden Rogers, Clay Durban, and myself

Andy Hill, Watauga Riverkeeper- in person interview (in class) 11/19 (828) 278-9821
Conducted by class

Paige Patterson- Extension Agent of Agriculture (828) 264-3061
Conducted by Anna Haydel

Clinton Barden, District Biologist- zoom interview (828)803-8491
Conducted by Clay Durban and myself

<https://wipeoutwaste.mecknc.gov/community/swatalitterbug#:~:text=Disposing%20of%20trash%20and%20recycling,dumping%2C%20also%20known%20as%20littering.>

<https://www.ncdot.gov/initiatives-policies/environmental/litter-management/Pages/litter-laws.aspx>

https://www.wataugademocrat.com/news/local/whs-sustainability-club-to-receive-ncgreenpower-grant-with-help-from-fundraiser/article_6487ee22-0c49-11ed-b84f-6fbe258fed22.html

<https://whs.wataugaschools.org/our-school1/departments/science>

<https://today.appstate.edu/2017/03/08/biggers>

[Composting](#)

Multimedia Ideas:

Trash polluting a river

Students advocating for sustainability
Photo from a trash clean-up
Oil reflections on pond water

Reflection letter:

As a reporter, I believe that I am flexible with sources while still seeking truth and digging deep. I put lots of thought into the questions I prepare. I'm weak in organizing interviews as far as timing/scheduling, and I am sometimes afraid to follow-up after I leave. Though over the course of the semester I gained more confidence, I wish I had spent more time with my sources and had better organized the information they gave me. However, I was given many opportunities for interviewing and enjoyed my first article. On the other hand, I believe my second article was broad. I wish I had honed in on a specific angle earlier on into the assignment. My team was very efficient and well spoken. They scheduled many interviews and conducted them thoroughly. For the group reporting assignment, I attended two of their interviews and conducted two of my own, contributing questions for each. I was not able to attend all the scheduled interviews, and I was not able to conduct as many interviews as I had hoped. As far as my teammates, Clay Durban was especially good at coordinating interviews and asking questions. I particularly enjoyed our picture a place assignment as it allowed me to use some creative writing. The assignments I disliked would be the readings, though the handbook was informative. I tend to have a short attention span when it comes to reading articles, but am unfortunately aware that my writing will improve with reading. I will continue to use tips from the handbook, and may also refer to some of Professor Edy's writings. For future classes, I think that in-class writing time may be beneficial so that you can give immediate feedback in the beginning stages of our writing. Writing some in class would also ensure that we are making timely progress with articles.