

POLK SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION Quarterly

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POLK COUNTY FARM BUREAU WINS WOMEN'S PROGRAM AWARD



Polk County resident and volunteer Dianne Davis (center) accepts the award on behalf of the local Woman's Program Committee.

In an award ceremony in Greensboro, NC, the Polk County Farm Bureau was recognized as the 2022 Division 3 Women's Program Award winner. The county program was judged as North Carolina Farm Bureau's most effective in achieving stated goals throughout the year. The award was presented at the Farm Bureau's 87th Annual Meeting last December at the Joseph S. Koury Convention Center.

The mission of the North Carolina Farm Bureau is to improve the quality of life for farmers and rural families. Members of the local committee are Helen Blackwell, Dianne Davis, Kelly Gay and Jan McGuinn. The Polk County Farm Bureau Women's Program members were involved in numerous humanitarian and educational initiatives and activities during the past year, including numerous school and charitable events.

CONSERVATION PLANTS – Sweet Azalea



Today's conservation plant is a native azalea that can be found scattered throughout Polk County. All azaleas are in the rhododendron family and even though most are naturally found growing along streams or in moist areas, the Sweet Azalea (*Rhododendron arborescens*) is only one of four rhododendron species that will tolerate wet soils. Typically you will find this native shrub growing along streambanks and occasionally in boggy areas.

Anyone who has traveled down the Green River in June has most likely seen plants in bloom or smelled their fragrant flowers. Sweet Azaleas have attractive white flowers with bright red stamens. Generally the native specimens are erect and six to eight feet in height. In undisturbed woodlands you may observe some Sweet Azalea plants up to 20 feet tall.

The Sweet Azalea will grow in full sun or partial shade and prefers moist soils. It is a little used, underrated plant for streambanks or home landscapes. The flower fragrance is second to none. In some areas of North Carolina this plant is known as the Smooth Azalea.

(Photo courtesy of Wilson Bros Gardens)

WILDLIFE PROFILES – Striped Skunk

The Striped Skunk can be found in 89 of North Carolina's 100 counties. This mammal has distinctive black fur with white stripes and has the ability to spray a smelly secretion when startled or threatened. This natural chemical weapon is nauseating and can cause temporary blindness to animals or people who get sprayed in their eyes.

Skunks live in areas with a mixture of woods, brush and open fields with forested ravines. They prefer timbered areas and pastures with a quality water source. The Striped Skunk is an omnivore with a diet of insects, worms, small rodents, bird eggs, reptiles, fruit, acorns and seeds. They hunt and move primarily at night or early morning so they are frequently "rarely seen".

This species of skunk is about the size of a large housecat. They are adept at digging and swimming. These skunks do not hibernate, but during cold winter days, they remain in their den that is commonly shared by several skunks.



(Information and photo from the NC Wildlife Resources Commission.)

BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT - Steve Modlin



Today's Soil & Water Board spotlight is on Steve Modlin. Steve is Polk County's newest board member and was sworn in at the regular August board meeting. He joined the board following David Slater's retirement.

After a successful 30-year career as a Special Agent with the NC State Bureau of Investigation, Steve decided to retire and spend more time on his family's small business and farm. This new board member brings an array of different life experiences to the conservation board. Modlin actively farms their 190-acre property while creating and packaging the family's regionally popular barbeque sauces and seasonings.

Steve Modlin and his wife settled in Polk County some 32 years ago. They purchased their farmland in the northwest section of the county initially producing beef cattle and switching to Katahdin sheep. Today the farm is home for 65 ewes and 2 donkeys.

Modlin sees his role on the board to help others learn about the programs available through Polk Soil & Water including those from NRCS. "We want every eligible farmer to take advantage of the services available," added Modlin.

This Soil & Water Conservation District member along with his wife Cheryl have three adult children.

POLK COUNTY FFA SUMMER CAMP EXPERIENCE

Each summer members of the Polk County High School FFA Chapter participate in the North Carolina FFA Camp Program at White Lake, North Carolina. This year 31 students made the trip to the camp in southeastern North Carolina.

The camping program consists of character building, leadership and recreational activities. Each day starts with students taking part in a devotional, flag-raising ceremonies and calisthenics. Next, students attended leadership sessions where they worked on enhancing their leadership skills. The afternoons were filled with recreational opportunities for the students to participate in competitive events including water sports (swimming, canoeing, water ball), basketball, volleyball, softball, horseshoes, shuffle board, checkers and table tennis. All activities were based on a point system and the team with the most points at the end of the week was declared the winner.



PCHS Ag Teachers Ashley Gilbert and Chauncey Barber accompanied the students on this extra curricular activity. Both faculty believe the camp experience helps build teamwork for the local FFA program.

MEET THE STAFF – Polk Soil & Water District

STUART WALKER -- Stuart Walker has been a fixture of the Polk Soil & Water Conservation District since 1989. His role in the department is that of Ag Technician. Walker manages the state cost share program for the county. He makes on-farm visits and helps advise the board as to which projects fit the criteria. swalker@polknc.org



KELLY GAY -- Kelly Gay is the program administrator for the Polk Soil & Water Conservation District. She has been a key staff member since 2017. Gay has a wide array of tasks in her role as administrator. In any given week she could be working with young people on the Soil & Water Envirothon, talking to county landowners about stream bank restoration or working on educational programs for the community at large. kgay@polknc.org

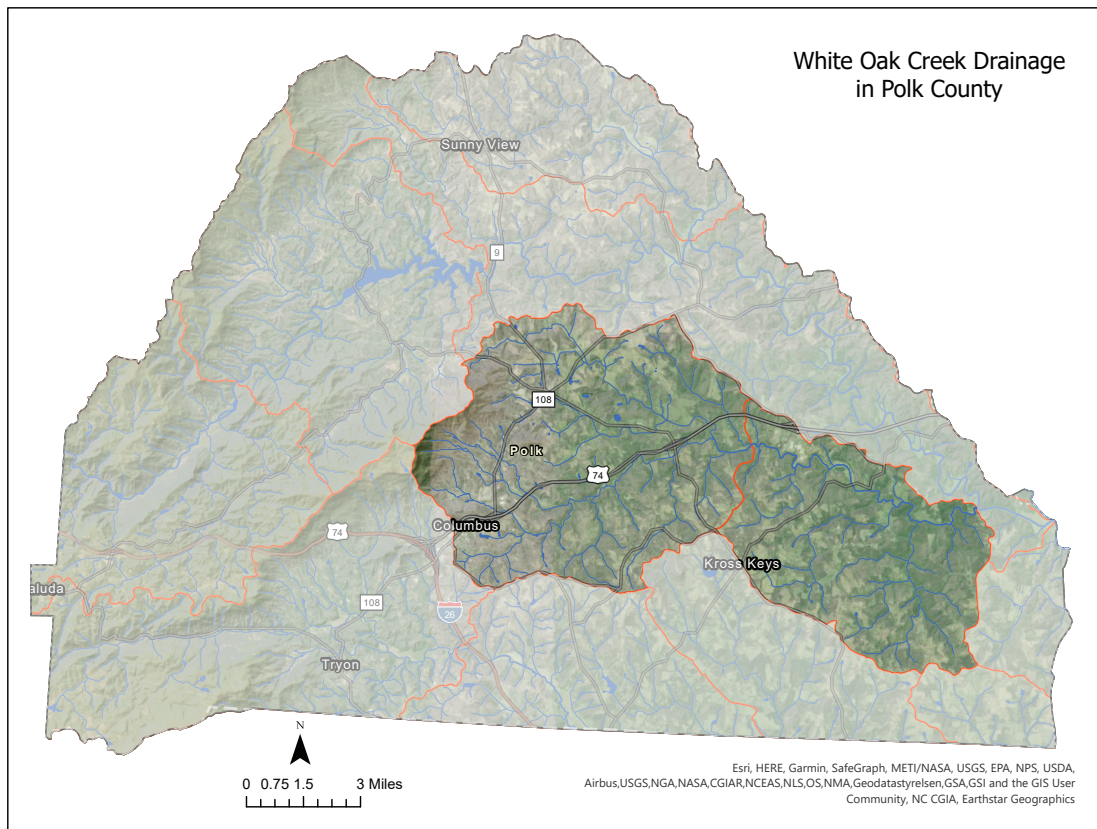
Contact: 828.894.8550

The Soil & Water Conservation District Office is located inside the former Mill Spring School on 156 School Road in Mill Spring, NC.

WHAT IS A WATERSHED?

A watershed is the land area from which surface water drains into a common stream, pond, lake or other body of water. It is the area of land that collects, stores and transports water. Every inch of Polk County is part of a watershed. Not all precipitation that falls on a watershed flows out as surface water. Some rainfall seeps into the ground. It goes into underground reservoirs called aquifers. In the modern world some precipitation ends up on hard surfaces such as roads and parking lots, from which the rain enters storm drains that feed into rivers and streams.

Watersheds can vary in size. A watershed for a tiny mountain creek might be as small as 5 to 10 acres. Some watersheds are huge. The Mississippi River watershed is the biggest watershed in the United States, draining more than one million square miles of land. Thirty-one US states and two Canadian provinces fall within the Mississippi River watershed.



MAP OF POLK COUNTY

This graphic indicates the area of Polk County that is drained by White Oak Creek and its tributaries.

HUMAN ACTIVITIES CAN AFFECT OUR WATERSHEDS

Everything we do in a watershed affects our water quality. Without realizing it, many of your daily activities can pollute the watershed and reduce the amount of fresh water for everyone. Unfortunately pollutants can wash into the rivers such as salt (in winter) and oil from roadways and parking areas, sand and debris from construction sites and chemicals from our home lawns.

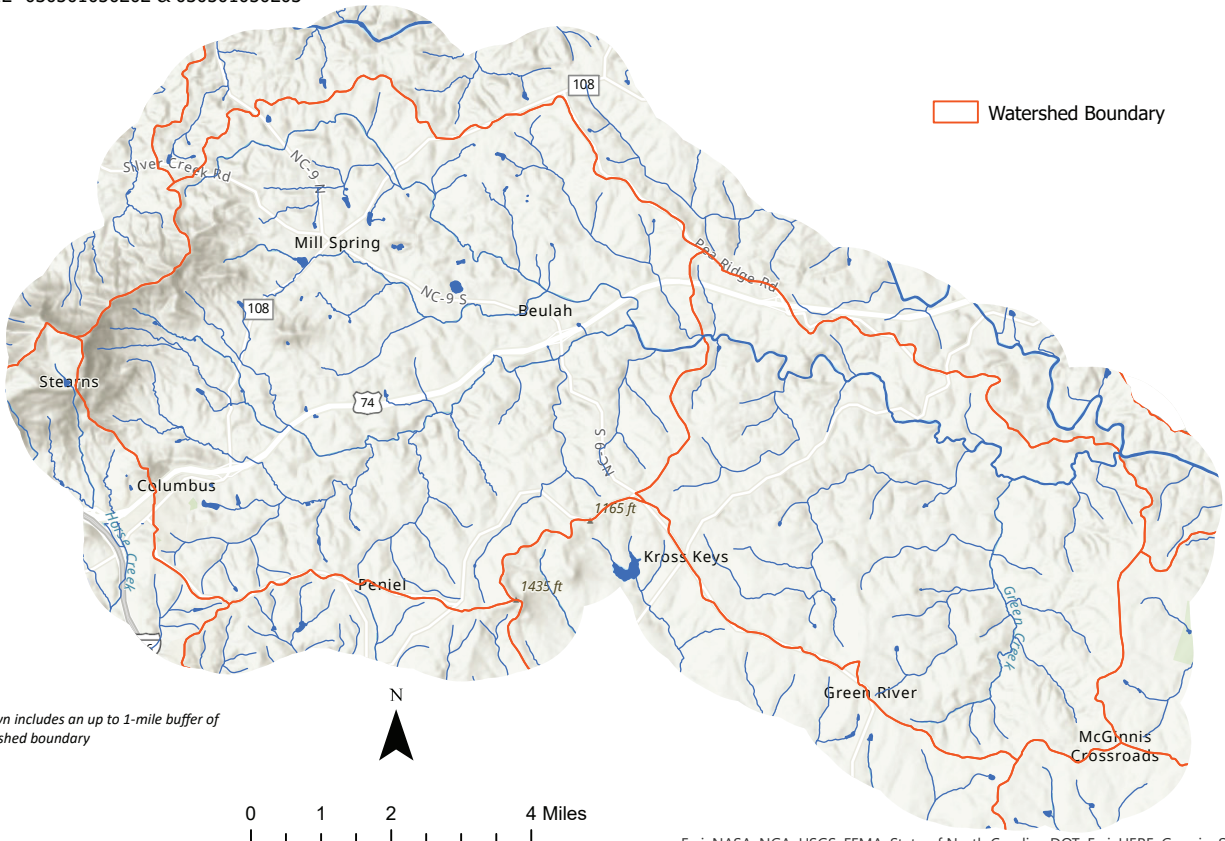
When humans clear land, we not only expose the watershed's soil to erosion, but cause changes to nature's water cycle. Impervious or hard surfaces keep the ground from absorbing water from rain or snow. Instead the water flows over the ground as runoff. Consequently less water is stored in the ground.

Unfortunately healthy watersheds are becoming less common. Everyone benefits from healthy watersheds in numerous ways. Healthy watersheds are necessary for nearly all high quality outdoor recreation sites involving the use of lakes, rivers and streams. In a few southern Appalachian areas, rainbow trout habitat has been lost due to an increase in water temps. If your town's drinking water comes from a surface water source, your city, town or county spends more money on treating drinking water from an unhealthy watershed.

WHITE OAK CREEK DRAINAGE AREA

White Oak Creek Drainage in Polk County-

HUC12- 030501050202 & 030501050203



The area of Polk County that White Oak Creek drains is shown in the map above. We are calling this section of the county a “drainage area” since it is not officially designated as a watershed. If you live in the shaded area care should be taken not to impact the waters of White Oak Creek and its tributaries.

White Oak Creek is the third largest stream in Polk County. It eventually empties into the Green River in the southeast corner of the county.

Thanks to Karyl Fuller at Triangle J Council of Governments for her help with these drainage maps.

REDISCOVERING POLK COUNTY'S NATIVE SWEETBAY MAGNOLIA

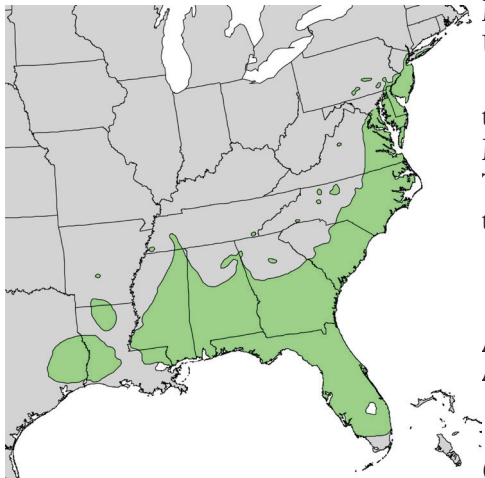


The evergreen plant on the far right of the photograph is a Sweetbay Magnolia sapling found growing along Hooper Creek in Polk County.

Sweetbay Magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*) is a native tree typically found growing along the Atlantic coast from New Jersey to Florida and along the gulf coast to Louisiana. Unknown to most people there is a native stand of this coastal tree species growing in Polk County. There are an estimated 100 trees of various sizes and ages. This is a very unusual, almost rare plant population for the WNC foothills.

This Magnolia prefers acidic, medium to wet soils in full sun or partial shade. The Polk County population was rediscovered in 2004 two and one half miles north of the South Carolina state line. South Carolina resident and Scientific Advisor for the Magnolia Society International Richard Figlar established the identification of the Magnolias that were originally cataloged years earlier by Dr Alan Weakly of UNC - Chapel Hill.

These plants can be found thriving in a boggy area in dense shade. Unfortunately the lack of sunlight limits the Magnolia's ability to flower. Sweetbay Magnolias have fragrant, creamy-white flowers that are 3-inches in diameter. The foliage is shiny-green and is normally semi-evergreen. In harsh winters the leaves may drop due to the cold conditions.



*Map Caption: Look closely at the map and you can see the small outpopulation of *Magnolia virginiana* located in the county.*

(Photo Courtesy of Richard Figlar) (Range Map from Wikipedia)

INVASIVE EMERALD ASH BORER DAMAGING MORE TREES



The metallic green Emerald Ash Borer is a devastating insect pest for Polk County's native Ash trees. Recent reports indicate there is damage in the Pearson's Falls area.

The Emerald Ash Borer is a devastating insect pest of both White Ash (*Fraxinus americana*) and Green Ash (*F. pennsylvanica*) in North Carolina. The insect was introduced from Asia via wood packing materials and was first detected around 2002 in the United States near Detroit. It has since spread to many states and counties. According to the NC Forest Service, evidence of Emerald Ash Borer was first identified in Polk County in 2019.

This exotic insect pest is a metallic green beetle that has spread to 74 of the state's 100 counties. It has also been found below the stateline in both Greenville and Spartanburg Counties. In North Carolina, the adult Emerald Ash Borer is typically active from late spring and early summer (likely April through June).

Nationally since its introduction, Emerald Ash Borer has killed tens of millions of Ash trees. When ash borers migrate to an area, adult beetles will fly to Ash trees and lay eggs. The eggs will hatch, and the immature insects will feed in the inner bark (phloem) and outer wood (xylem). This insect damage results in a thinning canopy, branch dieback, and excessive or epicormic branching from the tree's trunk.

Indicators of Emerald Ash Borer include D-shaped exit holes ($\frac{1}{8}$ " inch) and serpentine tunnels under the bark. Trees usually die within five years of infestation, or two years after symptoms appear. High-value trees may be treated with insecticides.

Ash trees are frequently some of the tallest trees in the forest. They can typically grow to a height of 75 feet. Most trees in the wild will succumb to the damage of this invasive insect. Ash lumber has many uses. Ash wood is used in making furniture, doors, cabinetry, millwork, tool handles, baseball bats, hockey sticks, oars and sliced for veneer. It is especially popular for food containers such as wooden bowls since the wood has no taste.

The state champion White Ash tree is located in the Lynn Community in Polk County.

(Photo courtesy of the Bugwood network. Photo by David Cappaert.)

NC Striped Skunk Fun Facts

- There are two species of skunks native to North Carolina, the Eastern Spotted Skunk and the Striped Skunk.
- Striped Skunks live one to six years in the wild. In captivity they have survived up to 10 years.
- Male skunks will mate with several females. They breed between mid-February and mid-April. Baby skunks or "kits" are typically born in May to early June. Litter size ranges from 5 to 9 kits.
- Striped Skunks are beneficial to people since they feed on a large number of pests such as mice, voles, moles, beetles and grubs.
- This skunk species has very poor eyesight so they use their nose and ears to forage for food. When digging for grubs, Striped Skunks create small, cone-shaped holes in the soil.

Information from the NC Wildlife Resources Commission

POLK SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION OFFICE IN MILL SPRING



The Polk County Soil & Water Conservation Office is located inside the Mill Spring Agricultural Center just off of NC Hwy 9. The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5pm. Because the local location is a field office, which means staff goes out and makes farm visits, frequently there is no one in the conservation office. Therefore call 894.8550 to determine if someone will be available at the time of your visit. Ask for Kelly or Stuart.

One can pick up information on programs offered, soil boxes for sampling and other ag related items. The street address is 156 School Road, Mill Spring.

This image shows the back entrance to the local conservation district office in Mill Spring.

Polk Soil & Water Conservation District

156 School Road, PO Box 455

Mill Spring, NC 28756