

## WILSON CREEK DELAYED HARVEST

Wilson Creek is the adopted stream of the Hickory NC TU Chapter. That's not just because it's the closest delayed harvest stream for us, but also because it is one of the most beautiful stretches of trout stream in North Carolina. It was declared a Wild and Scenic River by an announcement in the February 29, 2000 Congressional Record and all of us who have been there understand the beauty of the river.

Mr. SHERWOOD. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1749) to designate Wilson Creek in Avery and Caldwell Counties, North Carolina, as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 1749

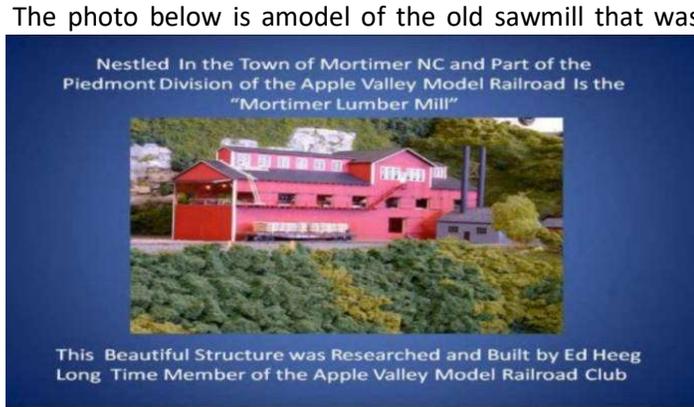
Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

However, Wilson Creek has not always been the beautiful river we visit today. In the 1800s, clear-cut logging operations by the Ritter Lumber Company devastated most of the area. By the early 1900s, the Ritter Lumber Company and a small cotton mill supported a population of 800 people in the town of Mortimer near where Betsey's general store is located today.



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The photo below is a model of the old sawmill that was



built by the Apple Valley Railroad Club. The model is built to authentic detail and you can view the construction at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEPdizZIBPE>. The lumber company had its own narrow gauge railroad that ran from the sawmill to near the town of

Edgemont. Much of the roadbed has disappeared, I



presume replaced by the present-day road. You can still see several concrete abutments along the river like the one shown here just below Betsey's Store. Just below the high bridge (along the

right side of the river when looking upstream) you can follow the old railroad berm. The Carolina & Northwestern Railway ran from Lenoir to Collettsville and was extended



to Mortimer in 1905 and to Edgemont in 1907. The picture to the left is the old station in Edgemont as it still stands today.

Then in 1916 there was a major forest fire

that

burned from Grandfather Mountain down to Wilson Creek and not long after a torrential rain. Without the vegetation to slow it, the runoff caused a tremendous flood that wiped out the saw mill and the town of Mortimer.

After a year, the saw mill was rebuilt and a new cotton mill was built. Mortimer again grew to be a large town to support the two mills. This photograph



shows Mortimer in 1929. It's difficult to tell for sure, but where the railroad bridge crosses the river appears to be where the middle bridge is today.

With the Depression of 1929 came the Civilian Conservation Corps. As a trout fisherman growing up in Michigan I felt this was one of the greatest programs the government ever produced and wish they would consider it again



today. Like the Wilson Creek area, the rivers I fished in Michigan were in clear-cut logging areas. The CCC was



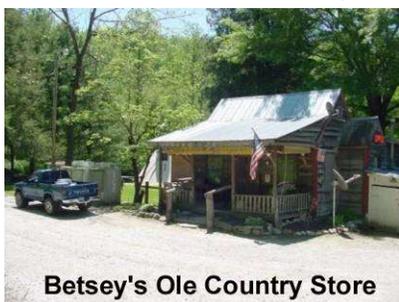
managed by the Army and their primary goal was reforestation and soil stabilization. They were dubbed the name "Roosevelt's Tree Army". But they did many other projects. In Michigan the streams had been ruined by the deforestation and soil run off. The CCC built wing dams all along the river to create pools for the trout. When I fished there in the 50s and 60s these were still in place



with great pools behind them. The CCC camp in Mortimer was established in 1933. In addition to planting trees, part of their effort was the beginnings of the Blue

Ridge Parkway. The CCC continued until WWII efforts needed the men for the military and the factories.

In 1940 a 20" rainfall brought a flood to Wilson Creek.

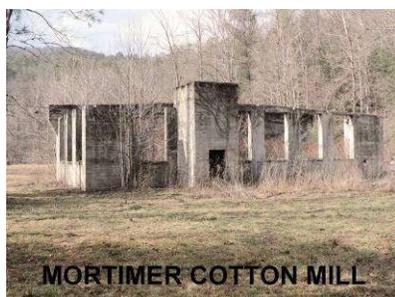


**Betsey's Ole Country Store**

Imagine the water level at Mortimer being 94' above flood stage! The flood destroyed the town of Mortimer along with the sawmill and cotton mill and several

people lost their lives. The mills were never rebuilt and the town died.

The only thing remaining today in Mortimer are one of the CCC buildings, Betsey's Ole Country Store, and foundations from the cotton mill.



**MORTIMER COTTON MILL**

But that history is what allowed us what we have today. The CCC helped to reforest the land to create the beauty that we see and to get it named as a wild and scenic river

and the ability of the stream to support trout. That led in about 2008 to the designation of the upper stretch to become the Delayed Harvest fishery that we enjoy today and has made it one of the most popular trout streams in North Carolina. Treasure it and help to assure its future. For additional reading on the history of Mortimer and Edgemont check out the following:

[https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/nc/newsroom/features/?cid=nrcs142p2\\_046741](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/nc/newsroom/features/?cid=nrcs142p2_046741)

<http://www.newsobserver.com/living/liv-columnsblogs/past-times/article10326905.html>

<http://www.appalachianhistory.net/2015/05/northcarolina-a-ghost-town.html>

<http://web.utk.edu/~jeparks/history.htm>

<http://www.mtnlaurel.com/backroads/379-mortimerand-edgemont-north-carolina-backroads-tour.html>

<http://touringbackroads.com/journal/wilson-creek-tour>