

## Wilson's Creek Flood 2019 - One for the Record Books

Most fisherman in the area are very familiar with Wilson Creek that is located in North Carolina, but there are some of you that are new to the area or that may not have visited it for yourself. Wilson Creek is a water way located in Pisgah National Forest that starts at the top of Grandfather Mountain located in Caldwell county and runs for 23.3 miles through the Blue Ridge Mountains into a 200ft gorge before dumping into the John's River. It was added to the Wild and Scenic River System in August 2000. The Wilson's creek area is broken up into several designations made up of the following sections: The Wild section that is - 4.6 miles; The Scenic section that is - 2.9 miles and The Recreational section that is - 15.8 miles.



Wilson's creek is home to various species of fish that include wild brook, hatchery supported rainbow, brook, and brown trout, several species of bass, blue gill and others. The clear pools and changing terrains make recreational activities both challenging, adventurous and beautiful that is complimented by the backdrop of the Pisgah National Forest. It also brings with it, the recreational adventurers that hike along the numerous hiking trails that are near or that cross the creek and the recreational people that like to enjoy a picnic along the creek's edge and swim in the same cool deep pools that fishermen enjoy so much.

One could be mesmerized by the beauty of the creek and the backdrop for the forest never realizing the changes and perils that the creek encounters over time. All creeks go through a certain amount of changes each year but Wilson's Creek is no stranger to high waters and severe flooding and the devastation that it brings. An emergency notification system utilizing flood warning sirens attest to that fact.

The ghosts of the buildings still stand at the old mill and parts of railroad trestles remain giving testament to the destruction of the two major floods that occurred in 1916 and in 1940 that wiped away the foot print of Mortimer, NC where a country store stands and Lone Flag marks the spot of this historic town. The last flood that occurred in the summer 2019 has been noted by locals as the worst that they had seen in many years. Dennis Coffee a local resident of Edgemont and owner Edgebrook (a local rental cabin) and Bruce Gray who resides in Mortimer and is the owner of Betsy's Country Store were both hit hard by the impact of the flood. Both men were quoted as saying this is the worst that they had seen including the flooding from hurricane Florence in 2004. The impact this time was so severe that the Federal government rendered aid to Mr. Coffee in restoring parts of the property and creek that runs through it due to the damage from the flood waters that rushed through his property and down Pineola Road. The water was so severe that it washed away the edges of Pineola road leaving gullies in areas along the road that were up to 6ft deep as well as a destruction that left the road impassible unless you accessed it by a high clearance 4wheel drive vehicle.

Before



After Flood



After repairs

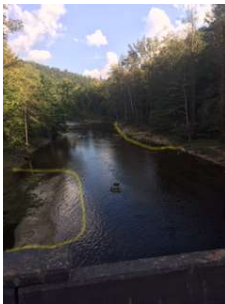


The devastation of the flood not only changed the path of the creek in some spots but the creek bed, terrain and the banks were also dramatically changed. What were areas of sandy beaches along the banks are now replaced with beaches consisting of rock beds. Areas that once had deeper holes are now filled in with rocks or sand creating new beaches of stone, while other areas that once were once shallow have now become deeper parts of the creek.

Popular fishing holes such as High Bridge, Emerald Pool, Sandy Beach and Handicap hole and a few others had more changes than other areas like Middle Bridge and Flag Pole Hole that did not receive as much damage. The majority of the damage was done above and around Edgemont and on through the delayed harvest section and on down to the Welcome Center. Bridges in Edgemont were damaged with one being completely destroyed by the flood waters leaving some residents trapped on the other side.

The sand beach that reached out into the water on the Mortimer side of High Bridge is no longer there, leaving deeper pools of water surrounding the large center rock and created a new current flow at the spot. A little further downstream on the right or the Edgemont side that once was a small rock bed is a more prominent rock bed that juts further out into the water. While directly across, are trees that once stood on the side that hung over the creek but are now holding down trees lining the bank.

High Bridge Before



High Bridge After



Emerald pool was another favorite spot amongst many that sported a large sandy area that no longer exists and is now under water.

Emerald Pool Before



After



Sandy beach has now been replaced by rocks and the sand that was once there, has now filled up areas of the deep pool.

Sandy Beach



Stretches along the area from Middle Bridge to Handicap Hole have either deepened or have been filled with massive amounts of sand. An area just before Handicap hole at the bend had a small island of rock before it made a transition into a deeper hole is now almost nonexistent. Large trees were left along the bank just before the handicap fishing deck, while the once deeper water in front of the deck has now filled in more with sand. Trees ARE left dangling from high power lines below the old mill and more trees and debris are scattered all along the banks. There is a foundation at the water's edge of the old mill that appears to be a trestle, has been uncovered and is exposing most of it to a height of nearly 5ft.

After the flood



Phillips Branch, where the Delayed Harvest section meets the Hatchery Supported waters received massive amounts of rocks and debris as water rushed down the mountain making its way to the creek.

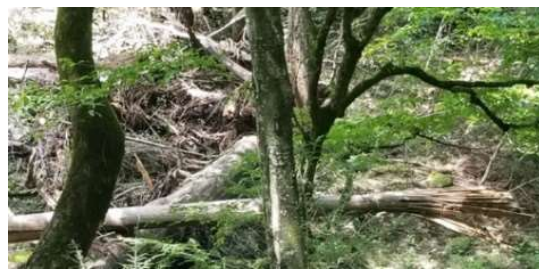




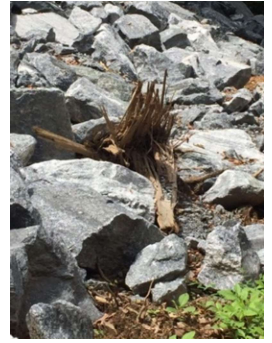
Damage down through the campground and onto the welcome center, sustained lots of considerable destruction. Debris, decks and trees are left piled against and hanging in the standing trees. The road just below the campground received a lot of damage and a new wall was constructed and the road was repaired. Buildings and other structures were ripped apart and debris, tin and other items such as a dog house were left in trees all along the various spots along the creeks edge in and though Edgemont.



Large trees are left hanging in trees along the entire section of the creek while others are piled up in large masses against objects such as the trestle above Betsy's Country Store. Many trees were shoved through objects and trees and left splintered like the end of a toothpick that had been chewed on. Trees with a root system of about 10ft to 15ft or more in diameter, were uprooted like a weed pulled from the yard and laid over or carried downstream.



Roads were washed away or severely damaged from the water rushing down the mountainside carrying mud, rocks, trees and other items clearing a path of destruction before dumping into the creek below. Roads were closed as a result of high water that extended all the way down to Adaco Road.



Wilson's Creek was impacted in many ways, not only affecting the people that lived along the creek but the damage on the aquatic species, vegetation and wildlife that may have been displaced and or even destroyed. Broken pipes, debris, trash and perhaps sewage were carried downstream and deposited along the banks as flood waters receded leaving a trail of destruction that could pollute the waters and could cause a health risk to not only humans but the eco system of Wilson's Creek. Trees and objects left dangling and the depth in water changes along the creek can cause a potential harm to the recreational aspect of the water.

There are actions from multiple entities, organizations and volunteers that could improve the creek should they take the initiative to help clean up and restore the creek to its natural beauty and create an environment that is true to a Wild and Scenic River System.

*"On the line with Charlie Walker"*

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