

WHAT'S NEEDED TO RESTORE THE PIGEON RIVER?

For over 101 years, the Champion Paper Mill in Canton, now Blue Ridge Paper Products, has used tens of millions of gallons of the tiny, beautiful mountain Pigeon River to manufacture pulp and paper, using chemical-intensive methods that have changed little since the 1800s. While the high-paying jobs and economic development have benefitted Haywood County and North Carolina, the downstream communities in Cocke County, TN are among the poorest in the state.

Only with extensive pressure from TN, EPA, Cocke County and downstream and environmental activists have improvements been made, but always with strong resistance from NC officials, as well as the Mill. NC has facilitated the continuing expansion of the Canton Mill by writing permits that allowed continued or even increased levels of pollution discharge with no improvements.

While that pressure has brought about improvements in water quality since the 1980's, there is a lot more that needs to be done to restore the river's aquatic life, recreational uses and downstream communities fully. The current NC draft permit again would prevent further improvements, and seeks an end to officially end any further clean up.

The threats to jobs at the Mill have come NOT from reasonable calls from Tennessee, Cocke County, EPA or environmental groups to clean up a long-blighted river. Instead, they come from the intense market competition among producers, the costs of chemicals, coal for boilers, and wood, and from the industry's own increasing automation. Perhaps the biggest threat to the Mill's operations has been the anger and distrust resulting its own and NC water quality officials' antiquated "polluter rights" attitudes, claiming the River for their use. Both EPA and independent Mill experts have identified high certainty process changes and "best management practices" that could substantially reduce pollution to the River, and, in several cases, reduce operation costs too! Only a very dumb company and state that manage their financial and natural resources poorly would let this drag on through another generation.

It's do or die for the Pigeon River. We must not let NC officials get away with this permit, which is a slap in the face of downstream communities and the Clean Water Act. We call for:

- ✓ **Strict daily enforcement of an in-stream numerical color standard at least as strong as the one EPA called for in 1987: 50 color units in the River just**

downstream of the discharge, even in low flows, approximately 19,000 lb/day of discharged color. If this can't be achieved in the current permit cycle, then a clear and enforceable compliance schedule must be included to continue into future permits, to prevent the "stall-outs" that happen every time the permit is left in NC hands. If that requires EPA taking back the permit, then so be it.

- ✓ We call for substantial (15% or more) decreases in color with EACH PERMIT CYCLE. We will not accept the proposed extremely weak monthly and daily discharge limits in the draft permit, designed to be sure that BRPP never violates them! The mill must be discharging less than 32,000 lb/day annual average within three years, with correspondingly lowered monthly and daily limits.
- ✓ Reduction of toxic discharges by at least 10% every permit cycle ----*the mill dumps more than 110,000 lbs of toxic each year, over 10,000 lb/year are CARCINOGENS*
- ✓ No more foam, odors, or "unpalatable" fish due to BRPP operations, still present over 40 miles downstream of the Mill.
- ✓ Require installation of pollution-reducing process changes and "best management practices" immediately, reducing chemical use and color discharges.
- ✓ A specific and enforceable "low flow contingency plan," requiring scheduled shutdowns or reduced production and discharge levels during low flow river conditions to continue to meet in-stream standard.
- ✓ Restitution to downstream communities (public, not just private landowners) for loss of our precious resource. As promised in the 1997 Settlement Agreement, long-impacted downstream communities must be given economic development assistance, and Blue Ridge Paper Products and NC must contribute resources to a full ecological study, led by EPA, of the Pigeon River, with special attention to toxic sediments in Waterville Lake.
- ✓ Restoration of a healthy aquatic habitat downstream by bringing BRPP's hot discharge into compliance with the Clean Water Act temperature requirements of no greater temperature increase downstream than 5 degrees F, also on an enforceable compliance schedule. Currently the Mill has no limit on its discharge temperature, and is allowed to increase the temperature downstream up to 25 degrees F, contributing to biological impairments for miles downstream.