



# A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

RIVERLINK'S 30+ YEAR HISTORY WITH THE FRENCH BROAD RIVER



# RIVERLINK

- Lisa Raleigh & Renee Fortner
- **RiverLink** was founded 30+ years ago to promote the **environmental** and **economic vitality** of the French Broad River and watershed.
- Today, we do that through our **youth education, water resources** and **land resources** programs and ongoing public **river access, parks** and **greenways**.



# FRENCH BROAD RIVER

- One of the oldest rivers in the world (~**300 million** years)
- One of a few rivers that flows North
- Over **4,000 miles** of tributaries feed serving ~**400,000** people in **8** counties in NC
- The French Broad River is ~ **219 miles** long
- Joins the Holston, Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi  
Cherokee names for the river include: *Tah-kee-os-tee* – ‘**racing waters**’ | *Agiqua* – ‘**Long Man**’
- Author **Wilma Dykeman**
- Flood of **1916**

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## KAREN CRAGNOLIN (1949-2022)



**“The story of the French Broad River is the story of the American river in microcosm, full of paradise and paradox.” ~ Karen Cragolin**





## CONVERGENCE IN THE LATE 80S

- **Deferred** infrastructure maintenance & **struggling** city center
- A **neglected** river encroached by **abandoned** industry & **isolated** from city.
- Land of Sky Regional Council created **FBRF**
- Chamber of Commerce || **“One More Day”** Campaign
- Creation of **“City of Asheville 2010 Plan”**
- A series of community **charettes**
- The **Asheville Riverfront Plan** emerges (1989)



**“The Asheville riverfront is where all the issues start to come together. The river is where economic development, land use planning and environmental concerns meet and marry.”**

– Karen Cragolin

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# THE TRANSFORMATION CONTINUES

- RiverLink **bus** tours and **artists** arrival
- **Partnerships** and multiple **funding** partners and donors
- New businesses and **French Broad River Park** (1994)
- **Arson** inspired fires of 1995
- **Wilma Dykeman RiverWay Plan** (2004) – 17 miles

**“There is rare consensus in our community in support of the Wilma Dykeman RiverWay Plan, which sees our river corridors as future high-density, mixed-use, mixed-income multimodal transit corridors – our next development frontier” ~ Karen Cragnolin**





## CONT . . .

- **New Belgium's** arrival (2014)
- From **parks** and **greenways** to **artists** and **breweries**
- **RADTIP** ~\$30MM infrastructure (completed 2021)
- The **River Arts District (RAD)** is born and **thriving**

“This colorful neighborhood, which was once full of bustling mills, is now home to **250+** working artists and offers an eclectic mix of dining, vibrant murals, and easy access to the French Broad River.”

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## TODAY – ECONOMIC ENGINE

- French Broad River Partnership supported a new study to survey the **economic impact** of the river.
- **\$3.8 billion** annually.
- The watershed receives **6.9 million** river-influenced visitors each year resulting in **\$2.7 billion** annually in spending.
- River-reliant businesses create or maintain **38,554** jobs each year (~**\$273 million** in annual federal tax revenue).
- **“Existence”** value of additional **\$2.4 billion**



## TODAY – RIVERLINK'S FOCUS

- **3 programmatic areas** and commitment to **greenways, parks & public river access** throughout the watershed.
- **Woodfin Greenway & Blueway**
  - Ambitious ~**\$23MM** project: 2 parks, in-river Wave and 5 miles of new greenway
  - WGB has raised **\$16.6MM** (including NCDOT, TDA, BC, NCDEQ, ToW) and the voters who approved a **\$4.5MM** bond referendum in 2016.
- Infrastructure and **Environmental Justice**
  - **Southside Community** Stormwater Project



## TOMORROW – CHALLENGES

- Blue Ridge Mtns are home to incredible **biodiversity** as a temperate **rainforest** with a **subtropical** climate.
- Popularity of area and ongoing development placing increased **pressure** on the **watershed & infrastructure**.
- French Broad River and several of its main tributaries to be **classified as impaired** (2022 NC Draft 303(d))
- Includes a **19-mile** stretch through the heart of Asheville



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## TOMORROW – OPPORTUNITIES

- Reinforces that river conservation is **never “done”**
- The value of the river is **significant economically, environmentally, and recreationally** to the area.
- Creates opportunity for ongoing **awareness, partnership** and **investment** by stakeholders and agencies.
- **“Because, just as the river belongs to no one, it belongs to everyone and everyone is held accountable for its health and condition.”** – Wilma Dykeman



THANK YOU || QUESTIONS?



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