

# Flat Creek 2040: Science, Community, Stewardship

---Update on the First Year---

Public Forum Presentation to the Town of Montreat  
Board of Commissioners, July 10, 2025

William Seaman, resident



**Purpose:** To inform commissioners, staff, and residents on the rationale, entities and individuals, and achievements and outlook of the “Flat Creek 2040” initiative. Especially, May 9 workshop results.

**Rationale:** From its high mountain headwaters in Montreat to its confluence with the Swannanoa River six miles away in Black Mountain, Flat Creek is a valued natural resource for its cultural, historic, economic, spiritual and environmental contributions. A recent survey of citizens in Montreat indicates the greater importance of the creek and its watershed, compared to other topics.

Table 1. Levels of concern among 235 survey respondents for different aspects of future community life in Montreat. (Highest level = 5.0.) Source: *Town of Montreat Community Assessment Survey Summary Results, Conducted January-February 2020.*

Issue	Score
Health of Flat Creek	4.7
Stormwater and flooding	4.6
Development/redevelop of land/structures	4.2
Population growth	3.9
Attracting younger people as residents	3.6
Increasing the tax base	3.3
Offering wider variety of housing to renters	2.9
Commercial/Retail development	2.7



Flat Creek and its so-called “ecosystem services” meet needs as varied as birdwatching, children’s education, trout angling, recreation, wildlife habitat and buffering of air temperatures, among others. Did I say fishing? In response, both Black Mountain and Montreat have made constructive provisions for the watershed in their comprehensive plans and their stormwater management plans. Meanwhile, a number of important initiatives from citizens and academic interests include new research on water quality, developing an all-access location, and college classes and research. With all of this said, in late summer 2024 four local scientists and educators got together to consider ways to bring together technical interests and information as a means of building a foundation for future use, planning and management of the Flat Creek watershed. We called our effort “Flat Creek 2040” with hopes of capturing positive and sustainable ideas for the future.

**Flat Creek 2040 Goal:** Combining expertise and wisdom across multiple interests for addressing future sustainability and services of the Flat Creek watershed

**Flat Creek as a model?** It is worth noting that a consensus has emerged among the individuals listed on the next page and others concerning the status of Flat Creek Montreat-Black Mountain as a system that other communities could emulate. In other words, our Flat Creek is demonstrating practical, cost-effective ways to live in harmony with the resource. Among the most significant problems are habitat disruption and loss, and runoff of soil and silt as we can see in the brown waters after significant rainfall. Heavy volumes of stormwater runoff cause ecological and physical damage.



## Flat Creek 2040 Science Working Group Organizational Meeting Results:

On May 9, 2025 a first-ever invitational meeting of experts actually involved with hands-on effort in Flat Creek was held in Black Mountain. (Some of you may recall getting a heads-up email with the bare-bones description of what was happening.) In a series of lightning presentations the contributors pictured here, and a couple of others, presented the available science-based



information concerning issues as diverse as history, water quality, atmospheric and rainfall trends, trout and hellbender salamander ecology, Lake Susan revitalization, education, and comprehensive planning and stormwater management. In a nutshell, the enormous disruption to the creek bottom and banks from hurricane rainfall stormwater flooding washed away certain species, such as about half of the fishes. Besides (1) the remarkable chemistry in the room as people started exchanging business cards and ideas for collaboration, the workshop (2) assembled information to be used in educational efforts with interested citizens and organization, (3) created the vision and network for holding a regional meeting addressing at least the upper Swannanoa River watershed's future, (4) assembled baseline information for use in assessing and recovering Flat Creek watershed habitats and ecology post-Hurricane Helene, and (5) developed a database and greater rationale for securing funds for additional research and education (with one new grant leverage against Landcare funding to triple the budget for water quality research, in a joint Montreat-Black Mountain citizen science project).

### Workshop Contributors, May 9, 2025, (Planning team members indicated with asterisk)

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**Outlook, Takeaways, Opportunities:** (1) Working group follow-up with watershed education; (2) working group follow-up for regional Swannanoa Valley conference; (3) new collaborations among researchers and educators; (4) new water quality study for entire creek (both towns); (5) determine feasibility of creek environmental damage and recovery assessment, as companion to ongoing built infrastructure evaluation in Montreat; (6) question of storm runoff reduction, pervious surfaces, on-site water retention, etc.