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Native river cane makes a return to the Pigeon

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WELCOME BACK — Volunteers with Haywood Waterways Association partnered with the town of Clyde to plant traditional river cane along the Pigeon River in Clyde, joining a regional initiative to re-establish the indigenous bamboo species of both cultural and ecological importance. Pictured are: Dustin Cornelison, Mary and Stephen Curry, and Camille LoCoco.



MAKINGS OF A CANEBRAKE — River cane planted along the Pigeon in Clyde will one day grow into a grove of cane once found along the water's edge throughout the Southern Appalachians.



WELCOME BACK — Volunteers with Haywood Waterways Association partnered with the town of Clyde to plant traditional river cane along the Pigeon River in Clyde, joining a regional initiative to re-establish the

indigenous bamboo species of both cultural and ecological importance. Pictured are: Susan Roberts, Rachael Hart, Mary Kelly and Dawn Cusick.

Native river cane has been planted along the Pigeon River in Clyde, in hopes that one day a grove of the bamboo-like plant will reclaim its place in the riverside ecosystem.

A team of volunteers with the Haywood Waterways Association partnered with the town of Clyde for a planting workday last week at Rivers Edge Park.

River cane is the only bamboo species native to North America and was once commonly found growing along river shores in the Southern Appalachians — known as canebrakes. The indigenous plant was important to the Cherokee, who used it for blow guns, fishing poles, baskets, pipe stems and woven mats to name a few.

River cane also played a vital ecological role.

“River cane acts as a natural riparian buffer while stabilizing stream banks and reducing erosion and runoff into the water,” said Caitlin Worsham, project manager with Haywood Waterways.

River cane has largely disappeared from the landscape, however. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians launched a river cane restoration initiative about a decade ago with the goal of re-establishing river cane throughout the region.

Haywood Waterways Association recently reached out to the tribe in hopes of getting their hands on some river cane to plant along the Pigeon. The timing was impeccable.

Warren Wilson College needed to dig up a stand of river cane it had previously planted to make way for a streambank restoration project.

“They were trying to get as many people as possible to find habitat for the river cane so it wouldn’t be destroyed,” Worsham said.

Her next step was finding somewhere in Haywood County to plant it. The town of Clyde welcomed the idea at its riverside park.

“The town of Clyde is grateful for the donation of the river cane, as well as the volunteers who assisted with the planting,” said Joy Garland, Clyde Town Administrator.

The park, which includes a walking trail, picnic facilities and playground, is located at 734 Thickety Road.