

# Sowing seeds of cleaner air, water

**Nature lovers of all ages pitch in as volunteers for a tree-planting mission Saturday morning.**

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## **More Information**

- [Huntersville Creek Releaf 2009](#)
- [To volunteer](#)

For more information or to volunteer for the Creek ReLeaf program's next tree-planting event in January at Colonel Beatty Park on Weddington Road, go to [www.creekreleaf.com](http://www.creekreleaf.com).

It was no bigger than a stick you'd rake up in the yard.

But the red maple seedling that 7-year-old Cub Scout Eric Misiak helped to plant Saturday - and thousands more like it - is one way volunteers are trying to improve the county's water and air quality.

Eric was among more than 350 people who gave up their weekend morning to plant 1,500 seedlings near Huntersville's Torrence Creek Greenway. Their goal: Keep creeks clean by adding more trees, which act as natural filters for water and air.

"Trees are an extremely low-cost way to improve our environment," said Rick Roti, chairman of the nonprofit Charlotte Public Tree Fund, which helped to organize Saturday's event.

The group - along with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services, Central Piedmont Community College's Center for Sustainability and the local Sierra Club - has planted 5,800 trees in the past two years as part of its "Creek ReLeaf" program.

Roti estimated the cost of planting Saturday's trees at about \$12,000, paid for by grants, donations and other sources, including the Tree Fund and the county.

As development replaces wooded areas, Roti said, higher volumes of storm water wash more pesticides and other pollutants into creeks and streams. These eventually flow into Mountain Island Lake, the primary source of drinking water for Charlotte and Gastonia.

A tree's roots absorb pollutants in storm water, reduce erosion and slow the flow of water during heavy rains. Trees also improve the air we breathe by absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen, reducing the production of ground-level ozone.

The estimated 2 million trees in Mecklenburg County's nature preserve system remove more than 450,000 pounds of air pollution each year, said Michael Kirschman, who oversees nature preserves for the county's Park and Recreation department.

It would cost the county \$58million, he said, to build a water treatment facility to manage storm-water runoff equal to the amount the park system's green spaces now handle.

In an open field near the greenway, volunteers added to the county's leafy filtration system Saturday by digging holes for tulip poplar, black willow, river birch and eight other types of trees.

Eric Misiak grabbed a 2-foot seedling, smaller in diameter than his little finger, and helped his mother, Laura, plant it in a hole they'd just dug. Then he and his three brothers covered it with fistfuls of dirt.

"They're fascinated by the worms," Laura Misiak said. And the dirt, she admitted, was "right up their alley."

But delightfully dirty play clothes aside, Misiak hoped her sons took something else home with them from Saturday's project.

"It teaches them to volunteer to help preserve nature," she said. "It's important to keep our air clean."