

# Clyde, North Carolina

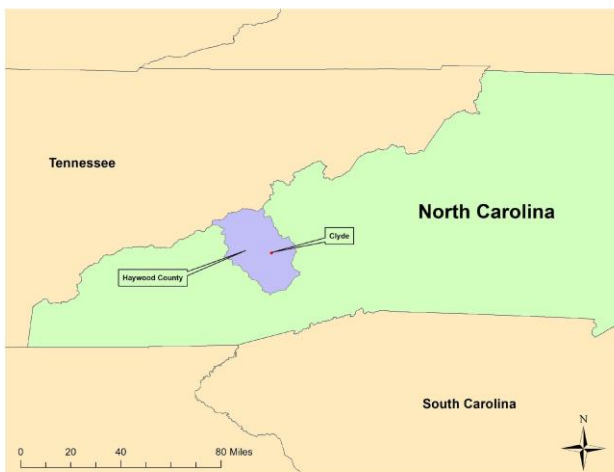


Buyout Area in Clyde, NC. Photo by author.

## Background

Clyde (pop. 1223) is a small Western North Carolina town located along the Pigeon River in Haywood County. Clyde lies on Highway 23 between the two population centers of Haywood County: Canton and Waynesville, which is the county seat. As a small town, Clyde has limited financial resources and relies largely on the county government for technical and administrative support.

**Figure 1: Location Map of Clyde, NC**



### History of Flooding and Mitigation

Flooding has been a perennial problem for the highlands of Western North Carolina. In 1916 and 1940 large portions of Western North Carolina suffered catastrophic flooding. Significant flooding has also taken place in subsequent years, including in 1961, 1964, 1977, 1994, and 2004. Except for flooding in 1994 and 2004, all of these took place prior to the creation of the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program in 1988.

Responses to these early floods centered largely on saving lives. Affected cities and towns and their residents were responsible for recovery and rebuilding efforts. In most cases, structures were rebuilt and development continued in the floodplain. In 2004, the banks of the Pigeon River in Clyde were densely populated with homes, businesses, and public facilities.

In September of 2004 two hurricanes, Frances and Ivan, travelled from the gulf coast up to the Appalachian Mountains. The two hurricanes moved through the western portion of North Carolina less than two weeks apart. Both storms brought heavy rains that exceeded 15 inches in some areas and causing flooding for several cities and towns, including Clyde.

Much of the downtown of Clyde is situated in the floodplain of the Pigeon River. There is also significant residential development in this area. During Hurricanes Frances and Ivan, Clyde dozens of homes and several businesses were submerged in up to six feet of water. One third of the town's housing stock was destroyed (Census 2000, Charlotte Observer).

**Table 1: Clyde Demographics**

	<b>Clyde</b>	<b>North Carolina</b>
Population (2010)	1,223	9,535,483
Median age	38.3	37.4
Housing units	619	4,327,528
Owner occupied (%)	54.0	65.8
Black (%)	2.0	22.1
White (%)	93.2	68.5
Hispanic or Latino (%)	3.0	8.4
High school degree (%)	82.1	85.4
Bachelor's degree (%)	24.3	27.8
Median household income	\$36,111	\$46,693
Poverty rate	22.8	17.2

Source: US Census, 2010 and American Community Survey 2014

Table 1 compares demographics of Clyde to the state of North Carolina. Clyde has a significantly smaller population of Black residents (2.0% vs 22.1%) than the state as a whole, as well lower household income. Poverty rates are also higher in Clyde than in the state's (22.8% vs 17.2%). In terms of education, Clyde compares to the state as a whole, with only slightly smaller percentages of those with high school and college degrees.

## The Buyout

Haywood County responded to the flooding of Clyde with a focus on reducing personal suffering and economic losses. Federal grant money was offered to flood victims, but many owners of damaged homes chose to repair or rebuild their homes rather than relocate.

The Department of Recreation and Parks in Haywood County was newly reestablished at the time of the flood. It had not made adequate preparations to implement a comprehensive greenway plan. Two years later the department developed a plan for a greenway system, including a segment joining Clyde and Canton, after most of the acquisitions had been finalized. The reluctance of homeowners to sell their properties would have limited the effectiveness of any attempt to construct a greenway or linear park in Clyde regardless of the existence of a greenway plan.

Several municipalities flooded by the back-to-back hurricanes were declared federal disaster areas on September 10 and again on September 18 of 2004. In February of 2005 the North Carolina General Assembly passed the Hurricane Recovery Act allocating over \$200 million to alleviate the suffering of storm victims. Much of this money was devoted to matching funding offered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) under the federal disaster declaration. Typically, FEMA will fund 75% of approved relief efforts if state or local governments contribute the other 25%. In North Carolina there is an unofficial precedent that the state, rather than local governments, provides the matching funds.

At least 250 homes along the Pigeon River were destroyed with 150 more homes damaged. Many residents of Clyde received rental assistance in the immediate aftermath of the flooding.

Federal aid in the form of low-interest loans, housing assistance, and other needs assistance reached \$20 million by November of 2004. According to FEMA, few applications were received from Haywood County by this time, and the Disaster Recovery Center in Clyde was closed on October 20. The lack of application activity in Clyde may be linked to the response of churches. By early October, Baptist and Methodist groups had visited Clyde to help residents with debris removal and home repairs.

Beginning in 2005, Haywood County appraised damaged homes and identified 88 residential and commercial properties to be acquired with federal and state funds. Of these, 62 property owners accepted the buyout and sold their homes to the county: 45 were within Clyde city limits. The total cost of the acquisitions in Haywood County was \$5.9 million. Today, most of those properties are owned and managed by the Haywood County Recreation and Parks Department. Three were deeded to the town of Clyde. The locations of acquired parcels near downtown Clyde can be seen in Figures 2 and 5.

The main goal of the acquisition was to minimize financial and personal loss and suffering for residents and business owners. Owners of any property that qualified were offered the appraised value of the structure and land.

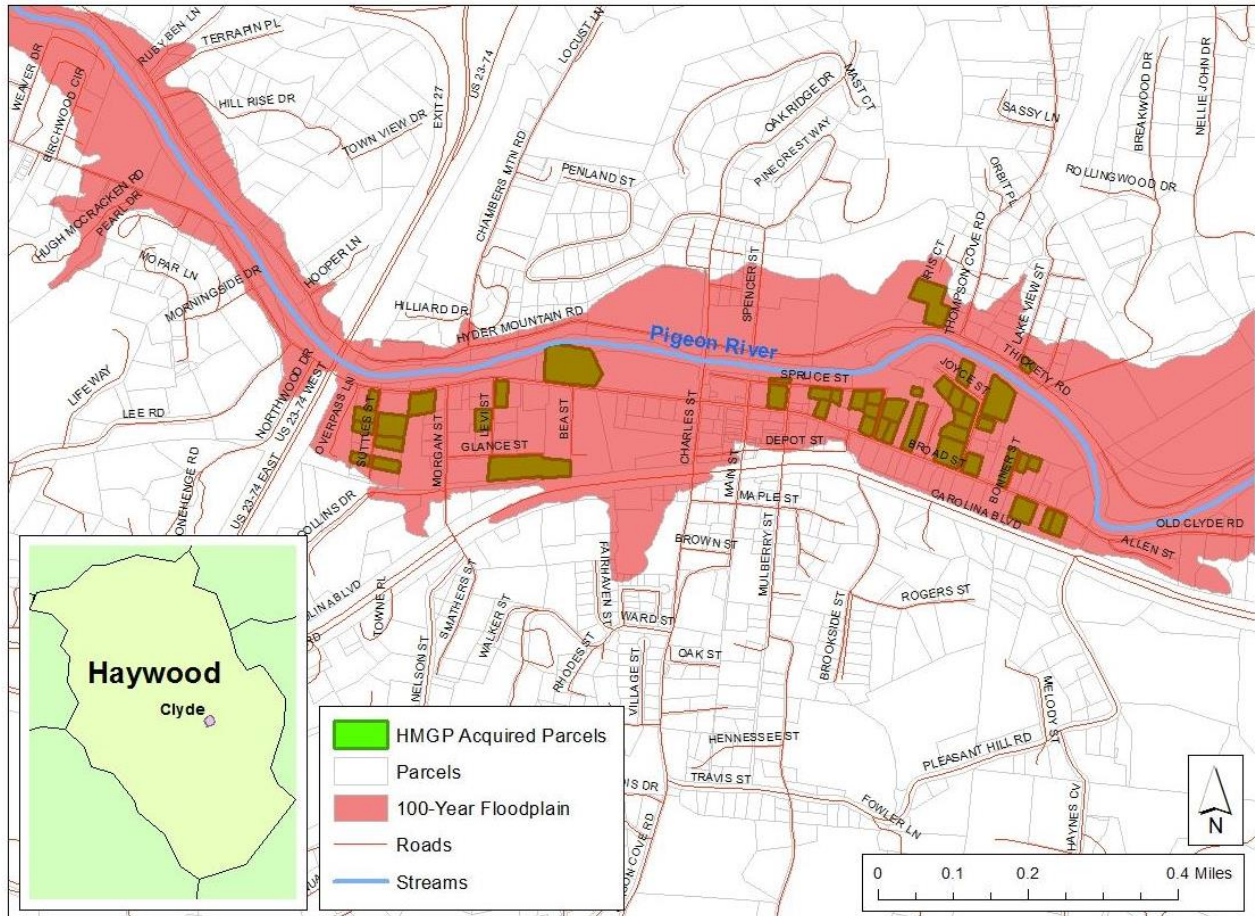
Not all residents accepted the offer to buy their home. According to several city and county officials interviewed, some homeowners declined the buyout offer because of a desire to remain in a home that had been in their family for generations. Another reason was that they had already done significant repairs to their homes by the time they received an offer. Their repair efforts were aided by nonprofit groups such as the NC Baptist Men and the United Methodist Men.

The legal transfer of property was conducted by a private consulting company hired by the county. Tony Sexton, a former lawyer specializing in business law, was the liaison between the county, the consulting firm, and property owners. Mr. Sexton was also the Greenway Administrator for the Haywood County Department of Recreation and Parks.

**Table 2: Homes Acquired in Clyde**

Homes acquired in buyout	45
Total cost of buyout	\$4.9 million
Average cost per home	\$109,000

Figure 2: Map of Buyout Areas in Clyde, NC



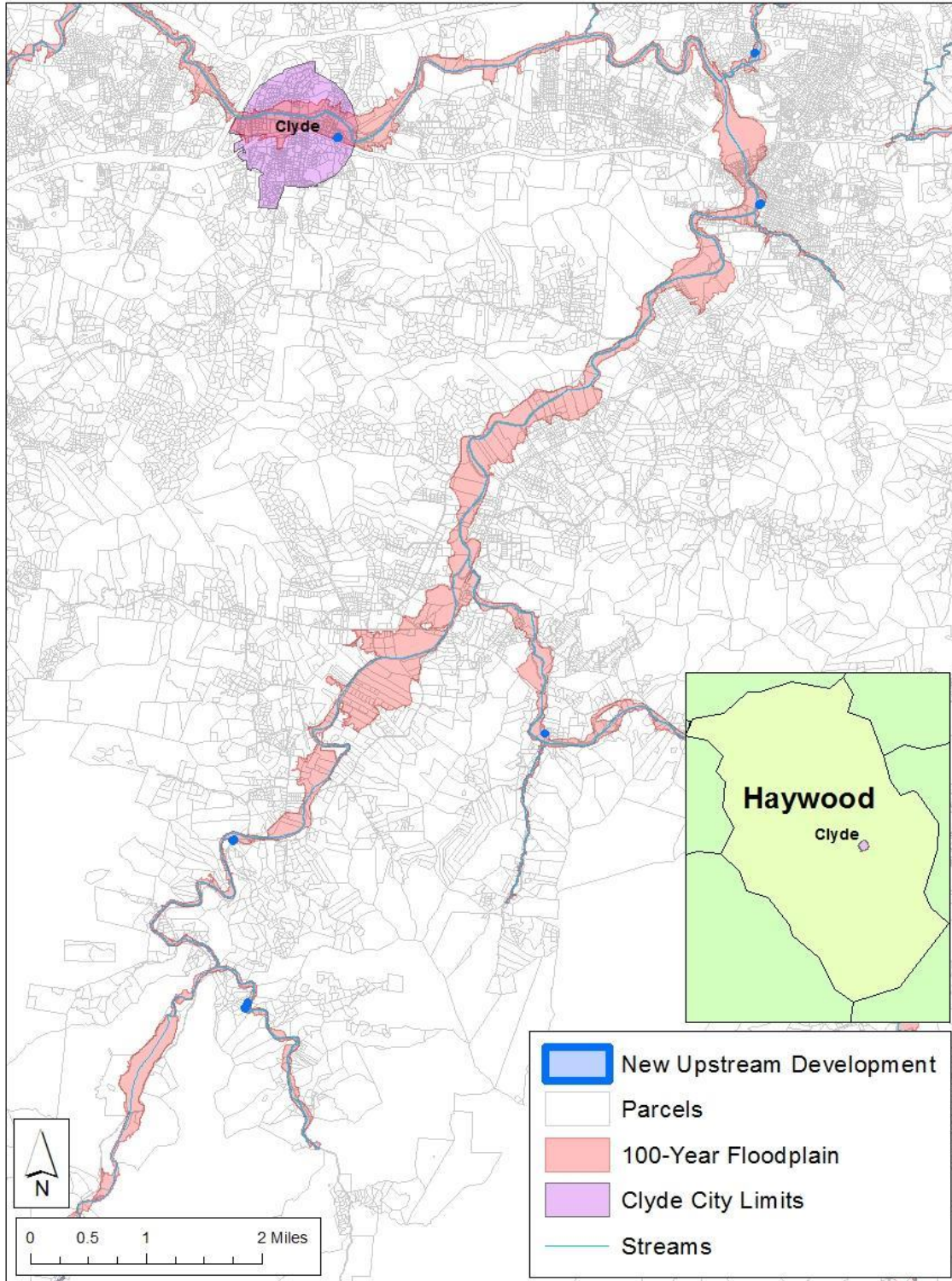
### Current Status

Haywood County's Department of Recreation and Parks had been reinstated in 2000 after being defunct for more than 20 years. Tony Sexton had become involved with the Department shortly after its inception when Director Claire Carlton tapped him to study potential greenway projects.

After the flooding in 2004, Director Carleton encouraged the county to pursue recreational ends through the acquisition process. Unfortunately, the collection of parcels that ended up under the county's control was not well-suited for that purpose. The newly acquired parcels were rarely contiguous with one another. Instead, they were interspersed with homes that remained after the flooding. Those parcels that are grouped together tend to be aligned perpendicularly to the Pigeon River rather than parallel to it (Figure 2).

Since the buyout occurred, only a few homes have been built in the floodplain (Figure 3): some within the town limits of Clyde and a few in the surrounding area.

**Figure 3: Recent Floodplain Development Since Buyout**



**Figure 4. Current Uses of Buyout Lands**



Almost two years after the arrival of Hurricanes Frances and Ivan, the Department began drafting a Master Plan that included considerations for a greenway system in the area. Other than the Department of Recreation and Parks, no recreational, environmental resource, or ecological preservation officials or organizations were consulted to guide the acquisition process.

Although almost all of the damaged properties in Clyde were contiguous, constituting a virtually unbroken, one half mile stretch of land along the Pigeon River, many of the owners of these properties chose not to accept the government buyout. As mentioned above, multiple charitable organizations provided needed assistance long before buyout funds were officially approved and buyout offers formally made. In addition, residents had made repairs of their



own in the meantime. Town Administrator Joy Garland believes this may have been a reason for property owners to opt out of the buyout. Haywood County Emergency Management Director Greg Shuping echoed this suspicion.

Ms. Garland also indicated that some property owners were reluctant to move because of personal and familial history bound up in a piece of property. Haywood County has experienced regular flooding on a 20-30 year cycle for at least the last 100 years. Local residents and their antecedents have weathered these disasters before and believe that they are capable of surviving and recovering from floods. Mr. Sexton experienced this sentiment in his interactions with buyout applicants as well.

Today, Haywood County Department of Recreation and Parks is responsible for maintaining the properties acquired after the 2004 flooding. Because of the lack of participation in the buyout among some property owners, the county has had to put aside the idea of a greenway in Clyde. Instead, it is leasing the properties to local residents for \$1 per year. Under the lease agreement, the users of the properties may not conduct commercial operations of any kind on the land and must keep it mowed or otherwise maintained. The most common use among current lessees is personal gardening (Figure 4). There are now around ten tilled garden plots and a one small orchard dotting the banks of the Pigeon River in Clyde.

Haywood County's Department of Recreation and Parks plans to continue leasing the acquired parcels to nearby homeowners for personal gardens and lawn space. The department has a greenway plan, but the distribution of the acquired parcels among occupied homes makes it impossible under current conditions to assemble a working trail or recreational area along the river. Haywood County and Clyde are also limited by a shortage of funding to invest in parks and trails.

In 2005, the Town of Clyde was awarded \$2 million from the NC Division of Water Resources Clean Water Management Trust Fund to acquire properties along the Pigeon River upstream from Clyde. Under the grant, these areas would be converted to riparian areas that would add flood retention capacity along the river. In addition to hazard mitigation, the town hoped to possibly use this land as a recreation area. Neither of these goals was achieved because local landowners refused offers to purchase their property. Clyde was forced to return the money to the state.

For the foreseeable future, Clyde will be maintaining the acquired parcels as open space and leasing them to neighboring homeowners.

Claire Carleton of the Haywood County Department of Recreation and Parks says she is aware of the potential for greater connectivity between acquired parcels if future buyouts can link them. However, the department has no explicit prioritization of parcels for acquisition nor does

the town. Any potential buyouts in the future would be based solely on the need to assist distressed homeowners and augment the recovery process.

Recreation, wildlife, and accessibility planning will not be used to make acquisition prioritization decisions according to town and county officials. FEMA regulations and the needs of residents have proven to be the most relevant bases for buyout offers in the case of Hurricanes Frances and Ivan. These motives will continue to set the criteria for prioritization in the future.

**Figure 5. Buyout Parcels (outlined in Green) Interspersed Among Parcels Still in Use**



### Integration with Hazard Mitigation Plan

Haywood County does not have a Hazard Mitigation Plan, although the county participates in the Smoky Mountain Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan (SMRHMP). The Haywood County component of the plan specifies that there are 13 repetitive loss properties in Clyde and recognizes the continuing risk posed by these parcels.

In the SMRHMP, Haywood County has made it a goal to “Continue to review the possibility of purchasing additional property in identified flood areas to convert it to open space”. This goal is given moderate priority and assigned to the county planning department. There is no goal for Haywood County or Clyde related to flood retention capacity. However, the county wishes to study the possibility of a comprehensive stormwater ordinance which could enact provisions for stormwater retention or detention.

### Integration with Land Use Plan

The floodplain ordinance for Haywood County requires that any structure built in the floodplain have a first floor elevation at or above the base flood elevation. Since the flood of 2004, there has been one home added to the floodplain in the city limits of Clyde. It is elevated to base flood elevation. However, 7 structures have been added to the floodplain upstream from Clyde

in Haywood County. These homes are widely distributed throughout the county but may have some effect on flood risk for Clyde.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to fault the process that Haywood County used to acquire homes after Hurricanes Frances and Ivan. The county made every effort to alleviate the distress in which homeowners found themselves. The fact that homeowners were able to make repairs to their homes quickly is a testament to their resolve and the generosity of volunteer groups.

The recovery program in Haywood County suffered from the delay that is inherent to large scale, intergovernmental efforts. The transfer of funds among levels of government and eventually into the hands of private citizens requires a high level of accountability that entails long waiting periods. Some local officials have indicated that reducing the lag time for federal funding could have led to more participation in the buyout.

Another opportunity for improving buyout participation is the development of updated flood maps. Tony Sexton told us the maps available in 2004 may not have accurately reflected the long term flood risk facing homeowners. While residents who are offered grant money have already been flooded, they may believe that they are unlikely to have their property flooded again. It is impossible for them to make an informed decision without a reasonably accurate indication of risk.

From our interviews with local officials, we got a sense of the motives of homeowners when deciding whether or not to accept buyout offers. In the future, it may be useful to interview homeowners from this and other communities to verify these motives and potentially identify others.