

LANDSCAPE



THANK YOU FOR MAKING GREAT STORIES POSSIBLE!

03 TWO FARMS CONSERVED

04 OUTDOOR LEARNING IN
POLK SCHOOLS

07 700 ACRES OF BREVARD
WATERSHED PROTECTED

10 PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

NEW NATURE PRESERVE CONNECTS TO TRAILS

Old growth trees. Rare salamanders. Pristine springs. Rock outcrops. Mountain streams. Refuge for wildlife adapting to climate change. All of this and more are now protected at an exceptional new nature preserve that you helped add to our network of protected lands in the Hickory Nut Gorge!

The Chestnut Hills Preserve adjoins our popular Wildcat Rock Hiking Trail and you can see the preserve from the dramatic rock overlook on that trail. Protecting this vital wildlife habitat helps ensure that our growing trail system will always be surrounded by beautiful, unbroken forests.

Chestnut Hills is one of the rare tracts in Western North Carolina that was spared from industrial logging. And for a century or more, virtually no tree cutting has occurred on the property. With its varied ecological niches—from



NEW NATURE PRESERVE CONNECTS TO TRAILS

continued from page 1

rock faces to streambanks—this mature forest offers rich and diverse habitat for wild plants and animals.

The preserve also provides important climate benefits. Land Protection Director Tom Fanslow says, “The tract is north facing and provides a cool, moist refuge for species adapting to climate change, and the soils support a richer diversity of plants. Because the forest hasn’t been cut in over a century we know this older growth forest is storing many tons of carbon, and as a nature preserve the forest will continue to soak up carbon dioxide for centuries to come.”

This 57.6 acre preserve connects to over a thousand acres that Conserving Carolina has already protected in the upper Hickory Nut Gorge. This block of protected lands includes the Wildcat Rock Trail, Bearwallow Mountain Trail, and Florence Nature Preserve—all part of the 100+ mile Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail that Conserving Carolina is spearheading.

We are grateful to landowners Dr. Jim Earnhardt and Barbara Earnhardt, who worked with us to protect their family land. They inherited the land from Irwin Earnhardt (the father of Jim and of Barbara’s late husband, Gene) who

purchased it along with a business partner. A community of 36 houses was built on the lower slopes of this property in Gerton, but the family never considered developing what they called the “upper acreage.”

Barbara says, “They really believed in preserving land. I remember Irwin saying, they’re not making any new land. Irwin was really kind of a farm boy and he liked land.”

A generation later, Jim says, “We just didn’t want to see it developed.”

Barbara also says, “I feel patriotic about the land and its care.” Projectile points found on the land bear witness to the presence of Native people, and Barbara sees its conservation as preserving that heritage. The land also carries the history of the great American chestnut trees, which once turned whole hillsides white with their blossoms. Now, the land’s history and its natural heritage will be carried forward for future generations, including hikers on the upper Hickory Nut Gorge trails.

We are grateful to Esten and Burt Walker, Fred and Alice Stanback, the Fernandez Pave the Way Foundation, and the N.C. Land and Water Fund for their support of this project. And we are grateful to YOU for expanding protected lands in the Hickory Nut Gorge!

PLACES YOU HELPED PROTECT

FOOD AND BEAUTY

Two farms that offer us both food and beauty are now protected with conservation easements. Conserving Carolina recently worked with landowners to protect San Felipe Farm in Polk County and much of Plumlea Farm in Henderson County.

San Felipe Farm takes its name from a coffee plantation in Venezuela that belonged to Rafael Bravo’s grandmother. Rafael’s family has farmed for generations at the foot of the Andes Mountains and he cherishes memories of working a ranch on horseback and sleeping outdoors in a hammock. Rafael met his wife, Mary, while they were both exchange students in England, and he went on to work in agriculture and the food industry in the United States. But once their children were grown, Rafael and Mary decided to pursue their dream of farming.

Today they raise sheep on their 18.5-acre farm in Columbus, NC, using sustainable farming methods that leave the land healthier and more fertile than they found it. They practice rotational grazing, a method that avoids wearing out the soil and returns fertilizer to the ground. On their small farm, they also care for a dairy cow, chickens, and a large garden.

Rafael, who serves on Conserving Carolina’s Board of Directors, says “Since we moved here, we have felt that San Felipe is a special place. It has a special beauty. We want to keep it as is so that future generations will be able to enjoy it as well.”

At Plumlea Farm, in Fletcher, NC, the Roberts family protected two parcels of farmland that boast prime agricultural soils. These 22.7 acres of rich farmland are currently used to grow corn and pasture ponies, alongside woodland and riparian habitat for wildlife. The protected land borders Hoopers Creek, a tributary of Cane Creek, and it’s located across from the Bill Moore Community Park and Cane Creek Greenway. In an area that is developing rapidly, this protected farmland preserves the open scenery around the popular park. This land also adjoins a tract where the Roberts family completed a stream restoration project, improving both habitat and water quality.

Landowner Fletch Roberts says, “We wanted to preserve it for farming as more land is developed in Western North Carolina. Also, we want to show how farming and protecting the environment can mutually exist. Finally, it’s an incredibly beautiful piece of property with long range views of Mount Pisgah and Mount Mitchell.”

Both of these families donated a portion of the value of their conservation easements. Funding to protect the land also came from NC Agricultural Development & Farmland Preservation Trust Fund and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

ON THE COVER:

Chestnut Hills Preserve ensures that Wildcat Rock Trail will always be surrounded by unbroken forests. Photo by Gordon Tutor.

ABOVE:

Lush forests near the Wildcat Rock overlook are now protected as Chestnut Hills Preserve. The preserve is seen in the foreground of this dramatic view. Photo by Gordon Tutor.



Rafael Bravo watches a visitor to the farm feed a lamb.



Livestock are regenerating the land at San Felipe Farm.



Plumlea Farm boasts prime farm soils and amazing views.

PROJECT RENEWAL



It only took a few minutes for Blake Cole's eighth grade class to walk from Polk County Middle School to Laughter Pond. It's a sunny spring day and they love being out in the sunshine by the pond. But they can also see problems there—and they're coming up with solutions.

"You see how eroded the banks are," Blake says. In the spots where people love to come and fish, the banks of the pond are worn down to bare red dirt. During a hard rain, so much soil runs off that the pond turns a dull, muddy orange. Even on this clear day, the green water looks murky.

Today's hands-on activity, ripping up invasive English ivy, is part of a project in which the students plan for the future of natural areas near their school. They're looking at three places—Laughter Pond, a proposed outdoor classroom, and Little White Oak Mountain. Little White Oak Mountain was one of our landmark conservation successes from a few years ago. It's where you helped create 900 acres of new public land right behind the middle school! And there's more. New grant funding will allow Polk County to acquire another 140 acres of parkland from Conserving Carolina.

Now the kids are developing proposals to improve these outdoor spaces for the good of their community. Teacher Jeanne Ferran says "We're looking at problems as things that can be fixed, using creative ways of fixing them."

This spring is the first time that school has felt remotely "normal" to these kids after a long disruption. Two years ago,

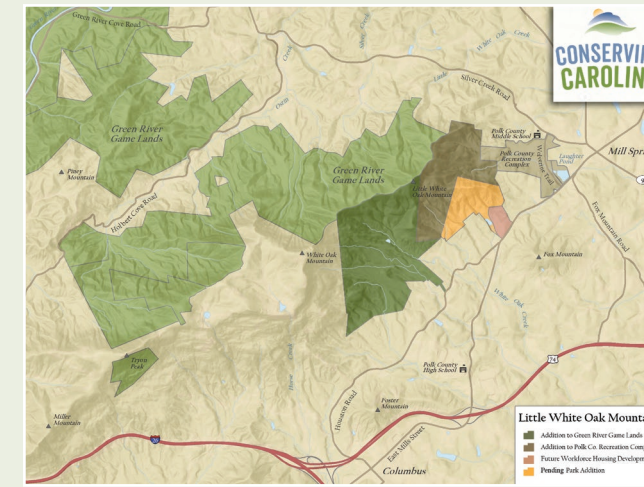
they got sent home at the onset of a deadly pandemic. Some family members got sick. Some lost jobs. Worry and distrust spiked. Sports, clubs, and friends disappeared from their lives.

Ms. Ferran says, "COVID has been really hard on everybody for a long time and I think everybody felt really powerless about all of the changes that were happening. I think this project is helping them feel like they can make change."

The project is led by four teachers—Andrea Walter, Jeanne Ferran, Stephanie Luedi, and Karen Rhodes. Their classes range from fifth grade through Early College and include both science and language arts. The project is supported by RootED, which encourages place-based, experiential education.

Conserving Carolina's Pam Torlina is also involved in the project, teaching about topics like native and invasive plants, songbirds, owls, and watersheds. She says, "I love being involved with the schools and the kids. Hopefully, they're learning how things would be better if we were a little more respectful and did our part to make the world a better place."

The kids are excited to do just that. Standing on the dock, Blake explains his group's idea. "If we have native species set



around the pond, that would help with erosion control. Also, species that nest in those plants or feed off of them will come to this area. And that would be real nice to sit here and be like, 'Oh, there's a bird I haven't seen in a while.'"

His classmate Reggie Owens says, "My group's proposals are to add birdhouses and bat houses that are specially designed for the native birds of North Carolina, such as Carolina wrens, woodpeckers, and cardinals. But the main birdhouses we want to set up are kingfishers."

When their proposals are ready, the students will have a chance to pitch them and possibly get resources and support to make them happen. The students have proposed:

- Raised platforms for fishing that would allow plants to grow in at the edge of the pond
- Wildflowers for pollinators, including milkweed for monarch butterflies
- Interactive signs with QR codes
- Removing invasive plants like English ivy, multiflora rose, and kudzu
- Trails that can be used for sports practice, hiking club, and outdoor classes
- An outdoor stewardship club to help maintain trails and provide wildlife habitat
- An outdoor classroom where they say they will learn better and enjoy school more

Thank you for protecting special places for these kids! Not long ago, Little White Oak Mountain was slated for a large housing development. If it wasn't for Conserving Carolina members like you, that's what probably would have happened. Instead, when these kids look to the future, they see a special place to enjoy the outdoors.

LEARNING by GARDENING

After students returned to Polk County Middle School following a long period of COVID isolation, sixth-grade science teacher Andrea Hill noticed a serious lack of engagement. In particular, she noticed a trend with her highest scoring students becoming apathetic towards school. These students were the inspiration for a new community garden project.



The project, called Grow it Forward, teaches kids how to create and care for a garden. Ms. Hill says the students are the main decision-makers and her goal is "to have them walk away with a sense of ownership in the school—to feel like they created something, they grew something, and to also grow relationships."

Pam Torlina, Conserving Carolina's Southeast Stewardship Manager, and Liz Dicey, a board member, have been supporting the project. Pam says, "The students have learned about what plants need to survive. They've decided what type of garden they want to grow. They've learned about the difference between native and non-native plants and their importance in the ecosystem. And they've learned about soil and compost."

Pam has high hopes for the program. "For me, the desired result is to educate the students about their connection to everything else in the world. I hope that they gain an appreciation of the natural world, an understanding of where their food comes from, the importance and role of native plants in the environment, and a connection to the ecosystem that they are a part of."

The students have been planning the garden, building raised beds, starting plants from seed, and tending the garden. When asked what plant they were most excited to grow, one student answered enthusiastically, "All of them!" It looks like this program is on the right track.

From an article by AmeriCorps member Allie Houtz

IMAGINE YOUR LEGACY

Your passion for nature can live on, beyond your lifetime. Will you make a gift to Conserving Carolina in your will or estate plans? This is one of the most profound ways that you can make a difference for conservation. Your gift will protect wonderful places for our children and grandchildren.

If you decide to make a legacy gift, please let us know so we can thank you and so we can plan for the future. We will gratefully recognize you as a member of our Land Legacy League. To discuss your gift, please call Lynn Killian at 828-697-5777 x. 202.



Photo by Dr. Leah Swann

GUARDIANS OF THE GREEN BUSINESS MEMBERS

Thank you to all of our Guardians of the Green business members! Please consider supporting these local businesses that give back to keep our region a wonderful place to live, work, or visit.

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 WALKER, WALLACE, AND EMERSON REALTY

PLACES YOU HELPED PROTECT

NEARLY 700 ACRES IN BREVARD WATERSHED PROTECTED



Courtesy of Equinox Environmental

When Richard Polchow was a boy, he went camping in Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest and was awed to see the towering old growth forest. Now, he has a vision of his own forest land growing into something that majestic.

In January, the Polchow family donated conservation easements on 694 acres of beautiful, mature forest that will now never be logged. This vast conservation project protects crystal clear streams that provide drinking water for the City of Brevard. The property spans an entire sub-watershed, with nearly seven miles of pristine streams, headwater seeps, and springs that form Tarkiln Branch, a tributary of Cathey's Creek.

The land is surrounded on three sides by Pisgah National Forest and it shares a 4.5-mile border with the national forest. So, its protection shields our public lands from

encroaching development. It's a place of clean streams, brook trout, salamanders, rare wildflowers, and tall trees.

"My goal is: Let's have Joyce Kilmer all over again."

- RICHARD POLCHOW

The land is owned by three Polchow siblings—Richard, Elizabeth, and one other sibling. Richard says that his parents originally purchased the land with conservation in mind. They bought the Cathey's Creek property in 1963, when he was in middle school. The family lived in New Orleans but came to the mountains for camp and vacations. "We fell in love with the mountains," he says. They never contemplated developing the

property, but always intended to protect it.

Richard says, "My goal is: Let's have Joyce Kilmer all over again... The Cathey's Creek forest isn't old growth but it's getting there. It's destined to be that again."

Many conservation easements do allow agriculture and forestry, but this easement is designed to offer the strongest possible protection for the watershed. This healthy forest has been growing uninterrupted for over 70 years and future forest management will have the goal of forest preservation.

Land Protection Director Tom Fanslow points out that conservation easements are tailored to help private landowners achieve a range of goals. In addition to protecting their land, those goals might include generating income, making a living from the land, reserving limited development rights, or passing property on to the next generation. Equinox Environmental helped facilitate this easement by setting up a stream preservation mitigation bank.

Tom says, "The Polchow family exemplifies a superb conservation ethic and community spirit. Their sacrifice of development rights ensures our community will continue to enjoy safe, high quality drinking water."

Courtesy of Equinox Environmental





Photo by Pat Barcas

GUIDE TO BUTTERFLY GARDENING

Want to see more butterflies in your garden? Our new *Complete Guide to Gardening for Butterflies in Western North Carolina and Upstate South Carolina* will show you how. This online guide covers:

- The most important thing not to do!
- Top host plants for caterpillars
- Top nectar plants for adult butterflies
- Best trees to grow for butterflies and moths
- More tips for a butterfly friendly yard

When you create habitat for butterflies, you're also improving habitat for bees, birds, and other wildlife. It's a hopeful, hands-on way to care for our natural world.



CHECK IT OUT:
CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/BUTTERFLY-GUIDE

STORYMAP: RESTORING THE FRENCH BROAD RIVER

The restoration projects that you support are making a real difference for the French Broad River! In our interactive storymap, you can see how these projects fit together as we work toward our vision of a thriving natural corridor along the river.

You'll see blooming wildflower meadows and muskie sloughs at the Mouth of Mud Creek; a buried wetland brought back to life at Carolina Memorial Sanctuary; new public land with a planned floodplain restoration at King's Bridge; and our newest restoration project at Pleasant Grove. Plus, you'll see restoration projects on private land that are bringing back habitat for trout, hellbenders, birds, and so much more.



GO TO:
CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/FBR-STORYMAP

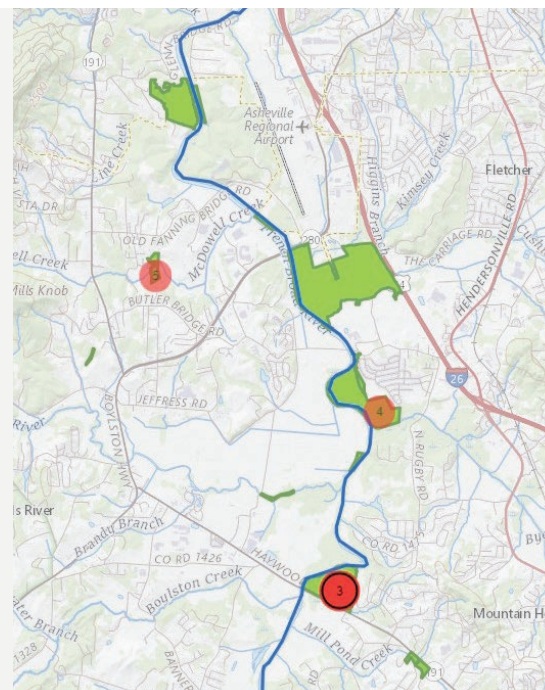


Photo courtesy of
 Headwaters Outfitters

BLUEPRINT FOR A BLUEWAY

Conserving Carolina will be leading efforts to make the French Broad River in Transylvania County a recreational "blueway" that offers abundant opportunities to enjoy a healthy, beautiful river. We worked with the Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority and Jennings Environmental to create a master plan for this initiative. The plan outlines short, medium, and long-term goals. Among these are mapping, signage, bank stabilization, trash clean-ups, boat ramps, fishing piers, pavilions, picnic tables, new parks, and greenway connections.



LEARN MORE:
CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/BLUEWAY-PLAN

ECUSTA TRAIL UPDATE:

MAKE THE DREAM REAL!

Thanks to generous donors, we're making great progress raising funds to build the Ecusta Trail! So far, we've raised 76% of our goal of \$6.5 million. This is the amount we need to raise in private donations to match state and federal grants for trail construction. As part of the match, your donation will be multiplied x 5!

Conserving Carolina and Friends of the Ecusta Trail are working together to raise funds for construction, after buying the land last summer. We've come a long way but we still need everyone's help to raise the last \$1.5 million so we can start building the trail.



DONATE BY MAIL, PHONE OR AT:
CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/ECUSTA



Q: IS THE ECUSTA TRAIL CORRIDOR OPEN TO THE PUBLIC?

A: It depends on what county you're in. In Transylvania, the corridor is *not* open to the public. Unauthorized use makes it harder for us to achieve our goal of opening the trail, so please be patient and respect the rules.

In Henderson County, public access is allowed, with limitations. Bridges and trestles are still off limits. Keep in mind that it's an unimproved rail line and recreation is permitted at your own risk. Please keep dogs on leash and respect neighbors' private property.

LADY SLIPPER AWARD

- WINNERS -

Here are our spring and summer award-winning volunteers. A huge thank you to Jeff and Delia and all of our volunteers!



JEFF SHIELDS

VOLUNTEERING FOR:

5 years

HOME:

Flat Rock

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:

Photography, organizing photo archive

HOW HE GOT INVOLVED:

He's harbored a passion for the environment from a young age and wanted to get involved in the community after moving here.

WHAT MOTIVATES HIM:

A love of the natural world and the belief that it is necessary to protect it for fellow creatures and humans alike.

TOP ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES:

Balance of development with protecting nature.

HOBBIES:

Photography, stamp-collecting, basket-weaving.

FAVORITE QUOTE:

"Our task must be to free ourselves... by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

- Albert Einstein



DELIA JOVEL-DUBÓN

VOLUNTEERING FOR:

2 years

HOME:

Dana, NC

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:

Leads Las Flores project, restoring a natural area to create an outdoor space for the Hispanic community and neighbors.

HOW SHE GOT INVOLVED:

Worked with the late William Hamilton and Tom Fanslow (at Conserving Carolina) to find land for a small farm.

WHAT MOTIVATES HER:

Bringing communities together and creating access to local, sustainable food.

MOST REWARDING VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE:

Seeing the strength, resilience, capacity, and energy her community puts into creating a better future for themselves and their families.

HOBBIES:

Working with soil and plants.

FAVORITE QUOTE:

"Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony."

- Mahatma Gandhi

WILD NEIGHBORS

GRAND PRIZE WINNER:
David Huff photographed this bear in
the buttercups in his yard in Asheville.



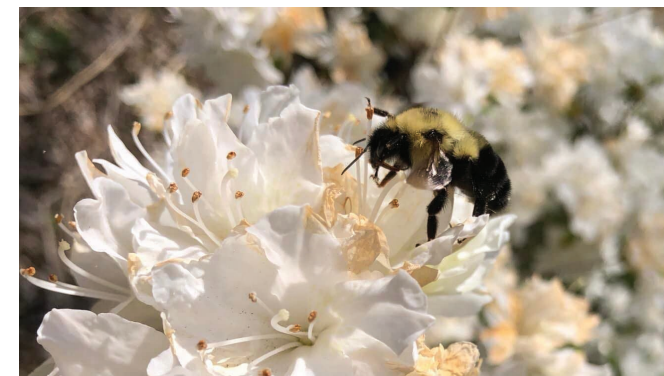
Debbie Macejka took a creative view of this dandelion in Saluda.

Wildlife need places to live, outside of parks and nature preserves. And we all need more nature in our everyday lives. In our spring Habitat at Home photo contest, we asked you to show how you're creating habitat close to home—and who's showing up. In response, you shared photos of bears, bees, foxes, butterflies, wildflowers, mushrooms, moths, turtles, salamanders, snakes, snails, spiders, lizards, hawks, herons, songbirds, owls... and more! Thank you for sharing your space with these wild neighbors.

Thank you to everyone who shared your photos! Your love of nature and wildlife is an inspiration. Congratulations to this year's finalists and to the grand prize winner, David Huff.



Denise Booher photographed this woodpecker near her home in Hendersonville.



Wendy McAnally Smith found this bee on her flowers in Hendersonville, seeming to eat from its "hand."



Lauren Sheperd captured this image of a wood thrush near her home in Leicester.



JOIN US FOR CONSERVATION CELEBRATION, AUG. 27!

Join us Aug. 27, 2022 at Falling Creek Camp in Tuxedo, NC for our annual Conservation Celebration benefit. This beautiful camp of 890 acres is protected by a conservation easement with Conserving Carolina. Celebrate with us in-person in an open-air pavilion. We'll enjoy music by Zoe and Cloyd with Bennett Sullivan, a buffet dinner, and drinks. There will be auction items on display, and the drawing of our trip raffle. More details to come in July at www.conservationcelebration.org.

CHECK OUT UPCOMING EVENTS

Subscribe to emails or go to our website calendar to find out about events like:

- Guided hikes and nature walks
- Speaker series and workshops
- Forest bathing walks
- Spanish-English nature walks
- Community events and festivals
- Members-only hikes and tours
- Volunteer workdays

There's something for everyone and we look forward to connecting with you!



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FOR NATURE AND PEOPLE. FOREVER.



NATURE LIGHTS PEOPLE UP.

Your gifts create life-changing places. Like new parkland behind Polk County Middle School (see story on p. 4.) Or a new nature preserve in the Hickory Nut Gorge. Or 700 acres with crystal-clear streams near Brevard. Please give today to protect more of these wonderful places!

For your convenience, your membership renewal date appears on the address label.