

LANDSCAPE



THANK YOU
FOR MAKING GREAT
STORIES POSSIBLE!

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TO BEARALLOW**

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RESTORING LIFE ALONG THE RIVER

This fall, the first muskie swam into a new backwater pool connected to the French Broad River. It was one of three pools, called sloughs, that were recently excavated beside the river as places for muskie to breed. Muskie—or muskellunge, to use their full name—are the largest fish native to the French Broad River. They can grow up to four feet long and are a prized, hard-to-get catch for anglers.

These giant fish belong in the French Broad River, but they nearly died out when the river was more polluted. They were reintroduced, but the stocked fish aren't reproducing. Biologists with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission have a theory as to why: the river flows too fast.



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**THANK YOU FOR
YOUR SUPPORT!**

ON THE COVER:

Biologist Amanda Bushon holds a 49-inch muskie. Courtesy of N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission



RESTORING LIFE ALONG THE RIVER

continued from page 1

A new muskie slough connects to the French Broad River at the Mouth of Mud Creek.

In its natural state, the river would spread into sloughs and wetlands and spill over its floodplain. But, today, the water and the land have been separated. Ditches and berms were built to keep the river in a narrow channel, where the current is strong. Many species, including muskie, seek out calmer, slow-moving waters to shelter, find food, and breed.

COMEBACK FOR THE FLOODPLAIN

That raised the question: Can we bring back something that we've lost? Can we recreate the kind of natural floodplain that supports abundant life?

When 103 acres of flood-prone farmland came up for sale in Mills River, on the French Broad at the mouth of Mud Creek, we had the opportunity to try. Conserving Carolina purchased the property and for several years, with multiple partners, we've been undertaking an ambitious floodplain restoration.

This summer, we completed the restoration. It includes three new muskie sloughs (pronounced "slews"), three acres of wetlands, reforestation along the river, and a wildflower meadow. We removed rampant invasive plants and replanted the land in diverse native species.

Scientists track the movements of muskie, which is how we know that at least ten muskie have started using the sloughs—including some who traveled 20 miles to get there! Many other creatures have been spotted at the Mouth of Mud Creek as well. Like otters, deer, racoons, coyotes, dragonflies, bats, osprey, and many kinds of birds. More frogs, turtles, and salamanders are all expected to move into the new wetlands.

The restoration brings important benefits for people as well. The land absorbs water and filters it as it runs toward the French Broad, improving our water quality. It also holds stormwater that would otherwise rush downstream in destructive floods. The site

David Lee shows one of three new muskie sloughs.



includes a paddle campground and a potential expansion of the Oklawaha Greenway.

David Lee, our Natural Resources and Trails Manager, says, “With this restoration, we’re thinking holistically about the larger ecological process and all of the benefits for wildlife and people that come from a natural floodplain. It’s a model that we’re already replicating at other sites along the French Broad River.”

UNCOVERING A BURIED WETLAND

Another recent restoration took place at Carolina Memorial Sanctuary, a conservation burial ground that we helped protect in Mills River. The sanctuary is located on a tributary of the French Broad River. When we started there, the grounds were abandoned farm fields overrun with invasive plants. But soil studies suggested that part of the site had once been a wetland. It looked like, at some point, the wetland had been covered with 16 inches of fill dirt.

The restoration involved removing invasive plants, planting natives, and regrading steep, eroded streambanks. But, for contractor Sean Moore, the most exciting part was removing the soil over what could be a buried treasure—the former wetland. Sure enough, as his excavator dug into the hillside, a spring started gushing out of the bank, like a hose. The basin he was digging filled up with water.

And, very soon, plants and animals began to appear. Wetland plants sprang up, possibly from seeds that had been buried for nearly a century! Wood frogs, swallows, mallards, and salamanders all arrived in the first few months. Cassie Barrett, who helps run the sanctuary, says that love is healing the land—both love from the burials and from the restoration.

BIG PICTURE VISION FOR THE FRENCH BROAD RIVER

Further upstream, on the East Fork of the French Broad, near Rosman, we recently completed improvements to a restoration from 2016. We worked with musician Woody Platt of Steep Canyon Rangers and his wife Shannon Whitworth on one side of the river and landowners Lois and Carl Ganner on the other side. Here, the riverbanks used



This red salamander lives in the restored wetland at Carolina Memorial Sanctuary.

to be 10-foot tall cliffs that would collapse and dump sediment into the river.

Conserving Carolina managed a project to regrade the banks and add underwater features that provide shelter for animals. During a site tour this fall, the water was running crystal clear—a good home for brook trout and hellbender salamanders. Monarch butterflies were gathering nectar from wildflowers along the banks, and trees were growing up to shade and cool the stream.

Looking forward, we’re planning another floodplain restoration at our Pleasant Grove property in Etowah. And we’re in the process of acquiring a potential restoration site in Fletcher. Both are located on the French Broad River.

Together, projects like these could make a real difference for our region’s largest waterway. And this fall, we were awarded a planning grant to chart a vision for floodplains in the Upper French Broad River watershed. With your support, we are changing the French Broad River for the better—providing cleaner water, reducing flood damage, and supporting more life. Thank you!

Water runs crystal clear in a restored section of the East Fork of the French Broad River. Photo by Pat Barcas.





Nicola Karesh and Edith Darity at the historic Bethel-A Baptist Church. Photo courtesy of Nicola Karesh.

STORIES OF THE LAND

AFRICAN-AMERICAN STORYLINE RECALLS LOCAL HISTORY

Edith Darity was one of the first Black students to attend Brevard High School, in 1963, after her community sued to integrate the schools. She grew in the Rosenwald community, where she still lives. But the neighborhood is very different today. Edith remembers a vibrant community, full of locally owned businesses where today you might see vacant lots. Integration had both upsides and downsides for Rosenwald, as new opportunities drew people away from the once self-sufficient Black community.

Conserving Carolina has been supporting a project called the African American Storyline, led by Edith, Nicola Karesh, Billy Smith, and other community members, which includes new historical signs. “I thought these historical markers would shed light on the work that had been done by the generations before us,” Edith says. “They wanted the children to know that they were somebody. I want the children today to know that even though they see a vacant lot, that doesn’t mean that there’s no history behind it. Even with a vacant lot, there is a story.”

The project also strengthened partnerships that could lead toward revitalization. There are plans in the works for a rebuilt community center, a new park, and a renovated playground. Conserving Carolina has played a role in expanding community green space, including an expansion of the Brevard greenway.



▶ SEE EDITH'S STORY: [CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/EDITH-DARITY](https://conservingcarolina.org/edith-darity)



JOIN THE CONSERVING CAROLINA COMMUNITY ONLINE

You are invited to join the newly formed Conserving Carolina Community, a private group on Facebook. Step outside the fray that social media can be and connect with people who share your love of nature and the outdoors. In the group, you can:

- Share your photos and experiences—like gorgeous mountain views, volunteers giving back, or wildlife seen in your backyard.
- Get important conservation news that might not show up in your news feed.
- Learn about upcoming Conserving Carolina events.
- Share your ideas for conservation.
- Ask and answer questions, among people who share your interests.


▶ TO JOIN, GO TO [FACEBOOK.COM/GROUPS/CONSERVINGCAROLINA](https://facebook.com/groups/conservingcarolina).



Give a Gift Membership!

If you have family and friends who love the outdoors, what would make a better gift than protecting the places they love? They’ll enjoy their gift membership all year long—every time they get newsletters full of updates about newly protected lands, or invitations to special events and members-only hikes. Plus, they will receive a Conserving Carolina tote bag and sticker, and a 15% off coupon for Mast General Store. It’s a stocking-full!

▶ GO TO [CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/DONATE](https://conservingcarolina.org/donate) AND CHOOSE GIFT MEMBERSHIP



🌲 PLACES YOU HELPED PROTECT

NEW TRAIL CONNECTS BEARWALLOW TO WILDCAT ROCK

Enjoy views from this ridgeline pasture. Photo by Gordon Tutor.

Ready to roam over a longer stretch of the Hickory Nut Gorge? We're excited to open a beautiful new trail for you! This two-mile extension of the Wildcat Rock Trail runs between two gorgeous mountain pastures. Along the way are ferny boulder fields, a rare mountain bog, and a stand of old growth forest. This new section of trail takes you from the summit of Bearwallow, with its 360-degree panoramas, to the ridgeline pasture on Little Bearwallow with its dramatic view down the Hickory Nut Gorge.

This new section creates a link between two of our most popular trails—Wildcat Rock and Bearwallow Mountain. Better yet, the Bearwallow Mountain Trail already connects to the Trombatore Trail. And the Wildcat Rock Trail already connects to the trails in the Florence Nature Preserve. That means that this new link brings together a total of 13.5 miles in the Upper Hickory Nut Gorge! On top of that, our volunteers and trails crew are hard at work building an additional three miles of trails in this area, so you can explore even further.

The extended Wildcat Rock Trail, which opened in November, brings us one step closer to our vision of a 20-mile loop trail in the Upper Hickory Nut Gorge. That loop is part of our ambitious vision for the 130+-mile Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail, which Conserving Carolina is spearheading.

To access this newly opened section of trail, you can start at Bearwallow Mountain or you can start at the base of the Wildcat Rock Trail at our Upper Hickory Nut Gorge Trailhead on Gerton Highway. There's also a great option for a shuttle hike between these two access points. Let us know what you think of the new trail!

▶ **SHARE YOUR PHOTOS ONLINE WITH THE HASHTAGS
#MOREWILDCATROCK AND #CONSERVINGCAROLINA.**



The new trail passes through beautiful woodlands. Photo by Gordon Tutor.



PLACES YOU HELPED PROTECT

NEW LAND ADDED TO DUPONT STATE RECREATIONAL FOREST

You helped add new land to DuPont State Recreational Forest! Your support allowed us to link this treasured state forest with a conservation corridor that covers over 100,000 acres along the North Carolina – South Carolina border. Here’s what that looks like from the air—a vast, unbroken expanse of forest land. Wildlife can use this vital corridor to migrate and roam. We’re excited about the potential for future trail connections, too.

This summer, Conserving Carolina conveyed 315 acres to the N.C. Forest Service, south of the main body of

Photos of the Continental Divide Tract by Shannon Millsaps, Millsaps Creative.



DuPont. This is the second phase of the Continental Divide Tract—a long-sought conservation priority that provides the “missing link” between DuPont and a vast chain of public lands. Including both phases, the Continental Divide Tract provides 717 acres of new public land.

The property straddles the Eastern Continental Divide, which separates the waters that flow toward the Atlantic seaboard from those that flow toward the Gulf of Mexico. It includes clear trout streams, rare wildflowers, and vital wildlife habitat. By expanding a major migration corridor, it allows both plants and animals to survive in a changing climate by shifting their range—often further north or higher in elevation. While there is not currently public access to the Continental Divide Tract, this important addition to the state forest creates opportunities to expand public recreation in the future.

Conserving Carolina has been active in protecting DuPont since the 1990s, when we helped protect the first 7,600 acres of the state forest—one of our very first conservation projects. Since then, we have helped add significant acreage to DuPont. With this addition, the state forest now spans nearly 12,500 acres.

REMEMBERING JOHN HUMPHREY, A CONSERVATION PIONEER



We remember with gratitude our great friend John Humphrey, who passed away on October 12 at 104 years old. It was John who granted Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy (now Conserving Carolina) our very first conservation easement, protecting his beloved farm in Mills River. He went on to serve on our Board of Directors, and twice served as board president. Well past his 100th birthday, John could be found out in his woods, removing invasive plants. He often outpaced much younger volunteers who worked alongside him! John inspired all of us who had the chance to work with him, and we will miss him.



Photo by Pat Barcas

WELCOME, 2020-21 AMERICORPS MEMBERS!

This September, we welcomed a new cohort of AmeriCorps Project Conserve members. Here, our new members are showing their enthusiasm on top of Bearwallow Mountain. This year, at Conserving Carolina, our AmeriCorps members include (from left to right) Meredith Wingerson, Sarah Sussman, Abby Williams, Laura Anderson, Pat Barcas, and Kelly Waldron.

Conserving Carolina also leads the entire AmeriCorps Project Conserve program, which this year placed 39 members at 21 conservation partners throughout WNC. This program makes a major difference for conservation throughout this whole region!



Dillon Hall explores the pollinator garden at our office. Photo by Julianne Johnson.

LEAVE A LEGACY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Your love for the natural world is a connection to something beyond yourself—one of life's greatest joys. Now, you can pass on the beauty and wonder that you have experienced to coming generations. One of the most significant ways that you can make a lasting difference is through legacy giving.

How will you leave a legacy? You have a variety of options, including a bequest through your will, or a beneficiary designation in your retirement account or life insurance policy. If you do include Conserving Carolina in your estate plans, please let us know, so we can recognize you as part of our Land Legacy League and express our thanks during your lifetime.

To discuss your **options for charitable giving**, please contact Lynn Killian, Development Director, at 828-697-5777, ext. 202 or lynn@conservingcarolina.org

HARMONY AROUND THE CAMPFIRE



Watch the online video to join this conversation on Bearwallow Mountain.

As a sales executive, Earl B. Hunter, Jr. traveled a lot, away from his wife and his two young children. That was until Dillon, who was seven at the time, confronted him.

“He said, ‘Dad, you keep telling me you’re going to take me to Mt. Rushmore, and yet you haven’t taken me. You always telling me to talk that talk and walk that walk. Well, I’m telling you to walk that walk,’” Earl recalls.

So, that summer, Earl took Dillon on an epic road trip across the U.S., as he traveled to RV dealerships, selling pop-up campers. Then, something happened at a campground in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Earl says, “I looked over, I said, ‘That’s a *Black* family! It turned out to be the only Black family that we saw in 49 campgrounds, three months of traveling, 14,000 miles. And they were shocked when they saw us.”

In the campground, the two Black families talked for hours. Earl recounts that the woman they’d met challenged him: “You say you’re one of the only Black executives in the industry—why don’t you get Black folks to go camping? Why don’t *you* do that?”

That conversation sparked a big idea.

Last year, Earl founded a new company, Black Folks Camp Too. He says to engage more Black people in the outdoors, you need to do three things:

1. *Remove fear.*
2. *Provide knowledge.*
3. *Invite them.*

Earl’s vision is for more people of all colors to be able to connect because we have something in common—camping. He says, “I had the grandiose idea that getting Black folks in the outdoors, getting people around the campfire—I felt like the campfire could be this piece that brings a whole entire country together.”

“Why don’t we get Black folks around the campfire with the folks who are already around the campfire?” He asks. “Now we begin to have this harmony, where people can talk around the campfire.”

We got together with Earl at Bearwallow Mountain and had one of those campfire conversations about how we can make the outdoors more diverse—and how that will change conservation for the better.

▶ YOU CAN SEE THE VIDEO OF EARL’S CONVERSATION WITH ROSE LANE, OUR COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR, AT [CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/EARL-HUNTER-VIDEO](https://www.conservingcarolina.org/earl-hunter-video).



“...I felt like the campfire could be this piece that brings a whole entire country together.”

- EARL B. HUNTER, JR

Earl B. Hunter, Jr. with his son Dillon



19-MILE ECUSTA TRAIL CORRIDOR UNDER CONTRACT

Imagine if you could travel by bike or on foot on an 19-mile rail trail between Hendersonville and Brevard. Would you use the new greenway to see the countryside? Would you stop at local businesses along the way? Would you find it easier to get outside, enjoy nature, and exercise?

We are working to make this vision a reality. Conserving Carolina is now under contract to purchase a former rail corridor for a proposed greenway, known as the Ecusta Trail. The trail is named for the former Ecusta plant in Brevard, which was named in turn for the Cherokee word for “rippling waters.”

Last year, the Ecusta Trail took a huge step forward when Conserving Carolina received a \$6.4 million grant from the NC Department of Transportation toward the purchase of the land. Supporting funding came from the Henderson County Tourism Development Authority and Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority. This fall, we went under contract with Blue Ridge Railroad, LLC and we hope to finalize the purchase in the coming months.

LADY SLIPPER AWARD - WINNERS -

Every quarter, we recognize some of our outstanding volunteers. We are so grateful to all our volunteers, who give generously of their time and their gifts!



ECUSTA TRAIL LEGAL ADVISORS

OUR VOLUNTEER ENVIRONMENTAL LAWYERS:

Amos Dawson, Pat McCafferty, and Mike Egan

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:

Ecusta Trail Task Force, Board of Directors

HOW THEY GOT INVOLVED:

Through the suggestion of a friend. For Amos and Mike, it was fellow board member Rick Merrill. For Pat, it was Amos.

MOST REWARDING VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE:

Moving the complex Ecusta Trail project forward. Building relationships with staff and volunteers.

HOPES & DREAMS FOR CONSERVING CAROLINA:

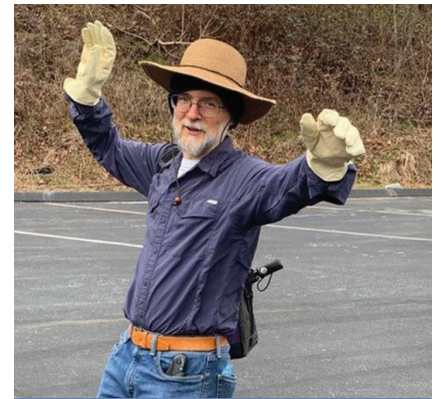
Continue to lead land conservation efforts throughout WNC. Build a community where conservation and equality are primary values.

COOL FACT:

All three have practiced environmental law all over the country and now call WNC home.

TOP ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE:

Conserving lands that are crucial to the survival of species through the climate change crisis



STEFAN ISRAEL

VOLUNTEERING FOR:

Over 2 years

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:

Rock Crushers trail crew

MOST REWARDING VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE:

The feeling of satisfied accomplishment after a day of trail work.

HOPES & DREAMS FOR CONSERVING CAROLINA:

Completing the trail loop around Gerton, one day around Lake Lure, and then eventually the length of the Hickory Nut Gorge!

WHAT MOTIVATES HIM:

Watching damage to trails disappear, seeing new trails spring up, and seeing people enjoying them.

COOL FACT:

He is semi-retired and runs his own German genealogy translating business – Unlock Your History

TOP ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE:

Extreme flooding in WNC and the devastation it causes in our narrow mountain valleys.

HOBBIES:

Hiking, trail work, his business, reading, calligraphy, and affectionately plaguing his nephews.



NEW POLLINATOR GARDEN AT POLK COUNTY LIBRARY

All it took were a few pickup trucks full of composted horse manure, some hard work, and some love to transform an empty space at the Polk County Library in Columbus into a thriving pollinator garden. The Polk Task Force of our education committee used manure donated by Deer Meadow Farm to transform the poor soil, and then planted bird-and-pollinator-friendly natives near the children's section of the library, complete with a footpath and bird feeder.



Flowers at pollinator garden. Photo by Pat Barcas.

CONSERVATION CELEBRATION GOES VIRTUAL

We were so grateful for the opportunity to connect with you through our first ever virtual Conservation Celebration, on Aug. 25! Thanks to supporters who are there for us, whether online or in-person, the virtual event and the online auction were a great success. Outstanding photographers, filmmakers, musicians, speakers, and sponsors contributed to make this a truly special event, raising over \$70,000. We are particularly grateful to Audrey and Frank Peterman for their inspiring keynote address. If you missed the live premiere, you can still watch the event on our website at conservingcarolina.org/2020-celebration.



FIGHTING KUDZU AT MELROSE FALLS PRESERVE

AmeriCorps member Laura Anderson was out treating kudzu at our Melrose Falls preserve between Saluda and Tryon. The preserve is a treasure trove of spring wildflowers that we can't lose to rampant kudzu! Laura worked with fellow AmeriCorps member Sarah Sussman and staff members Pam Torlina and David Lee to eradicate kudzu along the North Pacolet River and a rail line at the edges of the preserve. We worked in partnership with the Polk County Beautification Committee, as a pilot project to take on the kudzu problem along Rt. 176.



Laura Anderson treating kudzu. Photo by Sarah Sussman.

FIELD NOTES



See the butterfly in there? Monarch butterflies are miraculous throughout their journey, including their sea-green chrysalises flecked with glinting gold. The chrysalis becomes translucent when the butterfly is almost ready to emerge. Emily Kujawa captured this moment at her home in Asheville after growing milkweed, the butterfly's host plant, in her garden.



Why are goldenrod and asters beautiful together?

When Robin Wall Kimmerer was studying to be a botanist, that wasn't seen as a scientific question. But it is, she writes, in *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Their contrasting colors draw more bees than if they grew separately—and human eyes perceive these colors much as bee eyes do. She writes, "That September pairing of purple and gold is lived reciprocity; its wisdom is that the beauty of one is illuminated by the radiance of the other."

YOU ARE INVITED



VIRTUAL HOLIDAY GIFT EXCHANGE, DEC. 15

You know when you have a gift for someone that you're just so excited for them to unwrap? That's how we feel about the surprises we've been getting ready for you in this festive virtual event. We wouldn't want to miss the holidays with you, so please join us online on Dec. 15 at 7:00!



JOIN A FOREST BATHING WALK

You are invited to slow down and experience the forest with all of your senses. Dr. Mattie Decker is now offering regular forest bathing walks at Conserving Carolina preserves, through all seasons. Find upcoming walks on our online calendar.

VOLUNTEER IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Want to get outside and make a difference? We are now holding outdoor volunteer workdays, with measures to keep everyone safe including caps on group size and social distancing. Check our calendar for workdays or get email updates by signing up at conservingcarolina.org/volunteer.

► FIND DETAILS FOR THESE AND MORE EVENTS ON OUR EVENTS CALENDAR: [CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/CALENDAR](https://conservingcarolina.org/calendar)

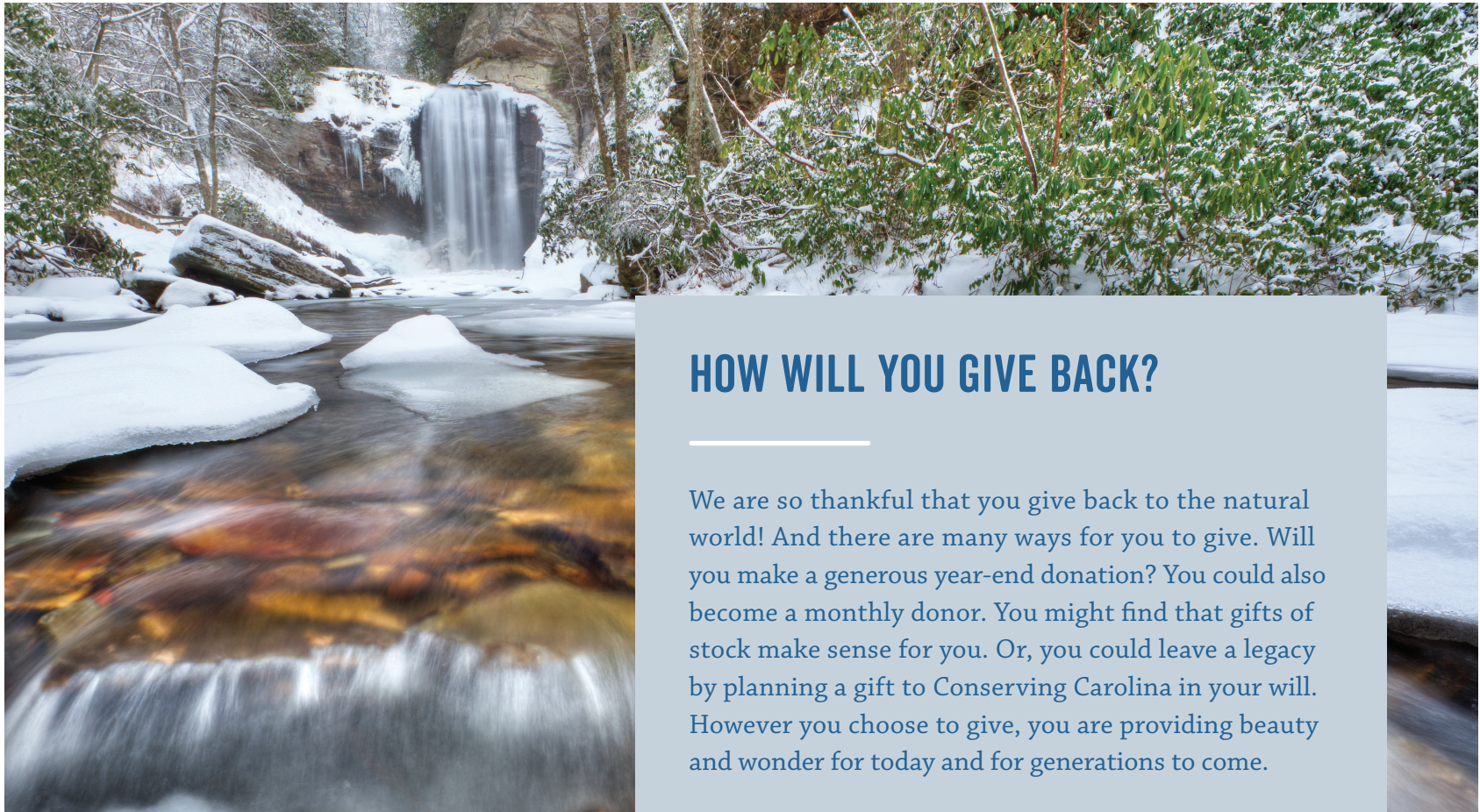


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HOW WILL YOU GIVE BACK?

We are so thankful that you give back to the natural world! And there are many ways for you to give. Will you make a generous year-end donation? You could also become a monthly donor. You might find that gifts of stock make sense for you. Or, you could leave a legacy by planning a gift to Conserving Carolina in your will. However you choose to give, you are providing beauty and wonder for today and for generations to come.

Thank you!

Photo by Kevin Adams.