

LANDSCAPE



THANK YOU FOR MAKING GREAT STORIES POSSIBLE!

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STRAWBERRY GAP TRAIL: A TRADITION OF WELCOME

It has long been a rite of passage for the children, grandchildren, and then the great-grandchildren, of Elspie and Jamie Clarke to hike on their own from the family home to the rocky outcrop of Ferguson Peak, with its dramatic views over the Fairview valley. It's a steep and demanding route that the young people can take pride in completing. And it strengthens their sense that this mountain is home.

Many friends and neighbors have also found a sense of home here. Mike Leonard recalls how when he was coping with divorce, Jamie—the father of his good friend from their law school days together, Dumont Clarke—would invite him out frequently and hike with him to the rocky peak. “The weather didn’t have to be particularly good for him to want to hike it,” Mike remembers.



The five living children of Jamie and Elspie Clarke's original eight children attended the opening of the trail, which is dedicated to the memory of their sister Susie Hamilton. From left, they are Billy Clarke, Doug Clarke, Dumont Clarke, Jim Clarke, and Annie Ager. Photo by Gordon Tutor.

STRAWBERRY GAP TRAIL: A TRADITION OF WELCOME
continued from page 1

Many friends recall how the family home since 1916—the historic Sherill's Inn—was always open to them, with or without notice, regardless of who was at home.

Now, this tradition of hospitality extends to you.

In September, the beautiful Strawberry Gap Trail opened to the public, crossing land that is owned by the extended family of Clarkes, Hamiltons, and Agers. At the trail opening, Dumont Clarke said, on behalf of the family,

“We are pleased and we are excited that this trail will provide members of the public with recreational hiking access across the beautiful, forested mountain land that has long been a cherished part of our family’s heritage. And we are grateful for the resources and the efforts of so many organizations that have made the Strawberry Gap Trail a reality.”

This trail resulted from a unique partnership between Conserving Carolina and the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC). Since 2008, SAHC has worked with the family to protect more than 700 acres of private land with conservation easements. SAHC also owns

the 170-acre Strawberry Gap Preserve, which the new trail crosses.

It was family friend Mike Leonard who first suggested a public access trail to the family—extending to others his own experiences hiking up to Ferguson Peak. While most conservation easements do not allow public access, the family wanted to offer a hiking trail, and included trail access in their conservation project. Conserving

until it reaches Blue Ridge Pastures, where the open meadow offers dramatic views of the Hickory Nut Gorge as it plunges toward Lake Lure.

At Blue Ridge Pastures, the Strawberry Gap Trail connects to Trombatore Trail, and it goes on from there. The Trombatore Trail connects to the Bearwallow Mountain Trail, which connects to Wildcat Rock Trail, which connects to the trail network in the Florence Nature Preserve. That brings us to more than 16 miles of connected trails, making up 85% of a potential loop trail encircling the Upper Hickory Nut Gorge! These trails move us closer to the vision for the 100+ mile Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail, which Conserving Carolina is spearheading.

With so many connected trails, you have the option to hike Strawberry Gap as a six-mile out-and-back, set up a shuttle connecting two or more trails, or create your own adventure.

The sustainably built trail was designed and built by an award-winning duo—Conserving Carolina’s trail specialist, Peter Barr, and local trail builder Shrimper Khare. Over 2,000 volunteer hours were contributed by Conserving Carolina’s expert trail crew, the Rock Crushers.

At the opening ceremony, Shrimper reflected on how trails spur greater interest in protecting land. The trails connect people to the landscape and to the natural world, encouraging further investment in land conservation along their route.

At the ceremony, many thanks were offered to the numerous partners who made the Strawberry Gap Trail possible. Shrimper added, “The thing I want to say thanks for the most is for all the believers—the believers in the viewshed, the believers in the concept of conserving land, but most importantly the believers that trails don’t need land, the land needs the trail. It’s really important to me that when you walk it, you connect back to the land.”

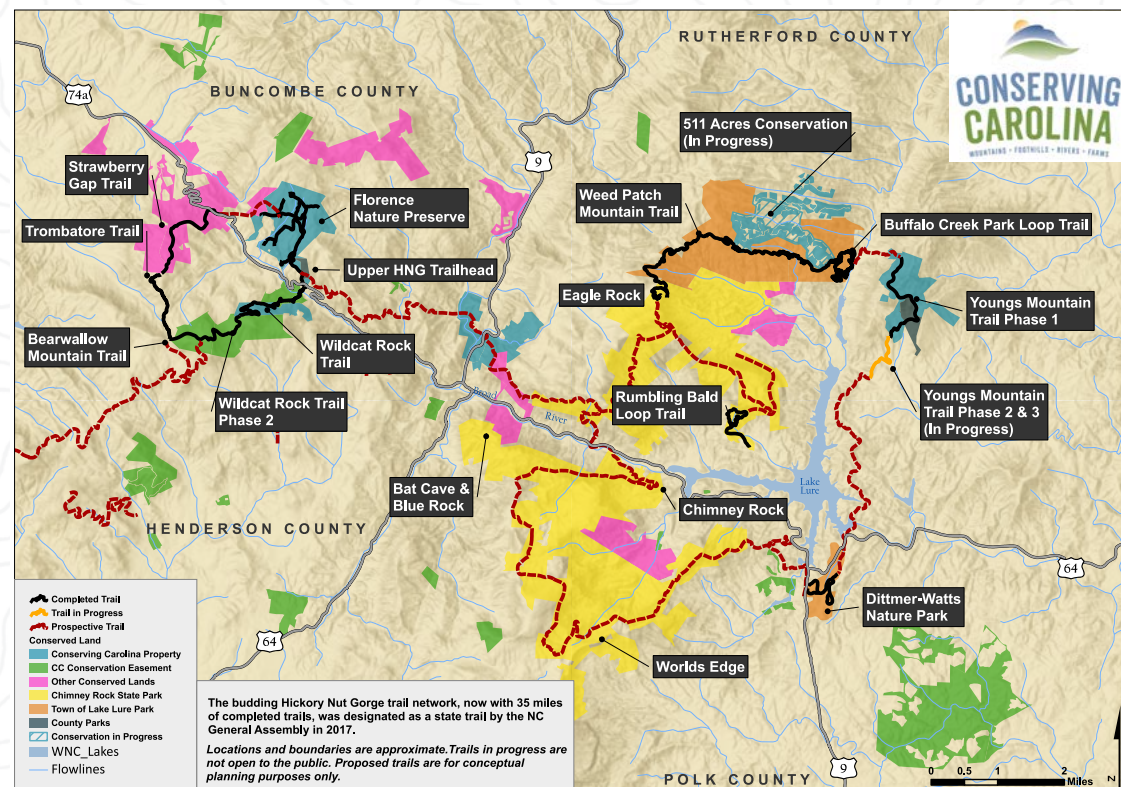
“Trails don’t need land, the land needs the trail. It’s really important to me that when you walk it, you connect back to the land.”

- TRAIL BUILDER SHRIMPER KHARE

Carolina then built the Strawberry Gap Trail, which connects to our growing network of hiking trails in the Hickory Nut Gorge.

The three-mile trail begins at a parking area off Hwy. 74A in Gerton and ascends through a beautiful, boulder-strewn forest to the rocky viewpoint on Ferguson Peak. From there, it continues to climb

Photo by Gordon Tutor.



Conserving Carolina is spearheading the visionary 100+ mile Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail.

HOW TO HIKE STRAWBERRY GAP TRAIL

LENGTH: 6 miles out-and-back

DIFFICULTY: Strenuous

ALTERNATE HIKE: 5.4 miles mostly downhill as a shuttle starting at the Bearwallow/Trombatore trailhead

NO DOGS ALLOWED: Dogs are not allowed on this trail, which is located on private property. Dogs on leash are welcome at other nearby Conserving Carolina trails.



LEARN MORE:
[CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/STRAWBERRY-GAP](https://www.conservingcarolina.org/strawberry-gap)

THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS

Funding for the Strawberry Gap Trail was provided by:

- RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM
- NORTH CAROLINA STATE TRAILS PROGRAM
- DAVID & DARYL NELMS
- FRED & ALICE STANBACK
- HENDERSON COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
- COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF HENDERSON COUNTY
- PERRY N. RUDNICK ENDOWMENT FUND
- FERNANDEZ PAVE THE WAY FOUNDATION
- JAMES G. K. MCCLURE EDUCATIONAL & DEVELOPMENT FUND
- DUMONT CLARKE IV & SHIRLEY J. LINN
- CONSERVING CAROLINA MEMBERS



BUYING THE SALUDA GRADE RAIL LINE

Saluda Grade through downtown Saluda. Photo by Jim Kelly/Palmetto Trail.

There's a new rail trail in the works—one that would travel from the rolling countryside of Upstate South Carolina, through historic and vibrant small towns, and into the spectacular mountain scenery of Western North Carolina. This 31-mile rail trail would follow the route of the historic Saluda Grade rail line.

Conserving Carolina has teamed up with two nonprofit partners in South Carolina—Upstate Forever and PAL: Play, Advocate, Live Well—to spearhead this ambitious new rail trail. Now, we are very close to going under contract on the land! Once under contract, we

will still need to raise the money to purchase the corridor. There's a lot of work ahead, but we're excited about the opportunity to pursue this trail, which could be a game changer for local economies, outdoor recreation, good health, and quality of life.

The trail would begin in Inman, SC (north of Spartanburg) and pass through Campobello, Landrum, Tryon, and Saluda before reaching Zirconia, NC (south of Hendersonville.) Along its route, it would feature scenic views, lively downtowns, historic landmarks, unique nature preserves, and gorgeous lakes and waterfalls. Our hope is to

eventually connect the Saluda Grade Trail with the Ecusta Trail. These two rail trails would form a long and vital link within a growing network of connected greenways and hiking trails.

Like the Swamp Rabbit Trail, Virginia Creeper Trail, and the future Ecusta Trail, the Saluda Grade Trail would be an amazing win-win for our communities—a boon for outdoor recreation, local economies, healthy living and more!

 TO LEARN MORE & GET INVOLVED: CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/SALUDA-GRADE

LOCAL HISTORY: Trails can highlight local landmarks and invigorate historic downtowns. The famous Saluda Grade rail line is itself a historic landmark.

TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS: With safe routes for walking or biking, people can get around without driving—reducing traffic and pollution.

WILDLIFE HABITAT: Rail trails can provide wildlife habitat along their routes and serve as migration corridors that link parks and natural areas.

Ecusta Trail. Photo by Real Digital Productions.

ECUSTA TRAIL: LET'S START BUILDING!

We're striving to cross the finish line of our fundraising goal for the Ecusta Trail. As you know, last year, a subsidiary of Conserving Carolina bought the land for the trail. Now we are partnering with Friends of the Ecusta Trail to raise funds to build it. Along the way, we've gotten some major grants, but we also need a 20% private match to unlock that funding! Our Phase 1 goal is \$6.5 million raised from local sources, and we're currently 89% of the way there.

We know that you're eager to get out on the Ecusta Trail, taking a walk, riding your bike, or however you like to enjoy greenways! The 19-mile Ecusta Trail, linking Hendersonville and Brevard, will be an amazing recreational amenity and we can't wait to finally make the dream real. So, can you make a gift to help us start building—even if you've already given in the past? Because your donations count as a match for grant funding, every gift you make is multiplied x5!



TO LEARN MORE & DONATE AT: CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/ECUSTA

HAPPY RETIREMENT, LYNN!



We wish a happy retirement to our development director Lynn Killian who will be retiring at the end of the year! Lynn worked with many of you on landmark conservation successes, such as Bearwallow Mountain and our Hickory Nut Gorge trails. During Lynn's time at Conserving Carolina, we saw substantial growth in both annual giving and land project funding. We also saw significant growth in our Summits Society (major donors) and Land Legacy League (those who are planning an estate gift.) Thank you to all of you who have helped us establish this stronger base of support!

Lynn continues to lead by example, as a member of our Land Legacy League, who has included Conserving Carolina in her estate plans. We hope that you'll feel inspired by Lynn's passion for conservation and do the same!

BENEFITS OF RAIL TRAILS

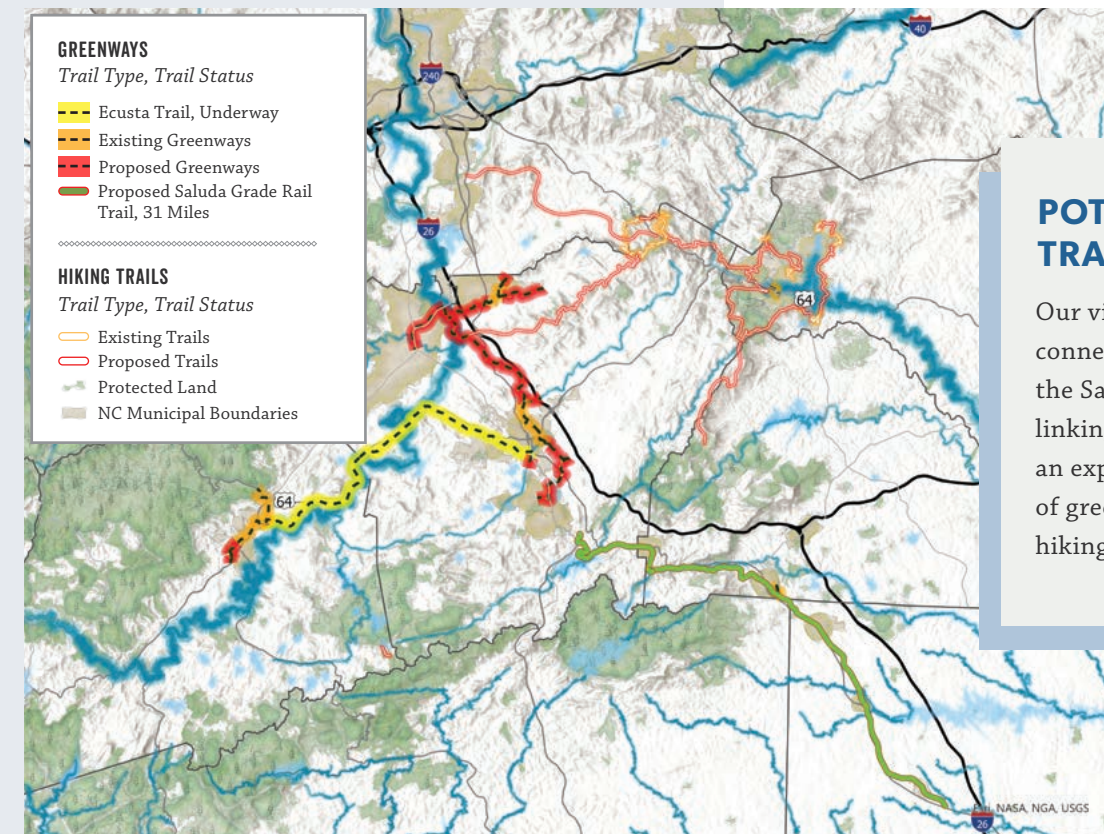
OUTDOOR RECREATION: These linear parks invite people out to walk, run, bike, play, visit, and enjoy the outdoors—convenient to neighborhoods and accessible to people of all abilities.

BETTER HEALTH: People get out and exercise more, so they enjoy better health. One study found that every dollar spent on greenways results in \$3 of health care savings!

THRIVING ECONOMIES: Rail trails are economic engines. They bring customers to local businesses, attract tourists, and appeal to companies when they're deciding where to locate.

POTENTIAL RAIL TRAIL CONNECTIONS

Our vision is to eventually connect the Ecusta Trail and the Saluda Grade Trail, while linking this rail trail corridor to an expansive regional network of greenways, blueways, and hiking trails.



A RARE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPAND BRACKEN

Have you ever hiked or biked the trails in Bracken Mountain Preserve? The preserve is one of Brevard's local treasures, linking the city with Pisgah National Forest. But the Bracken trails are heart pounding for even the most athletic trail users! Right out of the parking lot, the entry trail climbs up a grueling series of switchbacks. Many would-be trail users simply turn around, or they don't come back.

We have the opportunity now to expand Bracken Preserve with 34 acres of beautiful forest land right on the edge of town! Our goal is to purchase this land and build 2-3 miles of more moderate trails, including an easier way to reach the existing Bracken trail network. These new trails would invite people of all ages, skill levels, and

fitness levels to experience the extraordinary forest at the doorstep of Brevard. The new trails could also be more accessible to people with disabilities.

We are excited to potentially add this land to the preserve! It has clear mountain creeks, high elevation seeps, and healthy oak forests. It's a haven for rare plants like yellow ladyslippers and special wildlife, including salamanders that thrive in the seeps. Trails here would be a special place to connect with nature—and a gateway to all of Pisgah National Forest. People who start out riding bikes, walking dogs, running trails, or bonding with friends here may branch out to further adventures and an even deeper love for nature.

Conserving Carolina has been partnering with the City of Brevard to seize this opportunity and purchase the land while we have this chance. At press time we are hoping to close on the land by December. However, we still have a funding gap! To make a gift to ensure that we can meet our goal, go to:



[CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/
EXPAND-BRACKEN-PRESERVE](https://CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/EXPAND-BRACKEN-PRESERVE)

The Rise and Shine hiking club explores Bracken Preserve. Photo by Howard Granat.



If your friends and family love the outdoors, a gift membership to Conserving Carolina is a perfect holiday gift. Your gift will help provide them with more places to connect with nature—like new trails, greenways, nature preserves, and river access. What could be better? Your gift is also connecting them with the good work of conservation—helping to create the world we want to see.

A gift membership also comes with these benefits:

- Conserving Carolina tote bag
- Conserving Carolina stickers
- Invitations to special events
- Members-only hikes
- Eligibility to earn White Squirrel or Flying Squirrel patches
- Newsletters with inspiring conservation stories

Gift memberships are \$35 for individuals or \$60 for families. You can give a gift membership by donating online, using the envelope in this newsletter, or calling the office at 828-697-5777.

Photo above by Conserving Carolina member Rich Stevenson

NEW RIVER ACCESS NEAR BREVARD

A new river access point near Brevard will make it easier for people to enjoy the French Broad River. This summer, Conserving Carolina purchased a 1.25-acre riverside property, called Morrow Landing, that will provide a much-needed access point near the middle of what is currently the longest stretch between access points in Transylvania County.

Right now, if you want to paddle or float the river, you have no way to get on or off the water for almost ten miles. When Morrow Landing opens, it will make river trips more approachable to people with less experience and people looking for a shorter, more casual trip. Morrow Landing is located just 3 miles south of Brevard. And the shuttle to the next access point is only 1.5 miles driving. This convenient new river access will give people a simpler way to enjoy the beauty of the river, close to town. It also improves access for emergency response and for volunteers like our Transylvania French Broad Stewards who help clear logjams and remove trash.



Morrow Landing



Tubers at Riverfest in Rosman. Photo by Jeff Shields.

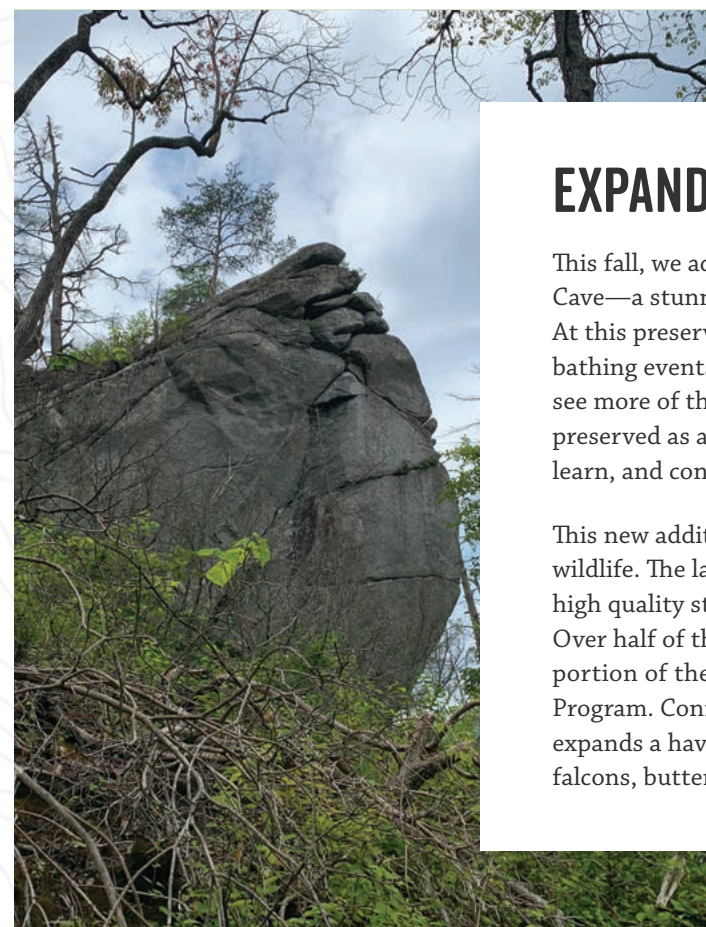


Photo courtesy of Equinox.

EXPANDING TRANSFIGURATION PRESERVE

This fall, we added 25 protected acres to our Transfiguration Preserve in Bat Cave—a stunning preserve that you may know from our forest bathing walks. At this preserve, now totaling over 525 acres, Conserving Carolina hosts forest bathing events, educational activities, and scientific research. We are thrilled to see more of the extraordinary land at the doorstep of Chimney Rock State Park preserved as a place for natural communities to thrive and for people to explore, learn, and connect with nature.

This new addition includes a range of features that support a great diversity of wildlife. The land has cliffs and boulders, multiple types of forest communities, high quality streams that drain into the Broad River, and streamside wetlands. Over half of the property ranks as an “exceptional” natural area, with another portion of the land ranked as “high,” according to the NC Natural Heritage Program. Connected to thousands more acres of protected land, this property expands a haven for numerous rare species, including salamanders, warblers, falcons, butterflies, bats, mosses, and wildflowers.

MORE *of* MUD CREEK

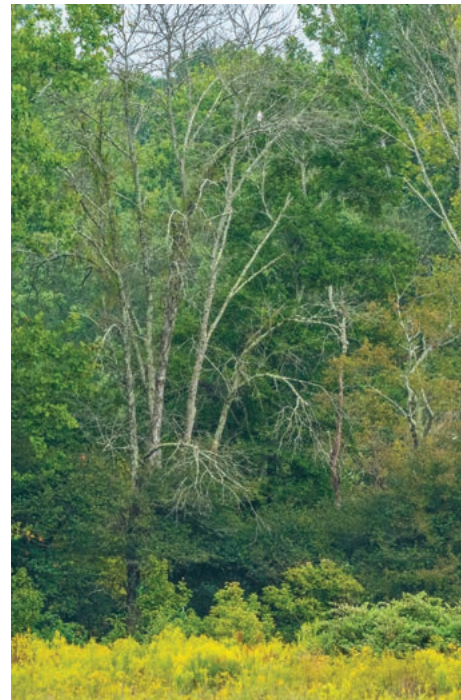
New land will support public access, greenway connections, and a bog restoration

There's already been an amazing transformation at Mud Creek—our flagship floodplain restoration on the French Broad River—and it's going to keep getting better. We're already seeing songbirds nesting in young forests, muskie swimming in new-made sloughs, and culturally important rivercane growing back at the water's edge. Now, we've purchased another 6.7-acres to add to the existing 103-acre site. "It's surprising how much value this small acreage adds," says David Lee, our natural resources manager.

Currently, the only public access to the Mud Creek restoration is if you get there by paddling the river. The new tract connects the site to a public road, so we can open it to more visitors. There's also space for a small parking lot.

The new land also lies at the intersection of two planned greenways—the French Broad Greenway and the expanded Oklawaha Greenway. Greenways would allow people, including youth from nearby neighborhoods, to reach Mud Creek without driving. "The greenways

would be an important recreational opportunity in what's becoming a pretty dense residential area," says our assistant director, Rebekah Robinson.



Red tail hawk perched above a pollinator meadow at Mud Creek. Photo by Nick Holshouser.



There could also be trails through the Mud Creek restoration. Since the land is fairly level, it lends itself to more accessible trails. We're also planning educational signage on topics like water quality, natural flood control, muskie, pollinators, and rivercane (which is used in Cherokee crafts).

The new tract also has potential for a bog restoration that will be unique from the other restored wetlands at Mud Creek. The wetlands we have now are filled primarily by floodwater. On the new tract, restored wetlands would be filled by groundwater. Because the hydrology is different, it would support a different natural community—including rare and endangered plants and wildlife, such as bog turtles.

As Mud Creek keeps growing better, we're also starting work on four new restorations along the French Broad River. David says, "The more restorations we can have along the river, the healthier the corridor will be and the more resilient it will be to change."

MOUNTAIN BOG ADDED TO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

A bog preserve protected by Conserving Carolina in East Flat Rock is now part of the Mountain Bogs National Wildlife Refuge. While most wildlife refuges cover vast unbroken areas, this unique refuge protects the scattered remnants of our Appalachian mountain bogs. Over 90% of these bogs have been lost, but where they remain, they are havens for rare and endangered animals and plants—like this bunched arrowhead.

This fall, Conserving Carolina transferred the 7-acre Ulinski Bog to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to become part of the refuge, which helps to ensure a stronger future for our unique mountain bogs. This bog was named for Anne Ulinski, one of Conserving Carolina's founders, who was passionate about protecting extraordinary places like this.



LADY SLIPPER AWARD - WINNERS -

Here are our fall and winter award-winning volunteers!



RICK MERRILL

VOLUNTEERING FOR:
18 years

HOME:
Flat Rock

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:
Committees, real estate consulting, served on Board of Directors

PROFESSION:
Retired realtor

HOW HE GOT INVOLVED:
Loves mountains and waterfalls and wanted to give back. First reached out to learn about conservation easements.

VOLUNTEERING HIGHLIGHT:
Helped secure land that became a breeding area for muskellunge (or muskie.)

HOPES FOR CONSERVING CAROLINA:
For the staff to grow in size, diversity, and self-sustainability.

HOBBIES:
Also volunteers with Interfaith Assistance Ministry and Flat Rock Historical District. Enjoys gardening (especially tomatoes!) and turning bowls with a lathe.



AMY DAHAN

VOLUNTEERING FOR:
New this year

HOME:
Bat Cave

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:
Office assistance, special events

PROFESSION:
Retired from career in gardening and landscaping. Former director of Heathcote Botanical Gardens in FL.

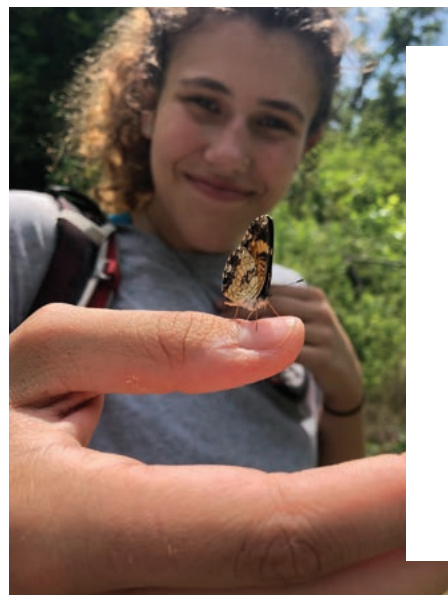
HOW SHE GOT INVOLVED:
Drawn to Conserving Carolina because of hiking trails and good news stories about conservation.

ISSUE SHE'S PASSIONATE ABOUT:
Greenways with natural habitat that support ecosystems and smart growth

VOLUNTEERING HIGHLIGHT:
Recording others' volunteer hours and gaining appreciation for so much hard work!

HOPES FOR CONSERVING CAROLINA:
For everyone in our region to become a member and donor!

HOBBIES:
Supporting farm-to-table movement, playing guitar and singing at open mics, tai chi.



IMAGINE YOUR LEGACY

YOUR LOVE FOR NATURE CAN LIVE ON, WHEN YOU MAKE A LEGACY GIFT TO CONSERVING CAROLINA. Making a legacy gift in your will or estate plans 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.

Please let us know if you are planning a legacy gift 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 Jenn Tutor at 828-697-5777, est. 209.



Terry Schupbach-Gordon on a hike.

HIKING with WHEELS

Terry Schupbach-Gordon is an artist, storyteller, teacher, mother, grandmother, and disability rights advocate who loves to hike, using her off-road wheelchair. If you're not used to seeing people like her on mountaintops, she says, it's time to revamp your expectations. Adaptive equipment has come a long way, whether it's designed for hiking, climbing, biking, kayaking, or snow sports. But it's not just about equipment, Terry says. We also need to change how people think about access—about who gets to go where.

Adaptive mountain biking. Courtesy of Catalyst Sports.



Terry was born with spina bifida, a spinal cord condition. As a child in the 1950s, she had no legal right to even go to school. But her mother insisted that she would attend public school, which she did.

“Fortunately, I grew up in a family who fell in love with my body before I even knew I had one,” Terry says. “My mother thought I was the best thing since sliced bread. I’ll give it to Mama, no matter how many surgeries I had, it was never to fix it. At that time, most people with spina bifida went through surgeries to get you as ‘normal’ as possible rather than get you as functional as possible.”

Recently, Terry and her husband, Toby Gordon, went hiking up a gravel fire road with some of Conserving Carolina’s staff. Her wheelchair is designed to move over rugged ground and Terry loves to be outside, hiking, picnicking, or gardening. But access is often a challenge. For example, this morning she could only reach the gravel road because Conserving Carolina was on hand to unlock a gate.

When we got to the mountaintop, with breathtaking views, Terry said, “We should all be able to embrace this. We

should all be able to enjoy it. We should all be able to roll up and down a path. And if you are lucky enough to join me on wheels someday when you’re old enough, I will take you hiking.”

Advocates like Terry are helping Conserving Carolina expand our understanding of trail access. We are proud to be leading the way on greenways and rail trails, which are accessible to everyone. Increasingly, we also see potential for accessible trails in places with moderate slopes or old roads. And, we’re learning how to avoid unnecessary barriers even on rugged hiking trails. We’re also working to improve accessibility at French Broad River put-ins.

If you’re looking for protected places that are accessible to all, we invite you to check out our Flying Squirrel Outdoor Challenge. We hope you enjoy these great places and we hope to create more!



EXPLORE THE CHALLENGE:
[CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/
FLYING-SQUIRREL-CHALLENGE](https://conservingcarolina.org/flying-squirrel-challenge)

LEARNING AND CONNECTION ON BEARWALLOW MOUNTAIN



We were thrilled to welcome about 520 children from Fernleaf Community Charter School to Bearwallow Mountain! These annual field trips include all students at Fernleaf, a public charter school, which currently offers kindergarten through ninth grade. Students with disabilities are able to reach the mountaintop by the gravel road for this event, so no one is left out. We love seeing the kids' joy and curiosity as they hike through the woods and play on the mountaintop. We also support spring field trips to Bearwallow with Edneyville Elementary School.



Photos courtesy of Fernleaf.

YOU ARE INVITED!

HOLIDAY DROP-IN

DEC 13., 4:30-6:30 PM
Kenmure Country Club, Flat Rock

Members and volunteers are invited to stop by for a bit of holiday cheer with Conserving Carolina. See our online calendar to RSVP.

SAVE THE DATE: DOUG TALLAMY TALK, MAR. 4

The acclaimed author of *Bringing Nature Home* and *The Nature of Oaks* is speaking in Columbus, NC, as part of a celebration called Gardening for Life. Details online.

MORE UPCOMING EVENTS

There are so many ways to connect with Conserving Carolina—guided hikes, volunteer days, forest bathing, speaker series, and so much more. See all upcoming events on our online calendar.



SEE ALL EVENTS:
[CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/
CALENDAR](https://conservingcarolina.org/calendar)



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GIFTS OF BEAUTY AND WONDER

In this issue, you can see how much good comes from your gifts: trails, field trips, greenways, nature preserves, restored wetlands, and more. Can you keep this good work going with a generous gift this holiday season?

Thank you so much!

Photo by Leah Swann.

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