



## THANK YOU

FOR MAKING GREAT STORIES POSSIBLE

- 4 Waterfalls and Trout Streams
- 6 Life Changing Summer of Service
- 10 Conservation Burial
- 11 Monarchs in the Garden

## Little White Oak Mountain Becomes Public Land

When students arrive at Polk County Middle School every morning, they see the rugged outline of Little White Oak Mountain, a backdrop of forested ridges that frames their school. Soon, this mountain will offer them much more than views, because it's becoming a local park.

Little White Oak Mountain will be a place where teachers can take their students outside—an outdoor classroom with tall trees, pristine streams, and rare plants and animals. It will be a place for the cross country team to run and other athletic teams to train. The hiking club will be able to reach trails easily from school grounds. And there's talk of starting a mountain bike club.



**THANK YOU FOR  
YOUR SUPPORT!**

**On the Cover:**

The new park at Little White Oak Mountain will be behind Polk County Middle School. The park will offer 7-10 miles of hiking and mountain biking trails. Photo courtesy of PCMS.



The PCMS hiking club, as well as classes and athletic teams, will benefit from new trails near their school. Here, teacher Rowann Hoy and AmeriCorps Project Conserve member Max Howe lead a hike at Woodland Park.

## Little White Oak Mountain Becomes Public Land

continued from page 1

Not long ago, Little White Oak mountain was slated for development, with plans for 687 houses on the mountainside. But, during the recession, the developer started looking into other options. Conserving Carolina was able to purchase over 1,000 acres of the mountain in 2016. This October, we transferred 300 acres to Polk County Parks and Recreation for a local park and 600 acres to the state to expand the Green River Game Lands.

Sixth grade science teacher Rowann Hoy, who leads the hiking club, says, “I’m excited about the possibility of trails that go up the mountain, so I can use it for hiking club.” She tries to foster the kids’ connection to place by taking them out on trails in Polk County, where they experience the area’s unique geology and off-the-charts biodiversity. She says, “My goal for the hiking club has been to get them out and see what’s available right here in their own backyard, for free.”

Jerry Stensland, the director of Polk County Parks and Recreation, thinks the new park will make the county more of a draw for outdoor recreation, with as many as 10 miles of new trails available for hiking and biking. Currently, locals put their mountain

bikes on their cars and drive to other places. But what if they didn’t have to—and bikers started coming into Polk instead? Jerry says, “I think it has the potential for a destination. It has the potential to bring in visitors and help local businesses.”

The 600 acres added to the Green River Game Lands also expand opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors. This land, which includes the summit of Little White Oak Mountain, will be open to the public for hunting, hiking, wildlife viewing, and other outdoor activities.

Many local residents supported the conservation of Little White Oak to protect a cherished scenic landmark—a beautiful peak that can be seen from viewpoints throughout the county. This conservation

**“ THIS OCTOBER, WE TRANSFERRED 300 ACRES TO POLK COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION FOR A LOCAL PARK AND 600 ACRES TO THE STATE TO EXPAND THE GREEN RIVER GAME LANDS. ”**

project also protects approximately 13 miles of streams, which flow into White Oak Creek and from there the Green River. And, it protects rare natural communities, including an endangered wildflower, the white irisette.

Conserving Carolina plans to transfer another parcel at the foot of the mountain to the nonprofit Housing Assistance Corporation, which will build much-needed workforce housing on the site. This will improve opportunities for local residents—such as teachers, healthcare workers, and small business owners—to become homeowners.

Many partners made it possible to protect Little White Oak, including numerous local donors who gave a total of \$130,000. Key partners include Fred and Alice Stanback, the Open Space Institute, Polk County, the NC Wildlife Commission, the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund, the NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, and the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration program.

“There was a time when it looked like Little White Oak Mountain would be heavily developed,” says Conserving Carolina’s executive director, Kieran Roe. “We are very pleased that, instead, we were able to provide so many long-term benefits to the community—from protecting scenic views, to expanding land for hunting, to creating trails for the local community, to building workforce housing.”

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*Little White Oak Mountain is a cherished scenic landmark in Polk County.  
Photo by Ford Smith.*



Photo courtesy of Frode Jacobsen@nm

*Citizen scientists in Polk County are looking for rarely seen species, like the Cerulean Warbler.*

## BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR POLK COUNTY’S MOST WANTED

Have you seen any Snail-eating Ground Beetles? Or Black Trumpet Mushrooms? Or Cerulean Warblers? If so, please report them. These species are some of Polk County’s Most Wanted.

Conserving Carolina has been collaborating for years with botanist David Campbell to engage local residents to track down rare species in Polk County. Every month we pick a species to highlight and put out the word in the local papers, asking people to look for them. Each time someone finds one, they’re helping to update the scientific record.



*Black Trumpet Mushroom*

Polk County is a perfect place for a biodiversity treasure hunt. It has an extraordinary number of species in a small area, due to its steep changes in elevation; varied rock types; warm, wet climate; and proximity to piedmont, mountain, and coastal ecosystems.

This fall, with the help of data provided by citizen scientists, Conserving Carolina and David Campbell completed a long overdue Inventory of Significant Natural Heritage Areas in the county. This study lists 32 areas that are important for biodiversity, with a focus on species that are in danger of extinction. The inventory can help guide decisions by conservationists, government, and private landowners about places that are important to protect.

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▶ **START SEARCHING: [CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/POLK-MOST-WANTED](https://www.conservingcarolina.org/polk-most-wanted)**

 PLACES YOU HELPED PROTECT

# HEADWATERS STATE FOREST OPENS

Explore Waterfalls and Trout Streams in the New 6,730-Acre State Forest



Headwaters State Forest in Transylvania County is now open for you to explore—a mountain wonderland featuring abundant waterfalls, pristine trout streams, and rare mountain bogs. After over a decade of work, we were thrilled to see this ambitious new state forest open to the public.

Adjacent to more than 100,000 acres of protected land in North and South Carolina, Headwaters adds to a vast conservation corridor for both people and wildlife. The forest is open for hiking, hunting, and fishing, and it borders a nine-mile stretch of the Foothills Trail. It's home to numerous rare or endangered plants and animals, including bog turtles, brook trout, and hellbender salamanders. And its 50+ miles of crystal-clear streams flow into the French Broad River.



*Bog turtle*

In 2009, former Congressman Charles Taylor reached out to Conserving Carolina about selling some of his family's land—one of the largest landholdings in the state. We worked with partners including The Conservation

Fund, federal and state programs, and private donors to make it happen.

Headwaters is a place where you can truly get away, off the beaten path.

► **FIND INFORMATION ON HIKES AND WATERFALLS AT: [CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/HEADWATERS](https://www.conservingcarolina.org/headwaters)**

## 10 REASONS TO BE EXCITED ABOUT HEADWATERS

1. It connects to a conservation corridor that extends for **over 100,000 acres**.
2. **50+ miles of pristine mountain streams** flow through it.
3. Those cold, shaded streams are excellent habitat for **brook trout**.
4. **Waterfalls** are everywhere!
5. It's a new place to go **fishing, hunting, hiking, or wildlife watching**.
6. It contains a 9-mile spur of the 77-mile **Foothills Trail**.
7. It helps secure current and future **drinking water supplies**.
8. Its clear streams pour into the **French Broad River**, making the whole river cleaner.
9. It's a **working forest**, providing forestry education.
10. It supports three major economic drivers: **tourism, outdoor recreation, and forestry**.

## 2019 Calendar Showcases Conservation



Romantic Asheville has created a stunning 2019 “Protected Places” calendar to benefit Conserving Carolina and our partner, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy. Each month features a beautiful place that we’ve helped to protect. These calendars make a great gift for anyone that loves the mountains!

We’re asking for a \$10 donation per calendar. Since each calendar contains a \$10 coupon for Diamond Brand Outdoors & Frugal Backpacker, you’ll get your money back when you shop for outdoor gear!

## Gift Memberships— Perfect for Everyone Who Loves the Land

From now until Jan. 1, all new members get a free calendar! That means that, with every gift membership you give, your friends or family members receive:

- A donation that helps protect places they love
- A beautiful 2019 calendar
- Two Diamond Brand \$10 off cards
- A reusable Conserving Carolina tote bag
- Special members-only hikes and activities
- More membership benefits

Gift memberships are available for just \$35! Please give them to the people in your life and help us grow the circle of land conservation.

# LADY SLIPPER AWARD

- WINNERS -

Every season, we honor outstanding volunteers. Here are our fall and winter award winners. We’re so grateful to all of our volunteers. You are making a huge difference!



**BILL & DONNA HAMILTON**

**VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY:**

Rock Crushers trail crew

**VOLUNTEERING FOR:**

3 years

**MOST REWARDING EXPERIENCE:**

The friends they have made along the way and helping construct Weed Patch Mountain Trail

**CAREER:**

Retired - Bill from finance and Donna from communications and marketing

**HOBBIES:**

Both: traveling, hiking, and volunteering at church; Donna: photography and art projects; Bill: fermenting beverages and cooking

**WHAT MOTIVATES THEM:**

The desire to share nature with others, including their grandchildren

**#1 ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE:**

Land management practices and urban sprawl

**HOPES AND DREAMS FOR CONSERVING CAROLINA:**

To continue to offer varied volunteer opportunities so people of all abilities, interests, and ages can have the opportunity to serve and conserve land; and also to continue to serve as an educational resource.

**FAVORITE QUOTE:**

“The mountains are calling, and I must go” by John Muir.



**LIZ DICEY**

**VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY:**

Jack of all trades; she serves on the Board and helps with events, education, development, pollinator gardens, and removing invasive plants

**VOLUNTEERING FOR:**

6 years

**MOST REWARDING EXPERIENCE:**

Educating youth

**CAREER:**

Retired science teacher and librarian

**HOBBIES:**

Hiking, riding horses, learning, and spending time with grandchildren

**WHAT MOTIVATES HER:**

Valuing nature and encouraging others to do the same.

**HOW SHE GOT INVOLVED:**

She has been interested in environmental issues since the very first Earth Day in 1970 and found out about Conserving Carolina from hiking with Pam Torlina

**#1 ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE:**

People losing appreciation of the magnificence of our incredible gift

**HOPES AND DREAMS FOR CONSERVING CAROLINA:**

More land conserved

**COOL FACT:**

She has been to Patagonia with Sierra Club



## LIFE CHANGING SUMMER OF SERVICE

Summer of Service is an AmeriCorps program for local 17-to-19-year-olds that Conserving Carolina launched in 2017. Participants explore personal growth and career directions while supporting community conservation projects, from a pollinator garden to a nature playground.

**ABOVE:** The 2018 Summer of Service crew included Fernando Baruch, Jordan Kirkland, Alexla Perez-Sanchez, Clayton Cilone, Ana Martinez, and Hazel Freeman.

## FINDING A PASSION

Jordan Kirkland participated in Summer of Service for two years running. “I didn’t realize how much I would love it,” he says. “Every day was just an awesome experience to wake up and be excited to come to service. This was the first time I did a service project—a heart project—and just seeing the physical results was way more than enough to realize that I love doing this.” He says he did “a 180” on his career path and is now pursuing a career in land stewardship.



# “What Have I Gotten Myself Into?”

Ana Martinez wanted to be more outdoorsy. But her mother tends to worry about insect bites or kids getting dirty, so she would keep them inside. Her dad is a different story. He'd try to get them out in the garden. "I really liked the idea of going camping, going backpacking, doing all this outdoor stuff," Ana says, "but my mom was not about it and my dad was working all the time."

She found out about Summer of Service through AIM Club, a group at East Henderson High School that helps students from immigrant families prepare for college. She knew the program would help build her resume. It paid. It came with an education award. And she'd be working outdoors, in nature.

But she didn't go for it. "I was shy," she says. That made the small group structure intimidating. She wouldn't be able to hang back, unnoticed, and let other people talk. She let the deadline pass.

But her friend, Alexla, who was joining, convinced her to reach out and apply after all.

Ana interviewed but she screwed it up—or it felt that way. "I went home and was like, 'Yeah, they said they'll call me, but they lied.' Then I got the call, it wasn't like, 'Sorry.' It was like, 'Congratulations, you got in.'"

"I was really nervous," she says. "Like what have I gotten myself into?"

At first, she says, "It was very quiet and awkward." Eating lunch the first day, there were long silences.

Then, they went on a three-day backpacking trip. They hiked to waterfalls and swimming holes, surrounded by wilderness. "It's crazy how it's just there, in the middle of a forest. I'd never seen that and it was really cool," Ana says. She wasn't sure about getting in the river to swim, but she did. "It felt really good," she says.

At their campsite, she was in charge of hanging the food, away from bears. She struggled with the unfamiliar knots. She says. "It's pretty cool when you get it done. You feel empowered, I guess, because you did it by yourself. Your parents aren't around and you're with a bunch of strangers that you just met and it feels good."

After the trip, several participants said, everybody felt like friends.

During the six-week program, Ana found her voice. "I learned how to introduce myself and keep a conversation going," she says. She feels confident now that she can present herself well in a college interview or a job interview.

She's grown in other ways, too. "My brother says ever since I started this job it's changed me, because I'll say, 'Stop, that plant's invasive.' Or I tend to think in more eco-friendly ways. I'll be like, 'Okay, I'm not using straws anymore.' Or 'We should just switch to paper bags instead of plastic bags.'"

"There's something about it that makes me want to be more friendly to the Earth. I think it's from working with the Earth. You go out there on those hiking trails and there's beer cans and trash and straws and you see all this stuff that could ruin what is, like, giving to us. It really did change me."

*Ana had never experienced a river surrounded by wilderness before going backpacking with Summer of Service.*





# IMPROVING FORESTS WITH FIRE



*Chris Monge a Sinac, a volunteer from Costa Rica, assists with a controlled burn at Table Rock State Park. Controlled burns can reduce the risk of wildfire and enhance wildlife habitat. Photo by Adam Warwick, courtesy of The Nature Conservancy.*

**T**wo years after massive wildfires swept through the Blue Ridge, smoke was in the air again—but this time as part of a training on how to use controlled burns to improve forest health and

minimize the risk of devastating fires. Controlled burns can reduce accumulated fuel in a forest and they improve natural habitats for many plants and animals.

Wildland fire professionals from across the world came together for a two-week training event coordinated by the The Nature Conservancy and involving numerous partners including Conserving Carolina. The Southern Blue Ridge Prescribed Fire Training Exchange took place from Oct. 29 to Nov. 9, with as many as 40 potential burn sites in six counties. Burn sites included DuPont State Forest, the Green River Game Lands, Table Rock State Park, and other public and private lands.

One of our conservation landowners in Transylvania County, Sandy Schenck, made his land available as a potential burn site. He says, “I am thrilled to see fire reintroduced to our fire-dependent ecosystems here on Green River Preserve and so appreciate the help of all the partners who have made this possible.”

## Connecting Brevard Greenway to Tannery Park

The Esatoe Greenway in Brevard is closer to connecting with the Mary C. Jenkins Community Center and Tannery Park in the historic Rosenwald neighborhood. Conserving Carolina wrote a grant that secured \$90,000 from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund to buy land to extend the greenway. Community leader Nicola Koresh says, “I can easily picture people strolling, kids on bikes, tricycles, scooters, skateboards; people enjoying conversation as they walk their dogs; people stopping to look at an artwork or historical feature that the community feels inspired to put up in celebration of its rich black history; people enjoying nature.”

## Volunteer with Friends of Brevard Area Trails!

Conserving Carolina has started a Friends of Brevard Area Trails group, in partnership with the City of Brevard and Transylvania County. The goal of the program is to enhance trails, greenways, and blueways and to promote the trail system as a place for enjoyment, exercise, transportation, wellness, community, and peace. Come volunteer with us! Our first project will be to break ground on a new trail in the Bracken Mountain Preserve.

▶ [GO TO: CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/VOLUNTEER](https://www.conservingcarolina.org/volunteer)





## Plan Your Legacy

What will your legacy be? At Conserving Carolina, some of the most impactful gifts that allow us to protect wonderful places come from people who were thoughtful and generous in planned giving.

What is planned giving? It could mean making a bequest in your will. Or it could mean designating us as a beneficiary of your retirement account or life insurance policy, among other options.

We are happy to talk with you about your planned giving options and we encourage you to talk to your financial advisors as well. We want to thank you, so when you do designate a gift, please let us know!

## OVER 70½? GIVE TAX FREE

Have you celebrated your 70-and-a-half birthday yet? If so, you can make charitable gifts directly from your IRA account. These gifts count toward your annual IRA required minimum distribution, but you don't have to count them as income. That means you can give tax-free from your retirement account to protect the places you love. ❤️

## THANK YOU FOR CELEBRATING WITH US!

We're grateful to everyone who joined us at the Conservation Celebration and For Lands Sake. Both of these annual benefits were a great success!



Photo by Yousef Natsha

The Conservation Celebration at Gwynn Valley Camp in Brevard featured exciting live and silent auctions, as well as the drawing for our annual trip raffle. Other highlights included scenic views over protected land, a delicious dinner, live music, and a butterfly release.



Photo by Liz Dicey

At For Land's Sake, our supporters enjoyed a perfect evening for an outdoor dinner at the home of Charlene and Helmuth Von Bluecher, in Landrum SC, with gorgeous views of the Piedmont countryside. Guests bid on a silent auction and celebrated conservation of this beautiful landscape.



STORIES OF THE LAND

# Returning to the Earth

When Caroline Yongue's Buddhist teacher first asked her to figure out how to take care of a dead body, without embalming, to be cared for by friends and family, she says, "I thought it was an unusual question, but I trusted her that she knew my practice, so I said okay."

At the time, Caroline says, "I had never seen death!" But she has a way with fear. It was one reason why her teacher asked her to start doing death care. "She saw in me that I had a willingness to step past my fear," Caroline says. "That when it arose, I saw it as an opportunity to go beyond. I didn't let it stop me."

In the 20 years since, she has gone on to found the Center for End of Life Transitions as well as Carolina Memorial Sanctuary. The sanctuary,

in Mills River, is the only certified conservation burial ground in the state of North Carolina.

**“BY THE TIME PEOPLE FINISH COVERING THE GRAVE, THEY’RE LAUGHING, THEY’RE NOT CRYING ANYMORE.”**

In October, the sanctuary donated a conservation easement on the 11-acre tract to Conserving Carolina. We have also partnered with the sanctuary on an ambitious habitat restoration—reclaiming a wetland, stabilizing stream banks, and bringing back native plants and trees. To further

support conservation, the sanctuary donates a portion of their proceeds to Conserving Carolina.

The sanctuary offers a beautiful, natural place for people to return their loved ones to the earth, whether through burying a body or scattering ashes, for both people and pets. It's an all-faiths cemetery, and every ritual is unique, Caroline says. Recognizing that death is natural and it's a part of life helps to bring about healing, she says. "By the time people finish covering the grave, they're laughing, they're not crying anymore. They're just so joyous, they're chatting, they're telling stories about the person."

▶ **SEE CAROLINE'S STORY AT: [CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/RETURNING-TO-THE-EARTH](https://conservingcarolina.org/returning-to-the-earth)**

*Caroline walks her dog, Jasper at Carolina Memorial Sanctuary. They are restoring wildlife-friendly native plants like the Joe Pye Weed and goldenrod that were blooming in late summer.*



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## FIELD NOTES

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### MONARCHS IN THE GARDEN

This was a great year for monarch butterflies in the pollinator garden at our office! We took dozens of caterpillars inside and witnessed their incredible transformation before releasing them.



*Photo by Kelly Holland*

While monarchs get nectar from many kinds of flowers, like this sunflower, they can lay eggs on only one plant: milkweed. Unfortunately, there's been a dramatic loss of milkweed habitat—and monarch populations in North America have plummeted. That's why gardeners are stepping up to help monarchs. The best kinds to plant are common milkweed and swamp milkweed, and the best time to start your seeds is in early spring. You can get milkweed seeds from many places, including the local company Sow True Seed.



## You Are Invited

Sunday, December 2, 12:30 to 3:30

### Holiday Brunch

Home of Bob and Babs Strickland in Mill Spring

Enjoy a festive brunch and desserts while supporting conservation at our Southeast holiday benefit. \$50 per person.

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Tuesday, December 18

### Holiday Drop-In, 4:30-6:30

Grand Ole Hall at the Highland Lake Inn, Flat Rock

Stop by and enjoy delicious hors d'oeuvres and beverages as we celebrate and thank you for saving our beautiful mountains, foothills, rivers and farms! Free for members.

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## CHECK OUT OUR ONLINE CALENDAR

There are so many opportunities to connect! Everything from members-only hikes to bat-box workshops. We get together to volunteer outdoors, learn from expert naturalists, celebrate conservation at local festivals, and more.

FIND UPCOMING EVENTS ON OUR WEBSITE OR ON FACEBOOK



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

**For Nature and People. Forever.**



*Photo by Mark File*

## SHOW NATURE SOME LOVE

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We all belong in nature. That's why Conserving Carolina is always protecting land for people—from Dupont State Forest to North Carolina's newest state forest, Headwaters (see p. 4.). As you enjoy this region's wonderful places, how will you give back?

PLEASE DONATE TODAY! YOU CAN GIVE ONLINE AT  
[CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG](http://CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG) OR CALL LYNN AT 828.697.5777 EXT. 202