

LANDSCAPE



THANK YOU

FOR MAKING GREAT
STORIES POSSIBLE!

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DISCOVERY AT TRANSFIGURATION PRESERVE

Transfiguration Preserve in Bat Cave is a beautiful, wild place where scientists recently discovered a new salamander. It's a place where fourth graders learn math and science outdoors. It's a place where people find healing through forest bathing and nature therapy. And it's a place where, in the future, a public hiking trail may connect to Chimney Rock State Park.

The preserve got its start when Episcopal nuns with the Sisters of the Transfiguration decided to protect land that they had long maintained as a mountain retreat. The Sisters, who have deep roots providing education to the poor, decided to protect their land as a place for both conservation and learning. In 2017, they conveyed over 400 acres to Conserving Carolina, to form what was originally called the Transfiguration Teaching and Research Reserve. With a new addition, the preserve just grew to more than 500 acres, as the vision for it continues to unfold.

DISCOVERY AT TRANSFIGURATION PRESERVE

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BROTHER'S AND SISTER'S LAND BROUGHT TOGETHER

One resident of the Sisters' retreat house near the preserve is Dr. Mattie Decker, a mindfulness teacher and retired education professor. Mattie is also an oblate, or a layperson connected with the Sisters.

One day at the Episcopal church in Bat Cave, Mattie sat next to somebody new. It was her neighbor, Lew Thatcher. As they talked after the service, they realized they had something in common. Lew is part of the family descended from Bishop Paul Matthews, who first came to Bat Cave in the 1880s. Over the years, this family has protected hundreds of acres in Bat Cave, including the famous bat cave itself. And it was the Bishop's sister, Mother Eva Mary, who founded the Sisters of the Transfiguration.

So, Lew was part of the brother's lineage and Mattie was part of the sister's lineage. And they lived on land that shares a boundary. Looking at the names on the maps, Lew thought, "Really, it's a family get together."

Meanwhile, Lew wasn't able to hike up the steep mountainsides anymore and he had been

The Hickory Nut Gorge green salamander lives in only a few spots in the Hickory Nut Gorge, including some Conserving Carolina preserves.



Paul Matthews and Eva Matthews, brother and sister, shown here in 1886, both founded lineages that protected hundreds of acres in Bat Cave.

debating what to do with the land. *Imagine*, Mattie said, if they could bring the brother's land and the sister's land together!

The idea caught on and, last winter, Lew transferred approximately 100 acres to Conserving Carolina to expand the preserve. The now 500+ acre preserve includes rushing waterfalls and dramatic rock outcrops and extends all the way to Chimney Rock State Park. This new addition creates potential for a future hiking trail that could connect with the trail system in the state park.

NEW SALAMANDER DISCOVERED

Years ago, as the Sisters were considering their decision, biologist Dr. J.J. Apodaca met with them to describe the exceptional diversity of salamanders found on the property, with its mountain streams and rocky slopes. "As an atheist scientist, I felt a little awkward in a room full of nuns," he says, "but we were able to connect in that this is something larger than our own lives."

Last year, J.J. was part of a team of scientists who discovered a new species of salamander that lives in only a few spots in the Hickory Nut Gorge—the Hickory Nut Gorge green salamander. Previously, Hickory Nut Gorge greens had been grouped with other green salamanders, but new genetic research shows that they are very much a unique species.

J.J. says that when they made the discovery, "We had to rush to get that news out because it's not only so different but it's also in so much trouble." Surveys show that the population of Hickory

Nut Gorge greens has dropped 56% in just 20 years. Their decline is due to a range of issues, but primarily habitat loss and disturbance.

"I've always been drawn toward fighting for things that can't fight for themselves," J.J. says. "For a lot of salamanders, it's all about protecting their habitat. For the most imperiled species like the Hickory Nut Gorge green it's about protecting what's left." Among the few places where these rare and beautiful salamanders live are several Conserving Carolina preserves, including Transfiguration Preserve.

THE FOREST IS THE THERAPIST

Transfiguration Preserve is open by reservation to school groups and researchers. Among the groups that have used the preserve for educational activities are Muddy Sneakers, Lake Lure Classical Academy, Warren Wilson College, Wofford College, Bowling Green University, and Conserving Carolina's Summer of Service.

In addition, the vision for the preserve has been expanding to include a more personal or spiritual kind of exploration: forest bathing and nature therapy. Following her retirement as a professor, Mattie trained in Norway to become a certified Nature and Forest Therapy Guide. In recent months, she has begun leading forest bathing experiences at Transfiguration Preserve and other properties that Conserving Carolina helped protect, including Laughing Waters and Walnut Creek Preserve.



Dr. Mattie Decker offers nature and forest therapy in beautiful places that Conserving Carolina helped to protect.

Mattie says that forest bathing is the practice of mindfulness in the presence of nature. She says, "What that does, when you open up and you know more... you know, it's endless." Studies show that forest bathing can bring health benefits such as lower blood pressure, lower stress hormones, and increased immunity. The experience can also lead to a sense of healing that comes from the land itself. Mattie says, "The forest is the therapist and the guide opens the door."



An alternative spring break group from Bowling Green University visits the preserve.



Looks like stunning views over Lake Lure are in your future. AmeriCorps Project Conserve member Devon Hathaway and volunteers Cathy Cooper and Jason Austin are among the crew working on this dramatic new trail—at a safe distance, of course!

SNEAK PEEK AT NEW TRAILS

Our trails crew is hard at work creating three new trails for you to enjoy in the Hickory Nut Gorge! We're glad to finally have the Rock Crushers back—volunteering while social distancing—and we're making progress on 7.5 miles of beautiful new trails. Each of these trails is a new link in the 130+ mile Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail, which Conserving Carolina is spearheading. Can't wait? You don't have to, because 35 miles of this ambitious long trail are already open to the public.

▶ SEE MORE AT [CONSERVING CAROLINA.ORG/GET-OUTSIDE](https://www.conservingcarolina.org/get-outside).



Two new trails will bring us closer to a loop that connects Bearwallow Mountain, Wildcat Rock Trail, and Florence Nature Preserve in the Upper Hickory Nut Gorge. Along the way, you can look out from mountain pastures to enjoy amazing scenery.

MOVING GREENWAYS FORWARD

Soon there will be a new link in Brevard's popular bike path, the Estatoe Trail. The new section will extend the greenway to the historic Rosenwald community, connecting this neighborhood with downtown Brevard and Pisgah National Forest. The greenway will extend to the Mary C. Jenkins Community Center in Rosenwald, which the city plans to rebuild.

On behalf of the city, Conserving Carolina wrote two grants that provided funding to expand the greenway system. In 2018, we received a grant from the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund to purchase land and easements. This spring, we received funding from the Pisgah Health Foundation for construction of the section that will connect to the Rosenwald community.

"Greenways are a priority for Conserving Carolina because they bring the benefits of conservation close to home for more people," says executive director Kieran Roe. "Greenways provide places for us to connect with nature, get exercise, and release stress. They also provide safe routes for alternative transportation, reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, and strengthen our local economies."

IN ADDITION TO THE ESTATOE TRAIL, CONSERVING CAROLINA IS ADVANCING THESE 4 GREENWAYS:

ECUSTA TRAIL: This proposed 18-mile rail trail would connect Brevard and Hendersonville, a big boost for outdoor recreation and tourism. After securing a major grant from the N.C. Department of Transportation last year, we have been working with the railroad toward purchasing the trail corridor.

MILLS RIVER VALLEY TRAIL: This 3-mile greenway would connect the heart of Mills River to the French Broad River, providing a safe route for walking and biking in the Rt. 280 corridor. Conserving Carolina is raising funds that will be matched 4 to 1 by a N.C. Department of Transportation grant.

CANE CREEK GREENWAY: We are acquiring easements from landowners in order to extend this greenway in Fletcher by approximately half a mile, using grant funding from the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund.

OKLAWAHA GREENWAY: Conserving Carolina is an active member of Friends of the Oklawaha Greenway, helping to maintain and improve this Hendersonville greenway. We're also working with willing landowners toward expanding the greenway, including a connection to Blue Ridge Community College.



NEW LIFE FOR A CITY STREAM

Turns out you can drive a leafless stick into a streambank and it will grow! At least one of the neighbors near the Mary C. Jenkins Community Center in Brevard was surprised when it actually worked. Several Rosenwald neighbors worked with Conserving Carolina's Torry Nergart to plant live stakes—

including silky dogwood, elderberry, and common rush—along the bare banks of a badly eroded urban stream. This spring, they sprouted leaves. By fall, with goldenrod and asters blooming too, the stream will be full of life!



Photo by Deborah McGrane.

LEGACY GIVING HOW WILL YOU LEAVE THE WORLD A MORE BEAUTIFUL PLACE?

One of the most powerful ways that you can leave a legacy is through planned or estate giving. We encourage you to consider these and other options, in consultation with your family and your advisors. The tax advantages of your gift may support your other estate planning goals. Most importantly, your gift will leave a legacy of natural wonders for generations to come.

BEQUEST: You can make a charitable contribution to Conserving Carolina in your will, including gifts of cash, stock, or real estate.

RETIREMENT ACCOUNT: You can make Conserving Carolina a beneficiary of your retirement account.

LIFE INSURANCE POLICY: You can name Conserving Carolina a beneficiary of your life insurance policy.

NEW INCENTIVES TO GIVE IN THE CARES ACT

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act act that Congress passed on March 27 includes new incentives for charitable giving, starting in 2020. Please consult your tax advisor or reliable resources for details, but here's a quick summary:

- Even if you don't itemize deductions, you can now deduct up to \$300 from your adjusted gross income for monetary donations to charities.
- If you do itemize deductions, there is no longer a cap at 60% of your adjusted gross income. If you're in a position to make larger gifts, you can now deduct up to 100% of your adjusted gross income for monetary donations to charities.
- If you are 70½ or older, you can still donate up to \$100,000 from your retirement account directly to a charity without paying tax on the distribution, even though the CARES Act eliminates the required minimum distributions (RMDs) from many retirement plans in 2020.

Thank You for Protecting Wonderful Places!

RESHAPING THE RIVERBANK

The banks of the French Broad River used to have more slackwater areas, or sloughs, which fish use to breed. These areas of slow moving water support all kinds of wildlife. But much of the land along the French Broad has been ditched and drained, to the point that some fish like the gigantic muskellunge—or muskie—are struggling to reproduce. We're helping bring back muskie by re-creating sloughs at our ambitious floodplain restoration at the Mouth of Mud Creek in Fletcher. Here's how it's taking shape.



Plans for the 103-acre restoration include muskie sloughs, wetlands, reforested areas, pollinator meadows, walking trails, river access, a paddle campground, and a potential greenway connection.



Earth movers have begun digging out three sloughs, including this work-in-progress. Ultimately, the floodplain restoration will benefit fish, ducks, songbirds, turtles, salamanders, insects, mammals and more.

STORIES OF THE LAND

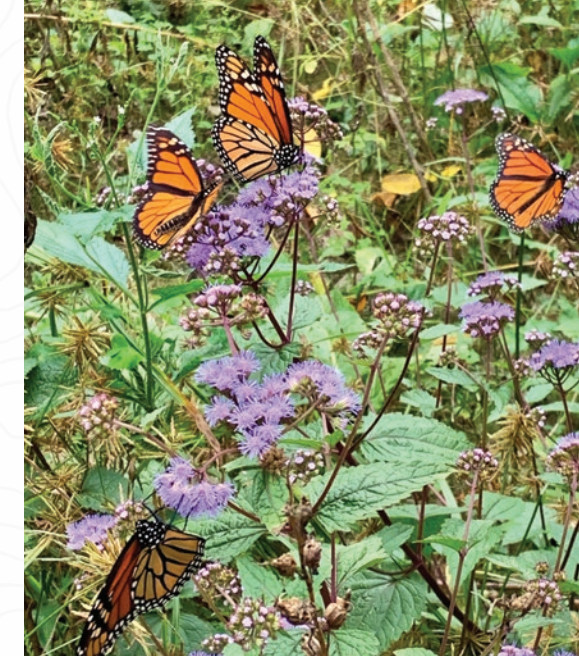
“IT CHANGED ME”

When Kim Bailey put her very first milkweed plants outside, a monarch butterfly must have laid eggs on them right away. Because when she brought her plants to a workshop on how to use monarchs in the classroom, soon afterwards, there were already colorful, big caterpillars munching on the leaves.

An expert was giving a presentation to a room full of educators, including Kim. “All of a sudden the caterpillar starts to pupate,” Kim says. “It’s shedding its skin and forming its chrysalis, right there, in real life. All the teachers, that’s the first time they ever saw the metamorphosis. And apparently, it also changed *me* because I got totally hooked on it!”

Today, Kim is the owner of Milkweed Meadows Farm in Fruitland, NC, producing seeds and plants for pollinator-friendly gardens. As a volunteer, she leads Bee City USA - Hendersonville and she has advised Conserving Carolina’s Habitat at Home columns. On vacation, she often goes to Mexico to see the monarchs overwintering in their mountain sanctuaries. “I feel lucky because what I do for a living, what I do as a volunteer, and what I do for fun, it’s all the same thing,” she says.

“I always remember hearing about the environmental footprint—what is your impact on nature? It’s such a negative way to look at it,” Kim says. “There’s an



As caterpillars, monarchs eat only milkweed, but as butterflies they gather nectar from many kinds of flowers.

alternative to that called an environmental handprint—what are you doing to lend a helping hand? How are you having an impact, but a positive one?

“To me, gardening for pollinators is all about that. Planting a seed is one of the most hopeful things you can do. And when you get the plant and the butterfly actually comes and lays her eggs on it or uses it for nectar, you see, *‘It worked!’*”

She says, “You’re asking people to do something that helps the environment but you’re also giving them a way to experience joy and beauty. I think that’s a big part of why this movement has caught on. Everyone wants to do something to help, but it’s a happy thing that you’re doing and it doesn’t feel like a sacrifice. It’s contagious. It’s an empowering thing and it’s a joyful thing.”



“Planting a seed is one of the most hopeful things you can do.”

- KIM BAILEY

Kim Bailey poses at a monarch butterfly sculpture at the Brevard Music Center, created by Sabrina Fadial.

▶ SEE KIM'S TIPS FOR STARTING A BUTTERFLY GARDEN AT [CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/KIM-BAILEY-BUTTERFLY-GARDENS](https://www.conservingcarolina.org/kim-bailey-butterfly-gardens)



GUARDIANS OF THE GREEN BUSINESS MEMBERS

It's so important to support our local businesses, especially these businesses that support local land conservation. Thank you to all of our Guardians of the Green business members!

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VIDEO

A FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON CONSERVATION

Want to see a birds-eye view of conservation? This new video shows stunning aerial views over Pisgah National Forest and the Hickory Nut Gorge. You'll see the sun rise from one of our newest trails. You'll glimpse beautiful animals like baby turkeys and a red eft. Best of all, you'll meet some of our amazing members—the people like you who make it happen.

You are part of a beautiful story.



▶ CHECK IT OUT AT [CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/CCVIDEO](https://conservingcarolina.org/ccvideo), OR SCAN THE CODE TO THE RIGHT.



2019 Summer of Service members Joe Treadwell and Clayton Cilone move plants for a pollinator garden at El Centro.

SUMMER OF SERVICE WILL PROVIDE COVID-19 RELIEF

This year, Conserving Carolina's Summer of Service will be shifting gears to meet community needs in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the past three years, this AmeriCorps program has engaged young adults in hands-on conservation projects. But this year, it wouldn't be possible to hold the group activities we usually do with Summer of Service, like building trails or planting community gardens. And this year, many more people in our communities are facing urgent needs in their day-to-day lives.

Across the nation, AmeriCorps programs are pivoting to help address the COVID-19 crisis—and we saw an opportunity for Summer of Service to help. This year, members will support community partners such as food banks, housing nonprofits, health centers, and disaster relief organizations. Individuals 18 and older are eligible to apply for this year's summer positions, which come with a stipend and an education award.

▶ FOR MORE DETAILS, INCLUDING ANY OPEN POSITIONS, SEE [CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/SUMMER-OF-SERVICE](https://conservingcarolina.org/summer-of-service).

LADY SLIPPER AWARD

- WINNERS -

This award goes to one of our outstanding volunteers every season. Big shout out to our spring and summer winners, Charly and Carole.



CHARLY AURELIA

VOLUNTEERING FOR:

1.5 years

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:

Rock Crushers trail crew

HOME:

Fairview, NC

HOW HE GOT INVOLVED:

After hiking Weed Patch trail, he reached out to share his trail building expertise as a former trails coordinator and a SORBA volunteer.

HOPES & DREAMS FOR CONSERVING CAROLINA:

A leadership role in the "second renaissance of trails" with sustainability as a priority.

WHAT MOTIVATES HIM:

Charly has always led a life of service and wants to continue giving back to his community and the natural world.

TOP ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE:

The health of the natural community and the way people move through natural areas. He likens trails to communication, helping people get to know the land.

HOBBIES:

Hiking, backpacking, and bike-packing



CAROLE BARTOL

VOLUNTEERING FOR:

So long she's not sure!

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:

Development Committee and Celebration Task Force

HOME:

Landrum, SC

HOW SHE GOT INVOLVED:

Read about our work in the paper, came to our holiday party to learn more, then started joining events like wildflower walks.

MOST REWARDING VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE:

Helping protect Little White Oak Mountain.

HOPES & DREAMS FOR CONSERVING CAROLINA:

To continue to fulfill the mission and share the importance of conservation.

WHAT MOTIVATES HER:

She wants others to have experiences like she did growing up in Elkin, NC, surrounded by beautiful mountains and spending time on the parkway.

TOP ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE:

Preserving the forest, which she helped do by putting her own property under conservation easement.

HOBBIES:

Playing music, reading, and loving on her cat, Leo August Bartol



HABITAT AT HOME

Y'ALL HAVE SOME WILD BACKYARDS

Wild critters need more places to live—and not just in nature preserves. In *Nature's Best Hope*, Doug Tallamy writes, “[W]e need to practice conservation in areas outside our parks as well as inside them. And this means we need to practice conservation where we live, where we work, and where we farm.”

While we were spending so much time at home this spring, it seemed like a good opportunity to turn our attention to the much-needed habitat we can provide right where we live. We asked you to share photos of the wildlife you see at your place, from bugs to bears. And we asked you to show us how you're making your place better for wildlife—like growing native trees and flowers or putting up bird boxes or bee hotels. You guys wowed us! Here are just a few of the over 275 photos or videos submitted in our #HabitatAtHome2020 Contest.

We'll do this again next year, so go ahead. Get even wilder.

Lauren Sheperd was photographing birds from her deck in Leicester when who should appear but this bobcat!



Amy Cecilia LoPresti Owens spotted this “bluebird of happiness” among the maple seeds at her home in Forest City.

“Excuse me, ma’am. You have mushroom on your face.” Angela Prodrick came across a box turtle chowing down near her home in Hendersonville.



It's a kid-friendly contest, with naturalists like three year old Griffin Thaller photographing native plants at his home in Bat Cave. This photo is by his mother, Sara Jackson.

Scott Nelson found these bear cubs playing on a tree at his home in the woods around Asheville.



STAY CONNECTED

GET THE WHOLE STORY

There's a lot more going on than we can fit in this newsletter! Sign up for emails to see the latest conservation news, upcoming events, and ways you can get involved. **To subscribe, go to conservingcarolina.org/email.** If you're signed up but don't see us, you might need to rescue us from your junk folder!

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

We miss seeing you in person! As we move forward, we're exploring ways to connect, learn, and volunteer while keeping everybody safe. **For updates on volunteering, sign up at conservingcarolina.org/volunteer.** And check our online calendar for events, whether digital or in-person.

CONSERVATION CELEBRATION

Mark your calendar for our annual Conservation Celebration scheduled for August 22. Details about the event, and any potential changes, will be shared this summer. **More at conservationcelebration.org.**

WIN YOUR DREAM TRIP

Tickets are available for our trip-of-your-choice raffle! See the Panama Canal, Sea Island, or your own dream destination. Tickets are \$100 and only 200 tickets will be available. Win big and take your trip any time through August 2022. **Details at conservationcelebration.org.**





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WE'RE ALL CONNECTED

When you give to Conserving Carolina, you're protecting the mountains, rivers, farms, and forests that support so many lives—and our lives are all connected.

We loved seeing your connection to nature this spring through our Habitat at Home contest (see p. 10)—like this tiger swallowtail that Wally Hughes spotted near his home in Polk County.

We can see how much you love nature. Can you help protect it? Your gifts matter more than ever right now. Please send a check, give us a call, or donate online. **Thank you!**



Photo by Wally Hughes.