



THANK YOU

FOR MAKING GREAT STORIES POSSIBLE

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Weed Patch Mountain Trail Opens

Hikers, mountain bikers, and rock climbers are now invited into a stunning backcountry wilderness in the Hickory Nut Gorge. In May, Conserving Carolina and our partners opened the Weed Patch Mountain Trail, which connects the Town of Lake Lure's Buffalo Creek Park to Eagle Rock in Chimney Rock State Park.

"It's already my favorite bike trail in western North Carolina," says Cathy Cooper, an avid mountain biker you will often find flying down a hill in Pisgah National Forest. Now she's found a new playground to satisfy her quest for adventure on two wheels.



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**THANK YOU FOR
YOUR SUPPORT!**

On the Cover:
View from Weed
Patch Mountain Trail
overlooking Chimney
Rock State Park. Photo
by Clint Calhoun.



Our Rock Crushers Trail Crew gave over 1,200 volunteer hours to create the Weed Patch Trail.

Weed Patch Mountain Trail Opens

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“Weed Patch has everything—solitude, flow, technical features, and killer views,” she says. “It’s a bigtime challenge, but nonstop fun.”

The new 8.6-mile trail is designed for both mountain biking and hiking, and a spur trail through a natural rock tunnel creates the first access to Eagle Rock, a rock climbing destination.

The trail opening culminates nearly a decade of work. It winds through more than 1,300 acres of mountain land that was once slated for development. Instead, Conserving Carolina purchased the land out of bankruptcy in 2009. We protected it forever with a conservation easement and sold it to the Town of Lake Lure to expand Buffalo Creek Park—bringing the park to more than 1,500 acres!

Our trails coordinator, Peter Barr, designed the trail and hired Shrimper Khare and Headwaters Environmental Services to construct it. The trail is built to high standards of sustainability to prevent erosion, minimize maintenance, and provide a natural, enjoyable experience.

Shrimper, a voracious mountain biker himself, loves the trail’s seclusion the most. “The solitude is second to none. The silence of Weed Patch Mountain is deafening,” he said, smiling ear to ear after riding the finished product.

Volunteers played a big role in creating the trail, too. Conserving Carolina’s Rock Crushers Trail Crew donated more than 1,200 hours digging and moving vegetation. Many of those came from Cathy.

“SOMETHING ELSE THAT MAKES THIS THE BEST TRAIL IS ALL OF THE ENERGY AND ATTENTION TO DETAIL PUT INTO EVERY INCH OF THE TRAIL,” SHE SAYS. “AND A LOT OF HARD WORK!”

The conservation and trail projects were funded by NC’s Clean Water Management Trust Fund, NC’s Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, Recreational Trails Program, NC State Parks, David and Daryl Nelms, Carolina Climbers Coalition, and REI Asheville.

▶ [GET THE TRAIL MAP AT CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/WEEDPATCH](https://www.conservingcarolina.org/weedpatch)

YOUNGS MOUNTAIN SUMMIT: HABITAT FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE



This rare crevice salamander lives on Youngs Mountain—a biodiversity hotspot.

The rocky summit of Youngs Mountain is now protected, providing habitat for exceptional biodiversity and potential for trails with breathtaking views. Conserving Carolina purchased over 300 acres of the mountaintop adjacent to Rutherford County's planned Youngs Mountain Park.

The mountaintop provides habitat for over 80 kinds of animals, from the Southern flying squirrel to the pipevine swallowtail butterfly to rare salamanders. There are even more kinds of plants. A scientist conducting an inventory counted 381 species, from trilliums to beautyberry to three kinds of dogwoods. The property also

includes a stand of extremely rare old growth forest.

It's the kind of place that native plants and wildlife most need as the climate changes. Many species are highly attuned to the habitat where they live—so if that habitat becomes hotter or cooler, wetter or drier, they may not survive. Many will need to move, whether to a different area or a different elevation. Scientists have found that an important characteristic for climate resilient habitats is a rich diversity of microclimates—like Youngs Mountain with its steep slopes, exposed rock faces, and rushing creeks.

The North Carolina Clean Water Management Fund, the Open Space Institute, and Fred and Alice Stanback provided support for this project. Youngs Mountain is part of the Blue Ridge Escarpment—home to some of the greatest biodiversity in the Southern Appalachian region, which the National Academy of Sciences has ranked as the top priority for species conservation in the U.S.

Youngs Mountain overlooks Lake Lure and moves us closer to our vision for a 100+ mile trail network in the Hickory Nut Gorge (see map on p. 4).

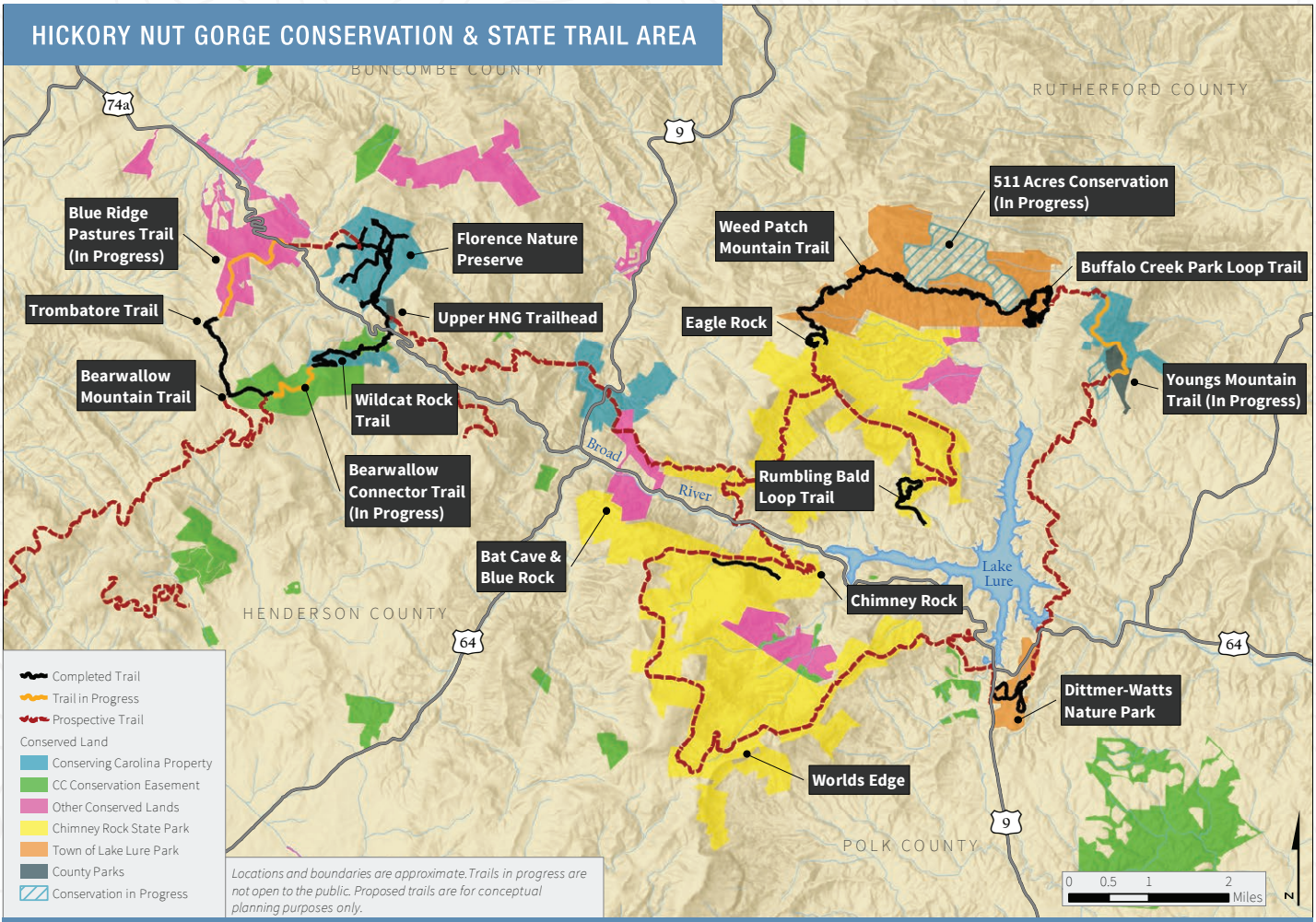


Peter Barr accepts the award from Sen. Richard Burr in Washington, D.C., accompanied by Marianne Fowler of the Coalition for Recreational Trails and Jay Leutze of Blue Ridge Forever.

Wildcat Rock Trail Wins National Award

Conserving Carolina went above and beyond to make Wildcat Rock Trail sustainable and enjoyable. The result is one of the best-made trails in the U.S., according to the Coalition of Recreational Trails. In June, the coalition granted its annual achievement award for trail design and construction to Conserving Carolina and our trails coordinator, Peter Barr. Peter accepted the award in Washington, D.C. from Sen. Richard Burr and Rep. Mark Meadows.

Sustainable features on the three-mile trail include its 300+ masoned stone stairs and its curvilinear design. The trail's undulations and curves help to quickly shed water, which prevents erosion. They also make for a more pleasant walk in the woods, as hikers climb to a 100-foot waterfall, a dramatic rock outcrop, and a ridgeline meadow.



VISION FOR A 100+ MILE TRAIL NETWORK

Imagine a loop trail that links Bearwallow Mountain with Blue Ridge Pastures and Florence Nature Preserve. Imagine another loop trail that goes all the way around Lake Lure, with dramatic stops at Youngs Mountain, Eagle Rock, and Worlds Edge. Getting excited? We are—especially now that we’ve come this far toward our vision of a 100+ mile network of connected trails in the Hickory Nut Gorge. So far, 35 miles of trails are open and more are underway. In 2017, the NC General Assembly officially designated this emerging trail network as the Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail.



Shrimper Khare on the new Weed Patch Mountain trail.

LADY SLIPPER AWARD

- WINNERS -

This award goes to one of our outstanding volunteers every season. Here are the spring and summer winners. (There's a theme here: nurses rock!)

Thank you, Marcia and Greg.



MARCIA CAGE

VOLUNTEER ROLES:

Office work, recording volunteer hours, bird box monitoring

VOLUNTEERING SINCE:

2014

MOST REWARDING EXPERIENCE:

Checking on bluebird families in their boxes (see one of her photos on p. 11!)

CAREER:

Nurse

HOME:

Hendersonville

HOBBIES:

Gardening, quilting, Monarch Watch, reading

HOPES AND DREAMS FOR CONSERVING CAROLINA:

To continue to grow in presence, gain more support, and preserve more land.

MOTTO:

"If we all tried to do a little bit for someone else or for nature or the planet, the whole world would benefit."



GREG MINER

VOLUNTEER ROLE:

Leader of the Kudzu Warriors

VOLUNTEERING SINCE:

2009

MOST REWARDING EXPERIENCE:

Teaching volunteer groups how to eradicate invasive plants and why it matters

CAREER:

Recently retired nurse

HOME:

Tryon

HOBBIES:

Photography and woodworking

HOW HE GOT INVOLVED:

Thought kudzu was beautiful until he was buying property; then he realized how destructive it can be and wanted to do something about it.

HOPES AND DREAMS FOR CONSERVING CAROLINA:

To become a more integral part of the community.

WHAT MOTIVATES HIM:

The spiritual connection of working with like-minded people. He says, "Conserving Carolina is similar to church for me."



Summer of Service alum Fernando Baruch holds an award from El Centro with Conserving Carolina's community engagement manager, Tony Beurskens.

Who Says He Can't?

It looked like Fernando Baruch would be left out of Conserving Carolina's Summer of Service.

He seemed like a good fit for the new AmeriCorps program for 17-to-19 year olds that we launched last summer—and our partners at El Centro of Hendersonville recommended him. But Fernando isn't a U.S. citizen, which means he can't receive AmeriCorps funding. The child of immigrants, he is a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient.

Conserving Carolina saw potential in Fernando and we knew he was motivated—so we found a way. We secured another source of funding so we could include him. As part of the five-person Summer of Service crew, Fernando helped build trails, restore habitats, plant pollinator gardens, build a nature playground, and more. "It was something different every day," he says. "It was a lot of information to take in, but I definitely learned that we have to take care of our environment."

This spring, El Centro gave Conserving Carolina an award for our commitment to equity. Carolina McCready of El Centro says that Fernando's experience last year has helped him develop a sense of place in Henderson County and blossom as a community leader. Now, Summer of Service has embarked on its second year, with Fernando as one of its senior members.

Mountaintop Experience

AUDREY AND FRANK

Audrey Peterman was in her 40s before she discovered America's national parks. At Acadia on a mountain overlooking the sea, she realized that if God had created a place so perfect, so beautiful, so wondrous, and God had also created her, then she must also be perfect, beautiful, and wondrous. And so must everyone else. She's tried to live in the light of that insight ever since.

She and her husband Frank set off on a 12,000 mile road trip to see more of these awe-inspiring places. But they wondered why they saw so few people who looked like them. Where were the people with black or brown faces?

On a 12,000-mile road trip to see America's national parks, Audrey and Frank Peterman wondered: Where are the black and brown faces?

In Yellowstone, Frank met a white man who told them about seeing the park as a boy with his father, and later with his own son. "That was one of the few times that I questioned whether I had been a good father," Frank says. This man had passed on to his family a sense of ownership of the national park. Frank had not done that for his children.

Audrey and Frank set out to change what they saw, launching new careers as advocates for engaging Americans, in all of their diversity, with the nation's public lands. They shared their story at an event that Conserving Carolina co-sponsored in March, with a visit to the Carl Sandburg home in Flat Rock and an address at UNC-Asheville.

KATHEY

Kathey Avery's family goes back for generations in Bat Cave, where her parents were farmers. In 2009, with Kathey's encouragement, they protected 150 acres bordering

Chimney Rock State Park, through The Nature Conservancy. But she knows that, to other African-Americans, places like Bat Cave are foreign.

"A lot of our people live in the urban areas and a lot of them, especially in Western North Carolina, are intimidated about getting outside the city limits," she says. "I was born and raised in the country, but I do understand both stories. They think, in these mountains, Ku Klux Klan is still roaming freely. And I'm sure they're still around, or people with that mentality. But most of the people that live in the rural area, they're friendly, and they don't even probably realize that people are afraid to come out into the country because they feel that way."

When African-Americans don't leave the city, she says, they miss out on the beauty, the fresh air, the exercise, and the peace of mind they could find in the mountains.

When Kathey heard about the event with the Petermans, she passed on the word to Flo Mayberry and Tanya Shahid-Cummings.

FLO AND TANYA

After the talk, they decided, on the spot, to do something. "We said, this is it. We're going to start something—a parks and nature group," Flo says. "For everyone, but specifically targeting people of color because we were inspired by the Petermans who told us that people of color do not take advantage of our national parks to the same degree that other groups do."

Flo moved to Bat Cave eight years ago, after she retired, but she realized she doesn't know most of the trails in the area. Where should they go? Conserving Carolina's community engagement manager Tony Beurskens introduced them to two trails in the Hickory Nut Gorge—the Wildcat Rock Trail and the Trombatore Trail. Both are Conserving Carolina trails on land that we've protected.





On the hike to Wildcat Rock, Tanya stopped when they got to the cliff. No way. It was a narrow trail over bare rock, at the edge of a sheer drop. But her companions were walking on it. “Are they crazy?” Tanya thought. She could turn back.

But she didn’t. “I overcame my fears and I did it,” she says. “And it was so beautiful. Oh, it was so pretty up there. That made it fun, because I conquered it. It was as though I conquered the world. Like I achieved a great feat by being able to do something I didn’t know I could do.”

ABOVE: After her first hike with the group, called Pathways to Parks, Tanya says, “I overcame my fears and I did it... It was as though I conquered the world.” Here, Tanya, Flo, and Larry Pender (left to right) explore a creek along Conserving Carolina’s Trombatore Trail.

BELOW: Tony, Tanya, Flo, and Kathey connected during the Petermans’ visit to the Carl Sandburg Home in Flat Rock.



▶ **THERE’S MORE! READ THE FULL STORY AND LEARN HOW TO JOIN THE GROUP AT: [CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/MOUNTAINTOP-EXPERIENCE](https://www.conservingcarolina.org/mountaintop-experience)**

WE'RE HERE FOR YOU, FRENCH BROAD

What does stewardship look like for a river? For the French Broad as it pours out of the mountains through Transylvania County, there's a festival involved—RiverFest in Rosman every June. That's one of the many activities

of the Transylvania French Broad River Stewards, a grassroots coalition of local citizens and nonprofits including Conserving Carolina. The group helps to improve public access to the river, through greenways,

put-ins, and a paddle trail. It puts out alerts when there are logjams or downed trees. It organizes volunteer water quality monitoring. And, it makes sure public officials know how vital the French Broad is to the local economy.



Conserving Carolina's crew of "Pollinator Pirates" took on the canoe relay race at last year's RiverFest. That's our fearless leader, Kieran Roe, with Jenn Tutor, Adrienne Brown, and Rebekah Robinson.

As of this summer, Conserving Carolina has stepped up our involvement in these activities, taking on the Transylvania French Broad River Stewards as one of our programs.

It's a one-year commitment as both groups explore making the move long-term. Our staff will be assisted by an AmeriCorps Project Conserve member to keep these stewardship activities going strong.


South Carolina Horse Farm Protected

Elizabeth Cummings and Ben Cox have generously donated 23 acres in Campobello, SC, to Conserving Carolina and made a pledge to donate another 30+ acres in the future. The land is a horse farm and contributes to the open countryside used for fox hunting. This land will be forever protected with a conservation easement, which will preserve productive farmland and allow native forest to regenerate. The eventual sale of this protected land will provide significant financial support for our ongoing land conservation work, especially along the North Pacolet River.

Polk Students Capture the DNA of Native Plants

Biotechnology students at Polk County High School were the first high school students in the nation to receive DNA analysis equipment called a mini PCR lab from Genes in Space—and they used it to record the genetic makeup of native plants. Pam Torlina from Conserving Carolina and botanist David Campbell provided specimens of native Polk County plants. Then, the students extracted and sequenced the plants' DNA under the guidance of their teacher, Jennifer Allsbrook. A unique DNA barcode (or fingerprint) for each species was entered in a national database to begin a census of life in Polk County. These DNA barcodes may be entirely new entries to the database.



 PLACES YOU HELPED PROTECT

Mountain Bog: Uniquely Appalachian

Conserving Carolina helped restore this now vibrant section of the bog in Flat Rock. We have helped protect this bog on three connected properties.

Once, the French Broad River basin was a network of wetlands stretching through the Appalachian Mountains. In recent centuries, so much of this land was drained that today, mountain bogs are rare. But where they exist, they are havens of biodiversity—home to unique wildflowers, songbirds, waterfowl, salamanders, turtles, and other plants and animals.

Conserving Carolina was able to preserve one of the remnants of this ecosystem in May when we purchased a 52-acre property that contains part of a mountain bog in Flat Rock. The land was slated for development—more than 100 lots ringing the upland portion of the property. “Think about the fertilizer and other pollutants that would run off of those lawns, streets, and driveways,” says Tom Fanslow, Conserving Carolina’s land protection director. “Think about the invasive species that could easily make their way to the bog.”

Instead, Conserving Carolina will manage the property to protect the bog. David Lee, Conserving Carolina’s natural resources manager, says, “An exciting thing about this property is

that there’s room for the bog to grow. What is currently dry land could become an extension of the bog.”

Conserving Carolina also manages part of this bog on an adjacent property, in cooperation with the landowners. The bog overlaps a third property, where Conserving Carolina holds a conservation easement.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been a key partner in protecting the bog. Eventually, the goal is to add most of the portion that Conserving Carolina now owns to the Mountain Bogs National Wildlife Refuge—a unique wildlife refuge that is a collection of pockets of this extraordinary natural community.

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STORIES OF THE LAND

A Legacy on Hightop Mountain

There's a place on Hightop Mountain in Fletcher where people go to hike and bike, to enjoy the cliffs and caves, the wildflowers and spring-fed creeks. It's been in Joe Thomas's family for centuries. "I have felt this land in my heart, in my soul, for as long as I can remember," he says.

As a boy, Joe had a favorite daydream. He would build a Victorian house up there, with a turret and a fishing pond. That was the place he'd pass on to his kids. But the money from his jobs as a factory worker and security guard never added up to build that dream home. And family took its time coming into Joe's life. His first marriage ended. When he found love and married two years ago, he became a stepfather with nine grandkids in the bargain—but his

stepdaughters aren't that interested in Hightop Mountain.

And the property taxes were piling up. He says, "I was kind of frantic because I didn't want it to be sold at auction."

“**I'VE ALWAYS CONSIDERED MYSELF MORE OF A STEWARD THAN AN OWNER HERE. BASICALLY, I CONSIDER THIS PASSING THE STEWARDSHIP.**”

Joe's solution was to donate over 98 acres to Conserving Carolina as a nature preserve where the community—including himself—can continue to

connect with nature. Joe asked that the property bear the name of his mother's family, as Youngblood Farms Preserve. He says, "I've always considered myself more of a steward than an owner here. Basically, I consider this passing the stewardship. That's what I'm counting on Conserving Carolina to do."

In recognition of his gift to the community, Conserving Carolina awarded Joe one of this year's Lela McBride Stewardship Awards.

▶ [READ JOE'S STORY AT CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/A-LEGACY-ON-HIGHTOP-MOUNTAIN](https://conservingcarolina.org/a-legacy-on-hightop-mountain)

This spot on Hightop Mountain has been special to Joe since he was a boy. It's where he pictured building his house.



FIELD NOTES



OUR ALL-STAR VOLUNTEER MARCIA CAGE (*see p. 5*) found these baby bluebirds in May when she was monitoring bird boxes at the Anne Ulinski Bog, a restored bog that Conserving Carolina owns in Flat Rock.



WHAT A BEAUTIFUL EASTERN BOX TURTLE!
When we showed this guy on our Facebook page, people shared great pics, videos, and stories about their own box turtle sightings. Some also said they don't see as many as they used to. It's true—box turtle populations have gone down. So help a turtle out. If you see one on the road, if it's safe for you to stop, pick it up and move it in the direction it was going. But don't take them home as pets, even if you plan to release them later. Remember, the turtle may have been living there for years and already know where to find food, mate and hibernate.



Historic Gwynn Valley Camp

You Are Invited

August 18, 4:00 to 8:00 PM

Conservation Celebration

Brevard, NC

Join us at historic Gwynn Valley Camp and soak in the scenic views over land that is protected by Conserving Carolina. Start by taking a nature walk with us. Enjoy delicious gourmet food, local wine, and craft beer. Browse a large selection of exquisite silent and live auction items. Dance to Brevard's own Crooked Pine Band. Cross your fingers as we pull the winner of the trip-of-your-choice raffle. All while celebrating conservation accomplishments with your friends and fellow supporters! \$100 per person. Sponsorships available.

LEARN MORE AT [CONSERVATIONCELEBRATION.ORG](https://www.conservationcelebration.org)

Trip Raffle

Get Tickets Now!

Win a trip to Ireland, Jackson Hole, or a make-your-own dream vacation! Get a ticket today and support conservation. Only 200 tickets are available. Winner will be drawn at the Conservation Celebration, but you don't need to be present to win.

ENTER AT [CONSERVATIONCELEBRATION.ORG/TRIP-RAFFLE](https://www.conservationcelebration.org/trip-raffle)

October 5, 6:00 to 9:00 PM

For Lands Sake

Landrum, SC

Experience Southern hospitality at the historic home of Charlene and Helmuth Von Bluecher, with its gracious architecture and gorgeous open views. Enjoy a gourmet dinner, bid on silent auction items, and celebrate conservation with a focus on our Southeast region.

LEARN MORE AT [CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/CALENDAR](https://www.conservingcarolina.org/calendar)


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