

LANDSCAPE



THANK YOU

FOR MAKING GREAT STORIES POSSIBLE!

INSIDE:

140 ACRES FOR POLK COUNTY PARK
LITTLE RIVER WETLANDS
50 MILES OF RAIL TRAILS
HABITAT AT HOME PHOTO CONTEST

AND MORE...

FROM GUN RANGE TO CONSERVATION LAND

Susan McHugh was at home when she heard the assault rifles—loud, continuous blasts of gunfire. It came from the property next door, the site of a proposed police training center that would involve automatic weapons and paramilitary scenarios. That day, the sheriff’s office was doing sound tests.

“It sounded like it was right on my porch,” Susan says. “I can’t even tell you how awful it was.” Their home beside the Green River Game Lands was usually peaceful. “How do you live with this?” Susan asked.

Her friend Sara Bell was upset too. Sara owns The Gorge zipline where people come for a wilderness adventure. That morning on the zipline, you could hear gunfire. You could hear it in downtown Saluda. If you were in parts of the Game Lands to hike or paddle or hunt, you would have heard it.



847 CASE STREET
HENDERSONVILLE, NC 28792

2060 LYNN ROAD, SUITE 1
COLUMBUS, NC 28722

828.697.5777
CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG

f @CONSERVINGCAROLINA

ig @CONSERVINGCAROLINA

tw @CONSRVGCAROLINA



THANK YOU FOR
YOUR SUPPORT!

ON THE COVER:

DiAnne Arbour, Jay Bergen, and Susan McHugh—some of the neighbors who fought to conserve the proposed gun range property—at DiAnne and Jay’s home overlooking the Green River Gorge. Photo by Gordon Tutor.

TOP

The land added to the Green River Game Lands includes this low elevation seep—a rare wetland community. Photo by Gordon Tutor.

OPPOSING PAGE

Kayaker Alex Harvey is protecting his land beside the Green River. Photo by Dave Degendorf.

FROM GUN RANGE TO CONSERVATION LAND

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The community organized to fight the gun range. At the same time, they started exploring other options for that property. Alex Harvey, a neighbor of the McHughs, is a kayaker who owns land with access to the world-class Green River Narrows. He says they started asking, “What’s plan B for this property? You can’t just say no to things.”

People suggested that they reach out to Conserving Carolina. The property was next to the Game Lands—so, could it be added to that public land?

It seemed like a long shot. The price was \$450,000. Even with a state grant, we’d need a large local match. Still, Conserving Carolina said we’d be willing to try.

“When they came to us, we had nothing to go on,” says our Land Protection Director Tom Fanslow. “It was like Stone Soup. We came in saying, okay, we’ve got this empty soup pot. It doesn’t have anything in it though. And then people just started bringing their onions and tomatoes and radishes. And then we made this big bowl of soup that everyone could enjoy.”

Tom and Susan McHugh live on treasured family land where Tom spent summers as a boy. But they worried about what would happen to this special place when they were gone. Now, the gun range project got them thinking about conservation. What if they protected their land too?

In response to fierce opposition, Henderson County dropped the gun range proposal. By this time, the idea of protecting that land had gained momentum. Neighbor DiAnne Arbour says, “The project pulled our community together. We got to know each other better because we were fighting for a cause.”

Now the cause had shifted to conservation. They started adding ingredients to the “stone soup.”

Neighbors dug deep, donating an extraordinary \$100,000. That influenced philanthropists Fred and Alice Stanback to contribute, too. Alex found another way to add to the match. He offered to donate a conservation easement on 25 acres of his own. Then, two neighbors, Annie and Randy Hall, offered to finance the purchase with a low-interest loan. That added to an earlier loan from the Conservation Trust for North Carolina.

Even before we got grant funding, Conserving Carolina acted to protect the land, which includes streams and a wetland. We bought it in 2019, and fortunately we did go on to receive a grant from the NC Land and Water Fund. Since then, we realized our goal of making the property public land. We added 76 acres to the Green River Game Lands!

And it turns out, that’s just the beginning.



The conservation easement on Alex Harvey’s 25 acres is in the works. Then, there’s another 50 acres that Karen and David Cook donated outright to Conserving Carolina. Add to that the McHughs’ land. The McHughs are willing to donate a conservation easement on 18 acres and sell another 125 acres to Conserving Carolina as a bargain sale. The goal is to add that 125-acre parcel to the Game Lands too.

Bottom line: You are helping create a new swath of conservation land totaling almost 300 acres—including about 200 acres of new public land, buffered by 100 acres of private conservation land!

“It’s going to be a huge amount of protection in this one community,” says Susan, who now serves on our Board of Directors. All of these properties have creeks that flow into the stunning Green River. They preserve a wildlife corridor on the edge of the Game Lands. And for people who love to paddle, hike, hunt, fish, bird, bike, or float, there will be more room for recreation. The new conservation land also strengthens outdoor recreation businesses that would have been harmed by a loud shooting range.

As Susan puts it, “There was a lot of silver lining to that gun range.” The proposal that threatened to destroy their quality of life resulted in the opposite—protecting forever so much of what they love about their home.



The new parkland at Little White Oak Mountain is right behind Polk County Middle School.

LITTLE WHITE OAK MOUNTAIN LAND ADDED TO PARK

A Polk County park just grew by 140 acres and new trails are underway. This is the second addition to the park to come out of the land you helped protect at Little White Oak Mountain! We bought the 1,068-acre Little White Oak Mountain property—once slated for development—in 2017. Since then, we’ve added 600 acres to the Green River Game Lands. Another 28 acres is becoming a workforce housing development. We added 300 acres to the Polk County Recreation Complex in 2018. Now, we’ve added another 140 acres to that park! That means that the whole Little White Oak Mountain property is going to good use, supporting important community goals.

We’re especially excited that the expanded park—now nearly 600 acres—is right behind Polk County Middle School, creating opportunities for students to explore the outdoors. Teacher Jeanne Ferran says, “This resource right outside our classrooms opens up a whole world to our students—not just in the academic sense of learning about the animals and plants that live there, but also learning the concept that students, no matter what age or ability, can be stewards of the land.”

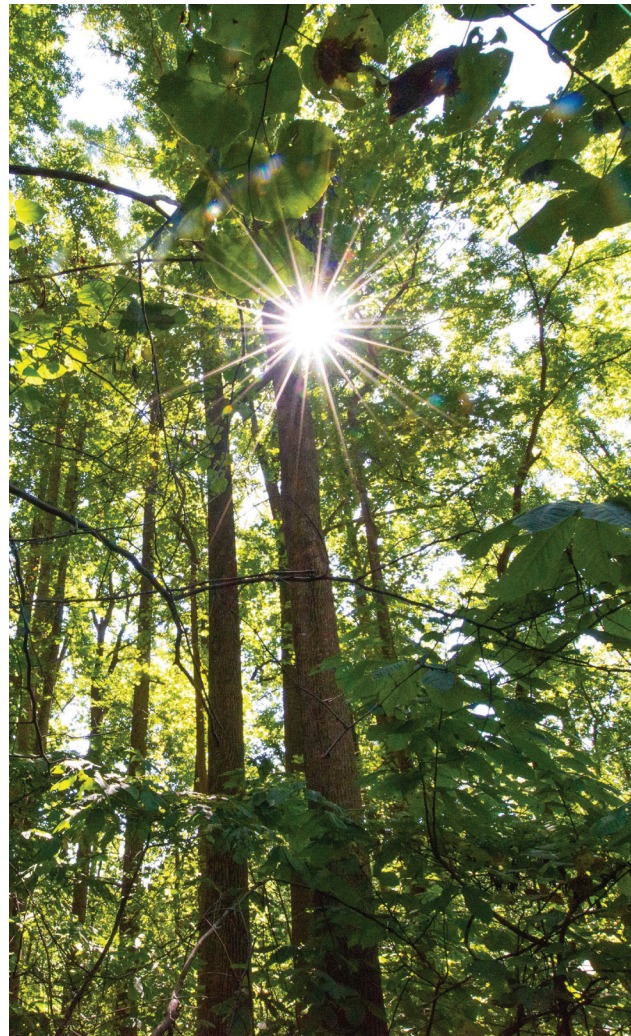
The park now extends all the way from the middle school to the Green River Game Lands. Polk County is building a 7-10 mile trail network there for hiking and mountain biking. Other improvements underway include an outdoor classroom, horseshoe pits, and a new playground. The new trails will open next year!

RARE SALAMANDERS AND OXBOW POOLS

Cross a footbridge across the Little River in Transylvania County and you'll sense that there's something different about these woods. It's the hummocky, moss-covered ground. It's the unusual sphagnum moss, which can grow in soaking wet soil. Then there are the oxbows—curved pools of still water. They look like little sections of river, which is what they are. They're part of a past riverbed, left behind when the Little shifted course. Now, they are perfect homes for frogs and salamanders.

Our Stewardship Manager, Torry Nergart, says it's the natural floodplain that makes this place so special. He says, "This is what happens when a river is allowed to do what it wants to do. This wetland is connected to its main channel and that allows the river to wiggle a little bit. It's not so rigid, stuck in its channel. It can flex and grow and swell as it sees fit."

This 27-acre property, called Little River Wetlands, is home to rare green salamanders and it provides excellent habitat for bats. Thanks to you, this special place is now protected! It's also right next to 83 acres that you helped us protect last year. Both of these properties buffer an Appalachian Mountain Bog—an ecological treasure that is home to some of our rarest plants and animals.



NORMAN WILDER FOREST EXPANDED

Thanks to you, a popular local hiking spot just grew larger! Conserving Carolina just bought a 36.5-acre addition to Norman Wilder Forest, between Saluda and Tryon. Now over 220 acres, this preserve offers protected views of Little Warrior Mountain, clear streams, beautiful wildflowers, mature forests, and 1.3 miles of trails. It also adds to conservation corridors that are coming together along the North Pacolet River, an area of exceptional beauty and biodiversity.

Pam Torlina, our Community Engagement Director, worked with the landowner, John Rice, for years to protect the land. She says, "It is a treasure that this property has been left in its natural state for many years and that now, it adds more land to our Norman Wilder Forest nature preserve." Among the rich natural community, Pam found a rare wildflower there—whorled horsebalm.

Like much of the surrounding area, the property does come with some kudzu and other invasive plants. We are so grateful to our Kudzu Warrior volunteers who are willing to take on this new challenge. If it weren't for the Kudzu Warriors, Norman Wilder Forest would not be the beautiful woodland it is today. Huge thank you to these hardworking volunteers!



A DEEP LOVE FOR NATURE LIVES ON

One woman who loved nature left a legacy that is making an immense difference for our conservation mission. Vivienne Jordahl left a bequest of \$1.75 million to Conserving Carolina when she passed away last year. Her niece Kathryn Brue says, "Her heart was for the outdoors—birds, animals, gardens, flowers. Vivi didn't have any children of her own, but she gave a lot of love to the earth and its inhabitants in many ways. She cared deeply about the land."

Her gift is truly transformational. For years, we've struggled to grow our staff to keep up with our ever-expanding conservation lands and our ambitious goals. This gift made it possible for us to hire much-needed staff to support our conservation and restoration work. We also placed part of the bequest into a land conservation fund. **Many special places will flourish because of Vivienne's love for nature, and we are deeply grateful.**

WHAT IS YOUR LEGACY?

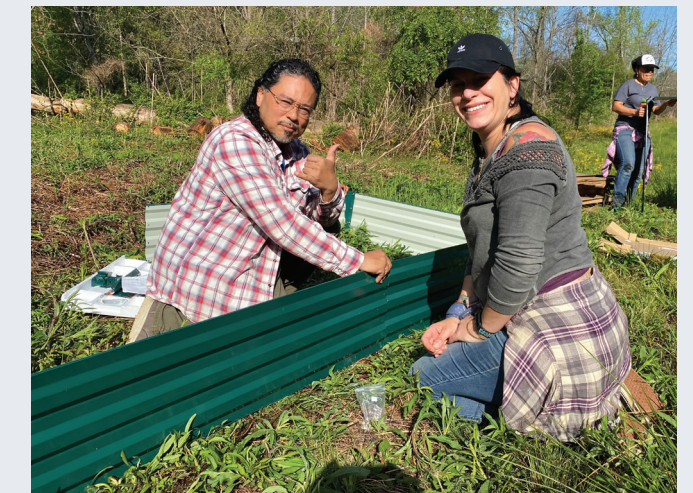
Legacy giving is one of the most profound ways that you can make a difference for conservation. If you are planning a legacy gift, please let us know so that we can plan for the future and honor you in our Land Legacy League.

We invite you to reach out to our Planned Giving Officer, Sierra Hoisington, to discuss your legacy gift, at sierra@conservingcarolina.org or 828-697-5777, ext. 220.

GROWING FOOD AND COMMUNITY

This spring, volunteers kicked off the new community garden at Las Flores. It's part of a vision led by Tierra Fértil for an outdoor space that will celebrate and support the Hispanic community. It will be a space where people can connect with nature and each other, grow food, and heal the land.

Conserving Carolina provided land near the Haywood Knolls neighborhood for this project. Last year, volunteers cleared out rampant invasive plants—so now we're ready to start growing! At this workday, volunteers built raised beds and filled them with composted horse manure donated by Deer Meadow Farm. Want to be a part of it? Join us for monthly volunteer days.



HORSE FARM WITH EQUESTRIAN TRAIL

When Ben and Rhonda King retired, they moved to a community that loves horses as much as they do—the part of Polk County known as Hunting Country. It’s a unique and historic landscape, with rolling hills, mountain views, and a culture that has centered around horses for centuries. Ben and Rhonda bought land that used to be a pony farm with a track around the property. To honor that history, they named it Pony Track Farm. Today, the historic pony track is part of the Foothills Equestrian Trails Association (FETA) network with over 125 miles of equestrian trails. Membership in the trail system is open to anyone who lives in, owns land, or boards a horse in the local community.

This year, Ben and Rhonda donated a conservation easement on 76 acres, which protects the beautiful scenery around this trail system, as well as prime farmland, streams, wildlife habitat, and rare plants. Kathy Nebel, the president of FETA, says, “Land conservation and horses go hand in hand. Pony Track on the Kings’ property has been used by horses for decades. Conserving it and other horse trails is an important component in ensuring the next generation can enjoy horses in Polk County.”



LADY SLIPPER AWARD - WINNERS -

A huge thank you to these truly outstanding volunteers, the winners of our spring and summer Lady Slipper Awards!



MARK BYINGTON

VOLUNTEERING FOR:
7 years

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:
Leader in Saluda Grade Trail project, expert consulting in sustainable landscaping, former Board member

HOME:
Tryon

CAREER:
Landscape Architect

HOBBIES:
Fly fishing with his wife

TOP ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE:
Biodiversity

HOPES AND DREAMS FOR CONSERVING CAROLINA:
Maintain excellence of the staff and sustainably manage the ongoing effort

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU?
“Being a lifelong naturalist, land protection and conservation are extremely important to me. Engaging with the volunteers and staff of Conserving Carolina, I have realized that there may be no better place for me to spend my time and efforts.”



CHUCK MCGRADY

VOLUNTEERING FOR:
Almost 3 decades

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:
Major advocate for Ecusta Trail and now Saluda Grade Trail, plus many other leadership roles over the years!

MOST REWARDING VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE:
Helping to create DuPont State Recreational Forest

HOME:
Hendersonville

CAREER:
Served on Hendersonville Board of Commissioners and in NC House of Representatives. Former summer camp owner and lawyer.

HOBBIES:
Multiple volunteer roles, reading, hiking, exploring canyon country, and (in his words) “failing retirement.”

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU?
As a child he spent a lot of time hiking and camping, leading him to deeply value the outdoors. He sees the environment as a space that brings us all together.

FOREST NEAR PEARSONS’ FALLS

When Bob Tobey and Donna Martin were looking for a place to call home, conservation was a part of their vision. If there’s a beautiful place in the mountains, they reasoned, eventually someone will want to develop it. Instead, they could help protect it. Eventually, they did find a place that felt perfect—and they were right. It had been slated for a development that fell through.

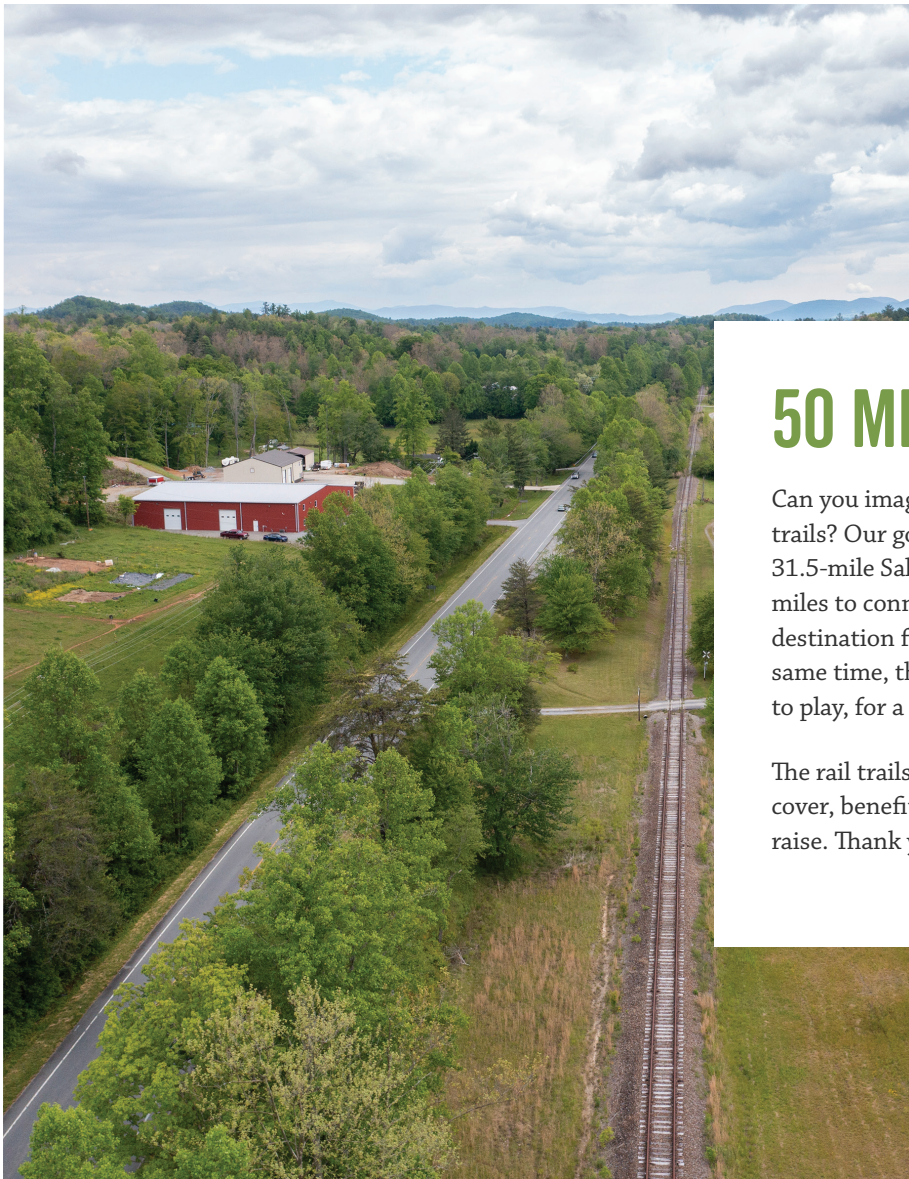
Their home has gorgeous mountain views and is surrounded by forests and streams that flow into Pearson’s Falls—a special place to Bob, who is active in the Tryon Garden Club, which owns the falls. Their land, called Greenhaven Farm, is now home to Donna’s unique menagerie, which includes horses, donkeys, a mule, a miniature horse, hair sheep, chickens, dogs, cats, and even a zebra and a zonkey (half zebra, half donkey)!

They acted on their conservation vision first by protecting 300+ acres through the NC Plant Conservation Program. This year, they protected even more by donating a conservation easement on 79 forested acres to Conserving Carolina. This easement allows forestry, with a forest management plan developed by EcoForesters. It expands an important wildlife corridor and protects wide buffers along nearly a mile of headwater streams.



THE GREAT OUTDOORS AT SCHOOL

Our team is supporting numerous school projects, including the school garden at Polk County Middle School (above) and the nature trail that just opened at Polk Central Elementary School (below). We also supported Edneyville Elementary School’s spring field trip to Bearwallow Mountain, where 450 kids got to enjoy the mountaintop!



50 MILES OF RAIL TRAILS

Can you imagine our region with not one but two epic new rail trails? Our goal is to create both the 19-mile Ecusta Trail and the 31.5-mile Saluda Grade Trail—and it would only take a few more miles to connect them. These 50+ miles of rail trails will be a destination for visitors and an engine for local economies. At the same time, they'll be an everyday asset for locals—a place for kids to play, for a stroll after work, or a safe bike route.

The rail trails are BIG projects—huge in the scale of miles they cover, benefits they offer, hurdles to overcome, and money to raise. Thank you for giving us the support we need to go big!

Ecusta Trail. Photo by Real Digital Productions

GROUNDBREAKING AND FUNDRAISING FOR THE ECUSTA TRAIL

For the Ecusta Trail, you've heard us ask you to help "make the dream real." Well, a part of the dream will be real very soon! A groundbreaking is planned on the first section of trail this summer. This section will be 5.7 miles, from Hendersonville to Horseshoe.

We're also getting ready for a final big fundraising push to raise the money we need to build all 19 miles, from Hendersonville to Brevard. We've seen truly amazing community support, raising millions of dollars! Those donations provide the match needed to unlock major state and federal grants, which multiply your donations x 5. We're also up against the reality of rising costs, so we're going back to grant funders and to our communities to raise the money we need to keep that construction going—all the way.

AGREEMENT REACHED ON SALUDA GRADE PURCHASE

While the end goal is in sight for the Ecusta Trail, we're just getting going on the Saluda Grade Trail. This spring, we saw a huge milestone when we reached an agreement with Norfolk Southern Railroad on terms for a future purchase of the rail line!

We also need to make sure we do this right—so we're starting an in-depth study of the trail this summer. The study will shed light on how the trail could shape local economies and the kind of growth our communities want to see. We'll also be gathering input from stakeholders about opportunities, challenges, and local goals.

The Saluda Grade Trail also has its own website now: saludagradetrail.org. Go there to learn more and sign up for email updates!



GUARDIANS OF THE GREEN BUSINESS MEMBERS

Thank you to all our Guardians of the Green business members! Please consider supporting these local businesses that give back to keep our region a wonderful place to live, work, or visit.



BECTON, DICKINSON AND COMPANY • BLANTYRE STATION • CAMP WAYFARER • CHIMNEY ROCK MANAGEMENT LLC • DAVIDSON RIVER OUTFITTERS • DIAMOND FALLS PRESERVE • DUKE ENERGY • KEYSTONE CAMP • LAZY OTTER RIVER OUTFITTERS • LEATHERWOOD WILDLAND MANAGEMENT • LOOKING GLASS REALTY • NOBLEBRAU BREWING • PISGAH SURVEYING • PISGAH THUNDER • ROCKBROOK CAMP FOR GIRLS • WALKER, WALLACE, AND EMERSON • WILDBIRDS UNLIMITED

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BEAUTY IN THE BACKYARD

In our annual Habitat at Home photo contest, we ask you to show us the wild things where you live—because nature isn't just for nature preserves. Restoring natural areas at home is a hopeful, hands-on way to care for our natural world. This year, Cathleen Bester won the contest with this stunning image of a ruby crowned kinglet in flight.

FIELD NOTES

YOU DON'T SEE THAT EVERY DAY!

Our Stewardship Coordinator, Hans Lohmeyer, was monitoring a conservation property when he found this rare crayfish. It's the first time the Red Burrowing Crayfish has ever been documented in Polk County! These crayfish dig networks of tunnels and chambers where they can stay safe. They need clean, healthy waterways, and we are grateful that conservation landowners Alicia and Greg Wallace are providing a good home.



YOU ARE NATURE'S BEST HOPE

Photo by Christopher Jayne

We were blown away by the enthusiasm at Gardening for Life, featuring best-selling author Doug Tallamy. Conserving Carolina co-sponsored the event in Polk County in March, which focused on restoring natural habitat in our own yards and gardens.

Tallamy, the author of *Nature's Best Hope*, said, "You don't have to save biodiversity for a living, but you can save it where you live. This approach empowers each one of us. It also shrinks the problem into something manageable for each one of us. Focus on the part you can influence. And remember, you are nature's best hope!"

Here are four takeaways from his talk:

1. SHRINK THE LAWN.

If we all cut our lawn by half and replaced it with pollinator- and wildlife-friendly plantings, we'd restore 20 million acres of much needed habitat! Tallamy calls this proposal "Homegrown National Park."

2. GROW KEYSTONE PLANTS.

Growing native plants is good in general, but some plants are true all-stars. Like oaks, which support over 950 caterpillar species in the U.S. Look up the online Native Plant Finder to find keystone plants where you live.

3. TURN OUT THE LIGHTS.

Insects are drawn to lights at night, to their peril. Create a healthy, dark habitat by using a motion sensor or switching to yellow light bulbs, which are the least attractive to bugs at night.

4. MAKE SPACE FOR CATERPILLARS BENEATH TREES.

Many kinds of caterpillars start out in trees, then drop off and burrow into the ground where they develop into butterflies or moths. But dense, mowed grass is hard to get through. They need leaves, mulch, or understory plants below trees.

JOIN US FOR CONSERVATION CELEBRATION ON AUG. 26!

Saturday, Aug. 26

4:00-8:00 PM

Caitlyn Farm

Mill Spring, NC

Save the date for our annual Conservation Celebration! Enjoy a festive evening in a beautiful location as we celebrate protected places and the people who make it possible. Invitations will go out and ticket sales will open in July.



SO MANY WAYS TO CONNECT!

Go to our website calendar or sign up for emails to learn about upcoming events. We'd love to see you at events like:

- Guided hikes
- Members-only hikes
- Spanish-English walks
- Forest bathing
- Speaker series
- Volunteer days

See what's coming up! Here's our calendar.



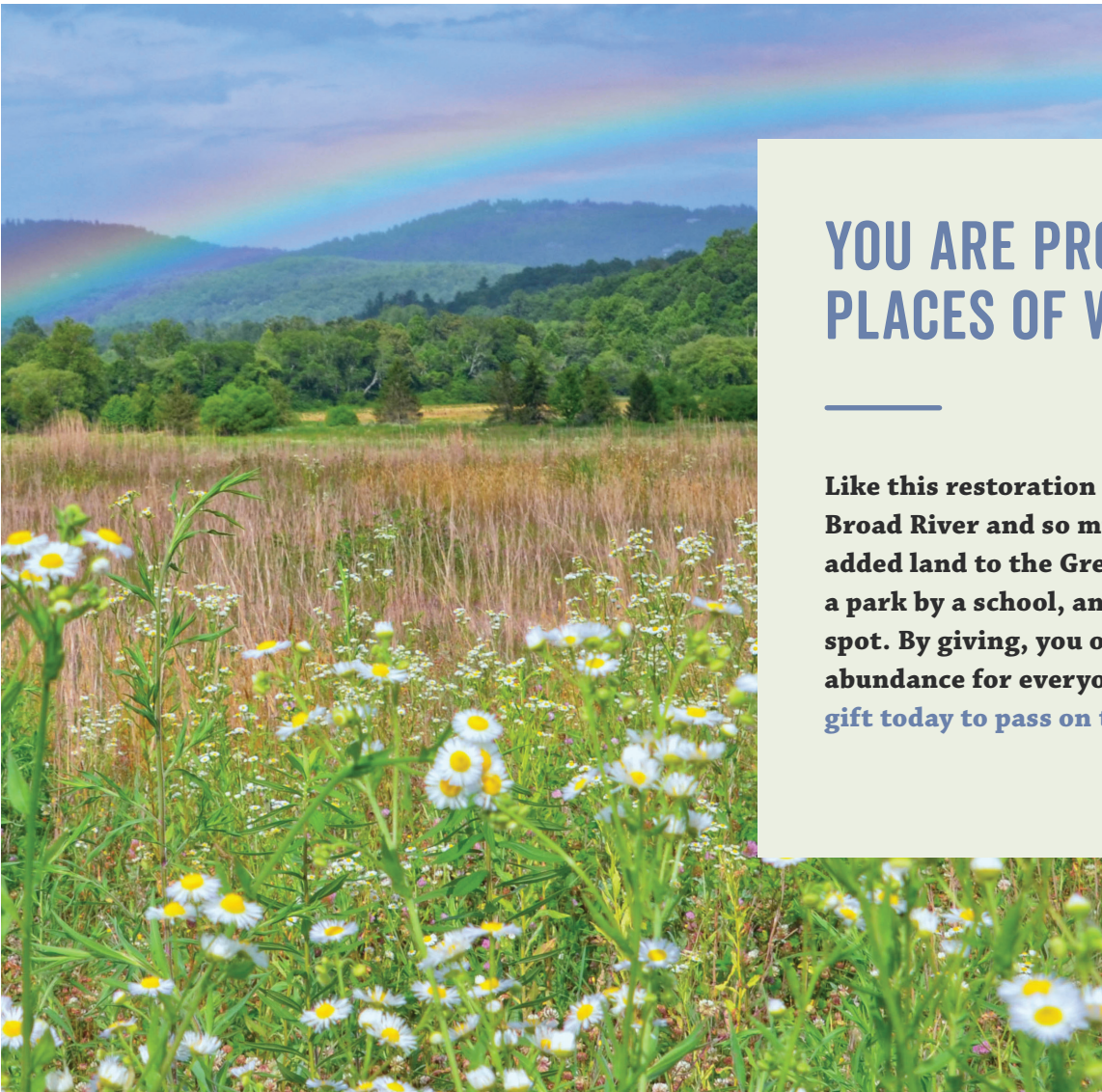
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FOR NATURE AND PEOPLE. FOREVER.



YOU ARE PROTECTING PLACES OF WONDER

Like this restoration site along the French Broad River and so much more. You just added land to the Green River Game Lands, a park by a school, and a favorite hiking spot. By giving, you offer more beauty and abundance for everyone. Will you make a gift today to pass on the wonder of Nature?

Photo by Sharon Mammoser