

LANDSCAPE



THANK YOU
FOR MAKING GREAT
STORIES POSSIBLE!

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WHERE NATURE IS MAKING A COMEBACK

The Whitesides family once lived in an overcrowded home where they didn't feel safe raising their child. Alex and Talyah worked hard to fix up the house and keep it clean, but there was so much that was out of their control—from violent outbursts to unsafe wiring. Their young son, August, couldn't play in the yard because of all the beer cans, cigarettes, and trash.

Then, the Whitesides had an opportunity to become homeowners. They helped build their own house in Habitat for Humanity's Dodd Meadows community, in East Flat Rock, working with Habitat volunteers and staff. Now, they have their own yard. Plus, the community has a playground and green space beside a stream.

But the stream was degraded—not an inviting place for families. When Habitat started to build Dodd Meadows, the stream had been straightened into an ugly



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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

ON THE COVER:

The Whitesides family explores the restored natural area near the stream in Dodd Meadows. Courtesy of Habitat for Humanity.

WHERE NATURE IS MAKING A COMEBACK

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ditch with eroding banks. It was full of trash. And the surrounding land was so choked with invasive species that you could barely see the creek. That's a pretty big mess to clean up. Still, Habitat wanted a healthy green space where families could take a walk and kids could watch tadpoles or chase fireflies.

So, Habitat reached out to Conserving Carolina and we partnered with them to restore the land and water. Together, we recreated a natural, curving streambed. We cleared out invasive species and put in native plants. We also built a gravel walking path. This fall, bright wildflowers were blooming and you could see butterflies, grasshoppers, and frogs in the meadow. We plan to plant hundreds more trees, so that as August grows up, he will see what used to be a scraggly wasteland around the creek turn into a patch of green woods.

We also collaborated with Habitat to restore their community garden and we're hosting programs to engage families with the outdoors. "We are making future environmentalists out of these kids," says Linda Saturno, president of Henderson County Habitat for Humanity.

Thanks to you, hopeful stories like this are happening at more and more places in our region. This year, Conserving Carolina

completed three restoration projects and we have eight more in the works!

On one farm, we worked with the landowner to fix two badly eroding streams that were dumping more than 20 tons of sediment into the French Broad River every year. During storms, one of these streams used to be a steep chute of muddy water. Now, with berms to slow the flow, it has a new shape—a series of calm pools that provide ideal habitat for wildlife. And the water that runs into the French Broad is clean.

Our largest restoration project this year was Pleasant Grove in Etowah, on 70 acres along the French Broad. Here, on an abandoned golf course, you helped us bring back a natural floodplain with:

- ▶ Over a mile of restored streams
- ▶ 22 acres of wetlands
- ▶ 13 acres of wildflower meadows
- ▶ 29 reforested acres
- ▶ A 7-acre backwater slough

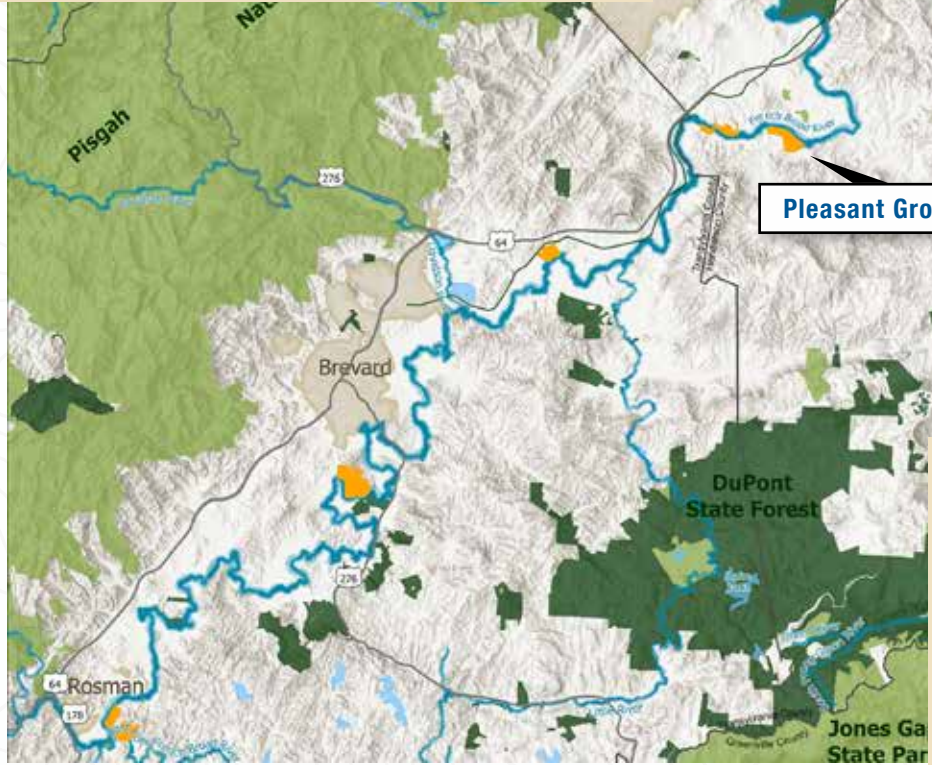
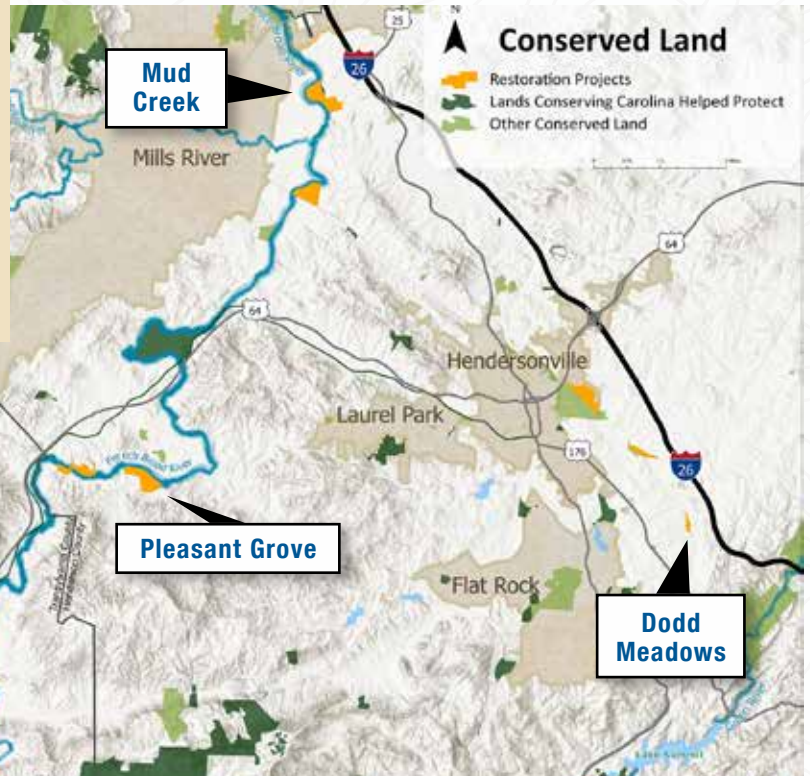
At Pleasant Grove, we breached levees so the river has a place to overflow and we plugged



Pleasant Grove is now a restored natural floodplain along the French Broad River. Courtesy of Jennings Environmental.

YOU ARE BRINGING BACK A THRIVING NATURAL CORRIDOR ALONG THE FRENCH BROAD RIVER!

Every property shown in yellow is a Conserving Carolina restoration project (completed or in progress).

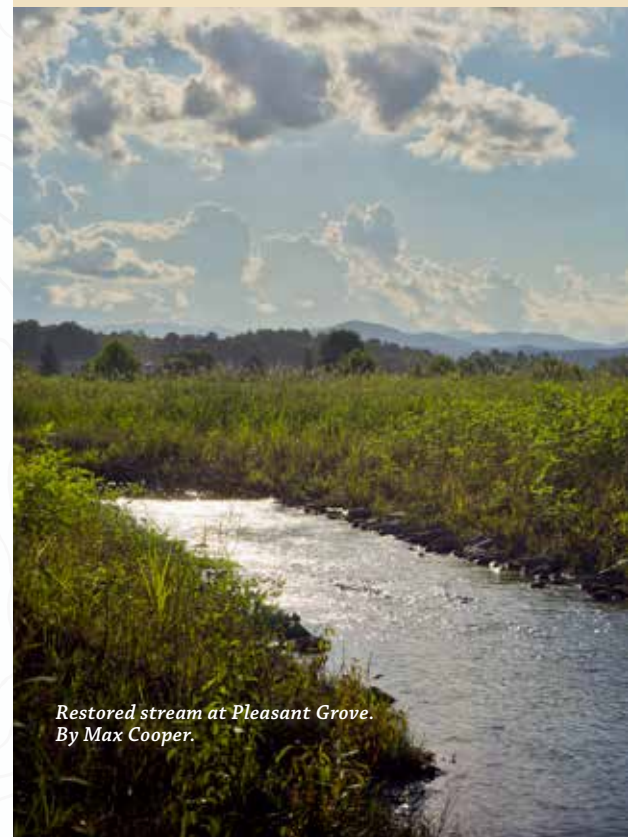


Imagine the river corridor as a place where we have fertile farmland, rich wildlife habitat, and clean water. In a changing climate, wetlands and natural areas reduce our risk of floods and droughts. They also create great places to play, walk, paddle, fish, or watch birds.

ditches so that water moves through wetlands instead of rushing straight into the river. This is how a natural floodplain is supposed to work—letting water spill over and soak into the land. This natural process reduces the severity of both floods and droughts, keeping us safer as the climate changes. Natural floodplains also filter our water. And they provide vital habitat for wildlife like birds, turtles, fish, and so much more!

We appreciate the skill and hard work of Jennings Environmental, North State Environmental, Baker Grading & Landscaping, and Stone and Spade, who carried out these projects. We are also grateful for funding and support from NC Land and Water Fund, NC Department of Public Safety, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Henderson County.

Only a few years ago, our Mouth of Mud Creek project was the first floodplain restoration of its kind in the mountains of North Carolina. Now, there is so much momentum for bringing back a thriving natural corridor along the French Broad River! We have plans for future trails at both Pleasant Grove and Mud Creek, so that you can see for yourself these places where nature is making a comeback.



*Restored stream at Pleasant Grove.
By Max Cooper.*

BREAKING GROUND ON THE ECUSTA TRAIL!

Just a few months ago, faced with escalating costs, it looked like we still had a long way to go with fundraising to build the Ecusta Trail. Then, this summer, the trail was awarded not one but two game-changing federal grants! Both of these multimillion-dollar grants came through the U.S. Department of Transportation. It now looks like we have all the funding we need to build the full 19 miles of rail trail from Hendersonville to Brevard. We are so grateful to all of you who donated, so we can match major state and federal grants!

The final phase of fundraising is to provide amenities so you'll be able to access and enjoy the trail—such as trailheads, restrooms, benches, and signage. Friends of the Ecusta Trail, which has been championing this project for over 14 years, is raising funds for these improvements.

Spirits were high as we broke ground on the first section of the long-awaited trail at Veterans Healing Farm on Oct. 28. The trail is now officially underway! The first section to be built is a 5.7-mile stretch between Hendersonville and Horse Shoe. It is expected that this section will take one year to complete, while the full trail may take 3-5 years to complete. It won't be long before you can be out there, walking, running, or biking!

We are so grateful to all of you who helped make this dream real! We especially want to thank our major donors, who are recognized at conservingcarolina.org/ecusta-trail-donors.

*Right: Ecusta Trail groundbreaking.
Photo by Jeff Shields.*



SALUDA GRADE NEWS: NC FUNDING AND PUBLIC INPUT

We also have huge news for the Saluda Grade Trail! This fall, the state of North Carolina passed \$12 million in funding over two years to buy the rail corridor. That's in addition to \$15 million appropriated in South Carolina to purchase the corridor in that state. Although more funding is needed to buy the land, this is a huge step forward!

The Saluda Grade Trail is a proposed 31-mile trail running from Upstate SC into the mountains of WNC on an unused rail corridor. There is even potential to connect it to the Ecusta Trail, creating over 50 miles of continuous trail through beautiful countryside and vibrant small towns.

This summer, we also started an in-depth study on the trail. This study addresses questions like:

What features are needed—such as bridges or road crossings? How much will the trail cost? What are the economic benefits? What are the community's goals for the trail? What concerns do we need to address?

As part of this study, we've been gathering public input. Landowners near the proposed trail were invited to listening sessions. Then, we held two packed public hearings, one in SC and one in NC. Finally, we circulated an online survey about the proposed trail. We look forward to seeing how all of this research and all of these perspectives shape the emerging vision for the Saluda Grade Trail.

Right: Photo by Scott Park / Upstate Forever.



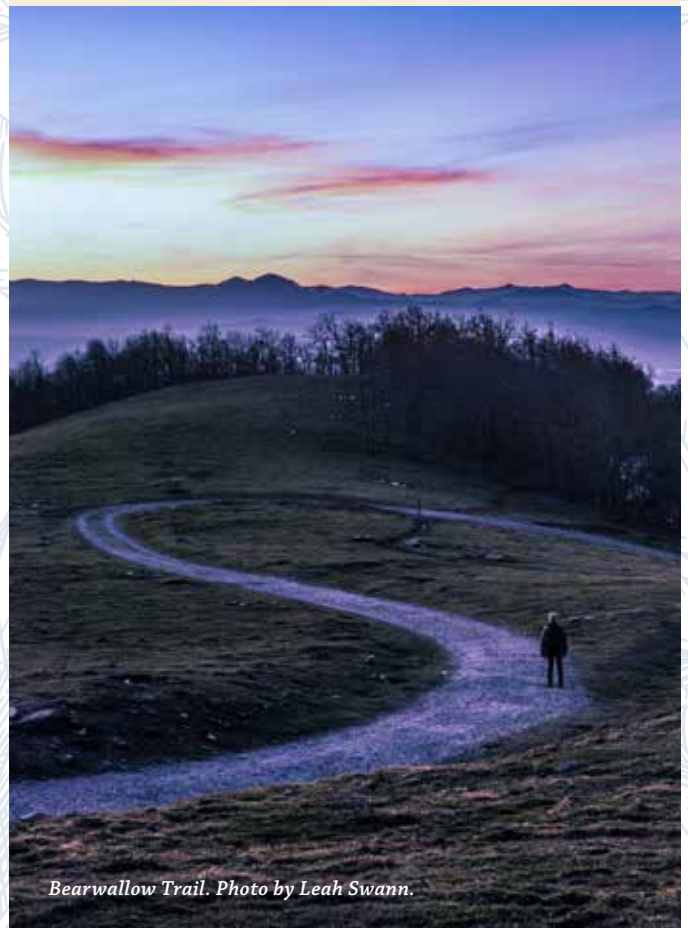


YOUR LEGACY TAKES PLANNING.

Throughout our lives, we meticulously plan out our endeavors, whether it's selecting the next hike to explore, ensuring our fall crop makes it through the first frost, or anticipating the peak of fall colors on our favorite conservation property. These preparations enrich our experiences and help us fulfill our desires. Yet, amid all this thoughtful planning, we often overlook creating a will.

In truth, planning to make a will shouldn't be any different from other well thought out endeavors. It's a way to carefully sow the seeds of our intentions, ensuring that our loved ones are tended to, and that we can still make a positive difference for the causes we care about once we are gone. If leaving a legacy related to land conservation is of interest to you, please consider including Conserving Carolina in your estate plans.

To discuss your legacy gift, please call Sierra Hoisington at 828-697-5777, ext. 220.



Bearwallow Trail. Photo by Leah Swann.



THOUSANDS OF PROTECTED ACRES WILL LINK TWO STATE TRAILS

Protected land on Joel Ridge. Photo by Leah Swann.

The future for the wooded mountains north of Lake Lure once seemed clear—a vast, upscale housing development. In the early 2000s, the planned GreyRock development spanned about 4,000 acres, with lots selling for up to \$700,000. Then, the recession hit and the development went bankrupt. Landowners were stranded with no roads to access their land. The company holding bonds for that infrastructure refused to pay, and the owner was arrested for fraud. Costly lots were now almost worthless.

Through all this drama and loss, a very different vision has emerged for much of this land—thousands of acres of protected forests, breathtaking trails, and now a link between two state trails.

With your support, we have been steadily protecting undeveloped portions of GreyRock since 2009. This summer, we purchased another 174 acres, bringing the land protected so far to

more than 2,200 acres. And we are working to protect even more, with the goal of protecting a grand total of more than 2,650 acres!


It's not easy to buy hundreds of lots, as well as common land, in a bankrupt development. Rebekah Robinson, our Assistant Director of Programs, navigated sales that involved swapping lots in areas that won't be built for lots within the reduced development footprint. This process also required forgiveness of unpaid property-owner dues and back taxes.

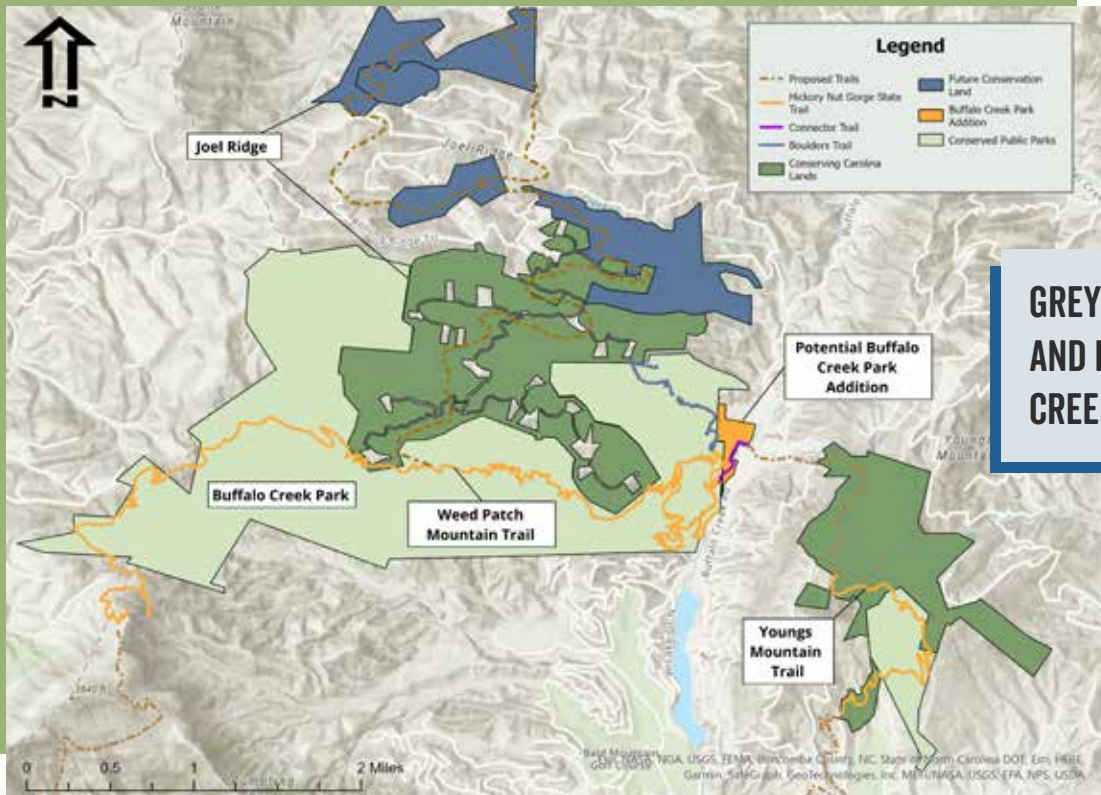
Rebekah says it has been complex and challenging but very rewarding. This project first led to the creation of Lake Lure's 1,525-acre Buffalo Creek Park, where we built the award-winning Weed Patch Mountain Trail. Now, on land known as Joel Ridge, we have plans for more trails, which will link two of North Carolina's 13 designated state trails—the 100+ mile Hickory Nut Gorge State

Trail that Conserving Carolina is spearheading and the 100+ mile Wilderness Gateway State Trail to the northeast.

The land you are helping protect is home to a great diversity of plants and animals, including the rare Hickory Nut Gorge Green Salamander. Nearly all of the Buffalo Creek watershed will be protected, providing clean water. And thousands of acres of forests will go on capturing carbon—an important part of climate solutions.

Many partners and funders made this extraordinary success possible. We are grateful to the GreyRock Community Association, Rutherford County Tourism and Development Authority, NC Land and Water Fund, Fred and Alice Stanback, Tim Sweeney, the Fernandez Pave the Way Foundation, the NC Complete the Trails Fund, and the estate of the late Maurice Loiselle. And we are grateful to YOU!





GREYROCK CONSERVATION AND POTENTIAL BUFFALO CREEK PARK EXPANSION



Above: Youngs Mountain by Gordon Tutor.



Below: Weed Patch Mountain by Gordon Tutor.

A KEY PURCHASE FOR TRAIL CONNECTION

Maybe you've hiked the dramatic Youngs Mountain Trail with its stunning views over Lake Lure. Maybe you've hiked, mountain biked, or accessed rock climbing from Weed Patch Mountain Trail, with its breathtaking views from Eagle Rock and Grey Rock. Now imagine a trail that brings those two Conserving Carolina trails together. We're working on it—and this fall we bought 21 acres near

Lake Lure that could be part of this link. Further land purchases will be needed, but we're excited for this strategic land purchase.

On top of the possibilities for a trail link, this new property also borders Buffalo Creek Park and the Town of Lake Lure is interested in potentially adding it to the park. It also borders Buffalo Creek and

helps keep clean water flowing in the creek, Bald Mountain Lake, and Lake Lure. A portion of the land lies within a state-designated natural area with exceptional biodiversity.

We were able to buy this special property thanks to your support and funding from the NC Complete the Trails Fund and the Fernandez Pave the Way Foundation.



Bracken Preserve. Photo by Howie Granat.

A MORE WELCOMING BRACKEN PRESERVE



Bracken Mountain Preserve is a local treasure... if you can make your way up the brutally steep trail linking the City of Brevard with Pisgah National Forest! But soon, Bracken will be both larger and more welcoming. Last year, 34 acres of beautiful forested land came up for sale on the edge of the preserve. It was a rare opportunity to expand the preserve and build more moderate trails.

With strong community support, we acted fast to buy the land. Then, we had to catch up on fundraising. The City and private donors got us most of the way there. This fall, a grant from the Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority got us across the finish line, with some funding for trail construction to boot. On top of that, Home Trust Bank will donate two lots where an easier trail can be added to the existing 9-mile trail network.

Convenient to neighborhoods on the north side of Brevard, the expanded preserve—430 acres in all—will be welcoming for more people, including children and teens, families, beginning mountain bikers, and people with physical challenges. These new trails may lead to an ever-growing love of nature... as well as all of Pisgah National Forest.

Right: Conserving Carolina's Lia Waldrum with potter Levi West harvesting blue clay. Photo by Chris Reed.

PARTNERSHIP TO GROW CHEROKEE CULTURE

Many plants essential for Cherokee traditional crafts are now in short supply—like rivercane used in baskets or yellowroot used for dyes. For years, Conserving Carolina has partnered with the Cherokee Preservation Foundation on managing our Mud Creek restoration to provide rivercane for future harvest by artisans. We also installed signage at Mud Creek in English and Cherokee. This year, while restoring a natural floodplain at Pleasant Grove, we found blue clay, which we made available to Cherokee potters.

Now this partnership is growing stronger. The Cherokee Preservation Foundation has funded a grant that includes a yearlong, full-time Cultural Resources and Restoration Coordinator. Lia Waldrum, who began supporting this partnership as an AmeriCorps member, is taking on this new role. Through our expanded partnership, Conserving Carolina will:

- ▶ Coordinate with Cherokee tribal members on management plans for our floodplain restorations to increase the sustainable harvest of artisan resources.
- ▶ Map priority artisan resources currently growing on lands owned by Conserving Carolina—approximately 5,500 acres.
- ▶ Collaborate with the Kituwah Academy and other partners on educational programs tied to our restorations that promote the flourishing of Cherokee language and culture.





Give your loved ones a gift that truly matters: special places protected forever, beautiful nature preserves and trails, and a place in the Conserving Carolina community.

A gift membership comes with:

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

Please allow some time for processing and mailing.

Sign up by Dec. 11 to have your membership package by Christmas.

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

LADY SLIPPER AWARD

- W I N N E R S -

Here are our fall and winter award-winning volunteers!



KEN SHELTON

VOLUNTEERING FOR:

4 years

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:

Board of Directors, Ecusta Trail leadership

HOME:

Hendersonville, NC

VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHTS:

Success of the Ecusta Trail and commitment to Saluda Grade Trail

PROFESSION:

Retired doctor with military service

HOPES FOR CONSERVING CAROLINA:

Preserve more open space and farmland

TOP CONSERVATION ISSUES:

Ecusta Trail with all its potential for flood mitigation, wildlife corridors, and adjoining projects such as pocket parks, gardens, playgrounds, and public art

HOBBIES:

Hiking, biking, trail building, woodworking, reading

FUN FACT:

Was drafted to the Denver Broncos but chose medical school instead



TRACY EGGLESTON

VOLUNTEERING FOR:

1 year

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES:

Kudzu Warriors, tabling

HOME:

Hendersonville, NC

VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHTS:

Seeing how quickly native plants flourish after invasive plants are removed

PROFESSION:

Retired lawyer

HOPES FOR CONSERVING CAROLINA:

Preserve and restore even more land, engage more of the community

WHAT MOTIVATES HER:

“Once I had time to give, I knew I wanted to be involved in my local land trust. Now, I realize just how important the work is. Also, the folks I have met are fantastic people.”

HOBBIES:

Hiking with her dog, reading, enjoying local food, wine, and beer.





ADVENTURES WITH KIDS

WE LOVE GETTING OUTSIDE WITH CHILDREN AND TEENS, SHARING A LOVE FOR NATURE AND EXCITEMENT TO BE OUTDOORS! HERE ARE A FEW OF OUR MANY RECENT PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS AND YOUTH PROGRAMS.

On a mindful birding outing with the Rise & Shine after-school program in Brevard, the kids did yoga, taking shapes from nature. Then they set off with binoculars to discover birds.

Photo by Rose Lane.



We got to fly through the treetops in a zipline adventure with the Hendersonville Boys and Girls Club, in partnership with Pathways to Parks.

Photo by The Gorge Zipline.



Students from FernLeaf Community Charter School got to play on the top of Bearallow Mountain, over three days of field trips. That's 670 kids in all! We also support spring field trips to Bearallow with Edneyville Elementary School.

Photo by Virginia Hunter.





Hiking Challenge participants on Bearwallow. Photo by Jack Thyen.

WHITE SQUIRREL HIKING CHALLENGE 7 IS HERE!

Explore 8 great hikes in places that Conserving Carolina has helped protect. As a Conserving Carolina member, you can be proud that you're conserving such extraordinary places. Here are this year's hikes:

- 1 Bearwallow Mountain: Visit this all-time favorite with near 360-degree views.
- 2 Strawberry Gap Trail: Experience stunning views on Conserving Carolina's newest trail.
- 3 DuPont Loop - Quarry and Rocky Bald: Discover a quiet and unique hike in DuPont.
- 4 World's Edge in Chimney Rock State Park: See breathtaking views over dramatic cliffs.
- 5 Green River Game Lands Loop with Stairstep Falls: Enjoy lush forests, views, and a waterfall.
- 6 Gravley Falls in Headwaters State Forest: A beautiful waterfall in in a vast state forest just opened in 2018!
- 7 Foothills Equestrian Nature Center trails: Enjoy woods, meadows, wetlands, and a pond.
- 8 Alexander's Ford at Bradley Nature Preserve: Follow in the footsteps of Revolutionary War soldiers.



If you complete all eight hikes and you are a Conserving Carolina member, you will earn your White Squirrel patch. And you will have a stronger personal connection to land conservation!

▶ [LEARN MORE: CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/HIKING-CHALLENGE-7](https://www.conservingcarolina.org/hiking-challenge-7)

Thank you to Witherspoon, Platt, and Associates for sponsoring Hiking Challenge 7!

WORK, LEARN, AND PLAY WITH US!

SEE UPCOMING EVENTS

Check out our online calendar—always full of volunteer days, speaker series, forest bathing, guided hikes, and more!



▶ [ONLINE CALENDAR: CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/CALENDAR](https://www.conservingcarolina.org/calendar)

DO YOU GET EVENT EMAILS?

We send monthly emails with all our upcoming events. Don't miss out!



▶ [EMAIL SIGN UP: CONSERVINGCAROLINA.ORG/SUBSCRIBE](https://www.conservingcarolina.org/subscribe)

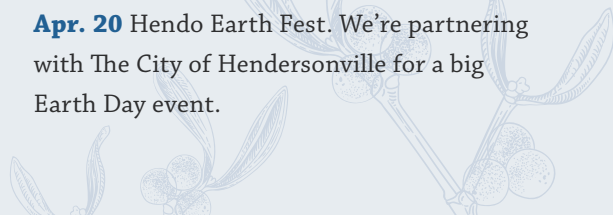
SAVE THE DATES

This winter, look forward to these spring events:

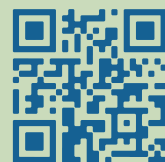
Mar. 7 Member Meet and Greet. Drop by Trailside Brewing in Hendersonville to meet Conserving Carolina staff and fellow members.

Mar. 30 Gardening for Life Celebration in Columbus, NC. Take your backyard wildlife habitat to the next level.

Apr. 20 Hendo Earth Fest. We're partnering with The City of Hendersonville for a big Earth Day event.



We also offer the Flying Squirrel Outdoor Challenge – a flexible challenge that you can tailor to your interests and abilities.





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FOR NATURE AND PEOPLE. FOREVER.

Photo by Paul Harmon

YOU MAKE GREAT THINGS HAPPEN!

Thanks to you, we just broke ground on the Ecusta Trail! Because of you, kids are exploring nature, rivers are running cleaner, and more forest land is protected forever. As you see how much good comes from your support, will you make a generous gift today?

