

Taproot

A scenic view of a mountain range. In the foreground, there are large, light-colored rocks and several green pine trees. The middle ground is filled with a dense forest of green and brown trees. In the background, a prominent mountain peak rises against a blue sky with some clouds. The overall scene is a natural, outdoor setting.

**Foothills Conservancy
of North Carolina
2021**

Our Land Trust

Mission

Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina inspires conservation in Western North Carolina by permanently protecting land and water for the benefit of people and all living things.

Vision

Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina envisions a thriving region to live and visit, with clean water, healthy forests, productive farmland, diverse wildlife, access to outdoor recreation, and communities that value conservation.

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Foothills Conservancy serves eight counties: Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cleveland, Lincoln, McDowell, and Rutherford, in three major river basins: the Broad, Catawba, and Yadkin.

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Andrew Kota, Executive Director
Pam Hardin, Director of Development
Tom Kenney, Land Protection Director
Ryan Sparks, Stewardship Director
Brittany Watkins, Special Projects Coordinator
Rachael Dial, Office & Finance Administrator
Grayson Barnette, Marketing & Communications Coordinator

Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina
204 Avery Avenue
Morganton, NC 28655

Phone: 828.437.9930 **Fax:** 828.437.9912
Email: info@foothillsconservancy.org
www.foothillsconservancy.org

Front Cover Photograph by
James Davidson, Orchard Hill Media



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From the Director



Andrew & Luke Kota

Transformative.

This past spring, Foothills Conservancy hosted N.C. State Parks Director Dwayne Patterson and Deputy Director Brian Strong on a tour of some of the recent land acquisition and public trail projects that our organizations have collaborated on in Catawba, Burke and McDowell counties.

We visited new state-owned lands on the Henry Fork River, discussed next steps for the Wilderness Gateway State Trail, put our boots on the ground at Bobs Creek State Natural Area, and met with local partners at the conservancy's Oak Hill Community Park and Forest. The visit was an opportunity for Dwayne and Brian to engage with local stakeholders, as well as the communities, project partners and elected officials that support conservation, parks and trails.

At the end of our excursion, Dwayne and I agreed on one word that adequately describes the changes occurring in this region of North Carolina: transformative.

In this issue of Taproot, you will read about the great work that FCNC is doing to transform this region for the better. You'll read stories about our work to introduce the next generation of conservationists — like my son, Luke — to nature through both our volunteer tree-planting activities and our annual Our Big Backyard summer camp (page 16). You'll read about the connections we've made with local businesses that share our values, and how, together, we've used a community-focused outreach approach to show that we all benefit from land and water conservation (page 38). You'll read about conservation projects that transform people's ability to connect with nature, ensuring everyone can enjoy the outdoors. You'll see a story on the conservancy's first trail construction project, a section of the Fonta Flora State Trail in Old Fort (page 6), and also about the G5 Trail Collective that is transforming Old Fort into the next trail town (page 34). You'll find details on the initial planning stages of conservancy lands like Oak Hill Community Park and Forest (page 20) and the Henry Fork River preserve (page 8), which are being transformed into shared spaces where people and communities can enjoy nature. You'll read about the success of an annual fundraiser that has grown to raise transformative support for Foothills Conservancy's work (page 26). You'll also find an article on our new partnership with a federal natural resource agency, through the Mountain Bogs National Wildlife Refuge, which will transform the way we protect the next 60,000 acres (or more) in our region (page 18).

While we can't predict the future, at the very least we can hope that Foothills Conservancy's actions today will have a lasting, positive and transformative impact on the people and places of this Western North Carolina region — forever and for the benefit of all.

Sincerely,

Andrew Kota
Executive Director

By the Numbers

CONSERVATION RECORD

In 2020, Foothills Conservancy and our public and private partners invested \$3,376,222 to protect 1,458 acres in 9 projects. 1995-2020: 60,853 acres protected.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

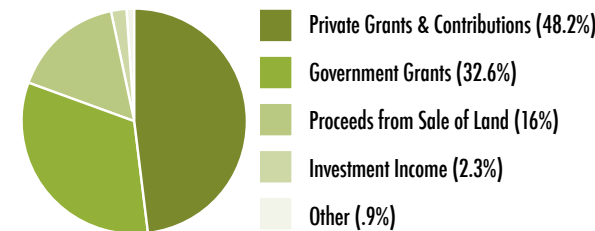
January 1, 2020 - December 31, 2020

Fiscal Year 2020 Sources of Funds

Private Grants & Contributions.....	\$4,147,150
Government Grants.....	\$2,805,346
Proceeds from Sale of Land.....	\$1,373,762
Investment Income.....	\$201,786
Other.....	\$71,230
Total Source of Funds.....	\$8,599,274

Fiscal Year 2020 Use of Funds

Purchase of Land & Equipment.....	\$5,092,646
Purchase of Investments.....	\$1,079,362
Program Expenses.....	\$741,167
Below Book Land Sales.....	\$2,418,355
Easement Purchases & Stewardship.....	\$354,986
Management & Administrative.....	\$138,345
Total Use of Funds.....	\$9,824,861



ASSETS

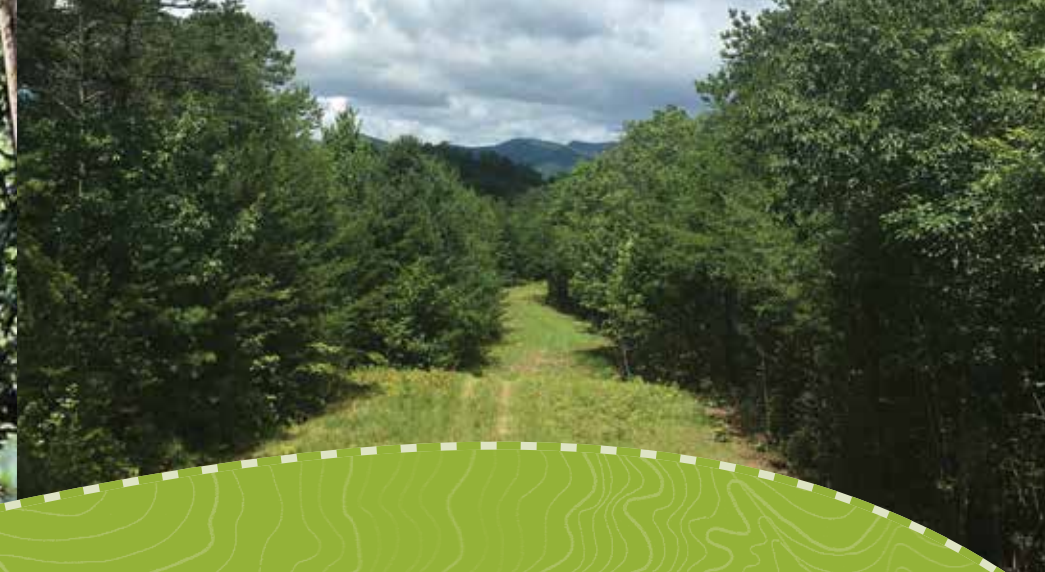
	2020	2019
Current Assets		
Cash & Equivalents.....	\$4,999,245	\$4,402,966
Receivables.....	\$5,495	\$109,834
Prepaid Expenses.....	\$0	\$0
Total Current Assets.....	\$5,004,740	\$4,512,800
Long-term Assets		
Conservation Property & Equipment.....	\$13,679,525	\$10,589,463
Total Long-term Assets.....	\$13,679,525	\$10,589,463

LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS

Current Liabilities.....	\$8,608	\$188,130
Total Net Assets.....	\$18,675,657	\$14,914,133
Total Liabilities & Net Assets.....	\$18,684,265	\$15,102,263

ENDOWMENT & RESERVE FUNDS (as of Dec. 31, 2020)

Easement Stewardship Endowment Fund.....	\$602,706	\$551,593
Preserve Stewardship Endowment Fund.....	\$353,822	\$287,520
Burke County Endowment Fund.....	\$63,872	\$67,154
Blue Ridge Foothills Fund.....	\$1,555,404	\$1,333,583
Wilson Fund - Active.....	\$400,000	\$0
Wilson Fund - Passive.....	\$400,000	\$0
Preserve Management Fund.....	\$70,026	\$63,170
Land Acquisition Fund.....	\$663,947	\$1,492,379
Legal Defense Fund.....	\$148,262	\$134,262
Program & Operations Reserve Fund.....	\$392,069	\$540,338



COPPER RIDGE

Building Trails & Growing Communities

In fall 2021, Foothills Conservancy did something it had never done before: It opened a trail for public recreation. A three-mile natural surface hike-and-bike trail, Copper Ridge is the first section of the Fonta Flora State Trail to be built in Old Fort. Its name, Copper Ridge, is both a nod to the hue of Western North Carolina's famously abundant clay soil and to the slithering creature that may be lurking around the next switchback.

On Oct. 7, project partners and members of the community met at Kitsbow's Old Fort Ride House, a local outdoor hub, to celebrate the newest addition to what is quickly becoming a destination for outdoor recreation enthusiasts. Those in attendance reflected the wide variety of partnerships responsible for the success of this project: local community members and landowners Dan and Denisa Allison; Camp Grier Executive Director Jason McDougald; Lisa Jennings of the U.S. Forest Service; Smith Raynor and Dwayne Patterson of N.C. State Parks; David and Jen Billstrom of Kitsbow; Lavita Logan of People on the Move Old Fort; Steve Pierce of the McDowell Trails Association; and Beth Heile and Bob Hunter from Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail.

Partnerships are what made Copper Ridge. In 2017, Camp Grier Executive Director Jason McDougald and Dan Allison, a local landowner, approached Foothills Conservancy about conserving 110 acres of land near Old Fort for the purpose of building a multi-use trail that would connect to existing trails in the area. Within a year, the conservancy acquired the land and transferred ownership to N.C. State Parks for just that reason.

Soon thereafter, Foothills Conservancy Land Protection Director Tom Kenney found himself fighting a tangled maze of mountain laurel and rhododendron with trail designer Tim Johnson to flag the future trail route. Kenney, inspired by the beauty of the land, was determined to carve a path that would allow the public to enjoy the land that the conservancy and its partners protected. Toward that mission, in 2019, he sought funding for the trail project from the N.C. Recreational Trails Program, and the conservancy was awarded \$100,000 to move it forward.


With funding secured it was go-time, and Brittany Watkins, Foothills Conservancy's special projects coordinator, was handed the torch. Fresh from a yearlong AmeriCorps Project

Conserve internship with the conservancy, Watkins was hired as a full-time staff member in order to manage trail projects and lead the conservancy's volunteer program. As Watkins was well aware, all trails require long-term maintenance to curb the effects of water erosion and to keep vegetation from growing over the path, but sustainably built trails require less attention. This makes them better for the environment and the lower backs of volunteer trail builders — which is why, when searching for the right trail builder for the job, Watkins was largely concerned with two factors: minimizing the environmental impact of construction and practicing sustainable design techniques to reduce erosion.

Luckily, the Professional Trail Builders Association makes it easy to find contractors who are passionate about both. It is through this entity that Foothills Conservancy connected with Long Cane Trails, a Carolina-based trail construction company with decades of experience owned and operated by Todd Branham.

Branham has a trained eye for reading the landscape, and he approaches trail-building like an artist sculpting clay. He also manages an organization called Blue Ridge Adventures that hosts a wide array of bike races. This unique combination of skills made Long Cane Trails a natural fit to construct Copper Ridge, which is open to both hikers

and bikers but is designed as a flow trail for the optimal mountain biking experience. Branham also recognized the value of community engagement in trail projects for so many reasons, including the heavy reliance on volunteers for long-term maintenance. With this knowledge, he helped host two workdays where Foothills volunteers removed roots unearthed by construction along the trail tread, giving those who participated a sense of ownership of the trail.

Copper Ridge was built through community connections for all to enjoy. This section of trail will soon be connected to a larger 40-plus mile trail system on adjoining Pisgah National Forest lands, nicknamed "Trails for All," with something for everyone — including hiking, biking and horseback riding. This effort is being spearheaded by the combined efforts of the U.S. Forest Service and the G5 Trail Collective. (Read more about the G5 Trail Collective on page 34.) Foothills Conservancy staff are excited to be part of this larger effort, and the conservancy plans to remain engaged with these partnerships as outdoor recreation evolves across WNC. 

PLAYING POSSUM

First Preserve Open to the Public



In August 2021, Foothills Conservancy opened one of its conservation preserve properties to the public for the first time in its history. With a name that nods to local history, Possum Rock River Access now serves as a gateway to the Henry Fork River for canoers and kayakers, anglers and anyone else looking for a convenient place to enjoy some time by the water. The site features a gravel driveway and parking area, informational kiosk, canoe/kayak ramp, and a small, sandy beach area. But it wasn't always that way.

Prior to Foothills Conservancy's ownership, this small, roughly 2.5-acre area was managed as an agricultural field, usually teeming with corn. It is part of a 68-acre tract of land donated to the conservancy by conservationist Tim Sweeney, as well as a section of the conservancy's Henry Fork River Preserve lands, which totals approximately 250 acres along River Road in Burke County, and protects the Henry Fork River and the Smiths Cliffs Registered Natural Area.

Stewardship Director Ryan Sparks visualized the site as both a convenient access point for passive public enjoyment of the Henry Fork River and a great way to invite people onto our conservation lands. In 2019, Sparks leveraged the conservancy's long-term relationships with N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and N.C. State Parks to forge a multi-agency effort to make this possible.

After obtaining the proper permitting, installing erosion control measures, seeding disturbed areas, and installing a property gate, Sparks oversaw partnership contributions, including:

- South Mountains State Park, which supplied staff and equipment for site grading, driveway and parking area construction, and the construction of a short approach trail.
- N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, which supplied staff

and equipment to install an ADA-compliant concrete parking pad and complete site grading.

- N.C. Forest Service BRIDGE Crew, which installed wooden steps, a kayak slide and trail edging.

Since its opening, the community has taken ownership of the site by participating in several volunteer beautification days to remove trash, install signage and treat invasive kudzu. Sparks and the conservancy's 2021 Stewardship Intern Grace Kiser have educated visitors on approved uses and leave-no-trace practices. They also expanded the vision of the site to include more opportunities for public education, specifically on the importance of land conservation in the form of forest restoration and soil conservation.

Restoration projects were implemented on the property in fall 2021 through yet another partnership. For an Eagle Scout project, local boy scout Aaron Grossman planted more than 200 native trees and shrubs* on the property, helping restore the native alluvial forest type that was present before the area was converted to agricultural use. Grossman also implemented several soil conservation practices, including building a berm to redirect runoff around an eroding section of riverbank

and installing several hundred livestock (vegetative cuttings) along eroding areas of the riverbank.

Possum Rock is open to the public from dawn to dusk during spring and summer seasons. The site is managed by Foothills Conservancy and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. 🐦

*Native trees and shrubs planted include: sycamore, river birch, green ash, box elder, sugarberry, American elm, black walnut, slippery elm, American beech, red oak, white oak, American hornbeam, American holly, flowering dogwood, sourwood, blackgum, pawpaw, spicebush, dwarf buckeye and witch hazel.





PARTNERSHIPS MAKE IT POSSIBLE

If you've kept up with news about Foothills Conservancy's work, it's likely you've come across this line: "The land trust plans to transfer the property to the U.S. Forest Service in the future."

Appearing so frequently in news about the conservancy, it's easy to imagine many readers glossing over this important line, its significance fading into the background after each repetition. But the partnership between Foothills Conservancy and the U.S. Forest Service is anything but insignificant.

"The reality is: It's huge," said Nick Larson, district ranger for the U.S. Forest Service Grandfather Ranger District. "The acquisition program that we have in Pisgah National Forest would not be possible without Foothills Conservancy and without partners like Foothills."

For government agencies like USFS, it often takes years of documentation, research and advocacy to gain approval for land purchases — plus additional time to acquire the necessary funding.

"When you're dealing with an individual landowner, they don't have that type of patience," Larson said. "You don't have five years to wait to see whether the government can or cannot acquire your property."

And that's where Foothills Conservancy — and other land trusts all over the country — step in.

"When there's an area of interest, an area that meets our criteria, Foothills makes the purchase and holds it for a few years while we go through all of our [processes], until we're able to buy it from them," Larson explained. "When you don't have the opportunity to respond quickly, when it takes three to five years to act, a lot of things could go wrong. Having active partners like this is what makes these acquisitions happen."



Johns River on the Burntfield Branch property in Caldwell County

Currently, the conservancy is holding onto three properties, all acquired in 2021, for future transfer to the USFS: Sunnyvale Slopes, a 130-acre parcel in McDowell County at Buck Creek;

Burntfield Branch, a 118-acre tract in the Globe area of Caldwell County; and Wilson Creek Gorge, a sweeping 333-acre property that will allow for better and expanded access to popular recreation opportunities in the National Wild and Scenic River area.

Each of these properties is surrounded by the Pisgah National Forest on three sides and falls along a major roadway, making them prime targets for future connections into natural public lands.

"Our 16-year partnership with the USFS has been invaluable, making it possible for us to advance our mission of protecting land and water of the highest conservation value for the benefit of all — without the burden of long-term or perpetual ownership of those lands," said Andrew Kota, Foothills Conservancy executive director. "Most conservation work begins with relationships among people working toward the same goals, and Foothills has established a very close working relationship with Nick and with the N.C. National Forest's real estate staff. We're truly partners in our efforts to add more land to the Pisgah National Forest, continuing to make it the exciting recreation destination that it is today. It's a win for the national forest, for Foothills, for the landowners and for the public."

One of the most memorable and publicly impactful examples of this partnership in his tenure, Larson recalled, was the collaboration to protect and provide access to Catawba Falls. Back in 2007, with support from individual philanthropists, Foothills Conservancy moved quickly to acquire 88 acres, under threat of development, in the Catawba Falls area near Old Fort. In 2010, the property officially joined Pisgah National Forest.

"Catawba Falls was, by far, one of the most visited spots in the Grandfather District, and that public access point exists entirely because of Foothills," he said, adding that it also makes up the headwaters of the Catawba River. Now, because of this partnership, people from all over stop to enjoy the natural beauty of these falls, a place where conservation and recreation meet.

Larson added that, in future years, he'll likely be referencing the Wilson Creek acquisition in much the same way: "Wilson Creek is going to be absolutely outstanding as we move forward," he said. "It's incredibly popular — really one of our most iconic places. And being able to provide additional places for people to access the national forest, creating connections for people to the outdoors: That's priceless." 🦋

NOTABLE USFS PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS

Lake James Watershed - 1,425 acres

2002-2005: Over multiple years, FCNC worked with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission to secure state and private funds for the agency's purchase of the large forested tract adjoining Pisgah National Forest's Linville Gorge Wilderness Area. The project protected a significant stretch of the Linville River downstream from Linville Gorge as it nears Lake James.

Catawba Falls Access - 88 acres

2007: When development threatened to limit public access to Catawba Falls, a popular destination hike just off I-40, Foothills Conservancy moved quickly to purchase the property with support from Fred and Alice Stanback and Dr. Gresham Orrison.

2010: The property, near Old Fort, was transferred to U.S. Forest Service ownership, becoming part of Pisgah National Forest.

Linville Cove - 54 acres

2014: With funding support from the Stanbacks, FCNC acquired this McDowell County property, including the Linville Dolomite Significant Natural Heritage Area, near Linville Caverns. Bordered by the Pisgah National Forest on three sides, this purchase helped to extend conservation lands from the Blue Ridge Parkway to the northern Linville Gorge Wilderness Area.

2017: The property was transferred to USFS, becoming part of Pisgah National Forest.

Wilson Ridge - 32 acres

2017: With funding support from Fred & Alice Stanback, FCNC purchased this Caldwell County property along the slopes of Wilson Ridge adjacent to Joe White Mountain, a ridgeline separating the watersheds of Wilson Creek, a National Wild and Scenic River, and the Johns River. Bordered by the Pisgah National Forest on two sides, it includes a section of the U.S. Forest Service's Wilson Ridge Trail.

2020: The property was transferred to USFS, becoming part of Pisgah National Forest.

Wilson Creek - 333 acres

2021: Conservation philanthropist Tim Sweeney donated this large parcel, containing 2.3 miles of Wilson Creek, a National Wild and Scenic River, to the conservancy. Adjacent to the highly popular Wilson Creek Day Use Area, the property will increase public access to the river and forest for recreation.

2022: FCNC will transfer ownership of the land to USFS.

Burntfield Branch - 118 acres

2021: FCNC acquired this tract in the Globe area of Caldwell County, along N.C. Highway 90 and the Johns River, between Blowing Rock and Collettsville. Named for a river tributary stream that runs through the property, this project presents opportunities for fishing and hiking along a local wildflower trail.

Sunnyvale Slopes - 130 acres

2021: FCNC purchased this McDowell County property along N.C. Highway 80 and Buck Creek, between Marion and the Blue Ridge Parkway. This project is named for a logging community once present in the area and is listed as a Registered Natural Area by the N.C. Natural Heritage Program.

2022: FCNC plans to transfer this property to USFS ownership, creating a corridor of conserved, public lands that, from Highway 80, stretches northwest to the Blue Ridge Parkway border and northeast toward Woods Mountain.



1995 - 2021
26 YEARS BY THE NUMBERS

FOREST RESTORATION



Walking through the pine needle underbrush of the conservancy's Oak Hill Community Park and Forest, shaded by a dense thicket of loblolly pine branches, it might be hard to imagine why this forest, in particular, is a target of forest restoration efforts.

The trees appear green and healthy. Pinecones litter the forest floor. Birds are chirping in the canopy above. But, said EcoForesters Co-Director Lang Hornthal, "to understand ecological restoration, you have to have an appreciation for what's been in that forest in the past, what's there now, and why the things that are there are there."

In decades past, for example, it was common to clearcut native trees and plant pine for timber harvest. "There was a market for it," Hornthal explained. "And even though [loblolly pine] wasn't native to the area, it was planted all over. So now there are pine forests in all these areas of Western North Carolina where there shouldn't be pine forests."

And that's the story of many forests in the region, including Oak Hill.

Remnants of loblolly pine plantations still remain on the property, and now, thanks to the collaborative efforts of Foothills Conservancy and EcoForesters, these non-native Piedmont and coastal species are being thinned to make room for native pine and hardwood regeneration.

"Forestry has historically been profit-driven, driven by the industrial revolution," Hornthal said. "But because of that, much of our forests have been depleted of native species. And they are not resilient, because they lack diversity. When you have only one or two

species dominating the landscape — and they're all around the same age range, you end up with weakened forest health."

And a lack of biodiversity is bad for wildlife too, decreasing both the quantity and quality of native animal species' habitat.

For the last three years, Foothills Conservancy and its partners have been using forest restoration practices, including the reintroduction of native species, at two of its large preserve properties across the region. In addition to planting 3,500 shortleaf pine seedlings, a native species that has declined in population, and about 400 blight-resistant chestnut seedlings on the Oak Hill Park property, EcoForesters' invasive species control crew returned to the future park in fall 2021 to begin treating invasive plants like kudzu, english ivy, and tree-of-heaven. These exotic plants have the ability to outcompete native plant species, negatively impacting biodiversity and degrading site quality over time. In late 2021 and early 2022, EcoForesters and FCNC will be leading invasive control work days for volunteers at the Oak Hill Park property.

But thinning the current population doesn't mean felling loblolly pines at random — or even in a systematic, every-fifth-tree kind of process.




"You have to mimic nature," said EcoForesters Co-Director Andy Tate. "All those common natural disturbances that occur — wind, ice storms, fire — that's what allows things to regrow and regenerate."

When hit with strong winds or blasted by an ice storm, many trees in a forest will topple — often the least healthy among them. In their place, new growth sprouts from the forest floor. To mimic this in a controlled way, EcoForesters harvests trees in an irregular pattern, looking for trees with less ecological value and leaving many of the big, healthy trees behind.

"There's a natural aversion to hearing a chainsaw in the forest and hearing a tree come crashing down," Hornthal said. "There's a disconnect between that act and the fact that our houses are made out of wood — and we drink our coffee out of a paper cup. There's always that natural reaction of sadness to seeing a tree fall." But, he continued, quoting "The Overstory" by Richard Powers: "Trees fall with spectacular crashes. But planting is silent, and growth is invisible."

And, though seemingly counterintuitive, fire also plays a huge role in the restoration puzzle — supporting biodiversity much like other thinning methods while also reducing forest floor fuel loads that contribute to destructive wildfires. In fall 2021, a collaborative effort between the N.C. Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy, with funding from the U.S. Forest Service Community Protection Program, allowed Foothills Conservancy to begin plans to reintroduce fire onto the Oak Hill Park property landscape. Conducting a controlled burn will mimic the natural fire regime that would have historically existed in the Southern Appalachian Mountains and Foothills. A firebreak was installed just inside the property boundary to reduce any risk of impacting the neighboring homes.

"You have this land that's been permanently protected for the values it brings to a community, so it's important that these conservation lands are properly stewarded. It's a big responsibility," Hornthal said. "So to be able to help land trusts like Foothills Conservancy is really important to us. Being able to keep these large, unfragmented natural areas healthy is only going to make forests stronger, and it's especially important as we grapple with chronic change to our natural world." 



Forest Restoration at South Mountains Headwaters Preserve (1,885 acres)

February 2019: N.C. Forest Service Controlled Burn

N.C. Forest Service conducts a controlled burn on approximately 100-acres of planted loblolly pine in the southern section of the property. The low-intensity burn removed woody debris that remained after a 2015 thinning, recycling the stored nutrients back into the soil to promote native seed growth.



April 2019: Shortleaf Pine Planting

FCNC plants more than 8,000 containerized shortleaf pine seedlings, donated by Tim Sweeney and his land management team, on 20 acres underneath the thinned loblolly canopy. Half of the seedlings are planted inside of February's controlled burn area, and half are planted in the unburned section.

July 2019: Crop Tree Release

FCNC conducts a crop tree release project on 40 acres of even-aged, naturally regenerated hardwood forest. After a previous clear-cut of this forest area by a timber company that used to own the land, red maples, yellow poplars, sourwoods and other less desirable species outcompeted the more ecologically valuable oaks and hickories for available resources on the site. FCNC staff identified and marked the healthy, dominant oak and hickory trees as "crop trees," and contractors cut adjacent trees with crowns touching the "crop trees." The removal of competing trees creates more open space in the forest canopy for bigger, healthier trees.

2020-2021: Native Forest Restoration Project

A loblolly pine harvest removes most of the remaining non-native trees after a 2016 thinning. Some portions of the harvest area are left to regenerate naturally, while other areas are replanted in shortleaf pine.

FCNC will work with the N.C. Forest Service to restore approximately 65 acres of shortleaf pine and oak-hickory forest on a section of the preserve that was clear-cut in 2018 before being donated to FCNC. The process involves chopping and burning existing post-clear-cut vegetation then planting 25,000 bare-root shortleaf seedlings across the prepared site.



4th Annual Our Big Backyard Summer Camp

INSPIRING YOUNG CONSERVATIONISTS

Our Big Backyard is a free summer camp for kids ages 6-10, designed to spark curiosity of the natural world through conservation-focused activities, crafts and outings. In 2021, the camp allowed participants to create their own adventure by providing take-home kits with guided instructions for each activity. The kits were strategically designed to explore five key categories: native plants, agriculture, wildlife, water and healthy snacking. To further connect campers with the conservation topics covered in their kits, Foothills Conservancy also offered several in-person outings, including a visit from the Carolina Raptor Center to see and learn about live birds up close, a guided hike with Lake James State Park's Kids in the Creek program, and a closer look at the creatures that live in our waters with N.C. Wildlife Resources at Foothills' Possum Rock river access.

Since its creation in 2018, Our Big Backyard has been driven by partnerships and funded through community grants. Foothills could not have offered this free program to 80 kids in 2021 without the generosity of TSH Charitable Foundation, Duke Energy: K-12 Education and the Harris and Frances Block Foundation.

Participation and donations from local businesses and community organizations also helped broaden the impact of this camp. Special thanks to Perry's Berrys, Carolina Raptor Center, Old Colony Players, Adventurebound Books, Lake James State Park, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, TOSS and to all Foothills volunteers.



PLACES YOU CAN VISIT

"Hi! Thank you for saying I'm a good camper. I hope to meet you one day. Thank you for all the fun activities and crafts you let all the campers do and me too. Thank you for being the best camp counselor ever!" — Devin Clark (camper)

"We've had a fantastic time doing the activities in the kits. Thanks again for everything you've all done!" — Heather McEnerney (guardian)

"We got busy dissecting that owl pellet. Very interesting. I think Jayne came to the conclusion that there was both a small rodent (maybe a tiny mouse) and possibly a shrew, as well. We were able to identify lots of the bones using the sheet provided." — Jacquelyn Hovis (guardian)

"She's had a great time with it all. Still have a few more activities to finish. But the window garden has been a success and her wind chime is absolutely beautiful." — Jacquelyn Hovis (guardian)

"Our boys Vikram and Krishna enjoyed so much and learned so many new things. It has been a great experience for them. Thank you for putting all these boxes together with fun and learning projects." — Zsofia Samuel (guardian)

OWNED & MANAGED BY FOOTHILLS CONSERVANCY

Possum Rock River Access

Paddle the Henry Fork River, catch a few fish or hang out on the beach. Just 20 minutes from downtown Morganton.

Copper Ridge Trail

Three miles of the Fonta Flora State Trail designed for bikers and hikers. Located in Old Fort, off Old Highway 70.

Wilson Creek Access

Enjoy the wild and scenic river by picnicking, swimming, boating or floating. Foothills Conservancy has protected over 1,200 acres along nine miles of Wilson Creek.

Burntfield Branch Trail

Hike a narrow out-and-back trail full of native wildflowers and a featured cave. Collettsville, N.C.

Bear Den Overlook

NPS Blue Ridge Parkway, Mile Marker 323.

PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS

- Catawba Falls
- Lake James State Park (MTB Trails and FFST)
- Linville Falls Campground
- Tuttle Educational Forest
- North Fork Catawba River
- Catawba River Greenway (MTB bike trail coming soon)
- South Mountains Game Land
- South Mountains State Park

- Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail
- Grandfather Ranger District - Pisgah National Forest
- Linville Caverns
- City of Marion Greenway (Ford Miller property)
- Laura Foster Gravesite
- Chimney Rock State Park
- Johns River Game Land
- Buffalo Cove Game Land
- Pisgah Game Land (Lake James and Wilson Creek)

COMING SOON

- Wilderness Gateway State Trail
- Catawba Meadows Mountain Bike Trail
- Oak Hill Community Park & Forest
- Rock Creek Hiking Trail



Scan this QR code to visit the outdoor recreation resources page on our website!

MOUNTAIN BOGS

National Wildlife Refuge

When picturing wild landscapes in the Southern Blue Ridge and its foothills, sunken, swampy wetlands don't typically come to mind. Once an abundant ecosystem throughout North Carolina's higher elevations, mountain bogs are now incredibly, and increasingly, rare — often drained, ditched and slated for development.

These low-lying areas with saturated, acidic soils collect rainwater and runoff in still, shallow pools, providing homes for unique plant and animal species — many of which are threatened, endangered or otherwise rare — only found in these swamplike oases.

"That's one of the cool things about mountain bogs," said David Viker, regional chief for the National Wildlife Refuge System, an entity of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "When you think of a mountain, you think of steep inclines and dry rock faces, so when you have these rare pockets of space that are cool and wet, that's pretty rare. And it attracts rare plants and animals, like the [endangered] bog turtle," the smallest turtle species in the United States, as well as a variety of endangered pitcher plants.



Bobs Creek State Natural Area within Mountain Bogs NWR.

Though the valleys of the Southern Blue Ridge once contained an estimated 5,000 acres of boggy wetlands, only a small fraction of this imperiled habitat, about 500 acres, remains. But when it comes to protecting mountain bogs and bog-dwelling species, it's not as easy as drawing a circle on a map, Viker explained. "It's not just one piece of ground, like the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia and north Florida, which is a

big oval. [It's] a series of smaller bogs scattered in wild areas in North Carolina and Tennessee."

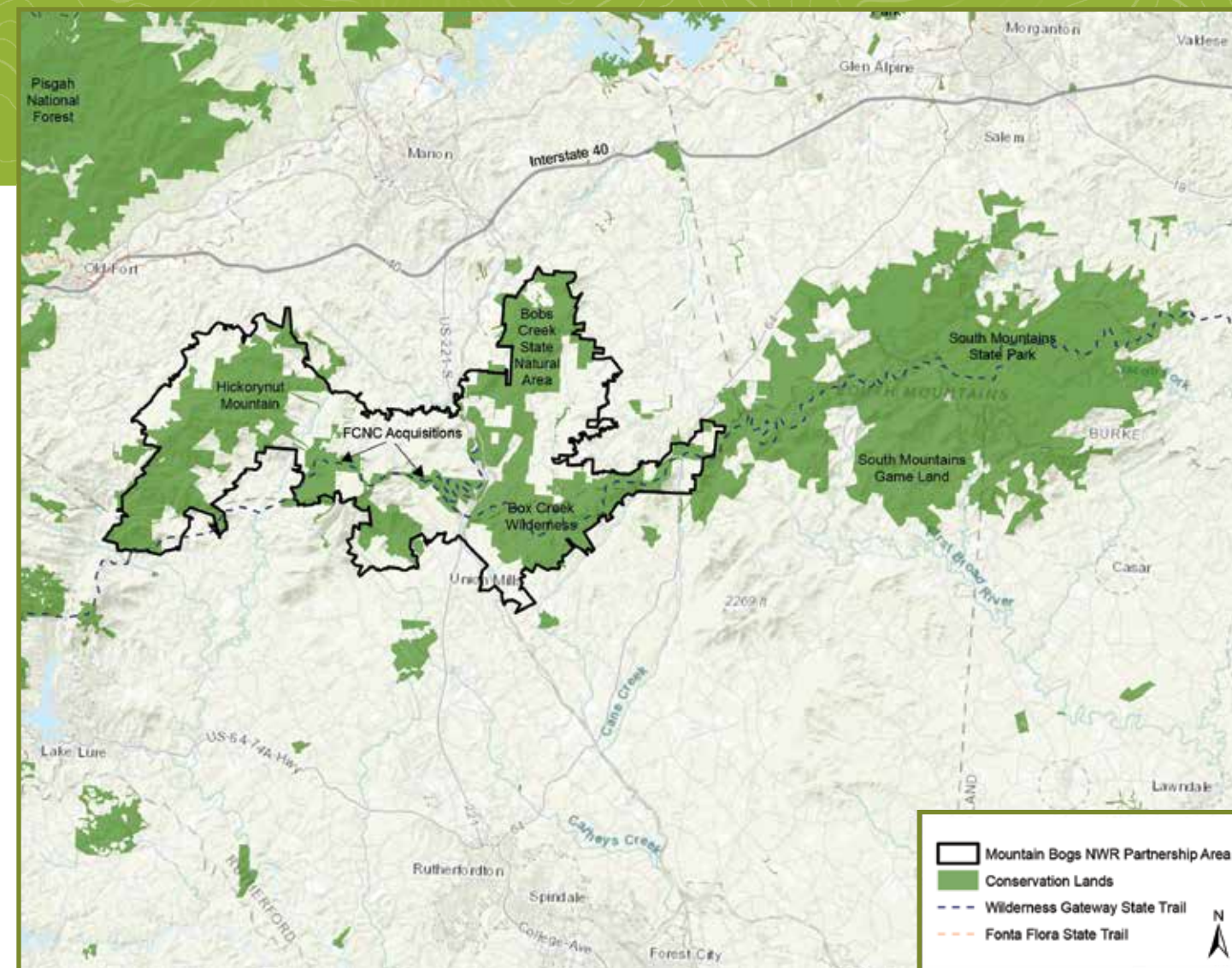
And that's why, in 2015, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service created the Mountain Bogs National Wildlife Refuge, supporting the conservation of these rare Southern Appalachian wetlands. And, within this larger refuge area umbrella, the agency has worked to identify 30 key sites, called Conservation Partnership Areas, to focus their mountain bog conservation energy.

One such area can be found in the South Mountains of McDowell and Rutherford counties, spanning the Broad River and the Catawba River basins. The Conservation Partnership Area there encompasses approximately 50,000 acres, close to half of which is already in some type of conservation ownership, whether by a private conservationist, N.C. State Parks or Foothills Conservancy. This includes areas such as Box Creek

Wilderness, held under easement by the USFWS; Bobs Creek State Natural Area, owned by N.C. State Parks; and Hickorynut Mountain, one of the largest contiguous single parcels of land in Western North Carolina, which is under private conservation ownership.

Because it falls within the conservancy's eight-county service scope, Foothills Conservancy plays a key partner role in this Conservation Partnership Area, including identifying opportunities for and assisting with the acquisition and conservation of additional lands within that area.

"The partnership area is a large landscape stretching from the South Mountains almost to the Blue Ridge Mountains, where Buncombe, McDowell and Rutherford counties meet," said Tom Kenney, land protection director at Foothills Conservancy.




"Basically, as opportunities for the acquisition of wetlands and buffering lands are identified, we'll work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to acquire and permanently conserve those lands."

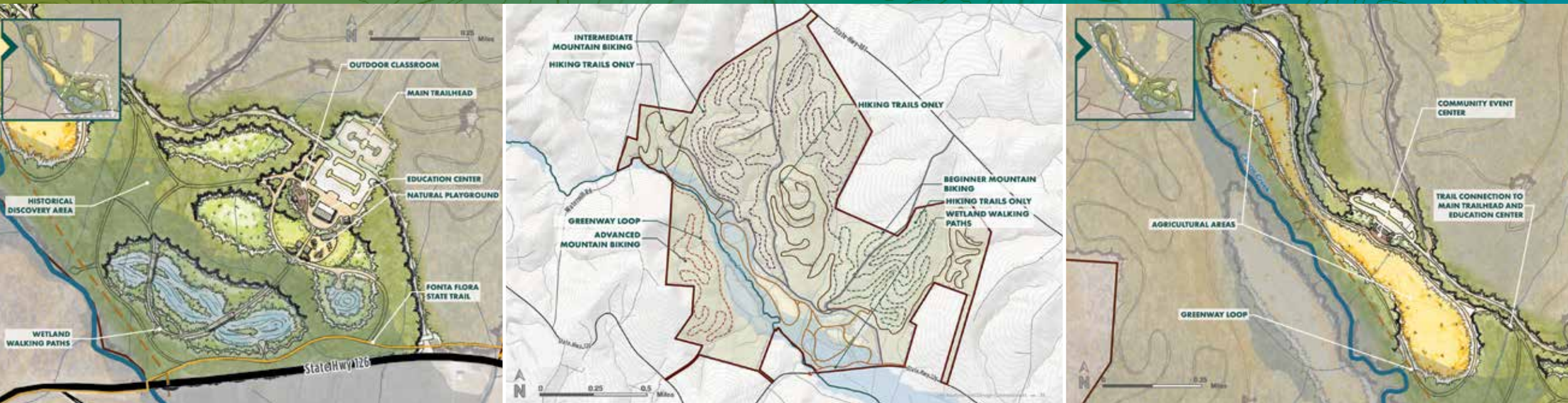
And, with the Wilderness Gateway State Trail route proposed for that area, Foothills Conservancy will also work closely with the USFWS to plan and develop a section of that public state trail through the Box Creek Wilderness Area within the Partnership Area.

"It's just another great example of a successful partnership with a government agency," Kenney explained. "The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, N.C. State Parks, the N.C. Land and Water Fund — we're all working together to conserve this very

important corridor connecting the South Mountains to the Blue Ridge Mountains. It's such a large landscape that it's going to take as many partners as possible to achieve permanent conservation of the corridor."

And, Viker added, there's never been a more pressing time to conserve rare and endangered ecosystems. "We already saw human populations growing in these areas as people continue seeking out wilder landscapes — and now, with COVID, people realize they can work in remote areas and still do their jobs," he said. Combine that with more general concerns about climate change, and "the 2020s may be the defining moment for conservation in the next century. If we don't conserve as much as we can right now, it might be lost forever. We've got a real opportunity to protect these places now, once and for all." 

OAK HILL PARK



Although it may not be obvious to the casual observer, activity is brewing at Oak Hill Community Park and Forest.

Led by the conservancy’s stewardship director and conservation program staff, several land management projects are underway at the future park, a 652-acre property just minutes from downtown Morganton.

First, in order to protect water quality in Canoe Creek, which runs along the property’s edge, conservancy staff demarcated a 300-foot riparian buffer around the creek, restricting agricultural production uses along its banks. This reduced the amount of existing open farmland from 75 to 45 acres and expanded the unmanaged area in the floodplain of Canoe Creek. Currently leased by a local farmer, the agricultural land is being used for a rotation of summer soybean and over-winter barley crops — with plans to offer the latter to Fonta Flora Brewery as a locally sourced ingredient for beer production.

Forest restoration activities are also underway on the property. In early 2021, FCNC partnered with

EcoForesters, a forestry nonprofit in Asheville, to complete a comprehensive forest stewardship plan to protect and enhance forest resources throughout the park. In addition to the benefit this has for wildlife habitat, this restoration work also provides opportunities for public education on ecologically responsible forest management practices. One example of this is the work underway to thin the remnants of loblolly pine plantations — a species that is not native to this region but was widely promoted for commercial forestry in decades past. In their place, native pine and hardwood species are being reintroduced to the landscape, creating a healthier, more diverse habitat. (To read more about EcoForesters’ work at Oak Hill, read the story on forest restoration on page 14.)

At the center of all of this work is Foothills Conservancy’s primary objective: to get the public into Oak Hill Community Park and Forest as soon as possible — breathing the fresh air, hearing the sounds of water flowing and the songs of birds chirping, and connecting with this beautiful, natural space that, for so many, is close to home. When complete, the park will contain a network

of multi-use, natural-surface trails, and the initial five miles are already in the layout and design phase.

As for public access, FCNC hired a local engineering firm, West Consultants, to design an entrance off of N.C. Highway 126, as well as a public driveway leading to a parking area and trailhead. The timeline for constructing public access infrastructure and public trails largely depends on fundraising efforts, so keep an eye out for events and other efforts that benefit this highly anticipated project. If you or someone you know would like to support this project and bring nature closer to local communities, donate to the cause by visiting our website at foothillsconservancy.org.

“ At the center of all of this work is Foothills Conservancy’s primary objective: to get the public into Oak Hill Community Park and Forest as soon as possible — breathing the fresh air, hearing the sounds of water flowing and the songs of birds chirping, and connecting with this beautiful, natural space that, for so many, is close to home. ”

In October 2020, Foothills Conservancy acquired the 652-acre property along Canoe Creek, just minutes from downtown Morganton, with funding from state and federal grants and generous contributions from more than 90 individuals, families, foundations, businesses, and community groups. This project also marked the first time that the Catawba-Wataree Water Management Group — a partnership consisting of 18 water utilities and Duke Energy, all of which source drinking water from the Catawba River — awarded a grant to a land trust for land and water conservation.

In spring 2021, the conservancy hired Destination by Design, a planning and design firm, to prepare a park master plan that adheres to the guidelines required by the North Carolina Parks & Recreation Trust Fund. Using public input as a guide, the goals outlined in the master plan center specifically around community benefits:

QUALITY OF LIFE. Enhance quality of life for current and future residents of Burke County and the surrounding area by conserving green space, expanding recreation assets, and providing educational opportunities.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS. Create infrastructure that provides additional recreational opportunities for all abilities and enhances community wellness through the improvement of physical, mental, and social health.

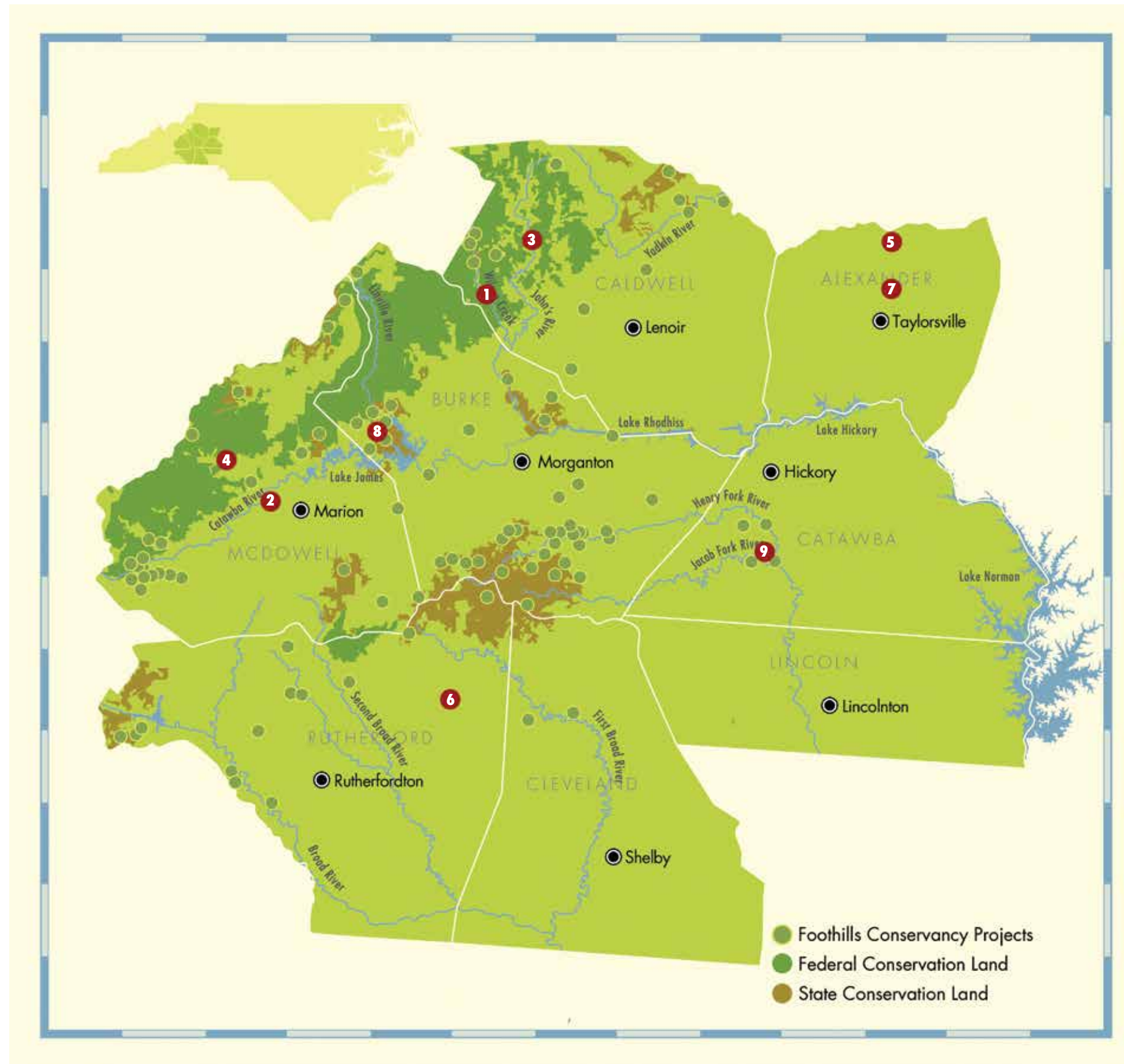
ECONOMIC IMPACT AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT. Promote economic growth by creating a significant community asset that will add to a multitude of other natural and recreational assets along with the area’s developing regional trail system, and attract visitors to Burke County and Western North Carolina.

EDUCATION AND STEWARDSHIP. Provide an outdoor space for students of all ages to learn about environmental education, forest management, and archeological exploration.

It is an ambitious undertaking to transform this property into a public park, but the conservancy is optimistic that it can fulfill this promise with help from its supporters and the community.

2021 Foothills Footprint

- 1 Wilson Creek Gorge**
333 acres. Donation of land in Caldwell County along the National Wild and Scenic River, Wilson Creek, to Foothills Conservancy for future transfer to Pisgah National Forest.
- 2 McDowell Catawba River Greenway**
13 acres. Purchase by Foothills Conservancy in partnership with the Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail for future transfer to McDowell County for public trail access and connectivity between Fonta Flora State Trail and the City of Marion's Catawba River Greenway.
- 3 Burntfield Branch**
118 acres. Acquisition of land by Foothills Conservancy to protect sections of the Johns River and Burntfield Branch for future transfer to Pisgah National Forest, including public trail access and fishing.
- 4 Sunnyvale Slopes**
130 acres. Bargain purchase by Foothills Conservancy to protect the watershed of Buck Creek, a public water supply watershed, and for future transfer to Pisgah National Forest for public access along Buck Creek.
- 5 Sugarloaf Mountain**
25 acres. Acquisition by Foothills Conservancy in the Brushy Mountains of Alexander County to protect part of the Sugarloaf Mountain Natural Heritage Area as a conservancy preserve.



- 6 Calton Farm CE**
385 acres. A bargain sale of an agricultural conservation easement to Foothills Conservancy, using funds from state and federal farmland preservation programs, to protect a family cattle farm along Robinson Creek in northern Rutherford County.
- 7 Sorkin CE**
118 acres. A donated conservation easement to Foothills Conservancy to protect habitats, woodlands and fields in the foothills of the Brushy Mountains north of Taylorsville in Alexander County.
- 8 Paddy's Creek**
27 acres. Purchase of land along N.C. 126 to protect Paddy's Creek upstream of Lake James State Park along a designated corridor of the Overmountain Victory National and State Historic Trail.
- 9 Jacob Fork River Parkland Expansion**
128 acres. Purchase of land along the Jacob Fork River for future transfer to N.C. State Parks.



**FOOTHILLS
CONSERVANCY**
OF NORTH CAROLINA

CREST at Western Piedmont Community College



Foothills Conservancy's Ryan Sparks, WPCC CREST Researchers Ann Burkhalter, Trey Dean and Hailey Ward, and Foothills Conservancy's Brittany Watkins at an upper elevation Appalachian bog in Jonas Ridge.

By Jessica Howells, Biology Instructor at Western Piedmont Community College

The buzz and hum of a scientific conference — with the attending talks, poster sessions, questions, and explanations of research methods — can be exhilarating and intimidating. This is particularly true for students who are first generation college students and have never set foot on a university campus before, much less attended a symposium where research is shared.

This is why CREST, Collaborative Research Experiences in Science and Technology, was formed at Western Piedmont Community College: to give community college students the opportunity to “do science.” “Doing science” means to participate in scientific inquiry and discovery and partner with members of the community, other students and faculty mentors as they ask questions and conduct research in the area. Students then share the results of their research in many different ways, including presenting it at scientific conferences. Research completed by undergraduate students is a relatively recent innovation, but it has taken hold — to the extent that

undergraduate research is a focus for the University of North Carolina system. Research by community college students is even more recent, but is happening throughout the United States. Many studies have shown that participating in scientific research helps engage and retain students in STEM fields; provides students with an understanding of research methods; improves critical thinking; teaches analytical techniques as well as communication skills; provides students with the ability to apply results of their own and others’ research to their lives and work, giving them ownership of the projects and of science in general; and provides accurate information to community partners for management and other lines of inquiry.

In 2011, The American Association for the Advancement of Science, along with the National Science Foundation, published “Vision and Change: A Call to Action.” In this document, scientists called for a reform of science education to broaden participation by advancing the science education

of all students, making sure to include underrepresented groups and students entering careers outside of science. In addition, contributors recognized the need to fully educate students about careers in science and about the process of science. This has inspired many of us who teach in the sciences to involve students in the process and show them how science applies to their lives. Science is not the memorization of facts, but a process of discovery.

Foothills Conservancy has been partnering with WPCC’s CREST to help students explore this sense of discovery in their own backyard. This partnership started with bog turtles. Dennis Herman, who started Project Bog Turtle, spoke to the CREST group about the unique plants and animals that lived in Appalachian freshwater bogs. CREST students recognized that Foothills Conservancy had purchased an upper elevation freshwater bog ecosystem in Jonas Ridge, which was later donated to Burke County. With the help of conservancy staff members Ryan Sparks and Brittany Watkins, as well as CREST faculty mentors Stacey Johnson, chemistry instructor, and Jessica Howells, biology instructor, students explored the bog and investigated its water chemistry, as well as the unique plant and animal life in the area.

Though this research was interrupted by the pandemic, it continued and even expanded as students returned to campus and CREST geared back up in fall 2021. Stacey Burchette, mathematics instructor at WPCC, has joined the CREST faculty mentors, and Foothills Conservancy is working with

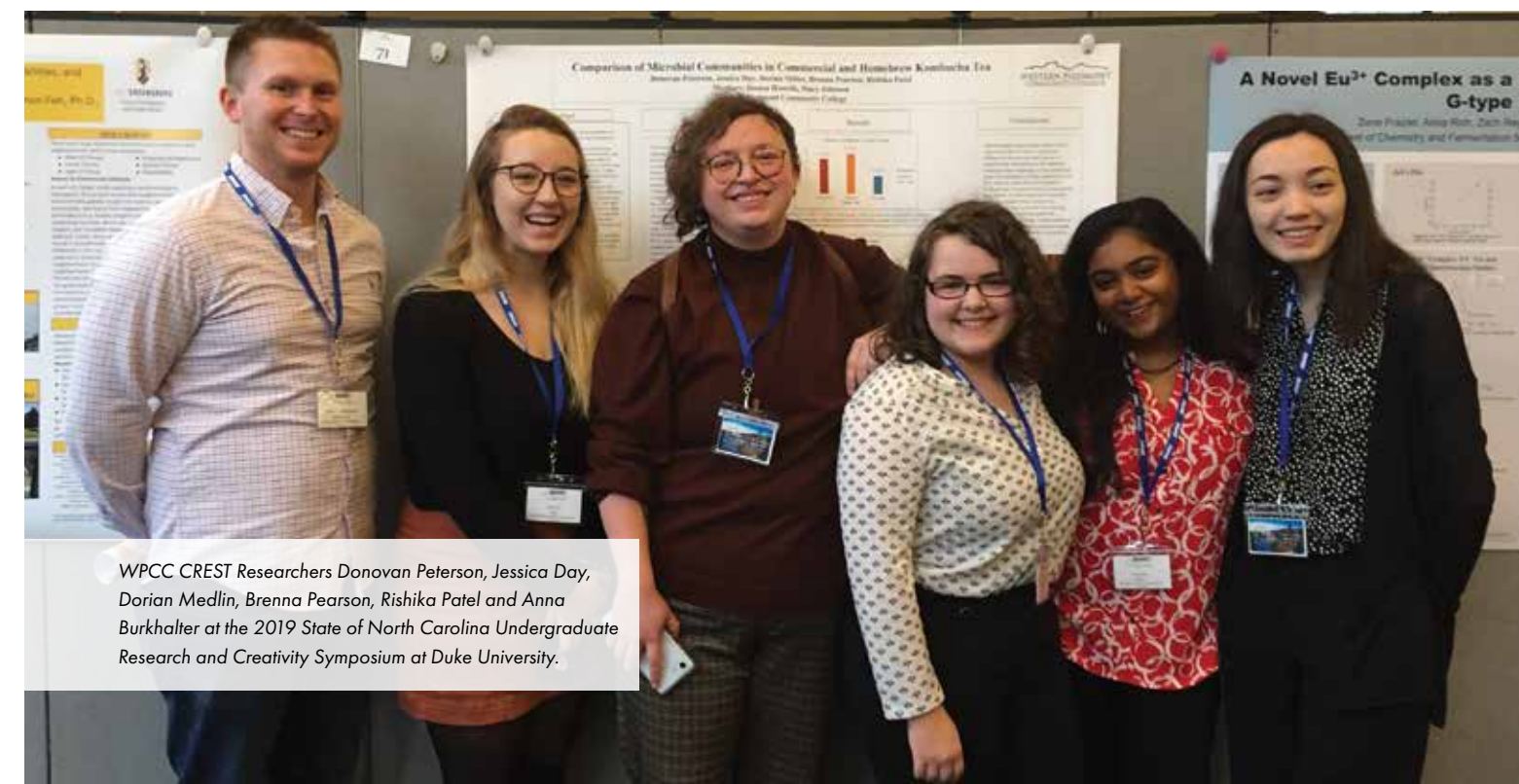


An Appalachian State University ecotoxicology student and biology professor, along with WPCC CREST Researchers Dorian Medlin, Tyler Mull and Shea Tuberty, complete a macroinvertebrate survey of the Johns River.

CREST on yet another project. CREST students are excited about a bird survey and possible research into habitat use and bird nesting practices at the Oak Hill Community Park and Forest, recently purchased by the conservancy in Burke County. The bird survey will be done in conjunction with the N.C. Bird Atlas of the Wildlife Resources Commission.

As students at Western Piedmont returned to in-person learning this fall, many joined CREST and expressed interest in these projects, exploring the ecosystems in their backyard. They have already started asking questions and using

science to search for answers about the places they share with the life around them. Western Piedmont Community College students will be contributing to the broader scientific community as they learn about this unique spot on our planet that they call home. 🦋



WPCC CREST Researchers Donovan Peterson, Jessica Day, Dorian Medlin, Brenna Pearson, Rishika Patel and Anna Burkhalter at the 2019 State of North Carolina Undergraduate Research and Creativity Symposium at Duke University.

SWEET LUCY'S A Different Kind of Affair



While Foothills Conservancy hosts many fundraising events each year, Sweet Lucy's stands apart. Currently, throughout all of the conservancy's eight counties, it is the only event conceived and run entirely by volunteers.

Sweet Lucy's Affair is "an unbelievable display of support from the communities around Lake James," said Andrew Kota, executive director of Foothills Conservancy. "Held in recognition of the conservancy's work to protect the lake, the event never fails to energize our staff and board, motivating us to continue our conservation work to the best of our ability."

In 2013, conservancy staff and supporters realized that, despite the land trust's major conservation efforts to save land on Lake James' shores and in its viewshed, lake community support was relatively low. Thus, Sweet Lucy's Affair launched as a private, community-driven annual fundraiser to enhance both support for and awareness about the conservancy. At its heart, it is a celebration, but it also serves as a platform to deepen project support for conservation opportunities around the lake — like acquiring and adding new lands to Lake James State Park and protecting its tributary waters, including Paddy's Creek and the North Fork Catawba River.

The engine of the fundraiser (and its source for volunteers) is the Sweet Lucy's Leadership Circle. Each Leadership

Circle family donates \$1,000 or more in support of Foothills Conservancy, and from these funds, collected in advance of the event, comes the annual Sweet Lucy's Affair, complete with appetizers, Turner family barbecue, a buffet, wine, beer and music. The celebration takes place each year in September at the open-air Camp Lake James, and, in addition to the families of the Leadership Circle, about 130 additional tickets are sold to residents of the area.

From a humble beginning of eight founding couples, the Leadership Circle has grown to include 67 families, grossing more than \$125,000 in support just this year. Since its inception, more than \$460,000 has been raised.

In fact, Kota said, the event has been such a success for Lake James that "we hope others in communities throughout our eight-county region might be inspired by this event and replicate it in their own local areas."

If you would like to explore starting a community-driven fundraiser in your area, please contact Pam Hardin at **828-437-9930**. More information can be found at foothillsconservancy.org/sweetlucy.

Board Member Spotlight ALLEN FULLWOOD

The great work that Foothills Conservancy does wouldn't be possible without the support of our committed board members — and in recognition of these invaluable contributions, we would like to spotlight one longtime board member in particular: Burke County native and lifelong resident Allen Fullwood.

Part of Foothills Conservancy's board since 2014, Fullwood understands firsthand the positive impact that our work has had on the region. His childhood was spent around Morganton, in the same beautiful mountains, forests and rivers he now shares with his children and grandchildren.

When asked what draws him to continue serving on the board, Fullwood explained that seeing "these important projects materialize after many years of work, then seeing how well the community responds to our work — that's the most rewarding aspect."

These days, Allen enjoys spending time outdoors — especially hunting, fishing and golfing — as well as learning about the rich history of Western North Carolina. When asked about the most important aspect of the work we're doing, he noted that he's particularly interested in its interconnectedness.

"Foothills' work has touched so many different areas of natural, historical and cultural preservation," said Fullwood. "The work that Foothills Conservancy does not only protects the natural beauty of this area, but protects the deep cultural and historical value for future generations to learn about and enjoy."

Moved by the protection of the land that many generations had once shared, Allen said he hopes that everyone will become more invested in and supportive of parks and conservation. He also noted that, as land is being lost rapidly, he feels a sense of urgency to take action to support conservation in our region.

"It's important to remember that there is only a certain amount of land available to protect," Fullwood said.



Allen Fullwood (back left) and wife Doris pictured with their daughters Valaida (front right) and Diatra (back right).

"Each passing day there is less and less opportunity for conservation, so it's important that we act with a sense of urgency. Foothills understands the challenges surrounding this issue and stands ready to act whenever opportunities for conservation become available."

Fullwood noted that, in addition to all of the great conservation work that Foothills Conservancy

does, he believes that the magnitude of and broad opportunity for community engagement is one of our greatest assets.

"Anyone can get involved with the great work that Foothills Conservancy is doing," he explained. "From volunteering or contributing financially, to simply enjoying and spreading the word about the spaces that Foothills has worked to protect, there is truly something for everyone."

When he's not outdoors, Fullwood, now retired from his work at the N.C. Division of Mental Health, spends time reading, learning about local and family history and enjoying the company of his family.

WHO'S WHO

New Employee Highlights

Over the course of the last year, three new staff members have joined the team at Foothills Conservancy, and we couldn't be more delighted by all the skills and talents that each one of them bring to our work. Additionally, in summer 2021, we welcomed two interns to our conservation program crew to help with our mission and gain insight from the protection and stewardship work we do for our eight-county service area. With so many new faces needing introductions, we asked them each to write about themselves below in a Who's Who highlight of our newest members.



Pam Hardin - Director of Development

My mountain and conservation roots run deep. My grandfather, born an orphan, was adopted by his aunt and grew up on a farm in the Linville Falls community, where his family donated land to support the formation of the Blue Ridge Parkway. My brother works for the North Carolina Arboretum, and my uncle created and founded the Daniel Stowe Botanical Gardens.

Sharing this family passion and keeping up the apparent tradition, I am thrilled to have joined the Foothills Conservancy team. Having worked in nonprofit management and fundraising roles in both health care and higher education organizations, I bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the director of development position. In reflection, I have been on a journey to serve in the conservation arena for some time now. It is not just a job or a next career move: It is an honor and a calling.

Rachael Dial - Office & Finance Administrator

Though I was born in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Georgia, I have spent most of my life in Burke County, leading to my love of the outdoors and the mountains. I joined the Foothills Conservancy team in 2020 after learning about its conservation mission through my youngest daughter's participation in the conservancy's Our Big Backyard summer camp. Around that same time, my oldest daughter and I volunteered with the conservancy to help clean up Valdese Lakeside Park. These two community-forward activities drew me into the organization.

I earned an associates degree from Caldwell Community College and bring more than a decade of office and finance experience to my position. In my free time, I like to spend time with family, get outdoors through hiking, kayaking and camping — or relax at home crafting, cooking and reading.



Grayson Barnette - Marketing & Communications Coordinator

As a native of Lenoir and multigenerational Western North Carolinian, I deeply appreciate the natural and historic value of these mountains. For as long as anyone can remember, my family has resided in Appalachia, with my twin brother and me as the 8th generation to call this region home. Both sides of my family were born in the Blue Ridge and helped shape the region's history and infrastructure by helping construct projects like the Blue Ridge Parkway, Appalachian State University and various other work in the Wilson Creek-Mortimer area.

My parents, Dawn and Ray, are strong conservationists and supporters of Foothills Conservancy. They raised my brother and me to have a deep appreciation for the region, which has carried over to our professional lives. My twin brother, Grant, is a professional

trail runner and outdoorsman. Before joining the team at Foothills Conservancy in 2021, I worked on public policy in the federal and North Carolina state government for many years, gaining experience in the environmental policy space. Working at Foothills Conservancy isn't just a job for me; it's a lifelong dream and passion project to be able to help protect the land that I value so deeply.

FCNC 2021 INTERNS



John Thompson - Conservation Program Intern

John Thompson joined the Foothills Conservancy team in June 2021 to assist Land Protection Director Tom Kenney with several new conservation projects.

FCNC completes a variety of natural, social and historical assessments before purchasing land, accepting donated land, or entering into a conservation easement agreement. With so much to do, Tom was looking for help completing field visits and office work. As a native of Morganton and a recent environmental studies graduate from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, John was a natural fit for the job.

Thompson's familiarity with our region, combined with his working knowledge of arc GIS software and his willingness to brave the summer heat, made him an absolute asset to FCNC. He assisted with natural resource assessments, baseline documentation reports, created property maps using arc GIS, and filed completed land project transactions. Outside of his core responsibilities John made

a lasting impact on the FCNC staff culture. He was tremendously outgoing with a wonderful sense of humor and was always willing to help with extra tasks. Thompson returned to school after his internship to pursue a masters degree in environmental land use and planning at UNC Chapel Hill. The FCNC staff looks forward to following his future accomplishments in his chosen field.

Grace Kiser - Stewardship Program Intern

Foothills Conservancy welcomed Grace Kiser to its ranks in June 2021 to assist Stewardship Director Ryan Sparks with conservation property inspections and land management activities on FCNC preserve lands.

Foothills' stewardship staff is required to visit each conservation easement and fee simple property annually to document any natural or man-made changes that may have occurred on the property throughout the previous year. Grace also saw FCNC's stewardship team kick off a three-year agreement with Duke Energy to monitor conservation easements the company holds along the Catawba River and Johns River in Burke County.

Throughout her internship, Grace was an important asset to FCNC's conservation program with her innate natural awareness and her courage to venture into some of the most wild and remote lands of our region. She proved her capabilities with a variety of hands-on skills during the many land management activities that she supported on FCNC-owned properties, including invasive plant control, erosion and runoff control, and planting native trees, shrubs, and grasses, along with assisting our volunteer work days.

Grace is a native of Morganton and recently completed an Associate of Science degree at Western Piedmont Community College while interning at FCNC. An avid animal lover, traveler and photographer, Grace plans to continue her studies while still finding time to explore and document our natural surroundings.



Foothills Conservancy offers hands-on internship opportunities to introduce students to the practical applications of natural resource conservation and the work of nonprofit land trusts.

PAM'S CORNER

Over the years, I have tried to leave the mountains, but this region always draws me back with its strong spiritual pull. This is my home, and the people who live here are my family, friends and neighbors. Now, as Foothills Conservancy's director of development, I am both honored and privileged to help protect this land — and to call others to support this mission as well. When you make a gift to the conservancy, you are contributing to the quality of life for all living things in the foothills and Blue Ridge. Protecting our land and water provides a healthy environment in which all of us can thrive for generations to come. We could not do our work without our partners, donors and supporters. We know you have many choices and opportunities when it comes to making philanthropic decisions. Thank you for choosing us!



Pam Hardin -
Director of Development

SUMMER APPEAL SUCCESS

In June 2021, Foothills Conservancy announced its summer donation challenge, and we're happy to report that it was a huge success. Thanks to the generosity of Gresham Orrison and Susie Hamrick Jones, the conservancy's board of directors and Greybeard Realty & Rentals, all donations received through Aug. 31, 2021, were doubled up to \$40,000.

Following this announcement, Foothills Conservancy received an outpouring of support from more than 220 donors, who, together, helped us reach our goal of \$80,000. The success of our summer appeal demonstrates that land and water conservation is of the utmost importance to our supporters.

Foothills Conservancy's staff and board are forever grateful for the incredible support of our donors, whose gifts help us protect their favorite outdoor spaces and wild places. Thank you for supporting our land trust!

Goal of
\$80,000
Achieved!

YEAR END APPEAL

Missed the summer appeal or want to give again? Make a difference in the future of this region with a donation in 2021 in support of our year-end appeal! When you give this gift to Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina, you are ensuring that our mountains and foothills stay beautiful, accessible and beneficial to all — forever. At the end of each year, it becomes all the more crucial to finish strong and reach our goals for the year to come. Consider making a year-end, tax-deductible gift now through Dec. 31, and know that you are the reason we're able to preserve the places you love.

Visit foothillsconservancy.org/donate to make a difference.

2021 Guardians of the Land

Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina's Guardians of the Land are landowners who choose to protect their properties either by donating conservation easements — in full or in part — or by donating their land outright to permanently preserve the natural places they cherish. We are pleased to recognize Tim Sweeney, Larry Sorkin, and Javan and Ann Calton as our new Guardians of the Land.

Tim Sweeney

National Wild & Scenic River Wilson Creek - 333 acres

On Earth Day 2021, private conservationist Tim Sweeney donated 333 acres in Caldwell County, along two miles of the National Wild and Scenic River, Wilson Creek, to Foothills Conservancy. The property is surrounded by the Pisgah National Forest on three sides, and adjoins the highly popular Wilson Creek Day Use Area. The section of Wilson Creek that runs through this property not only supports access to downstream whitewater rafting, canoeing and kayaking with challenging Class II-V rapids, it also boasts beautiful, cascading waterfalls and contains the trailhead for the six-mile Wilson Creek Trail, which connects to other popular trails in the area. The conservancy will transfer the land to the U.S. Forest Service for watershed protection and public access and recreation. Mr. Sweeney is one of the foremost conservationists in North Carolina.



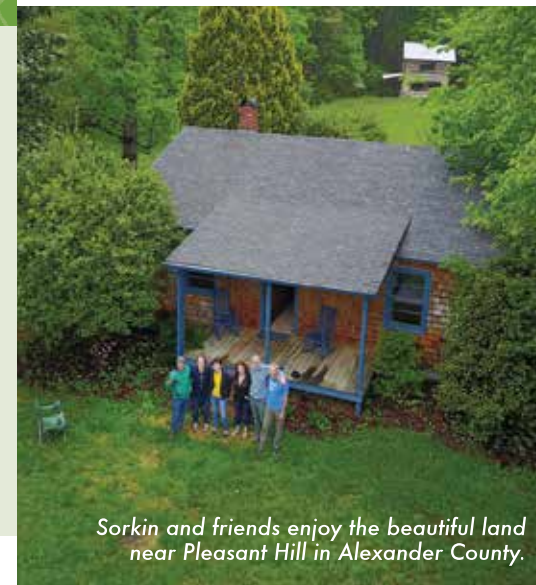
Tim Sweeney

Larry Sorkin

Pleasant Hill Conservation Easement - 118 acres

In November 2021, Larry Sorkin generously donated a conservation easement to Foothills Conservancy to permanently protect his property in northern Alexander County near Pleasant Hill along the Black Oak Ridge, part of a cluster of small peaks in the Brushy Mountains, including Rocky Face, Round Top, Joe Mountain and Coon Mountain. Larry acquired his land and current home in 1974. It serves as a quiet retreat for himself and his friends, as well as occasional artists and writers. "For almost 50 years, this land has provided a home, a sense of place and no end of wonder. I'm grateful and want to return the favor by offering it the protection it deserves. I'm thankful that Foothills Conservancy is proving to be the perfect partner in achieving that end," said Sorkin.

This charitable gift protects nearly a mile of headwater streams of Muddy Fork, which is a tributary of Lower Little River in the Catawba River Basin. Of the 210 plant species and 71 wildlife species documented on the easement property, six are considered to be watch-list rare species by the N.C. Natural Heritage Program. There are also three rare natural communities on the property, including a Low Elevation Seep, Montane Oak-Hickory Forest (Basic Subtype) and Rich Cove Forest. Foothills Conservancy is pleased to help Larry protect the property in perpetuity.



Sorkin and friends enjoy the beautiful land near Pleasant Hill in Alexander County.

Javan & Ann Calton

Calton Family Farm Conservation Easement - 385 acres

In December 2021, Javan and Ann Calton granted a permanent agricultural conservation easement to Foothills Conservancy and made a generous charitable donation for a portion of the easement property's extinguished development rights. The majority of the Calton Family Farms' agricultural lands lie on 385 acres of their large property in the Sunshine community of Rutherford County, nestled against Cherry Mountain. Using state and federal farmland preservation grant funds, Foothills Conservancy purchased the majority of the subdivision development rights value on 385 acres of their property. The land will continue to be owned by the family and managed as productive farmland and woodlands. The farm has been in the Calton family for several generations and was formerly operated as a dairy farm. In permanently conserving it, Javan and Ann chose Foothills Conservancy and the Department of Agriculture programs as the best way to honor the heritage of their family and farm between Bostic and Golden Valley in the South Mountains.

The easement property includes a portion of the Cherry Mountain Natural Area, which is ranked "very high" by the N.C. Natural Heritage Program, as well as more than three miles of streams, including Roberson Creek in the Broad River Basin. Half of the Calton farm includes soils that are classified as "prime" or of statewide or local importance for agricultural production.



Calton Farm

Dan Allison 2021 Ruby Award

Named for late biologist, educator and founding conservancy board member Ruby Pharr, the Ruby Award is Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina's highest honor for conservation volunteer service. This year, Foothills Conservancy is honored to announce Dan Allison Jr. as the 2021 Ruby Award recipient.

Dan Allison and his wife, Denisa, have deep roots in the Eastern Blue Ridge Mountains and Foothills region of North Carolina. His family has owned land in the Old Fort area for generations, and Dan studied at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. He has spent most of his career improving technology in the healthcare industry. He directed his own consulting firm, DE Allison Enterprises, LLC, served on the board for Arcadia Healthcare Solutions, and now works as the vice president and general manager for Dell Technologies Healthcare - Life Sciences.

Foothills Conservancy staff met Dan in 2017, during the land trust's pursuit to acquire and permanently conserve over 100 acres along Old Highway 70, west of Old Fort in McDowell County — where the Blue Ridge Mountains rise abruptly from the town limits. "I want folks to be able to enjoy it like I did," he said. "It's important to me that we share this with others."

Dan was eager to engage with the conservancy in a partnership that also involved N.C. State Parks to protect natural lands in his beloved Old Fort. With Dan's financial assistance, FCNC acquired the property in spring 2017, then transferred its ownership to the state of North Carolina in April 2018. This tract of land became the canvas for a 3-plus mile section of the Fonta Flora State Trail, which helped link Old Fort to the existing Point Lookout Trail. Dan also donated some of his personal property to enable Foothills Conservancy to construct a portion of the new Copper Ridge section of FFST. The conservancy recently completed the Copper Ridge trail, and it is now open for public use.



Dan Allison cuts the ribbon at the Copper Ridge grand opening celebration. Pictured with wife Denisa and son Nicholas.

Since that initial partnership, Dan continues to support Foothills Conservancy in its regional conservation efforts. He has become a tremendous advocate, strong leader and collaborative volunteer in promoting the betterment of the Old Fort community. He is deeply invested in numerous efforts to revitalize local tourism, diversify and strengthen the area's economy and foster downtown economic development to enhance the lives of Old Fort residents.

Dan now splits his time between Texas and his home in Old Fort. During trail construction, he remained connected to the project, offering his own equipment, donating supplies for the trailhead parking area, and helping keep a watchful eye over the trail.

VOLUNTEER SHOUTOUT



What inspires you to volunteer with Foothills Conservancy?

Ray Barnette: "Growing up in this area I always valued the environment and access to outdoor recreation. Foothills Conservancy is on the front lines of conservation and doing the important work to secure this region's future."

Garry Vogelpohl: "Being a part of effective stewardship of creation, and seeing visible results of this work."

Tom Ruckdeschel: "I have always loved the outdoors and think that the Foothills Conservancy is an effective organization and asset to the community."

Phoebe Greene: "Being able to help sustain our local natural areas."

Candace McGuire: "Community pride."

What is one thing you've learned by volunteering with Foothills Conservancy?

Glenn Grossman: "I have learned a lot about managing land and how the process to ensure effective conservation is conducted."

Caitlin Wahle: "It has been amazing getting to know the organization, its work, and the staff especially. They are all quality people who are passionate and motivated, and they truly care about conserving our natural environment. I volunteer for the conservancy at the Morganton Farmers Market, and I am moved by how many people love their work and have nice things to say."

Luke Kota: "Foothills Conservancy is awesome! Planting trees helps restore our forests and also gives wildlife a place to live and food to eat."

Volunteer Stats for 2021

Bags of Trash: 46
Trail Improved or Maintained: 3.2 miles
Invasive Removal: .10 acres of kudzu treated
Streambank Repair: 1,000 feet of live staking

Property Gates Installed: 2
Kiosks Installed: 1
Trees Planted: 1,030
Our Big Backyard Camp Kits Assembled: 80

Files Scanned: 260
Total Hours: 222
Number of Volunteers: 82

G5 TRAIL COLLECTIVE



G5 Collective volunteer crews work on the trail. Credit: Abbey Huber, USFS. Inset Credit: Lisa Jennings, USFS.

Surrounded by vast stretches of natural landscape — rolling hills, scenic vistas, cascading creeks and tumbling falls, the town of Old Fort has, historically, fallen surprisingly short when it comes to outdoor recreation.

Though it borders Pisgah National Forest on three sides, “there aren’t a lot of trails near here,” said Jason McDougald, executive director of Camp Grier in Old Fort. “And seeing that lack of infrastructure and knowing what the outdoor economy can do for small, rural towns, we had this desire to start building some ourselves.”

It began as a small group, meeting for work days in the forest — performing maintenance on the few existing trails in the area.

But soon, “that led to pulling some groups together — trailrunners, mountain bikers, equestrians, backpackers, hikers — and just kind of dreaming about what would be cool to see, taking a Sharpie and drawing lines on a map,” McDougald said. “We presented that concept map to the Old Fort Community Forum,” and the G5 Trail Collective took flight.

In both mission and practice, as well as in its name, the G5 Trail Collective represents its communities — “G” for the Grandfather Ranger District, the 192,000-acre east district of Pisgah National Forest, and “five” is for the number of counties that make up that district: Avery, Burke, Caldwell, McDowell and Watauga. The collective comprises at least 24 regional partners, including Camp Grier, the U.S. Forest Service’s Grandfather Ranger District, People

on the Move for Old Fort, Blue Ridge Traveler, Kitsbow Mountain Bike Wear — and even Foothills Conservancy.

Just in the last year, the collective submitted a proposal for a sustainably constructed 42-mile network of community-driven trails in Old Fort, but its partners are also already brainstorming additional projects in other communities throughout their five-county focus area.

“Our public lands are such an asset, especially around Old Fort, where Pisgah National Forest is right in the backyard,” said Lisa Jennings, recreation and trail ranger for Pisgah National Forest. “But our public land management agencies don’t have the resources or the interest these days to do it ourselves. Everything is really driven by the community and what the community can bring to the table. And that’s what G5 has been able to do, is to create those connections within the community and bring resources and funding to the table in a really unique way that you don’t see on public lands very much.”



Lavita Logan and Lisa Jennings. Credit: Many Mankiewicz, Kitsbow

Lavita Logan, project coordinator at People on the Move for Old Fort, was one of the first to get on board with the idea — and her efforts to lead and engage with the community have been crucial in driving the project forward. People on the Move, a Black-led initiative founded to advocate for Old Fort’s Black residents, has spearheaded the effort in making the forest a welcoming environment for all.

“I’d love to see more diversity on the trails,” Logan explained. “Old Fort sits right in the middle of Pisgah National Forest. We’re surrounded by forest, and I’d love to see more of the community, especially the Black community, accessing the trails and being involved in what we’ve got going on in town. Whenever I’m able, I’ll be out there on the trail myself,” she added.

Before that can happen, though, the trails must exist — and they must be accessible to all in the community. But thanks to the collective and a grant from Dogwood Health Trust, the Old Fort

Trails Project is coming together, scheduled to break ground on the first six miles, at the intersection of Curtis Creek and Jarrett Creek roads, in January 2022. Supported by two new trailhead parking areas, this network through nature is designed to improve community connectivity, reduce barriers to access and support environmental and social sustainability.


“These are trails we want everyone to be able to access in perpetuity,” Jennings said of the entire 42-mile network. “And without secured public access, whoever owns that property could one day decide they don’t want people on their land anymore. Foothills has been a great partner in securing official easements that guarantee public access in perpetuity, and it’s allowed us to connect these trails — like the trails at Camp Grier and also some sections of the Fonta Flora State Trail — directly into Old Fort in a way that really serves the community, instead of having all these backcountry access points.”

With all of its members bringing a different perspective — and a different set of skills — to the table, the G5 Trail Collective serves as a symbol for what can happen when a community comes together for a common good.

“What you see here, while it’s replicable, is not the norm,” said Stephanie Swepson Twitty. “To have a cross-section of different sectors at the table in this way, and to have communities of color at the table at its inception, is part of what makes this such a magnificent project.”

As the president and CEO of Eagle Market Streets Development Corporation, Swepson Twitty plays the economic development role in the collective, and for her, “this is about being able to revive a vibrant economy in Old Fort and McDowell County,” she said. “I think that the sky is absolutely the limit when we think about how we can tie [the economy] into this industry.”

But no matter what angle you choose, the collective is changing Old Fort for the better.

“The outdoors, for me, is one of the last great spaces of common ground that we have,” McDougald explained. “And in a time when things seem very divided, very polarized, when there are so many forces that are pulling us apart — the outdoors is that place where we can all have a shared experience, that place where we all come together.” 



A BIOLOGICAL HOTSPOT

Ecologists Helped Save Box Creek Wilderness

By Christopher R. Wilson, Wildlife Ecologist, Conservation Ecology LLC
(Adapted from a 2019 article in Rewilding Earth Magazine)

Box Creek Wilderness is a 7,000-acre property located in McDowell and Rutherford counties, positioned within the Mountain Bogs National Wildlife Refuge Conservation Partnership Area (see article on page 18). This ecological hotspot is encompassed by an even larger, unbroken matrix of private and public conservation lands of roughly 53,000 acres in the South Mountains that link to the Blue Ridge Mountains to the west.



Christopher R. Wilson

In 2016, conservationist Tim Sweeney permanently protected Box Creek Wilderness with one of the largest conservation easement donations in the state's history, made to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Box Creek Wilderness is now the canvas for what is likely to become the first segment of the Wilderness Gateway State Trail.

During the fight to protect Box Creek Wilderness from a proposed powerline right-of-way condemnation, Sweeney enlisted a team of field naturalists, including myself, to lead a systematic inventory of the natural features and species of the land. We then assembled a larger group of experts into one of the most collaborative and intensive ecological inventories on private land in the region.

In all, we documented a stunning 1,100 plant and animal species, 130 of which are considered rare, and 34 natural communities (including 23 global and state imperiled communities). Kevin Caldwell, an ecologist on the team, remarked, "Before our first survey season had really begun, we were joking that whoever didn't find rare species that day was a loser." But the real excitement came from the new scientific discoveries.

Caldwell and botanist Lloyd Raleigh noticed that several communities on Box Creek didn't match the classifications available from the N.C. Natural Heritage Program, so they consulted expert Michael Schafale, who visited the property and suggested these could be new and undescribed communities; a Dry Basic subtype of Montane Oak-Hickory Forest, a Low Elevation Basic Glade, and a Headwater Stream Forest. Another four natural communities — common elsewhere but never before found in the South Mountains — were documented, as well as hundreds of acres of unlogged old growth. But the new discoveries didn't stop there.

During botanical surveys a researcher from Austin Peay State University discovered two plant species: a type of spiderwort and a fameflower, both new to science. Another biologist



Hillcane Borer Moth

discovered the state's first and only records of Allegheny plum. A researcher from the Smithsonian Institution recorded 373 moth species, including three new-to-science or undescribed species, two species never before recorded in the state, and 10 rare species tracked by the N.C. Natural Heritage Program. One moth, the hillcane borer moth, was not just a new species to science, but an entirely new genus.

Box Creek also proved to be a hotspot for salamander diversity. The South Mountain gray cheek salamander, a globally imperiled local endemic, was found on the property further west and at lower elevations than previous records. Within small floodplain pools on the property, I found the first county record of the mole salamander and, in nearby mossy seepage areas, the first county record for the four-toed salamander — both state rare species.



Mole Salamander

One day, a neighbor walked up to a group of biologists with a plastic bucket containing an interesting turtle he had found. It turned out to be the first county record of a Gulf Coast spiny softshell turtle, another state rare species.

My camera traps captured photos of the Eastern spotted skunk, a declining and understudied rare species with few recent observations in the state at that time — and two biologists from the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission found the fantail darter, broad river crayfish, and Carolina Foothills crayfish — all state rare species. Our acoustic surveys and mist-netting for bats detected or captured a

state rare little brown myotis, federally threatened Northern myotis (Northern long-eared bat), and a tricolored bat, recently petitioned for federal endangered species listing. Additionally, our bird surveys found abundant populations of many species considered high conservation priorities, including the Acadian flycatcher, Louisiana waterthrush, Swainson's warbler, sharp-shinned hawk, worm-eating warbler, and woodthrush.

At the completion of our work, an astounding 386 point occurrences of rare species were documented on Box Creek. Based on these findings the NCNHP designated the Box Creek Wilderness as a state-recognized Natural Area (a site of special biodiversity significance) and gave it the highest possible significance rating, placing it in the top one percent of nearly 2,500 Natural Areas in the state.

In the end, our work shows Box Creek is truly a showpiece conservation property: it's big and wild, it's connected to a large surrounding landscape of protected lands, and it's full of rare and endemic species.

Many thanks to all the passionate field naturalists that participated in this collaboration; without them the secrets of Box Creek would be largely unnoticed! 🐦



Rocky Face in Box Creek Wilderness, part of Mountain Bogs NWR.

LOCAL BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

It comes as no surprise that conservation and outdoor recreation play an important part in our region's economy. Over 25 million people live within a half-day drive of this area of North Carolina, and now more than ever, people are seeking out and discovering the variety of nature-based opportunities — coupling those experiences with visits to local businesses.

What do regional breweries and Foothills Conservancy have in common? We all care about clean water, a key ingredient for great beer, and we support outdoor recreation and trails in our region.

Fonta Flora Brewery

The conservancy's partnership with Fonta Flora Brewery began in 2015, when we pooled our resources to acquire the historic Whippoorwill Dairy Farm. Foothills purchased and donated 41 acres of the farm to Lake James State Park, permanently conserving the scenic backdrop to Fonta Flora's 8-acre Whippoorwill Farm Brewery.

Earlier this year, Fonta Flora approached Foothills with an idea to help raise funds for regional conservation and trail projects, enabling brewery patrons to make a donation to the conservancy when they purchase a beer. A simple \$5 donation builds a foot of trail and supports the conservancy's work on the Wilderness Gateway, Fonta Flora and Overmountain Victory state trails, as well as a mountain bike trail project at the city of Morganton's Catawba River Greenway. Visit Fonta Flora Brewery locations in downtown Morganton, Charlotte and at Whippoorwill Farm to enjoy a local brew while supporting Foothills Conservancy.



Kitsbow Cycling Apparel

Old Fort is perfectly positioned as a destination for outdoor enthusiasts, right at the gateway to the Blue Ridge. David and Jen Billstrom at Kitsbow speak to the importance of authenticity in business partnerships, such as the one they have developed with Foothills Conservancy.

"The principals at Kitsbow — the founder, board members, major shareholders and the CEO — have all supported conservation organizations like FCNC for decades," the Billstroms explained. But beyond David and Jen's personal support, they describe how it also makes excellent sense for Kitsbow Cycling Apparel to align its brand with conservation in general, and specifically with FCNC.

"We have learned that good intentions and written vision statements simply aren't enough," they continued. "When we truly engage with FCNC and its projects, then our employees, customers and other partners witness our actions in supporting conservation financially. Our hope is that this will amplify the successes of Foothills Conservancy to a larger audience via our marketing channels, while participating hands-on with any and every project that we can. Actions over words, that's authenticity."

And, together, Foothills and Kitsbow have made an authentic partnership. It's good for the Kitsbow brand and good for the business precisely because it is authentic. "The measure is in comments made by our employees, resonance in our

marketing communications, and requests by partners and vendors to find out how they can get involved," the Billstroms said. "Then you know you're doing something right."

Foothills Conservancy is seeking business and community partners who wish to grow and expand ecotourism in our region. Let's continue to make this region of Western North Carolina a great place to live and work, as well as a destination for those who love all our region has to offer. Let's work to grow our communities together.

Opportunities for businesses to support conservation in our region include in-kind and cash donations, sponsorships, partnerships, hosting an event and naming opportunities. For more information on ways your business can get involved, contact Director of Development Pam Hardin at 828-301-5737 or phardin@foothillsconservancy.org.

FOR THE LOVE OF NATURE Photo Contest Winners

Thank you to the talented individuals who shared their outdoor adventures and to the more than 200 people who voted for your favorites. Congratulations to the winners!

1st Place Landscape
Mary Tron - Table Rock in the Snow



1st Place Wildlife
Sue Roussopolous - Monarch Caterpillar



2nd Place Landscape
Trish Keene - Lake James at Sunset



2nd Place Wildlife
Don Williams - Black Bear Crossing



3rd Place Landscape

Sue Crotts
Kids in the Creek
at Linville



3rd Place Wildlife

Linda Bridges
Wild Turkeys



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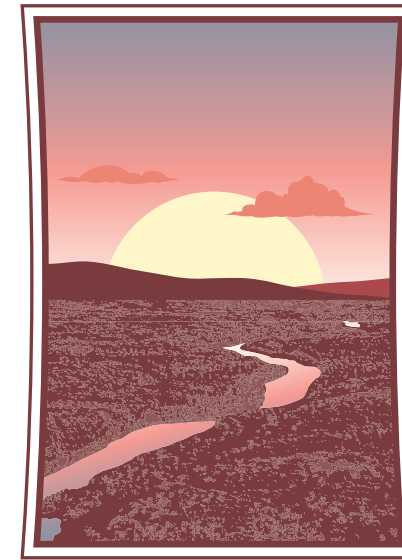
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FOOTHILLS CONSERVANCY OF NORTH CAROLINA

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The Horizon Society honors those supporters who contribute \$1,000 or more throughout the year in support of the mission of Foothills Conservancy and help us keep the Blue Ridge Mountains and foothills beautiful through conservation. Business members of the Horizon Society receive logo recognition in Taproot and on our website.

We are grateful for these conservation leaders who make the preservation of land and water in the Blue Ridge and foothills a priority with their philanthropic giving.

For more information and to become a Horizon Society member, contact Pam Hardin, Director of Development at 828-437-9930 or phardin@foothillsconservancy.org.

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FOOTHILLS CONSERVANCY OF NORTH CAROLINA

PINNACLE SOCIETY

Established in 2008, the Pinnacle Society honors supporters who have:

- Included Foothills Conservancy in their estate plan or will (and have notified the conservancy of this decision).
- Added FCNC as the recipient of an annuity or retirement plan distribution outside of their will.
- Have passed away and left a gift to FCNC in their will.

We are grateful and honored that these individuals have chosen to support the mission and work of FCNC for generations to come. The long-term significance of these gifts creates a legacy of giving for these supporters and their families, making an impact for decades to come.

For more information on the power of planned giving, or for information on planning a gift and becoming a member of the Pinnacle Society, contact Pam Hardin, director of development, at 828-437-9930 or phardin@foothillsconservancy.org.

The following supporters have informed the conservancy that they have chosen to leave a lasting legacy by supporting our work in one or more of the ways listed at left.

Karen Baker

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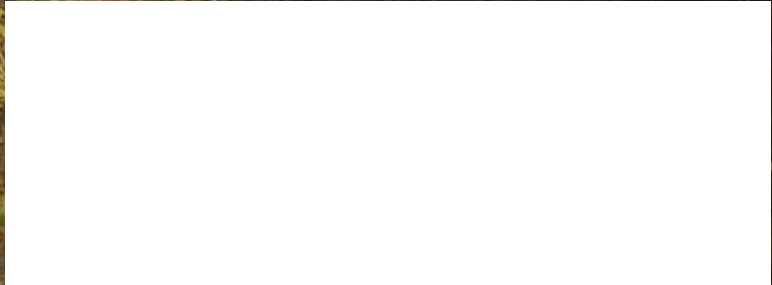
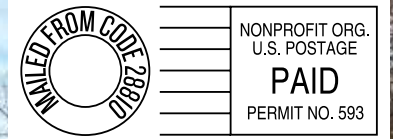
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The staff and board at Foothills Conservancy are grateful for the support of our loyal and dedicated donors, volunteers and partners who generously give their time, talent and resources. Thanks to your support, we have permanently protected over 63,000 acres and built six miles of public trails, with many more to come. Thank you for helping keep our region beautiful for the benefit of all.

Left to right: Tom Kenney, Pam Hardin, Andrew Kota, Rachael Dial, Ryan Sparks, Brittany Watkins, Grayson Barnette