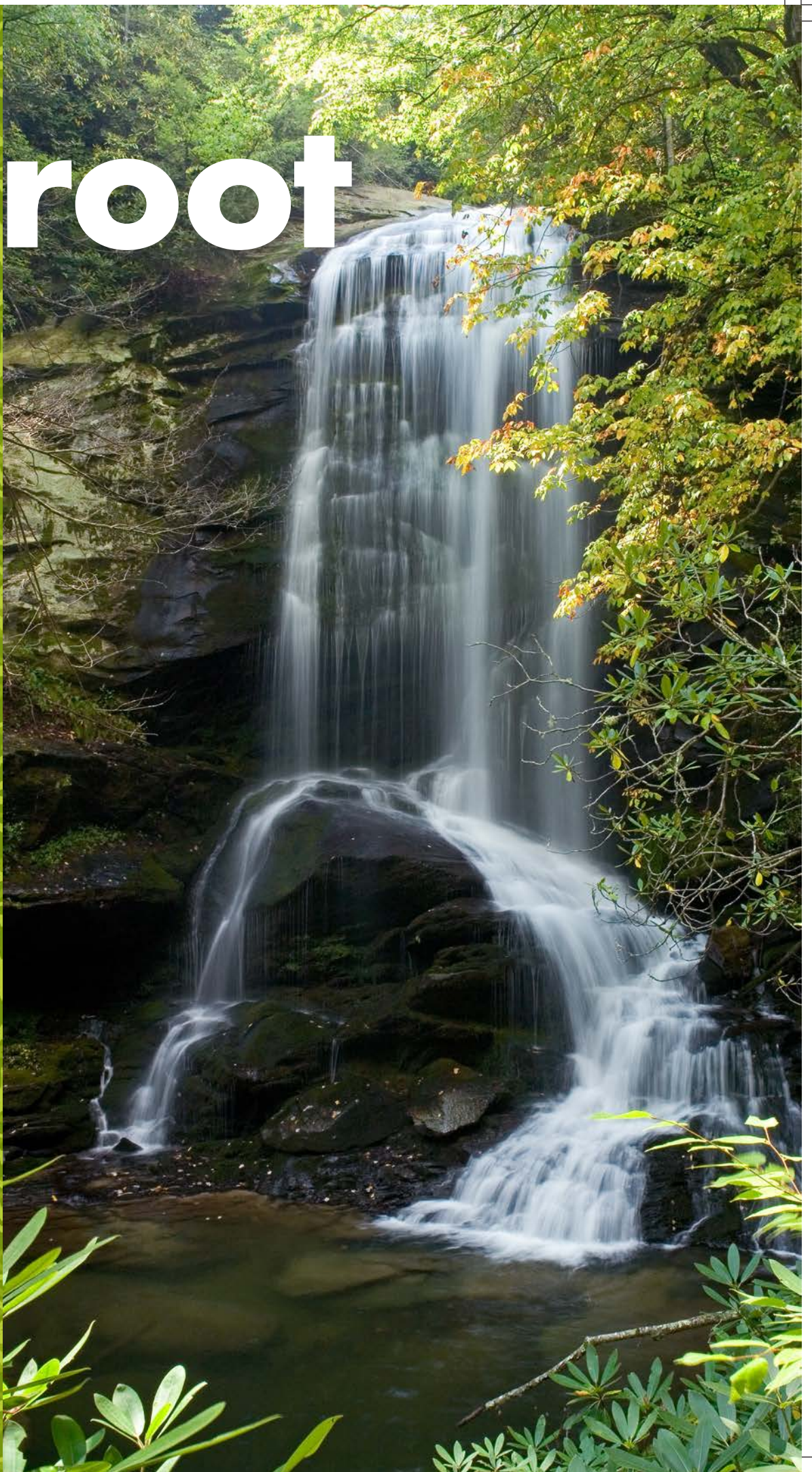


Taproot

**Foothills
Conservancy of
North Carolina
2018**



Taproot

Our Mission

Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina is a nationally accredited regional land trust that protects the fabric and character of Western North Carolina's landscape forever and for the benefit of all.

We preserve the natural and cultural heritage of our region by conserving scenic and recreational landscapes, productive farms and forests, healthy watersheds, rich biodiversity, and vital wildlife habitat.

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

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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**FOOTHILLS
CONSERVANCY**
OF NORTH CAROLINA

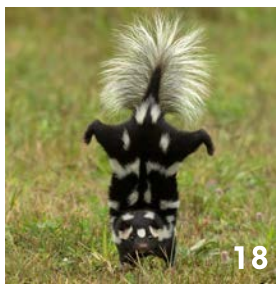
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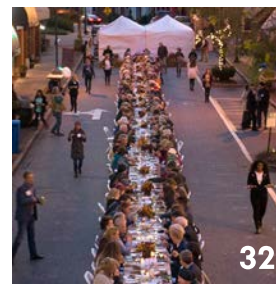
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PHOTOS: Cover by Rich Stevenson, page 19 by AnaRose Hebein; Page 31, Tim Sweeney photo by Steve McBride; page 33, Sweet Lucy's photo by Kathy Kmonicek; page 34 Flavors of the Foothills photos by John Payne.

From the Director



My introduction to the natural world happened in two very different yet equally important ways. The first was at a weeklong, overnight nature camp for sixth graders called REEP (Residential Environmental Education Program) where I hiked trails, learned about being a good environmental steward, and discovered basic ecological processes. The second was in Dr. Mallow's high school biology classroom, where I learned about the amazing intricacies of nature like the Calvin cycle — a set of chemical reactions during photosynthesis (Remember?! You'll be tested on this later). These experiences activated my interest in the natural world and inspired many outdoor adventures, instilling in me a lifelong love of the land and a desire to help protect it.

Fostering similar experiences for kids today can be a challenge, especially given the ever-increasing distraction of phones, tablets and other devices. The importance of wild places may not make it to the top of the list of things we want to teach children, but it should. Introducing young people to nature and teaching them about the environment prepares them to become adults who understand, value and respect the natural world.

Getting people, especially kids, outside is an integral part of our mission to protect "the fabric and character of Western North Carolina's landscape forever and for the benefit of all." How can we ensure that our landscape is forever protected without working to cultivate the next generation of conservationists?

Though the lion's share of our work is, and will continue to be, focused on directly preserving and protecting land and water, we are also adding new programs that focus on people.

The biggest of these "people" projects in 2018 was Our Big Backyard nature camp (read more on page 10). This summer, 43 kids from across our region participated in the weeklong day camp that included visits to places many of them had never been — places like Broughton Pond, Tuttle Educational Forest, the Table Rock Fish Hatchery and the Morganton Farmers Market. It was a powerful week watching those kids learn about our environment and try out skills like fishing or archery that were completely new to them.

Another is the formation of Foothills Conservancy's first volunteer program, which will be spearheaded by our new AmeriCorps Project Conserve service member, Brittany Watkins (read more on page 17). With Brittany in the role of volunteer coordinator, we hope to connect more of you with Foothills Conservancy projects and places, giving you opportunities to help us actively steward the lands entrusted to our care.

I hope that with each summer camp group, each volunteer day, each opportunity we have to provide experiences out on the landscape, we continue to inspire new conservationists who will advocate for the protection of this region's outdoor spaces and wild places, "forever and for the benefit of all."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew".

Andrew Kota
Executive Director

P.S. If you're interested in supporting the summer camp program or would like more information about volunteering with Foothills Conservancy, contact Communications & Outreach Associate Sophie Shelton at 828.437.9930 or sshelton@foothillsconservancy.org.

By the Numbers

Conservation Record

2017: 3,161 acres permanently conserved

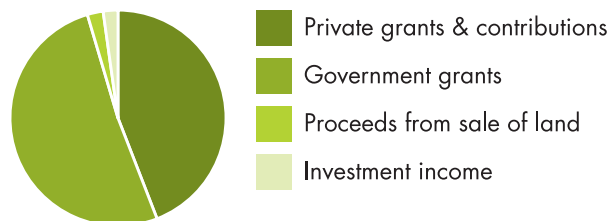
In 2017, Foothills Conservancy and our public and private partners invested \$3,995,505 to protect 3,161 acres in 12 projects, leveraged by \$4,017,383 in donated land value. 1995-2017: 53,815 Acres Protected

Financial Summary

January 1, 2017–December 31, 2017

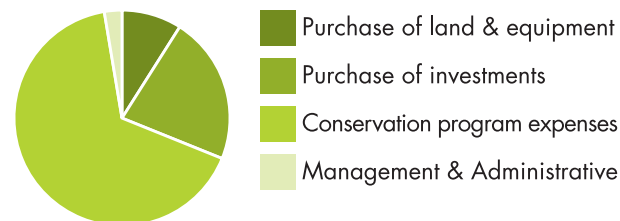
Fiscal Year 2017 Sources of Funds

Private grants & contributions	\$1,902,390
Government grants	\$2,213,362
Proceeds from sale of land	\$102,291
Investment income	\$95,181
Total Source of Funds	\$4,313,224



Fiscal Year 2017 Use of Funds

Purchase of land and equipment	\$418,568
Purchase of investments	\$1,029,953
Conservation program expenses	\$3,085,500
Management and Administrative	\$122,683
Total Use of Funds	\$4,656,704



ASSETS

Current Assets

	2017	2016
Cash & Equivalents	\$3,352,403	\$2,515,857
Receivables	\$6,555	\$103,835
Prepaid Expenses	\$4,360	\$4,567
Total Current Assets	\$3,363,318	\$2,624,259

Long-term Assets

Conservation Property & Equipment	\$8,379,429	\$8,330,092
Total Long-Term Assets	\$8,379,429	\$8,330,092
Total Assets	\$11,742,747	\$10,954,351

LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS

Current Liabilities	\$600,784	\$610,429
Total Net Assets	\$11,141,963	\$10,343,922
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$11,742,747	\$10,954,351

Endowment & Reserve Funds (as of Dec. 31, 2017)

Easement Stewardship Endowment Fund	\$442,616	\$366,042
Preserve Stewardship Endowment Fund	\$138,869	\$107,222
Burke County Endowment Fund	\$65,574	\$59,055
Blue Ridge Foothills Fund	\$1,200,147	\$153,342
Preserve Maintenance Fund BB&T	\$139,781	\$128,791
Land Acquisition Fund BB&T	\$901,970	\$567,049
Legal Defense Fund BB&T	\$116,252	\$104,010
For Now & Forever Fund BB&T	\$113,573	\$546,104
Program & Operations Reserve Fund BB&T	\$299,168	\$567,868

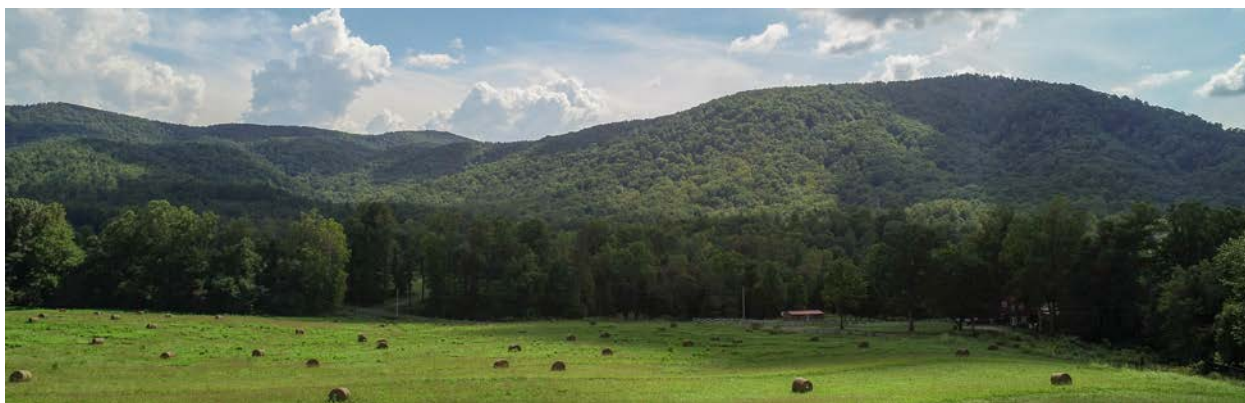


Out of Pocket

Bob, the man, may not be a well-known figure — but, in 2017, his pocket went public, set to become one of the newest additions to the North Carolina State Parks system. Bob's Pocket Wilderness, a 6,000-acre spread of McDowell County forestland, got the go-ahead for state protection last July, changing its official name from Bob's Pocket to Bobs Creek State Natural Area.



Out of Pocket



A bill signed by Governor Roy Cooper identified Bobs Creek as perfect for conservation due to its “significant ... scenic beauty, high-quality natural communities, rare and unusual natural features, and opportunities for natural resource preservation, outdoor recreation, and regional trail connections.”

While a state park provides visitors with outdoor recreation opportunities and facilities like visitor centers and swimming areas, a state natural area focuses primarily on the preservation of natural resources — and Bobs Creek is full of geological and biological treats.

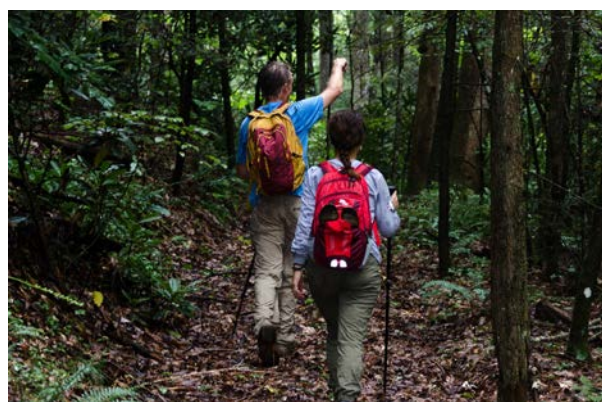
In 2013, Foothills Conservancy was a partner in a study that evaluated opportunities to protect a landscape-scale wildlife corridor across the South Mountains, connecting it to the Blue Ridge Mountains to the west. One of the key components of this conservation corridor focused on this McDowell County wilderness, among other

In the thicket of Bobs Creek State Natural Area, biologists found healthy, natural ecosystems thriving on dry ridges and along numerous springs and streams.

areas. The study determined the significance of several potential conservation sites, and how they could be connected into a continuous wildlife corridor — and it established the region was special for more reasons than one.

In the thicket of Bobs Creek State Natural Area, biologists found sheltered coves and ravines, with unique rock formations. They found healthy, natural ecosystems thriving on dry ridges and along numerous springs and streams — and several rare species of plants and pockets of very mature, uncommon forest types.

Located just south of Marion and Interstate 40, Bobs Creek State Natural Area is currently owned by Tim Sweeney, conservationist, frequent Foothills Conservancy supporter, and founder and CEO of Epic Games. Sweeney is also the owner of the 7,000-acre Box Creek Wilderness, which is protected by a conservation easement held by the U.S.



Fish & Wildlife Service, and the adjacent Vein Mountain property, which connects Box Creek to Bobs Creek.


For years, Sweeney has assisted in Foothills' conservation efforts by purchasing large tracts of land and setting them aside for future preservation projects. This allows Foothills Conservancy and other conservation groups and natural resource agencies the time needed to apply for grants, receive funding, and acquire public lands for permanent conservation.

To add the Bobs Creek State Natural Area to the state park system, Sweeney's land will be purchased directly by the State of North Carolina with funds from Foothills' grants of \$1.42 million from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund and the Open Space Institute's Southeast Resilient Landscapes program, matched by N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund dollars and donated land value. The first phase of this multi-year acquisition will happen by the end of 2018.

Not only does this effort protect wildlife habitat from fragmentation, it also prevents the degradation of water supplies 10, 50, 100 miles downstream.

This project is huge for Foothills Conservancy; it, along with other recently preserved or acquired properties, will help connect large swaths of Western North Carolina's natural areas that are essentially a highway of greenery from the South Mountains to the Blue Ridge Mountains, a core zone of the the consevancy's service area.

Not only does this effort protect wildlife habitat from fragmentation, it also prevents the degradation of water supplies 10, 50, 100 miles downstream.

This addition to state lands will eventually bring new opportunities to outdoor enthusiasts as well. In its previous life as a popular hiking area, Bobs Creek's many trails wound around its hills and streams, allowing visitors a peek at pristine Western North Carolina wilderness. As a State Natural Area, though its purpose would not be solely for recreation, these trails could be redeveloped and maintained for future public use. 

Wild Child

**From July
16-20, the
great outdoors
of Western
North Carolina
got a little bit
noisier and
a lot more
joyous.**



Foothills Conservancy's first-ever summer camp program, Our Big Backyard, transported 43 children ages 8-12 to the wild and wonderful forests that surround us — and the hills echoed with excited shouts and giggles. The camp was free for the 30 children who participated through Foothills Conservancy and, through a partnership with North Carolina Cooperative Extension Burke County Center, 13 more children were able to join in on the fun.

For many of these children, spending a week in the wild was a brand new experience — and, hopefully, the memories

For many of these children, spending a week in the wild was a brand new experience.

made at the camp will instill a deeper love and understanding for natural places.

Each day began and ended at Cooperative Extension, which provided its staff and facilities, served as a home base for the week and was essential to the camp's success. In the morning, campers piled into Cooperative Extension's 14-passenger van and a 35-passenger mini-bus provided, complete with volunteer drivers, by Zion Baptist Church, and ventured to a new and exciting location. In the afternoon, campers returned to Cooperative Extension for a healthy snack and reflected on their day through a journaling exercise.



Wild Child

The first day of camp brought children to Lake James State Park, where participants collected and studied aquatic creatures in Paddy's Creek, a tributary of Lake James. In the early 2000s, Foothills Conservancy helped to expand the wild spaces around Lake James by adding nearly 3,000 acres to Lake James State Park, tying this fun excursion to the organization's work. While hiking the Holly Discovery Trail, the children played a game of "Nature Bingo," identifying native plants along the way. Campers ended the afternoon by cooling off with a dip at the Lake James State Park swim beach.

Tuesday was another day packed full of outdoor activities. During a visit to the Broughton Pond, behind the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission Depot, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

While hiking the Holly Discovery Trail, the children played a game of "Nature Bingo," identifying native plants along the way.

technicians instructed campers on the art of fishing — how to bait their hooks, cast a line, and catch a fish at various depths. Game wardens provided archery equipment and instructions on safety and accuracy, before each child was given the chance to shoot an arrow at a target. Burke County 4-H staff introduced the children to the Japanese art of Gyotaku, or fish printing, by using paint and silicone fish to create works of art. The campers ended their busy day by visiting a local farm and learning about animal husbandry.

On Wednesday, the children visited Tuttle Educational State Forest, where rangers offered an educational lesson about the origins and importance of soil. In early 2018, Foothills Conservancy helped the Tuttle Foundation purchase 20 acres of land (including an important waterway) to buffer



the edge of the state forest — another important connection for campers to learn about the conservancy’s role in protecting our natural world. Hiking the Talking Tree Trail, campers learned all about native trees before heading to the Morganton Mini Farmers Market to purchase fresh produce, plants, and homemade treats. Then it was back to the Cooperative Extension office to learn about the diets and digestive systems of owls through a hands-on dissection of owl pellets.

The following morning, children began the day with sun salutations

A post-camp survey reported that many of these children had never been swimming at Lake James State Park, caught a fish, picked blueberries, or seen a farm.

On the final day of camp, 4-H staff taught campers to make jam from their Perry’s Berry’s blueberries as well as a lesson on baking homemade biscuits. With faces full of jam, the children then learned about another one of nature’s sweetest treats, honey — how it is made and collected, as well as the ecological importance of bees — straight from the beekeepers and the bees themselves.

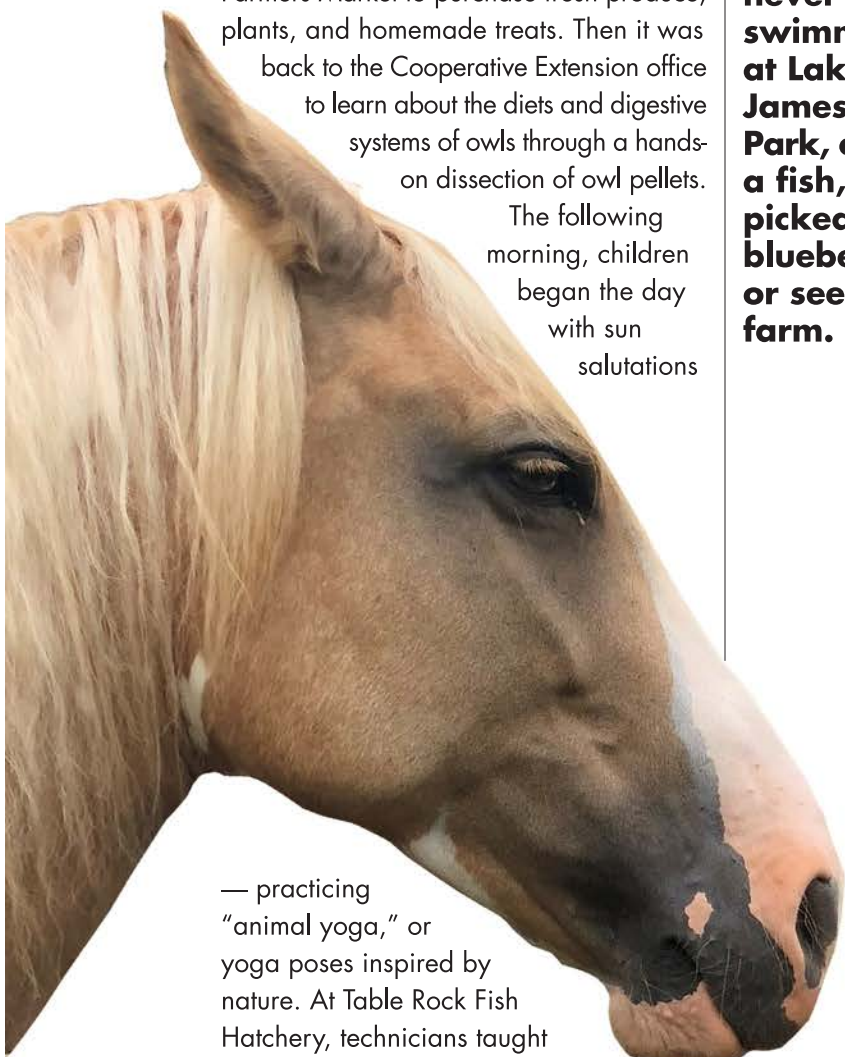
The weeklong camp, including food, T-shirts, supplies and travel, was free thanks to grants from Community Foundation of Burke County, American Fisheries Society, International Paper, Carolinas HealthCare System Blue Ridge, and private donors. Carolinas HealthCare also supplied water bottles and slack bags.

Over the course of the five-day program, campers were treated to lunches generously donated by Food Matters Market - Morganton, Subway of Morganton, and Chick-fil-A of Morganton.

Not only did these 43 children end the week with fun memories and knowledge of the environment, they also brought back jars of jam and honey to share.

A post-camp survey reported that many of these children had never been swimming at Lake James State Park, caught a fish, picked blueberries, or seen a farm — making Our Big Backyard their introduction to many of North Carolina’s natural spaces. 🌿

— practicing “animal yoga,” or yoga poses inspired by nature. At Table Rock Fish Hatchery, technicians taught campers methods for growing and caring for fish that are used to stock public waters. Wildlife biologists demonstrated “creek shocking,” a method of collecting fish samples from creeks, streams, rivers and lakes — and children were able to explore and investigate the samples collected using this method. After lunch, the group ventured to Perry’s Berry’s farm, where campers picked blueberries and met farm animals, including goats and horses.





Preserving the Henry Fork River

Big developments have been unfolding around the Henry Fork River in southeastern Burke County. Piece by piece, property by property, this project is coming together, building off the work of previous expansion efforts. These big developments, however, didn't involve cranes, hardhats or construction materials.



Instead, the expansion focused on conservation — protecting and preserving wild spaces and natural places.

Over the past several years, Foothills Conservancy has been piecing together a preservation puzzle, permanently protecting lands in the Henry Fork River watershed, part of the larger Catawba River Basin, to maintain the quality of this region’s rivers, protect its remarkable biodiversity, and expand public lands.

As both the state’s population and economy continue to grow, more pressure is put on vital waterways and natural assets like these, and, without a targeted effort, the strain could affect the future stability of clean water in North Carolina and beyond.

Currently, Foothills owns more than 4,300 acres of conservation lands in Burke, McDowell and Rutherford counties — with 2,406 of those acres falling in the Henry Fork River watershed. Unlike state parks and forests, conservancy lands aren’t always open to the public, instead focusing on watershed protection and habitat conservation.

“Safeguarding our region’s water supply through watershed land conservation is one of Foothills Conservancy’s highest priorities,” said Andrew Kota, executive director of Foothills Conservancy.

Over the past year alone, the organization has made several more strides in protecting the Henry Fork River watershed, a clean source of drinking water to multiple communities downstream, by conserving more than 1,600 acres in four separate projects.

A collaborative project between Foothills Conservancy and The Conservation Fund resulted in the protection of 1,226 acres in the South Mountains of Burke County between December 2017 and summer 2018. Fourteen parcels of forested watershed lands were transferred to public ownership for management by South Mountains State Park and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.

This large swath of land lies in the headwaters of the Henry Fork River and contains miles of vital tributary streams, including Ivy Creek and Hipp Creek. Made possible by grants from the Open Space Institute, North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund, and the National Fish and Wildlife foundation, these 14 properties — along with other, earlier

Preserving the Henry Fork River

conservation acquisitions — help ensure the continued health of North Carolina’s wild spaces.

In a separate project in June 2018, Foothills acquired 303 acres in the South Mountains of Burke County for permanent conservation. The undeveloped, forested property known as Rock Creek extends the boundary of the conservancy’s South Mountains Headwaters Preserve to Old N.C. 18 (State Road 1924).

Streams on the Rock Creek property drain into both the Henry Fork River watershed and the Jacob Fork River watershed, and the property conserves two waterfalls, habitat for the rare golden banded-skipper butterfly, and a small population of the federally threatened dwarf-flowered heartleaf. Approximately 143 acres of the property are registered with the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program as the South Mountains Pleasant Grove Uplands Natural Area.

Foothills purchased the property at a bargain sale price from conservancy supporter Tim Sweeney, funding the acquisition and transaction costs with a \$291,352 grant from North Carolina’s Clean Water Management Trust Fund, a private contribution from Fred and Alice Stanback, an \$80,000 grant from Open Space Institute, and a small grant from the Community Foundation of Burke County.



The property conserves two waterfalls, habitat for the rare golden banded-skipper butterfly, and a small population of the federally threatened dwarf-flowered heartleaf.

“The Rock Creek acquisition protects several miles of streams on the headwater tributaries of the Henry Fork River and the Jacob Fork River,” said Walter Clark, executive director of the Clean Water Management Trust Fund, “both of which are classified as Outstanding Resource Waters.”

Peter Howell, Open Space Institute’s executive vice president, added: “Protection of the South Mountains will save natural strongholds that will continue to retain or attract plants and animals – not only today, but far into the future. We congratulate Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina on their protection of this amazing place, forever.”

Shortly after the Rock Creek acquisition, in July, Foothills Conservancy added 77 more acres of Burke County wildlands to its Smith Cliffs/Henry Fork River Preserve which, like Rock Creek, consists of acreage registered with the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program. The land, known as the Overstreet Property, was donated to the organization by the same conservationist who sold Rock Creek to Foothills at a bargain price.

“With continued thanks to Tim Sweeney, Foothills Conservancy’s efforts to acquire and conserve important natural areas and rural lands along the Henry Fork River are



growing in impact,” said Tom Kenney, the conservancy’s land protection director.

Just a few weeks later, on August 9, Foothills received an 8-acre donation of undeveloped, forested streamside land along the Henry Fork River from members of the Corbitt family.

The property is dear to sibling-landowners Robert and Susan Corbitt, whose grandfather, Claude Beard Keller, was born near the land and purchased the parcel as an adult, seeing the land not only as an investment but as a testament to his love for all things wild. His adult grandchildren can remember Keller saying: “Land is something that they don’t make anymore.”

And that sentiment stuck, prompting the siblings to donate the property to Foothills Conservancy, forever protecting



“The conservancy is honored that the Corbitt family entrusted us to permanently protect their family land.”

—Andrew Kota

almost a half mile of the Henry Fork River. Kota said that the conservancy is “honored that the Corbitt family entrusted us to permanently protect their family land.”

A goal of Foothills Conservancy’s work in the Henry Fork River watershed is to sustain a healthy, natural landscape for the enjoyment of the region’s residents and prosperity of native wildlife. With the help of Foothills’ partners, donors and grantors, this preservation work ensures the waters of the Henry Fork River will continue to flow clear for the benefit of those downstream. And its land, home to some of North Carolina’s most valuable natural heritage, will continue to offer much-needed refuge to native plants and animals.



Building a Volunteer Army

In September, Brittany Watkins began an 11-month journey with Foothills Conservancy as its first volunteer coordinator, a position that was made possible through Conserving Carolina’s AmeriCorps Project Conserve program.

Project Conserve is a program founded by Conserving Carolina, formerly Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy, as a sector of AmeriCorps, specifically dedicated to meeting environmental needs in Western North Carolina. Members of this program are dedicated to increasing community understanding of conservation initiatives in their local environment.

Together with Foothills staff, Brittany will be responsible for developing a robust volunteer program that will increase the organization’s fundraising, land management, and stewardship capacity through activities such as events and



Foothills Conservancy welcomes its first volunteer coordinator.

outreach, maintaining trails, combating non-native invasive species, and leading river sweeps.

Brittany will help Foothills raise awareness for its conservation work by recruiting and training volunteers — giving community members (or perhaps philanthropic non-locals) an opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the natural world.

Of her new position with Foothills Conservancy, Brittany said: “I am so excited to work with Foothills Conservancy through AmeriCorps to help establish a volunteer program that will bring people together in efforts to protect and sustain the natural environment.”

Though Brittany will only be with Foothills for a limited period of time, her work here will have a lasting impact on the land trust.





Raising a Stink

Never judge a book by its cover, or, in the case of the Eastern spotted skunk, by its smell.

Unlike its well-known striped cousin, the Eastern spotted skunk is small and slender, about the size of a large squirrel, boasting a unique, black-and-white marbled coat. Once thriving in the Appalachians, the American South, and Midwest, the species has seen a drastic decline in population over the last 60 or so years — and no one really knows why.

Recently, though, the weasel-like creature has become a research target for both Clemson University and Warren Wilson College, and both institutions turned to Foothills Conservancy for help.

A vigilant steward for the environment, Foothills Conservancy is dedicated to protecting the Blue Ridge Mountains and foothills, from its endangered flowers to its undeveloped forests and clear waters. The

The species has seen a drastic decline in population over the last 60 or so years — and no one really knows why.

near disappearance of the Eastern spotted skunk gave the conservancy a new reason to protect the natural environment.

Is this skunk endangered in our region — or is it merely hiding?

Warren Wilson graduate Brian Wuertz was on a mission to find out. He developed new, noninvasive snares for collecting hair samples from spotted skunks for genetic research. His study brought him to the South Mountains to locate the species' potential habitat.

That's where Foothills came in, inviting Wuertz to conduct his project on the South Mountains Headwaters Preserve, a conservancy-owned property south of Morganton in Burke County on the eastern side of the South Mountains range.

Wuertz's research yielded a relatively

low-cost method for scientists and wildlife managers to obtain genetic material in hair samples from eastern spotted skunks, making it possible to conduct population analysis and to better inform wildlife management decisions.

As Wuertz completed his project, Clemson University embarked on another study and, once again, Foothills allowed researchers access to the South Mountains Headwaters Preserve in search of the spotted skunk.

"We set traps in February 2018 to determine the preferred den sites of the skunks," said Clemson graduate student Allison Hody. "We put cage traps in stream drainage, oak stands, among pine needles and in rhododendrons."

The results were astonishing.

In just one night, the first few hours of the study, the Clemson research team caught 13 male and two female skunks, all of which were then radio-collared for tracking purposes, allowing the scientists to pinpoint skunk den sites based on movement.


"According to trail cameras on the South Mountains Headwaters Preserve, there is a higher density of spotted skunks

The results were astonishing. In just one night, the first few hours of the study, the Clemson research team caught 13 male and two female skunks, all of which were then radio-collared for tracking purposes.

here than in other places like Pisgah," Hody said. For reference, Pisgah National Forest covers a whopping 500,000 acres of forest, while South Mountains Headwaters Preserve spreads across only about 1,800 acres.

Even with a smaller range to roam, these skunks are thriving in this area for a reason — the diverse landscape. So far, research data has shown that these spotted skunks — or at least the group wearing radio collars — are an adaptable and resilient bunch, indicating the animals' potential as an indicator species for climate change. After being released back into the wild, the collared skunks scattered across the South Mountains, retreating to dens made up of, among other hideouts, rock piles, tree cavities, and downed logs.

"Foothills Conservancy has been a massive help in all of this," Hody explained. "We're excited about the number of skunks we've been able to study on their South Mountains Headwaters Preserve."

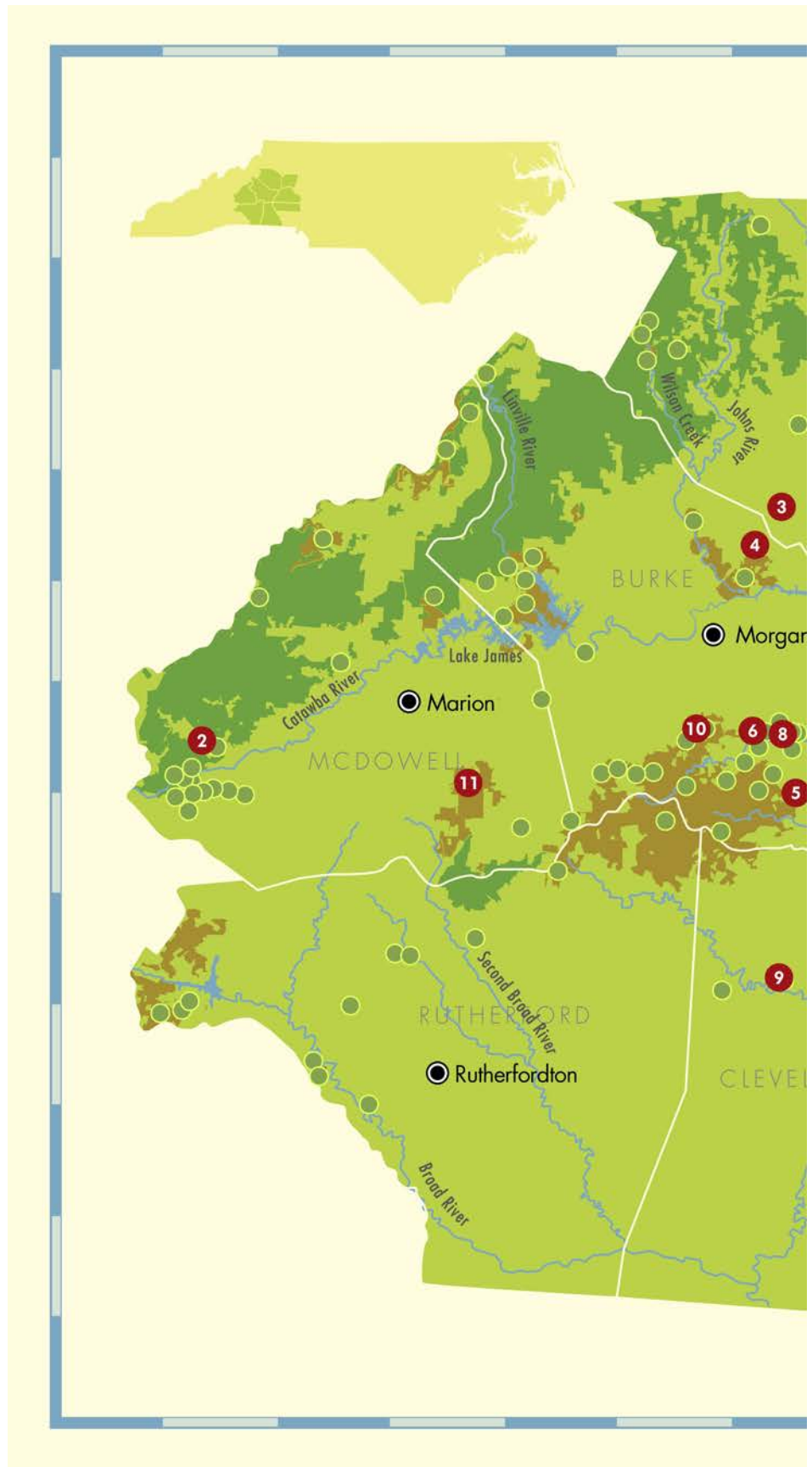
Both the Warren Wilson and Clemson studies were funded, in part, by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. The Clemson research will conclude with a final presentation of findings in 2019. 



Foothills Footprint

Recent projects around our service area

- 1 Valdese Lakeside Park**
302-acre acquisition partnership between Foothills Conservancy and the Town of Valdese resulting in a new town park on Lake Rhodhiss
- 2 Fonta Flora State Trail Expansion**
90-acre acquisition by Foothills Conservancy transferred to North Carolina State Parks to expand the Fonta Flora State Trail near Old Fort
- 3 Tuttle Educational State Forest**
20-acre acquisition partnership between Foothills Conservancy and the Tuttle Forest Foundation
- 4 Bristol Creek Bog**
25-acre donation to North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission facilitated by Foothills Conservancy
- 5 Rock Creek**
303-acre acquisition by Foothills Conservancy expanding our South Mountains Headwaters Preserve
- 6 Henry Fork River – Overstreet**
77-acre donation to Foothills Conservancy expanding our Smith Cliffs Preserve






7 Henry Fork River – Corbitt
 8-acre donation to Foothills Conservancy for future public access

8 Henry Fork River – Simpson
 26-acre acquisition by Foothills Conservancy expanding our Smith Cliffs Preserve

9 Clover Hill Farm (2017)
 192-acre agriculture conservation easement acquisition by Foothills Conservancy and North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund

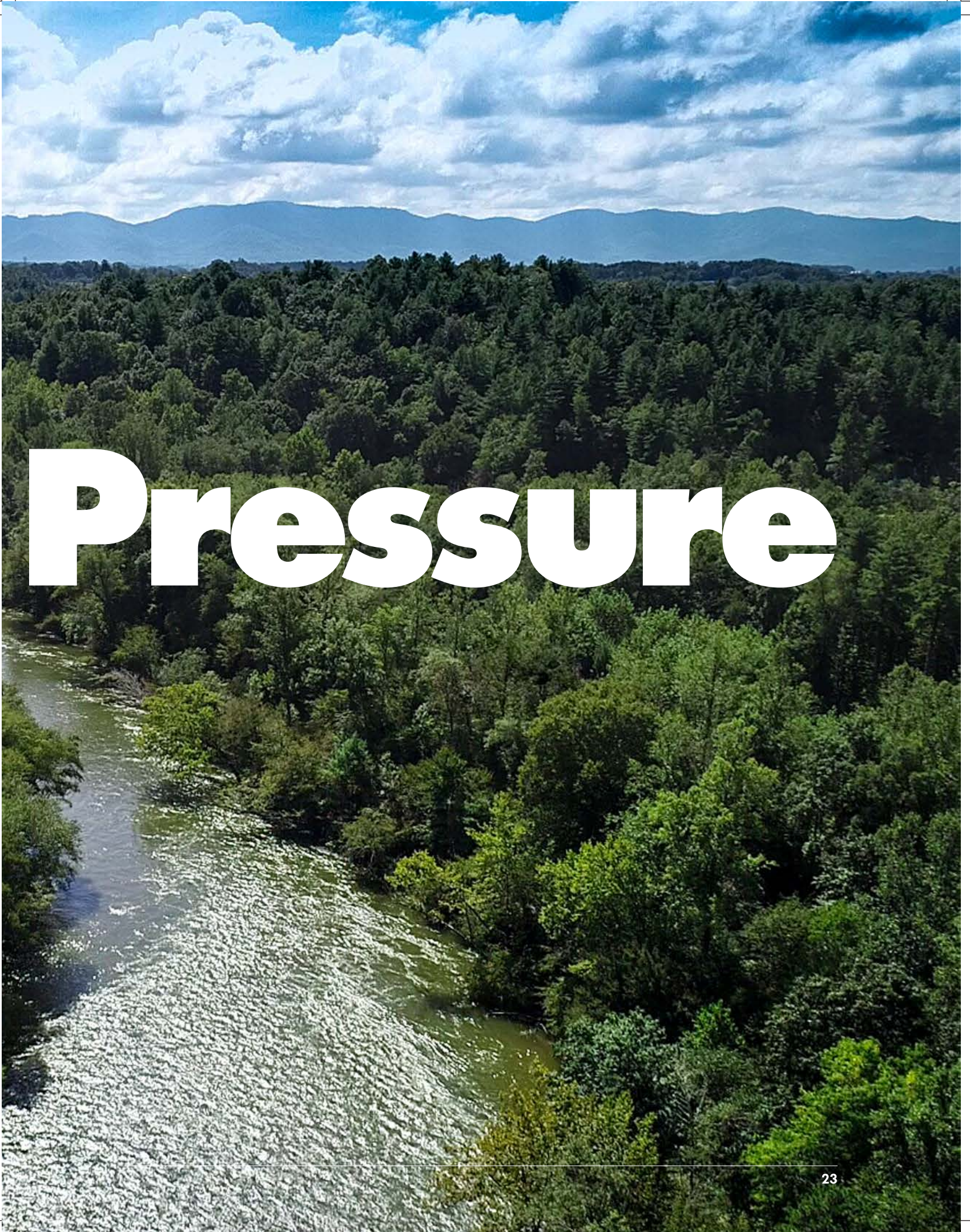
10 South Mountains State Park and Game Lands Expansion (2017)
 1,232-acre acquisition partnership between Foothills Conservancy and The Conservation Fund donated to South Mountains State Park and North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

11 Bobs Creek State Natural Area Phase 1
 1,500-acre acquisition for North Carolina State Parks to create a new public conservation area near Marion in McDowell County



**The Catawba-
Wateree River
supplies 2 million
people with drinking
water. For now.**

Water



Pressure

Water Pressure

The Catawba-Wateree River flows east from McDowell County, winding through its namesake valley, fed by streams and rivers of the Blue Ridge Mountains and South Mountains, onward into a series of reservoirs of the foothills — passing through Burke, Caldwell, Alexander and Catawba counties. As it turns south, it spills into Lake Norman, flowing through the outskirts of Charlotte and across the border into South Carolina, where it later joins with the Santee Basin before washing out to sea at Charleston.

In total, the Catawba-Wateree River flows across 225 miles through 24 counties in two states, with 5,000 combined miles of waterways, containing 11 reservoirs and 14 dams, and supplying more than two million people with drinking water.

But, without preventative measures to protect this natural resource, how many years of clean water in this crucial basin do we have left?

During the federal relicensing process of its hydroelectric power plants, Duke Energy tried to answer that question — and discovered some startling details.

In preliminary studies of this river basin, researchers found that “at our current growth rate — counting for population growth, climate change, future development, and water-use needs — the system was not going to supply enough water by 2050,” said Andrew Kota, executive director of Foothills Conservancy. “The safe yield would not be met. That woke up a lot of people.”

In addition, the region experienced a “drought of record” in 2002 and again in 2007-2008. Duke Energy, along with the water utilities drawing water from the river system, knew they had to act.

This prompted the formation of a Drought Management Advisory Group, along with a Low Inflow Protocol to be implemented during times of drought. Following that, the Catawba-Wateree Water



“At our current growth rate — counting for population growth, climate change, future development, and water-use needs — the system was not going to supply enough water by 2050.”

—Andrew Kota

Management Group (CWWMG) was formed as a nonprofit corporation dedicated to funding projects to protect and enhance our water supply while maintaining the ecological integrity of the waterway. Duke Energy and all 18 municipal utilities that draw water from the river and its reservoirs are members. A number of successful projects have been completed by the Water Management Group, including the development of a Water Supply Master Plan.

Similarly, in 2013, Foothills Conservancy, Catawba Lands Conservancy, and The Conservation Fund formed the Catawba-Wateree Clean Water Initiative to identify and protect watershed lands and forests throughout the Catawba River Basin.

“This is the reality of the situation,” said Vicki Taylor, environmental advisor to CWWMG and lead staff of the Catawba-Wateree Clean Water Initiative. “Even though we’ve always been pretty complacent about being a water-rich state and region, the reality is that we need to change the way we manage our water now so the region can continue to grow and thrive. We need to understand how climate change and development affect our water supply, and figure out how and where watershed land conservation can help protect our water before we experience any major negative impacts to the quality and abundance of our water.”

In early fall 2018, RTI International, a nonprofit research institute, completed a study to determine key, strategic areas where the Initiative should focus its watershed conservation efforts. Funded by the Catawba-Wateree Water Management Group, the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, the Water Research Foundation, and a grant to Foothills Conservancy from Duke Energy’s Water Resources Fund, this study examined the future impacts of land use changes and

climate change on the Catawba-Wateree Basin. Its results will provide recommendations for target conservation areas, along with suggestions for efficient and cost-effective ways to protect both water quality and quantity throughout the watershed.

What's so important about land conservation when speaking about water?

"In places where the land is developed — cities, towns, neighborhoods — water flows over impervious surfaces," Kota said, "and directly into stream channels, oftentimes picking up pollutants along the way." This may increase the amount of water in rivers and reservoirs, but usually only for short periods of time. Little or none of this water is stored in the landscape for discharge at a later date.

"Forested landscapes do a much better job absorbing and filtering that water so it can be cleansed and discharged through creeks and streams over periods of weeks or months — and this can be very important for our water supplies during long, dry periods," he continued. "This is why you still see many creeks flowing during drought, because of the stored water. This study is the first step in developing a strategy to protect some of the most important forested areas for water storage. It's helping us to better understand the hydrologic system across the entire Catawba River Basin and to locate the most important watershed landscapes to protect. Next, we need to develop partnerships at the local and regional levels to make a positive impact."

With the results of this recent study beginning to take shape, it's now up to the study's partners to collaborate with diverse stakeholders in the Catawba-Wateree Basin to plan and fund extensive conservation efforts of critical watershed lands.

And these partnerships, this plan, the



"Water in places like Charlotte or Columbia is connected to what happens on the land miles and miles away in the Blue Ridge Mountains or South Mountains."

—Vicki Taylor

future of our region's water — it all begins with education, Taylor said. "It's something that a lot of folks really have not considered — that water in places like Charlotte or Columbia is connected to what happens on the land miles and miles away in the Blue Ridge Mountains or South Mountains, in the headwaters of the river system."

Kota agreed, adding that future conservation and preservation efforts require a committed team effort from all communities along this basin — all 24 counties across two states.

"A droplet of water that ends up in your glass from your faucet might have originated in the national forest, far beyond your county or municipality," Kota said. "This water doesn't come into existence at the municipal water utility intakes. The entire basin is connected, from upstream to downstream — and it's a much bigger process, a much bigger landscape than just the creek right beside your house or the lake that you visit for recreation."

Over the coming months, the land trusts involved in the Catawba-Wateree Clean Water Initiative will use a grant from the Healthy Watersheds Consortium, which is funded by the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, to transform the results of the study into an action plan. Though the Initiative and its many partners realize it will take years to spread awareness, advocating for the future of the region's water is crucial for future generations and for the region's economy to thrive.

"The next step," Taylor said, "while building this plan that includes counties, towns, utility companies, state and federal agencies, and those working in agriculture and recreation — is to arrive at a consensus on how to put this plan into place and how to fund the continued protection of the Catawba-Wateree River." 



HANDED DOWN

When Myron Edwards looks out across his 192-acre cattle farm, he sees his family story reflected in every rise and ripple of the land. For more than 150 years, Myron's family has owned and tended the land beneath Clover Hill Farm — and he makes his love for both the land and his family abundantly clear.

Strolling around Clover Hill Farm is like stepping back in time. Outside, cattle dot its rolling pastures, and inside his home, old Edwards family photographs line the walls. From the fields of the Cleveland County farm, Myron's ancestors overcame history's hardships — Civil War and Reconstruction, the Great Depression, and the impacts of both World Wars. This family lineage earned Clover Hill its North Carolina Century

Farm status, an honorary title given to farms owned continuously by a single family for 100 years or more.

While being a Century Farm gives recognition to the Edwards family, the designation doesn't protect the farm or ensure its continued prosperity. So Myron, hoping to preserve his family legacy, contacted Foothills Conservancy.

In December 2017, Clover Hill Farm was placed

under a conservation easement with Foothills Conservancy, permanently protecting the land's fertile and productive soils, wildlife habitats, open pasture, and woodlands, along with more than 1.5 miles of surface waters in the Broad River Basin. Clover Hill Farm was one of Foothills Conservancy's 12 conservation projects across five counties in 2017 alone.

Funding for the conservation easement purchase and transaction costs was provided by a \$278,000 grant from the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, a \$17,000 grant from Conservation Trust for North Carolina for stewardship and legal defense, and a \$1,000 grant from the Dover Foundation in Shelby, North Carolina.

Myron himself also contributed funds to the project and donated a portion of the conservation easement value, making him a Foothills Conservancy 2017 Guardian of the Land (read more on page 31).

Back on Clover Hill Farm, Myron flipped through yellowing albums filled with sepia-toned photographs. He's able to recall the names and stories of each family member — even the ones that he never met.

As he recalled these stories, he smiled, cherishing the memories passed from generation to generation, and he even grew emotional when recounting the hard work and sacrifice of his ancestors, driven to tend the same land since 1854.

"Farms are getting harder to come by," Myron said. "This farm has been through several years of hard times, but my family held onto it and sacrificed to keep it. I want to honor the ones who came before me."

Though his Century Farm is full of memories, its vast spaces echoing times of the past, it is through this conservation easement that Myron has hope for the future — envisioning a new family, a new generation of farmers, who care for and maintain the land on Clover Hill Farm. 🌱

"Farms are getting harder to come by. This farm has been through several years of hard times, but my family held onto it and sacrificed to keep it. I want to honor the ones who came before me."

—Myron Edwards





There's more to the Eastern hemlock than meets the eye. Large evergreens, towering above Western North Carolina wilderness, are crucial to the mountain ecosystem — and, for more than 60 years, they've been dying off in increasingly alarming numbers.

Hitching a ride on agricultural imports from Asia in the early 1950s, an invasive insect, the Hemlock woolly adelgid, was introduced to the North American woodlands. Without a natural predator or any means of biological resistance, the sap-sucking adelgid population rapidly spread, wreaking havoc on hemlocks from coast to coast.

Why are hemlocks important? In the summer, their needled branches shade the ground and streams, keeping waters cool enough for native aquatic species to thrive. In winter, the Eastern hemlock is especially important, its dense thicket of evergreen providing animals with vital cover from predators in an otherwise barren forest. Once the adelgids infest a tree, they

sap the life from its needles, completely starving the tree of its nutrients before moving on to their next victim.

Once a dire and seemingly unsolvable problem, environmental organizations recently found hope in the smallest of packages — another Asian bug and a natural predator of the woolly adelgid, the *Sasajicymnus tsugae* (or Sasi, for short).

In April 2018, Foothills Conservancy partnered with Patrick Horan, founder of Saving Hemlocks, to take sustainable action against the invasive, ecologically devastating species. Saving Hemlocks is an organization based in Western North Carolina that promotes biological control of Hemlock woolly adelgid, pitting beetle against beetle in an ultimate showdown to save our forests.

Meeting with Horan on the conservancy's Cane Brake property, part of the Smith Cliffs/Henry Fork River Preserve, Foothills staff got to work identifying hemlock trees in need of treatment, using Horan's keen eye as a guide.

"We are fortunate to have a site with many large, mature Eastern hemlock trees


Pitting beetle against beetle in an ultimate showdown to save our forests.

BELOW: Patrick Horan releases Sasi beetles on a hemlock at the Cane Brake property.

that are still healthy despite the presence of the Hemlock woolly adelgid," said Foothills Conservancy's Conservation Associate Ryan Sparks.

As Horan and Sparks walked through Foothills' property, they identified some instances of hemlocks in trouble, easily spotted by the multitude of fuzzy, white adelgid egg sacs lining the underside of each tree's needles.

Several affected trees on the Cane Brake property were given a healthy dose of Sasi beetles — about 100 bugs per tree. Overall, Horan and Foothills staff released 600 beetles on the preserve. Over the course of the next year, Sparks will revisit these treated trees to monitor adelgid presence and also watch these trees for signs of new growth.

"By taking a proactive approach and releasing these predatory beetles before the Hemlock woolly adelgid has inflicted serious damage to the trees," Sparks said, "we hope to maintain the health of these hemlocks and allow them to continue to flourish at this location." 



Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina


2018 Ruby Award

Susie Hamrick Jones

Each year Foothills Conservancy presents the Ruby Pharr Conservation Volunteer of the Year award, known as the Ruby Award, which is the conservancy's highest honor for volunteer service. The award is named for its first recipient — the late biologist, educator, and wildflower expert Ruby Pharr, one of our founding board members and former board chairman, whose life was devoted to conservation of the natural environment. This year, we are pleased to honor our founding executive director, Susie Hamrick Jones, as the 2018 Ruby Award recipient.

Susie's history with Foothills Conservancy dates back to its very conception. She was among the land trust's founding board members in 1995 when it

incorporated as South Mountains Coalition. Susie became Foothills Conservancy's first paid employee, taking the reins as executive director in 1997, and she always poured her heart into its work, going above and beyond the call of duty to foster its success.

"From her earliest days with the grassroots effort that became Foothills Conservancy, Susie worked tirelessly as an advocate of land and water conservation in the eastern Blue Ridge Mountains and their foothills," said Ron Beane, conservancy board chairman. "Her savvy for coalition-building brought together communities, agencies, and nonprofit organizations to save some of the largest undeveloped lands in the region, many of which have now become beloved public lands." 

Susie Hamrick Jones with 2012 Guardian of the Land Gresham Orrison



Guardians of the Land

Foothills Conservancy's Guardians of the Land are landowners who choose to protect their properties by donating conservation easements, in full or in part, or by donating their land in fee to permanently protect the places they love. We are pleased to recognize Tim Sweeney, Philip Blumenthal, Myron Edwards, and Susan and Robert Corbitt as our newest Guardians of the Land.



Tim Sweeney

Overstreet Property, 77 acres

Tim Sweeney of Cary, North Carolina, has been a conservation partner of Foothills Conservancy for many years. His donation of a 77-acre property on the Henry Fork River to the conservancy in 2018 added to the vast number of acres and river miles he has already helped protect (read more on page 14).



Myron Edwards

Clover Hill Farm, 192 acres

Myron Edwards was born and raised in Cleveland County, on the 192-acre farm that has been owned by his family for over 150 years. Edwards chose to place a conservation easement on his farm with Foothills Conservancy in late 2017 to permanently protect the land's pastures, woodlands and water (read more on page 26).



Philip Blumenthal

Wildacres Retreat, 1,076 acres

As director of Wildacres Retreat Center, Philip Blumenthal knew for many years that he wanted to permanently conserve the property. And for good reason — Wildacres provides a refuge for species on the move during periods of climate change, serves as a community meeting place, and is a historic landmark.

As of December 2017, the 1,076-acre property is protected by two conservation easements — a state-held Clean Water Management Trust Fund easement and a second held by Conservation Trust for North Carolina. These easement lands, monitored by Foothills, will protect the headwaters of the Catawba River.



Susan and Robert Corbitt

Corbitt Property, 8 acres

Siblings Robert and Susan Corbitt have lived most of their lives in Oxford, North Carolina. Their great-grandparents John and Jane Keller, grandfather Claude Keller, uncle Lee Keller and mother Ruby Keller Corbitt, instilled Susan and Robert with an appreciation for the natural environment and the desire to be responsible landowners and land stewards. In 2018, the Corbitts donated 8 acres of land along the Henry Fork River to Foothills Conservancy to protect the river for future generations (read more on page 14).

OUT

OF

OFFICE

A year's worth of fundraising and fun

Fourth Annual Acres and Ales

Foothills Conservancy was astounded by the outpouring, both literal and metaphorical, of support at the fourth annual Acres and Ales fundraiser on March 24. Brown Mountain Bottleworks was extremely generous in not only hosting, but also donating \$1 for every pint sold at the event, and providing swag for raffles.

West Union Art Studios and Downtown Morganton also donated raffle items of handmade local pottery and downtown bucks. Local bands Two Crow Moon and Sycamore Bones filled the taproom with mountain music, and Homer's Soda Shop served delicious barbecue.

Foothills Conservancy is extremely grateful for the continued support of Brown Mountain Bottleworks and all partners in conservation who helped raise over \$1,100 at Acres and Ales!



Inaugural Proceeds For Land Protection

On June 2, Foothills Conservancy celebrated Land Trust Day with a brand new fundraiser, Proceeds for Land Protection. The following businesses in Morganton, Marion and Hickory donated a portion of their June 2 sales to the conservancy: art and soul, Benjamin's and Libba's, Breathe Yoga & Wellness, Brown Mountain Bottleworks, Catawba Brewing Co., Craft Beer Cellar Hickory, The Dapper Doughnut - Morganton, Fonta Flora Brewery, Gregory Jewelers, The Grind Cafe, Hamilton Williams Gallery & Studio, Homer's Soda Shop, Kathryn's Custom Framing, Moondog Pizza, The Nook Homebrew and Tavern, Patterson's Amish Furniture, Refinery 13 Taproom, root and vine, and Treat.

Together, these generous businesses raised over \$2,800 for land and water resource conservation!

Sixth Annual Sweet Lucy's Affair

Thirteen Lake James communities were represented at Sweet Lucy's Affair on September 15. Guests enjoyed an intimate celebration with delectable food, craft beer, wine, acoustic music, and fellowship, all while raising funds and awareness for Foothills Conservancy. Ticket sales, contributions from the Sweet Lucy's Leadership Circle, a generous sponsorship by Benthos and additional donations to the event resulted in a record-breaking \$60,000 raised!

This incredible fundraiser was made possible through the dedication and generosity of many local people and businesses including Fonta Flora, which donated delicious beer, the Morganton Community House, which provided a medley of side dishes, and

Richard and Catherine Turner, who stole the show with their ever-amazing barbecue.

We would like to offer special thanks to the Sweet Lucy's Affair Leadership Circle:

Jim & Tammy Basinger
 Steve & Mary Boehm
 Bill & Gwen Bradley
 Javier & Yngrid Chacon
 Philip & Annette Chamberlain
 Tom & Geneva Coffey
 George & Ann Costello
 Rick & Danyel Harris
 Rob & Katie Kirby
 Joe & Kate Lagedrost
 Paul & Jan Lokie
 Jeff & Carol MacKinney
 Ed McMillan & Margie Divish
 George & Paula Moore

Steve & Lisa Nikrant
 Chuck & Jerelen Ohrt
 Gresham Orrison & Susie Hamrick Jones
 Jeremy & Virginia Purbrick
 Douglas Robinson & Inez Serventi
 Tim Roush & Jennifer Kersten
 Jeff & Linda Schilling
 Richard & Catherine Turner
 Jim & Jean Veilleux
 Doug & Liz White
 Chip & Martha Whitfield
 Steve & Janie Witte



Out of Office

Ninth Annual Flavors of the Foothills

This annual fall benefit took to the streets! On October 27, guests enjoyed beer, wine and appetizers while bidding on a wide variety of handmade items and exciting experiences during our auction at the Morganton Community House before making their way to a locally sourced feast in the streets of downtown Morganton.

Farmers, artisans and homesteaders contributed all things local to the authentic farm-to-fork dinner served on a long harvest table, set in the middle of West Union Street in downtown Morganton. This celebration featured locally raised meats, cheeses, bread and produce and raised \$40,000 for land and water resource conservation!

Made possible thanks to the evening's hosts:

Blue Ridge

Equinox Environmental
Randy & Lea Loftis
Gresham Orrison & Susie Hamrick Jones
Janet Wilson
Chip & Martha Whitfield

Foothills

Ron & Christine Beane
George & Ann Costello
Jeff & Carol MacKinney
Morganton Humanist Alliance
Table Rock Pharmacy

Preserver

BB&T
Andrew Blumenthal
Robin Brackett
Curtis Braswell & Peg Broyhill
Sallie Craig
Foothills Marine
Tom & Sandra Foster

Lex & Michelle Garey
Jim Goldsmith
Andrew & Shannon Kota
Bob & Susan Powers
Gordon & Judy Scott
Jim Sitts
Squeak & Connie Smith
Mike & Lynne Tanner

A special thank you to our growers: Blue Ridge View Farm, Bluebird Farm, Brown Mountain Bottleworks, Fonta Flora Brewery, Food Matters Market - Morganton, Forget-Me-Not Farm, J & J Farm, The Natural Olive, and Perry's Berry's.

Additional thanks for the support provided by the City of Morganton Main Street Office and the Morganton Farmers Market, and to Curbside Composting, Freedom High School International Club, Patton High School Anchor Club, Morganton Community House, and Simply Green Recycling.





Summer Appeal Update

This summer our supporters contributed just over \$40,000 to unlock a \$40,000 matching pledge from three donors—including von Drehle Corporation—and reach our \$80,000 goal. The Foothills Conservancy staff and board of directors are sincerely grateful for all who donated to the summer challenge. This successful campaign confirms our supporters' commitment to our land trust work and to the lasting protection of our region's land and water resources, outdoor recreation opportunities, outstanding biodiversity, and economic vitality. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you!

Get Ready for #GivingTuesday

We are kicking off our year-end fundraising on Giving Tuesday, November 27. Giving Tuesday is a global day of giving at the beginning of the holiday season, fueled by social media. Help us reach our goal of 50 contributions in a single day. Mark your calendar and tune in to our social media channels where we'll be reporting giving stats all day!

Need more time for your year-end gift planning? Don't worry — we will gladly accept your traditional year-end contributions through December. Watch your mailbox for a letter from us in early December.

Qualified Charitable Distributions

If you are over the age of 70, the government requires you to take annual distributions from your retirement account—a provision known as the required minimum distribution. Up to a certain amount, these distributions may be made tax-free as long as they are directed to a qualified 501(c)(3) organization like Foothills Conservancy—an option known as the qualified charitable distribution. Work directly with the custodian of your retirement account to take advantage of this opportunity.

Thank You

GIVING LEVELS

Horizon Society

Heritage	\$10,000+
Legacy	\$5,000+
Patron	\$2,500+
Benefactor	\$1,000+
Steward	\$500+
Preserver	\$250+
Protector	\$100+
Conservator	\$50+
Friend	\$35+

HERITAGE

Steve & Mary Boehm
Myron Edwards
Jeff & Carol MacKinney
Marilyn 'Dee' North
Gresham Orrison & Susie Hamrick Jones
Fred & Alice Stanback
Timothy Sweeney
Chip & Martha Whitfield
Janet Wilson

LEGACY

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Community of Lake James
Crescent Communities, LLC
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Jacques & Diane Geitner
Hickory Toyota
Scott Lewis
Dan & Lisa Oberer
Clay & Joani Richardson
Laura Ervin Smith
Brad & Shelli Stanback

PATRON

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George & Ann Costello
Mike & Joella Fulenwider
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Roby & Julie Braswell
Brown Mountain Bottleworks
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Andrew & Jean Canada
Henry & Maude Cantrell
Javier & Yngrid Chacon
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Rountree & Ellen Collett
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Bruce & Debbie Hershock
James Houle
Winston & Laura Hoy
Robert & Katie Kirby
Joe & Kate Lagedrost
Randy & Lea Loftis
Ellen Losch
Steve & Janie Matthews
Edward McMillan & Margie Divish
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Douglas Robinson & Inez Serventi
Jim & Linda Rostan
Tim Roush & Jennifer Kersten
Tom & Leslie Ruckdeschel
Robert & Mary Marcia Salsbury
Gordon & Judy Scott
Faye Spangler

Table Rock Pharmacy
Richard & Catherine Turner
Vulcan Materials Co. Mideast Division
Ed Wall
Doug & Liz White
Steven & Janie Witte

STEWARD

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Ray & Dawn Barnette
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Thomas & Patti Moore
Graham & Bobbie Morgan
Morganton Humanist Alliance
Gary Morrow
Patrick Mucklow
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Gerry & Margaret Nieters
Jerry & Barbara Norvell
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Steve & Judy Padgett
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Monroe Pannell
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Dawn Poore
Nancy Pope & Jacklyn Tatelman

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Foothills Conservancy's Pinnacle Society recognizes thoughtful people who have chosen to leave a lasting legacy of land and water conservation through a bequest to the conservancy in their will or by naming the conservancy as a beneficiary of a life insurance policy or retirement plan such as an IRA. We honor and thank these generous forward-thinking individuals. For more information on making a planned gift to Foothills Conservancy and becoming a member of the Pinnacle Society, please call Beth Willard-Patton, associate director, at 828.437.9930.

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For more than 20 years, hundreds of dedicated volunteers and donors have championed the mission of Foothills Conservancy. The past and ongoing work of conserving the land, water and

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Left to right: Sophie Shelton, Isaac Crouch, Tom Kenney, Andrew Kota, Ryan Sparks, Beth Willard-Patton