



make
the
connection



A Mid-year Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friend,

With your help LTLT has become the chief motivating force for incredibly important work in the Southern Blue Ridge—conserving forest and farmlands, restoring waterways, and connecting people to our region's rich natural and cultural heritage and to each other.

We can readily quantify the *conserve* and *restore* aspects of our mission, but the success of *connecting* people to their natural resources is harder to tally. Who can measure the far-reaching impact of seventh-graders, standing in the clear rushing water of Tessentee Creek and excitedly spotting a wriggling, young hellbender—a creature witnessed by few? You hope their 13-year-old minds remember the important lesson of how this conserved land and restored stream created ideal habitat for this giant salamander. But, realistically, we know it is the pure excitement they'll remember and carry home to their families. Yet that is success. The experience will forever connect those children to the wonders of the natural world. (see below)

This year LTLT will connect about 3,000 people to nature through the educational programs your donations support. We'll expand urban restoration along the Little Tennessee River (see below) and undertake other long-range land protection projects that may require seven or more years to complete, such as the critical Stateline Wetland project (below). **You are the reason LTLT can confidently take on these challenging projects.**

As you consider your donation to LTLT this year, think of all we can accomplish together to help shape the future of these mountains. Your strong support is very important.

Sharon Fouts-Taylor



Photo: Ross Pringle

Legend has it that hellbenders, the largest salamander species in North America, got their name from fishermen who said they look “like they crawled out of hell and are bent on going back.”

P.S. Thank you for returning the enclosed response card. I hope to see you this fall at one of the three events LTLT is hosting (see back) to share exciting news!

Heaven for Hellbenders

Prehistory comes alive at Conservation Field Day.

Hellbenders—widely considered one of the coolest creatures to see in these mountain rivers—have been around for about 65 million years. These giant salamanders, *Cryptobranchus a. alleganiensis*, breathe through their skin, so they make their homes in clear, rocky stream bottoms. Over the years, their numbers have dwindled drastically as their habitat has been

significantly degraded by mud and silt washing into the region's mountain streams.

Such was the case with Tessentee Creek, where experts believed that the lower end of the creek might be a lost cause to ever have habitat suitable for hellbenders, even after a costly restoration.

Luckily, they didn't tell the hellbenders...



Photo: Freshwaters Illustrated



On this beautiful spring day biologists found a three-inch long juvenile hellbender, making his home in the newly restored cobblestone stream bottom. Imagine the excitement of the middle-schoolers when they saw this wriggling, prehistoric creature!

Conserve: In late April, LTLT hosted Conservation Field Day, an interactive education event, on its 60+ acre Tessentee Bottomland Preserve. Purchased in three separate transactions since 1999, this property lies at the confluence of Tessentee Creek and the Little Tennessee River. With an extensive trail system for hikers, it is also stop #53 on the North Carolina Birding Trail.

Restore: Through a collaboration with a national non-profit and local and federal agencies, 2,000 feet of Tessentee Creek that border LTLT's property have been restored this year, creating a more stable flow. The sloped banks were rebuilt and the adjacent farmer has installed fencing and alternative watering sources for his cattle.

Connect: The 2015 Conservation Field Day included 260 seventh-graders from Macon Middle School and Trimont Christian Academy. The event is organized to raise the students' awareness of the amazing natural resources found in western North Carolina. LTLT partners with eight local, state and federal agencies for this event each year.

We Bag a Big Bog

Thanks to your support, LTLT saves a crucial mountain habitat.

With thick layers of soggy vegetation covering an underbelly of black mud, bogs are not visually appealing to most people. Still, wetlands are as important to our landscape as the rushing rivers and gorgeous mountain views.

Located at the headwaters of the Little Tennessee River in Rabun County, Georgia, near the North Carolina border, this mountain bog acts as a natural water purification system, filtering out silt and playing a significant role in flood control. Wetlands are among the most biologically diverse of all ecosystems, supporting an amazing variety of plants—272 different species have been inventoried on the “Stateline” wetland so far.

Southern Appalachian mountain bogs like this are the most endangered wetland ecosystem in the southeastern United States—it is estimated that only 10 percent of original Southern Appalachian bogs remain, covering fewer than 500 acres.



Protecting the Bog Candles

Easily identifiable within a wetland because of their beautiful yellow blooms, Bog Candles (*Lysimachia terrestris*) are critically imperiled in Georgia. Botanist Tom Patrick of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources says, “While Bog Candles occur in all types of wetlands in the northern parts of their range—New England, New York, Canada—they are found in only two or three sites in Georgia. To me, Bog Candles represent a common northern plant reaching its southern limits in the Southeast, existing here in only the cooler mountain bog and natural, shallow, swampy pond margins of extreme northern Georgia. Thank you LTLT for protecting the Stateline Bog, where rare plants like this can thrive.”

Conserve: Working with numerous partners over seven years, LTLT completed the purchase of a permanent conservation easement on the 11.7-acre stateline wetland in April. The unique property is owned by Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School. Funding for the conservation easement was provided through the Georgia Land Conservation Center.

Restore: LTLT has worked extensively to remove exotic and invasive plants from the property. Further work will be done to restore this formerly drained wetland to a more natural condition (with the help of beavers, whose activities significantly aid in the process)!

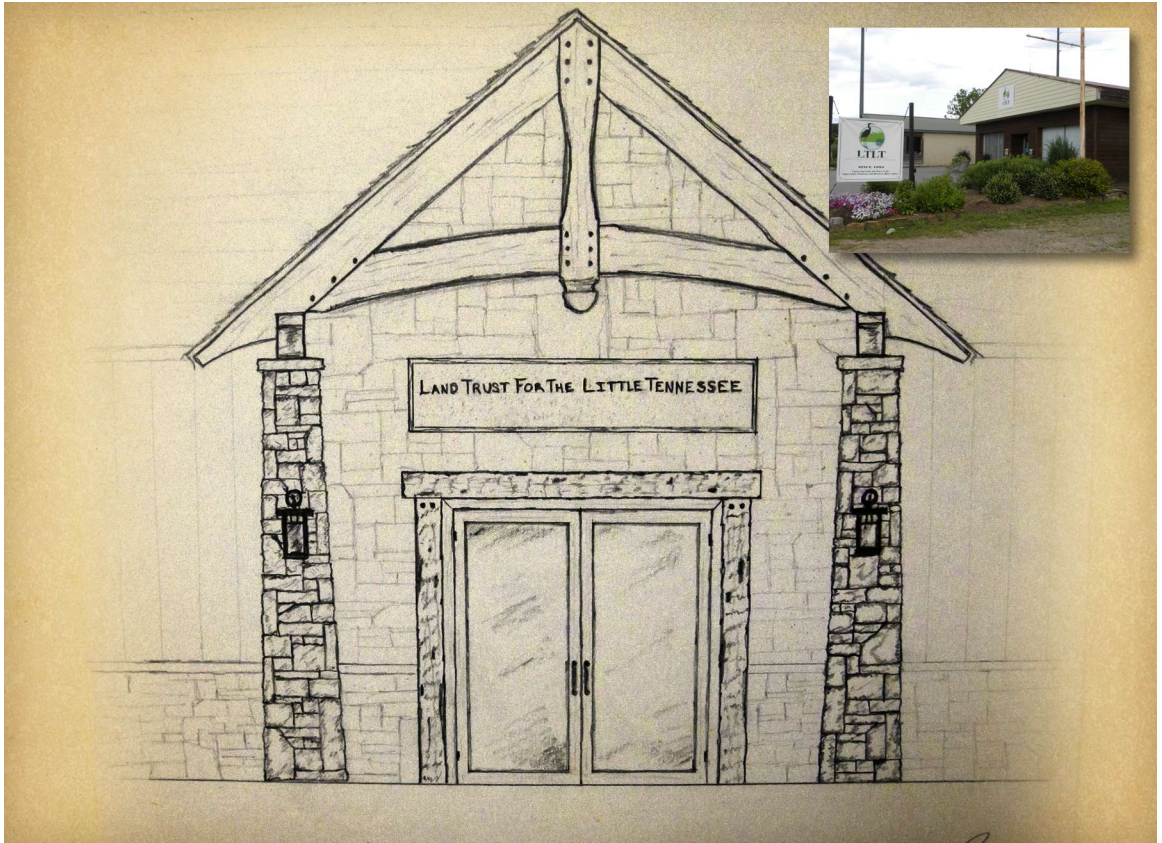
Connect: Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School, a college preparatory day and boarding school serving students in grades 5-12, reserved rights to build hiking trails, boardwalks and observation platforms to lead educational tours and scientific studies on the property.

Home Improvement

LTLT's headquarters is now permanent, and changes are on the way.

Three years ago, LTLT relocated its growing staff to a 1,200-square-foot building located along its namesake river in downtown Franklin. At that time, adequate space was the priority. But as LTLT staff began to use

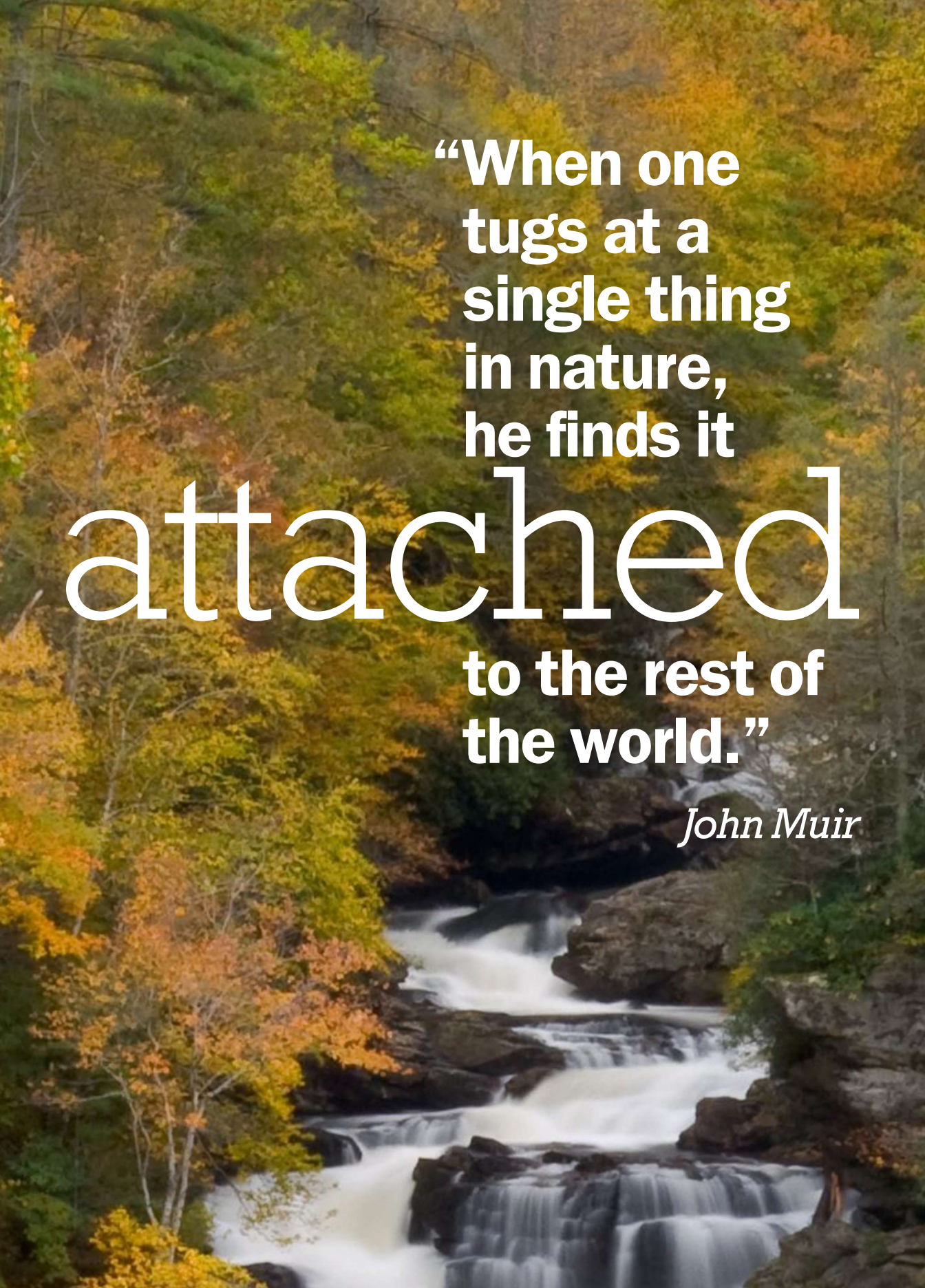
the adjacent greenway for walking meetings and saw the potential for boosting economic development by improving this "gateway to downtown," the building began to take on new possibilities.



Conserve: Purchased in May 2015 with a locally secured loan, LTLT's now-permanent home lies within 100 yards of the Nikwasi Mound, the heart of the Cherokee village around which the town of Franklin was founded. Nikwasi is the southern terminus for LTLT's Nikwasi to Cowee Cultural Corridor project which focuses on economic development, environmental, cultural and historical assets.

Restore: In addition to several renovations inside the building to better suit the needs of LTLT's staff, plans are in place to join the property with the adjacent brownfield lot LTLT purchased in April 2015. Once cleanup of the contaminated ground is complete, the property will be repurposed to include river access, green space with native landscape, and examples of modern technology that can treat storm water and reduce runoff into the river.

Connect: By connecting the brownfield property with the office lot, this small campus will include revamped indoor and outdoor meeting spaces. On-site programming for youth and adults in an easily accessible place is part of the overall strategic plan.



**“When one
tugs at a
single thing
in nature,
he finds it**

**attached
to the rest of
the world.”**

John Muir

Save the date

Join us for an LTLT
event near you!

Thursday, October 22
Cherokee/Clay Counties

Saturday, October 24
Macon County

Tuesday, October 27
Jackson County

*Times and locations
to be announced.*

Read more of our stories at
www.ltl.org.



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