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From the Board Chair

As I reflect on the past year with Mainspring Conservation Trust, the phrase "conservation in action" comes to mind. I see so many accomplishments in conserving our land, water and cultural heritage in western North Carolina and am excited to share some of them with you in this *Land Steward*.

Mainspring's board of directors and our extraordinary staff have made strides in each of these areas. Still, the common theme for every successful project is the generosity of supporters like you, and you can learn more about how Mainspring leverages your donations on page 4.

Your gifts of time, talent and resources are very much appreciated and valued. In this issue, we're highlighting a donor couple and a volunteer, who share why they support Mainspring's work. Everyone's motivation may be a little different, and we hope their perspectives inspire you as much as they did me.

We are just the stewards of this beautiful mountain environment, and it is critical that we preserve it for our children, grandchildren and future generations. We are the example they will follow as they develop and nurture their relationship with the land, water and cultural heritage of our region.

With much gratitude,

Connie

Connie Haire, Chair

Mainspring Conservation Trust

Board of Directors

P.S. I encourage you to continue your annual donations and consider increasing your gift amount to further the work of Mainspring in the years to come.

Cover photo: Ralph Sargent (1904-1985) photographed this Bigleaf Grass-of-Parnassus (*Parnassia grandifolia*) in Highlands, North Carolina, on October 1, 1961.

The annual publication about the activities of Mainspring Conservation Trust

November 2018



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Back to Nature

Mainspring watches an abused and overused piece of land take a seven-year journey back to viable natural habitat.

Managing Welch Farm

Basic maintenance costs like mowing, managing invasive species and road repairs are expenditures that must be factored in to any land trust acquisition.

tretched along the Valley River, a mile and a half west of the Andrews airport in Cherokee County, Mainspring's 57-acre Welch Farm boasts a variety of uses. Along with its cultural importance, Welch Farm is leased for farmland, provides paddlers with river access, and contains both hiking trails and a hunting area.

Since its acquisition in 2011, the farm has slowly morphed from bare, overused land to a highly productive habitat for wildlife. Mainspring worked with numerous partners to restore ecological health to the diverse property, including bringing much of the wetland back to its natural state.

But these restorations brought unique management challenges.

"Six years ago, our plan was to let the land regenerate itself, and it responded really well," says Hiwassee Programs Manager Sara Posey. "Now, because of the exceptional growth rate, we're finding it a challenge to manage the land."

As any property owner knows, owning land costs money — even land considered "unimproved" by real estate standards. Basic maintenance costs like mowing, managing invasive species and road repairs are expenditures that must be factored in to any land trust acquisition when it opens the property for public access. Add in

Volunteers prepare to conduct a comprehensive biological survey of Mainspring's Welch Farm property.



the property, including kiosks, picnic tables, kayak access, trails or tree plantations, and it's easy to see how amount may fluctuate depending on actual donations received to its annual fund



[NO.1]

Wingstem
Water-Primrose
Ludwigia decurrens



"Our plan was to let the land regenerate itself, and it responded really well. Now, because of the exceptional growth rate, we're finding it a challenge to manage the land."

Sara Posey, Hiwassee Programs Manager

quickly staff time and expenses can add up.

Mainspring currently manages its public access properties through a single line item in its budget, paid for primarily through unrestricted gifts. The goal is to have a minimum of \$15,000 available each year to manage all of Mainspring's publicly accessible properties. However, that

In July, Mainspring used some of its management funds for a biological survey on Welch Farm, providing a baseline of important features that are present now, after the seven years of restoration work. The scientific findings (see "Survey Says," next page) were the initial step toward developing a framework for understanding and documenting the



[NO.2]

Long-tailed Skipper Urbanus proteus



ecological trajectory of Welch Farm and for planning how best to manage it.

Posey says she hopes the new management plan will focus available financial investments into the property where it's most needed. "The Welch Farm is such a special property with so much potential," she explains. "I'd love to see it become an outdoor educational center, possibly for university-level research projects. It would be great to see botany students here, conducting studies that can impact farmers or hobby gardeners. Having a management plan will keep us on track with the priorities needed to keep it special for years to come."

Survey Says...

The biological survey of Welch Farm produced some surprising results.

KELDER MONAR
Stewardship Associate, Mainspring

elch Farm is a special place biologically. Few others along the Valley River can boast its oxbow, alluvial forest and canebrake communities. Fewer still are permanently protected from riverfront development. A comprehensive biological survey, conducted in July at Welch Farm, revealed several uncommon plants and animals living in this wet bottomland.

Wingstem water-primrose (Ludwigia decurrens) loves low, moist

sites and can even grow in standing water. In late summer and fall, it produces yellow flowers which become boxy seed capsules.

The long-tailed skipper (*Urbanus proteus*) is a striking butterfly, with iridescent blue and black wings ending in long, elegant tails. It lives in brushy, open habitats. The variety of flowering plants at Welch Farm provide nectar for adults, while the hog peanut vine supports the larvae.

Butternut (Juglans cinerea) is a tree with a long human history. Its bark was once (and is still) used by Cherokee to produce a yellow dye,



[NO.3]

Butternut Juglans cinerea





[NO. 4]

Green Ash
Fraxinus pennsylvanica



Sadly, the surveyors discovered that emerald ash borer is destroying these trees. This invasive Asian beetle had not been previously reported in Cherokee County.

and its buttery nuts were a delicacy to native people. The crop produced at Welch Farm is enjoyed by wildlife.

Green ash (*Fraxinus* pennsylvanica) is an attractive tree that grows along stream banks, where

reported in Cherokee County.

The most intriguing find was the possible sighting of an eastern fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger*), which are larger than the more common gray and red squirrels. If confirmed, it



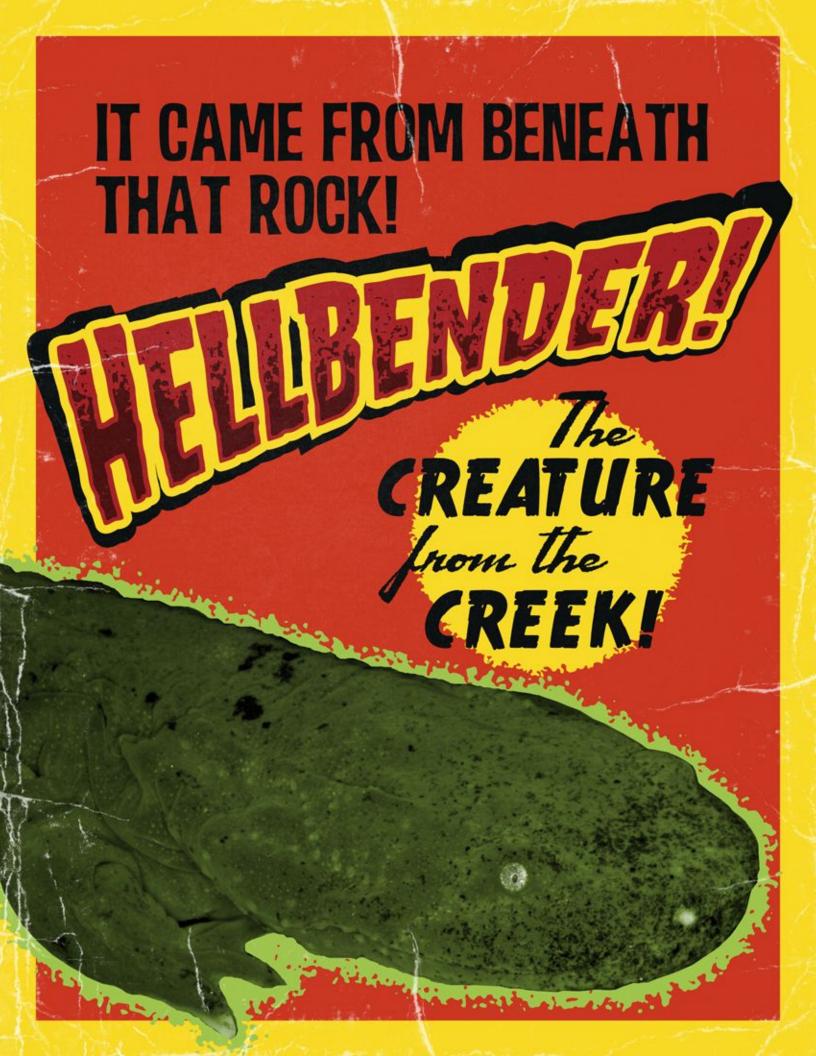
[NO.5]

Eastern Fox Squirrel Sciurus niger



its seeds are important food for aquatic organisms. Sadly, the surveyors discovered that emerald ash borer is destroying these trees at Welch Farm. This invasive Asian beetle had not been previously would be the first modern sighting of the species in Cherokee County.

It's amazing what was found in just a few days of surveying — and we've just scratched the surface of the incredible biodiversity at Welch Farm.





largest salamander in the Northern hemisphere. An exclusively aquatic creature, the hellbender is one of the most unique representatives of our rich Appalachian biological heritage. Its appearance frightens many people — with popular nicknames like "lasagna sides" and "snot otter," the hellbender isn't known for its beauty. Due to recreational use of rivers, it often falls victim to habitat degradation and den site disturbance, and far too many hellbenders have been killed, both accidentally and intentionally, by anglers.

All of these factors combined spell trouble for the eastern hellbender — to the extent that the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service is studying the species to determine whether it should be listed as threatened or endangered.

Starting in 1990, eastern hellbenders were occasionally caught between Tellico and Rabun Gap as part of the Stream Biomonitoring Program, led by Bill McLarney. Over the next 24 years, McLarney reported 89 catches to the North Carolina and Georgia wildlife agencies, adding to the sparse knowledge of the species in the Little Tennessee River watershed. McLarney knows of no reported hellbender sightings in the watershed since 2014.

Mainspring's usual stream biomonitoring technique, electrofishing gear used to sample

fish, is not an efficient way to locate hellbenders. It's also quite invasive. A better approach to locating and helping hellbenders is by installing "hellbender huts" — concrete structures designed to provide a perfect habitat for hellbenders to breed. The huts are equipped with a viewing port that allows for close monitoring to document the presence of adults or eggs with minimal disturbance. Earlier this summer, 10 of these structures were installed by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) in Tessentee Creek on private, conserved





ABOVE: Hellbender love in a North Carolina mountain stream. CENTER: A precast hellbender hut. BELOW: Installing hellbender huts; a hut in place.

property. Continuously seeking to strengthen both Mainspring's efforts and the region's aquatic ecosystem, McLarney helped with these installations.

Another
noninvasive
method used
to determine
if hellbenders
are in a
stream is
environmental
DNA (eDNA)
sampling. All aquatic
animals slough off tiny particles
of skin or slime into the water, and,
assuming there is a "signature" for

to detect the presence of the species. For the past several years NCWRC has been applying eDNA

microscopic portions of the eDNA

are then captured in water samples

the species one is looking for,

methodology to search for hellbenders throughout the western mountains. Recently, McLarney received training in eDNA sampling and collected samples from 22 sites in the watershed during Septem-

> ber, the height of breeding season. Mainspring's sampling, combined with

NCWRC's
earlier work
directed by
Lori Williams,
will result in a
better understanding of the

locations where hellbenders are still hanging on.

If you are lucky enough to see a hellbender, get a photo if you can—and please report your sighting to a Mainspring office or to Williams at Lori. Williams@ncwildlife.org.





One Fish, Two Fish...

ainspring conducted biomonitoring on the Little Tennessee River earlier this year with Tennessee Valley Authority partners. The bigger river required bigger tools to help with the work. Results were similar to the smaller tributary findings, which showed fewer shiners and other fish species than usual. Dr. McLarney attributes the reduced numbers to the unusually high rainfall this summer.



Beetlemania!



Congratulations to Charles and Wanda Wolfe of Sylva, North Carolina, the winners of Mainspring's Vintage Volkswagen Convertible Beetle Raffle! The winning ticket was randomly chosen out of the 150 tickets that were sold to raise money for Mainspring's clean water initiatives.



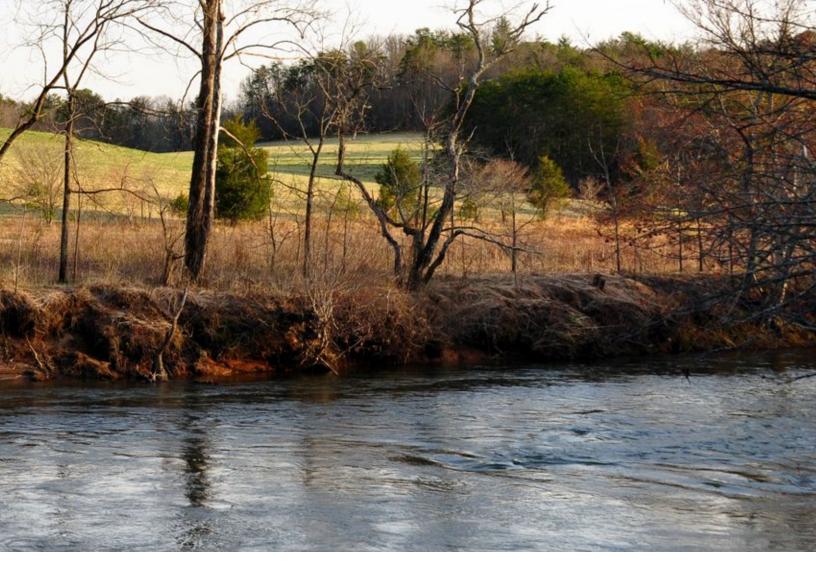
New interpretive signage symbolizes the success of a community reconciliation effort.

n 2007, a conservation project spearheaded by Mainspring Conservation Trust culminated in the return of ancient Cowee Mound and its surrounding property to Cherokee ownership. Following years of partnering with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) on that and other conservation and restoration projects, Mainspring initiated a reconciliation process in 2015 between neighboring citizens of the EBCI and the Town of Franklin. who had clashed over maintenance of the ancient Nikwasi Mound in downtown Franklin.

Three years later, on September 22, 2018, Nikwasi Initiative, the entity that was born out of the reconciliation process, held a ribbon-cutting celebration for the new interpretive signs to be placed on Mainspring

property across the Little Tennessee River from Cowee Mound, which affords an expansive view of the historic mound. The panels tell the story of Cowee in both Cherokee syllabary and English, and they are the first of three sets of interpretive panels to be placed at key cultural heritage sites to launch the Cherokee Cultural Corridor being developed by the newly formed organization. Along with Nikwasi Initiative and Mainspring, officials from the Town of Franklin and Macon County joined Principal Chief Richard Sneed and other EBCI leaders for the event, held at Cowee School. "It truly is a great day today," said Chief Sneed. "We have had so many great partners in this project — folks with vision for the project of a cultural corridor."

Holding the event at Cowee School



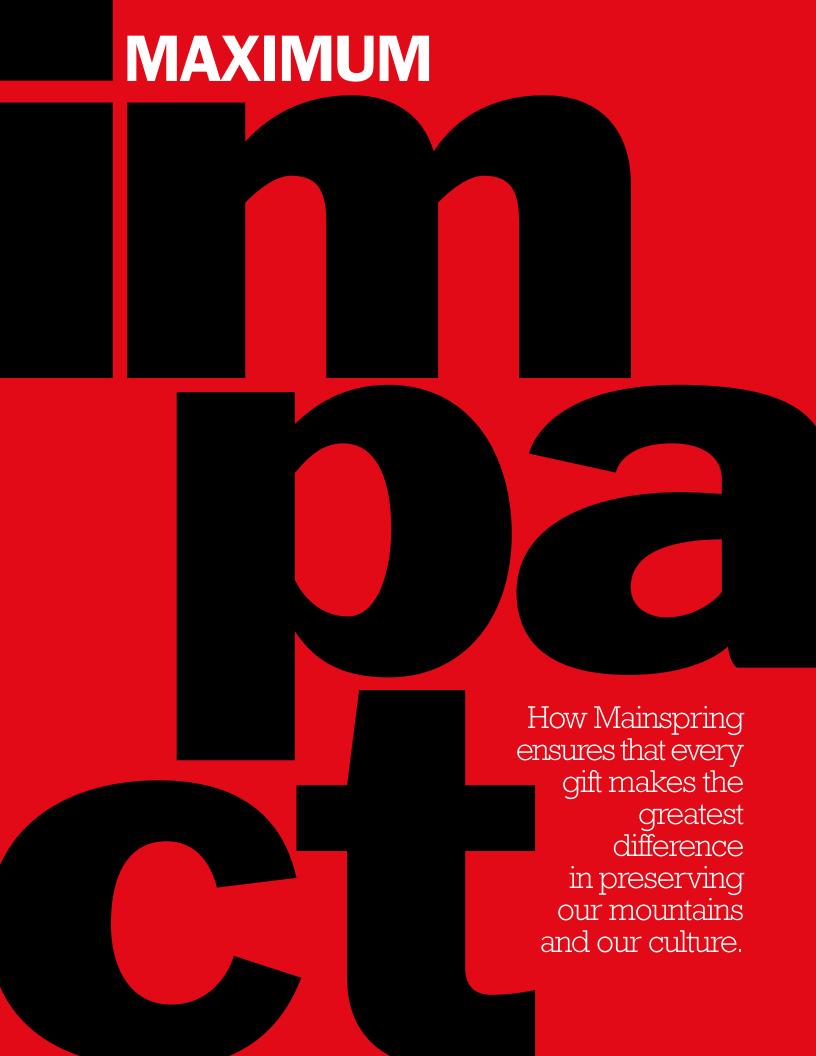
was significant. Located in the heart of the nationally recognized Cowee-West's Mill Historic District, a designation secured by Mainspring in 1999, the school now serves as an arts and heritage center for western North Carolina residents and visitors. The heritage center will be a significant stop along the emerging cultural corridor.

COVE (KAND) CONTO MONTO MANAGEMENT OF THE PROPERTY OF THE PROP

Mainspring Executive Director Sharon Taylor said of the project, "We're proud to have been the impetus for this process that brought neighbors together to work for the good of all. And we're delighted in the progress that has been made to highlight the region's cultural heritage resources for conservation, education and economic benefit."



ABOVE: The Cowee Mound. BELOW LEFT: Unveiling the new interpretive signage for the Mound. BELOW RIGHT: Principal Chief Richard Sneed of the EBCI with Mainspring Executive Director Sharon Taylor at the ribboncutting celebration.



Levereage – (verb) – use something to maximum advantage



donation make a difference, especially when I read about

successful land acquisitions and restoration projects costing hundreds of thousands of dollars?"

It's a legitimate and fair question—one that might be best answered with a few examples based on three of our current projects, each of which a donation of any amount could effectively support.



Murphy Office

(Cherokee County)

Probably the simplest example of Mainspring's leveraging is for its Murphy office, which opened in 2016. It costs about \$100,000 annually to cover staff salary, travel, rent, utilities and other necessities for a second location an hour's drive from Mainspring's headquarters in Franklin. Mainspring is optimistic that its close partnership with landowners and recent state and federal grants could

bring close to \$4.5 million into Cherokee County to protect valuable farmland. That's a strong return on investment in dollars (and food security) for Mainspring's donors whose gifts help cover the costs of operating expenses for the Murphy office.





Discussing charitable giving can be difficult for nonprofits, but our reality is that we cannot operate without unrestricted gifts. Helping donors understand how Mainspring leverages their gifts is critically important to

achieving our goals. If you have additional questions or would like to hear more specifics, we invite you to request a personal meeting. It would be a great opportunity for us to say thank you.

A strong return on investment in dollars (and food security) for donors











n July, Mainspring acquired two adjoining tracts in southern Macon County. The 71 acres connect the state-owned Needmore Game Lands on the west side and the Nantahala National Forest to the east and will give improved access to a popular piece of the Bartram Trail.

"It's always a priority for Mainspring when we can connect public lands," says Jordan Smith, Mainspring land conservation manager. "Anytime you connect conserved property, you are protecting wildlife habitat and corridors."

The Bartram Trail runs 114 miles from Pine Mountain, Georgia, to north of Cheoah Bald near Robbinsville, North Carolina. It closely follows the route famed botanist William Bartram took from 1773-1777, when he identified more than 200 plants in the region. The trail is designated as a National Recreation Trail by the National Trails System Act of 1968.

Walter Wingfield, president of the Bartram Trail Society, a volunteer organization that creates and maintains the trail, says he hopes more people will be able to visit this section and that eventually the trail can be expanded. "This acquisition by Mainspring is giving us a place to park, and that's pretty important," he says. "It's exciting to think about starting an additional maintenance group for this section."

Mainspring plans to own the land for at least three to five years and, in addition to constructing a Bartram Trail parking area, wants to begin restoration projects that reduce destructive erosion along the riverbank and replace invasive plants with native ones. Mainspring hopes to eventually convey the property to the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, which will increase the acreage of the Needmore Game Lands in that area of the county.

"It's always a priority for Mainspring when we can connect public lands. Anytime you connect conserved property, you are protecting wildlife habitat and corridors."

Jordan Smith, Mainspring Land Conservation Manager



Project: Little Tennessee River Bartram Trail

Location: Southern Macon County (off Hickory Knoll Road)

Acreage: 71

Conservation Values: Conservation of Little Tennessee riverfront, floodplain and floodway. Rare aquatic species benefit, including four mussels and two fish species. Floodplain includes two significant plant community types: the rare Montane alluvial forest and the Floodplain pool. Could connect Bartram Trail from the Fishhawk Mountain trailhead to the Little Tennessee River. Part of the Cherokee Coweeta Creek settlement (see page 28). Provides vital early successional habitat for declining bird species.

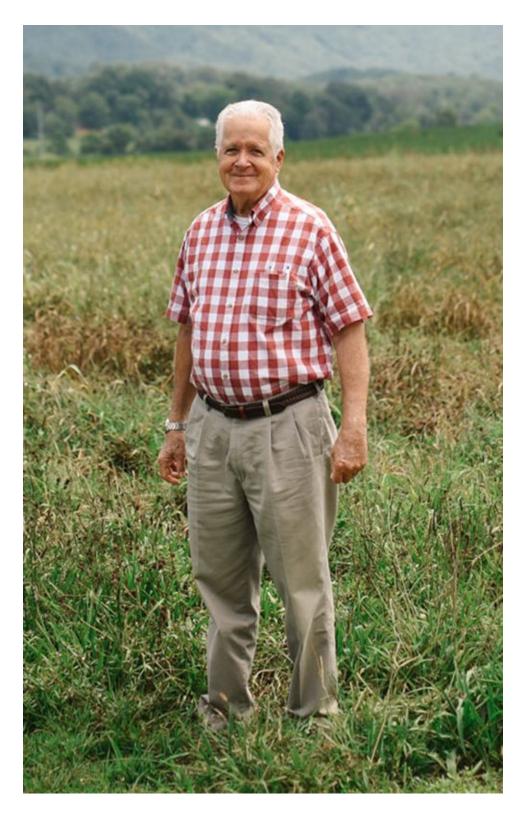
How You Can Help: Mainspring is currently raising funds for a level parking lot, information kiosk and fence for entrance to the Bartram Trail. If you would like to support that project, please contact Cris Weatherford at Mainspring at 828.524.2711 ext. 306 or cweatherford@mainspringconserves.org.

Meet a Mainspringer

Larry and Kendra Rasche A Passion for Preservation



Say hello to some of the people whose time, generosity and dedication help make Mainspring an effective voice for the Southern Blue Ridge.



David Hinson The Joy of Volunteering

Larry and Kendra Rasche

"We live in an area that is unique in the world for its environmental quality and biological diversity."

Since moving to Franklin full-time in 2006, Larry and Kendra Rasche have become ardent supporters of Mainspring. Recently, we sat down with them to learn why.

How did you discover Mainspring?

We, for many years, supported The Nature Conservancy. As we reached retirement, we felt we could more readily help to make a difference in smaller, local organizations, rather than national or global ones. We decided to focus our giving on a few areas we were passionate about — protecting the environment being one of those. We heard about the work of Land Trust for the Little Tennessee (now Mainspring Conservation Trust), and it seemed a natural fit.

Does one of Mainspring's three core initiatives — land, water, cultural heritage — resonate with you more than the others?

Not really, because each is eternal and important to our area. We live in an area that is unique in the world for its environmental quality and biological diversity, including a revered Native American heritage, that is worthy of our passion and support. We want to preserve all that and pass it on!

What would you say to others aboutwhy they should join you in supporting Mainspring?

We've lived in several large, heavily populated cities, where green space is at a premium. Coming to Franklin makes us especially appreciative of the gorgeous scenery: the beautiful mountains just outside our windows, the wildlife roaming in our yard and the creeks and rivers and streams nearby. It just has to be preserved and saved from pollutants. Who will do this, if not those of us who live here?

Recognizing the region's growing population and dependency on tourism, and the world need of farms for food, what would you like to see this area look like in 50 years?

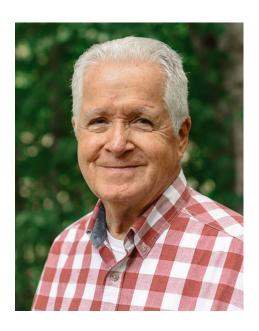
We'd love to see working farms, more farm-to-table initiatives, clean, stable streams and rivers filled with fish, a vibrant riverfront (perhaps similar to Greenville, South Carolina)— all the while maintaining the quality and diversity of our regional environment. We think Mainspring is the right organization to realize these goals.



David Hinson has lived in Rabun County, Georgia, for 11 years. A loyal volunteer since 2014, he has some great stories to tell, including a river mishap that resulted in a fractured leg. Thankfully, he's healed and is back to helping out whenever he can. We asked him about his dedication.

David Hinson

"The volunteers at the work day treated me like a long-lost friend, and I've been hooked ever since."



When did you start volunteering for Mainspring and why?

I met Dennis Desmond (Mainspring stewardship coordinator) at a festival in Franklin in 2014. He invited me to a work day. The volunteers at the work day treated me like a long-lost friend, and I've been hooked ever since.

What would you say to others to encourage them to invest their time volunteering with Mainspring?

You get to work with people who want to make the world a better place, starting right here in western North Carolina. You get to plant trees, build trails and work with Kids in the Creek.

What is the best part about volunteering? The worst? (Be honest!)
I enjoy working outdoors. On a hot day, you get all the cold water you can drink — and free snacks! The worst job is pulling multiflora rose

vines out of an old fence.

Why you do you think it's important to give your time to Mainspring?

Mainspring has a small staff that does a tremendous job. Volunteers multiply the effectiveness of the staff, so more can get done with less strain on the budget. This lets the dollars go to other projects, like conserving more land. A win-win for all of us who live here.





wenty-five years ago, a group of residents, conservationists and agency officials led a Little Tennessee Watershed Conference, a gathering that was the catalyst for forming the Little Tennessee Watershed Association and the Land Trust for the Little Tennessee. Today, those organizations' missions are combined into Mainspring Conservation Trust.

This summer, Mainspring cohosted another water forum, "Rain, Rivers, Fish and Faucets," a day-long event that highlighted the state of water resources in the Little Tennessee River Watershed. Other sponsors included Forward! Franklin, Macon County Schools and Coweeta Long Term Ecological Research Program.

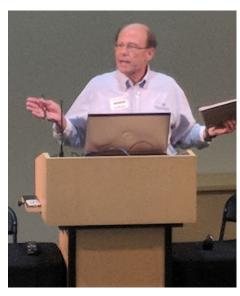
Arguably the most biodiverse river in the Blue Ridge, the Little Tennessee's headwaters are in Rabun County, Georgia, and it makes its way north through western North Carolina and into Tennessee before joining the Tennessee River. The Little Tennessee drains portions of three national

Rain, Rivers, Fish

TOP: Drake Education Center in Franklin was the venue for the 2018 Little Tennessee Watershed Conference. BELOW LEFT: Conference flyer. BELOW RIGHT: Ken Murphy introduces a conference session on the future of Lake Emory dam.







THE LAND STEWARD

forests — Chattahoochee, Nantahala and Cherokee — and provides the southwestern boundary of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Attendees heard talks about the findings from 30 years of stream biomonitoring in the Little Tennessee, the effects of river recreation on tourism in the region and the state of the dam at Lake Emory. Scientists from the University of Georgia discussed the impact of climate change in the Southern Blue Ridge, and soil and water experts showed

examples of how to help with streambank erosion.

"It was encouraging to see the overwhelming interest in the state of our streams — and even more encouraging to have questions about what should be done to protect and improve water quality," said Sharon Taylor, Mainspring executive director. "With that kind of appreciation of water quality and the biological diversity that depends on it, conservation of the Little Tennessee Watershed is promising."

and Faucets Mainspring co-hosts a second Little Tennessee Watershed Conference



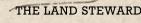


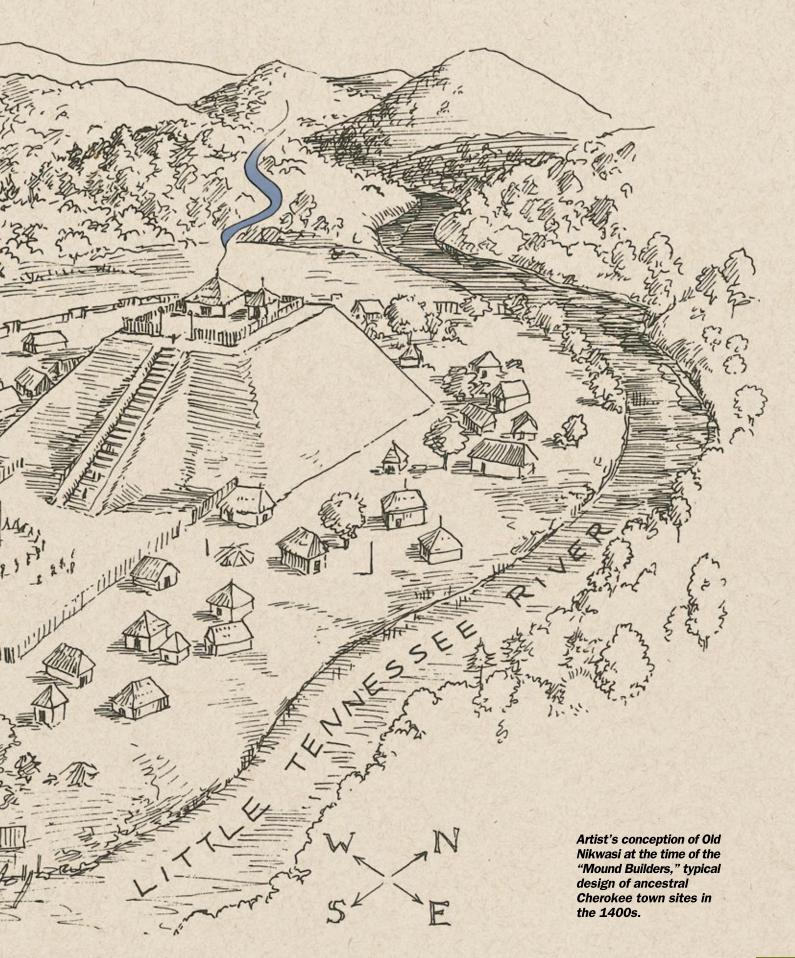
ABOVE LEFT: Jason Love presents Bill McLarney with a proclamation from the Town of Franklin for his contribution to the health and understanding of the Little Tennessee River Watershed. ABOVE RIGHT: Jason Meador speaks on the state of mussel populations in the Little Tennessee River. **BELOW: Participants** enjoy each other's company between sessions.



Sacrec fire

Much of the national cultural significance of the Southern Blue Ridge is steeped in rich Cherokee history, including the ancient townhouses that dotted the landscape in the 17th and 18th centuries. We asked Dr. Ben Steere, a member of Mainspring's board of directors, to share his insights into these unique and important places.







he Coweeta Creek site, known locally for its mound and association with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, is located on the west bank of the Little Tennessee River, south of Hickory Knoll Creek.

The mound at the Coweeta Creek site represents at least six successive stages of a large Cherokee townhouse dating from the 1600s to the early 1700s. Roughly 100-200 people would have lived at this town at any given time, and the town would have been connected through ties of kinship, language and culture to other Cherokee towns throughout western

sacred fire

North Carolina, northern South Carolina, northern Georgia and eastern Tennessee. The townhouse would have marked the Coweeta Creek site as an important Cherokee town, and provided an important locus for community events. People living in the town would have used the townhouse to hold important meetings and councils.



At the townhouse center was a large clay hearth in which a sacred fire would have burned throughout the life of each building. The fire would have been carefully tended and would have burned continually. Based on ethnographic and historic accounts of Cherokee culture, once a year, at the Green Corn Ceremony, every household at the Coweeta Creek would extinguish their own hearth and light it anew with fire from the townhouse, symbolically linking each household with the townhouse.

The Coweeta Creek site was extensively excavated by archaeologists from the University of North Carolina from 1965 to 1971 as part of the Cherokee Project. Their excavations revealed that the low mound was the focal point of a townhouse and plaza complex surrounded by domestic structures. In recent years, Tulane archaeologist Christopher Rodning analyzed and interpreted the architecture, features and artifacts from the site, making it one of the best understood and publicized sites in western North Carolina. Interested readers should see Rodning's book, "Center Places and Cherokee Towns." for more information.

Dr. Ben Steere is an assistant professor of Anthropology at Western Carolina University and the author of "The Archeology of Houses and Households in the Native Southeast."

The Last Word

MOLLY PHILLIPS

Communications Coordinator

s you read through this *Land*Steward, my family and I are
(hopefully) settling into our
new home.

In early fall, my husband and I purchased a true fixer-upper — a house built in 1973 that hadn't seen an update since its 1983 addition.

Many of our friends thought we were crazy to tackle a project this large at such a busy time in our lives. I won't lie: It's been pretty stressful.

But there is a reason behind our madness.

Our former home was lovely, but it lacked a real yard — a place where my kids could go outside and explore. Our new-to-us property has a creek in the front yard, huge trees to climb and a flat yard to play in.

We live in one of the most beautiful regions in the world — a place filled with diverse habitat, good weather and plenty of space to explore outdoors. I want my children to

appreciate what natural wonders surround them. I want them to care about clean water and open spaces. I want them to grow up and support conservation, so much so that I was willing to go through a huge renovation to give them that experience.

It's one reason why I believe so much in Mainspring's education programs. Surprisingly, many local children don't get a chance to tromp through the woods or experience the feel of rushing water. Without Mainspring, some of my children's classmates would never know the significance of where they live.

It will be all too soon before my kids and their friends are grown and on their own, making decisions about conservation in the Southern Blue Ridge. If I — and Mainspring — can give them a few more years of wet feet, exclamations of discovery from digging in the dirt and memories made outdoors, I'll take it.

(Still, if anyone is willing to help us unpack, feel free to give me a call.)



Without
Mainspring, some
of my children's
classmates would
never know the
significance of
where they live.





CONSERVATION TRUST

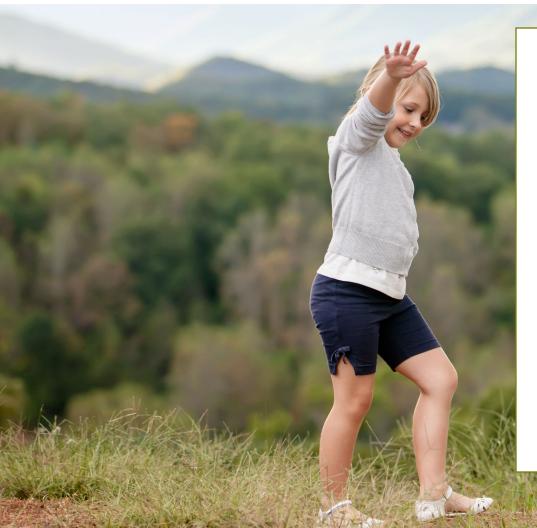
Stewards of the Southern Blue Ridge

P. O. Box 1148, Franklin, NC 28744

Conserving the waters, forests, farms and heritage of the Upper Little Tennessee and Hiwassee river valleys in western North Carolina and northern Georgia.



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Leave a Legacy

The next generation should know the simple pleasures of clean water, healthy forests and productive farmland.

If you are interested in making a lasting difference in the Southern Blue Ridge, including a gift of a required minimum distribution from your retirement account or from your estate plan, contact Mainspring's development office at 828.524.2711, or visit mainspringconserves.org.