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From the Director

Every story you read in this Land Steward is a reason for celebration.

On page 4, you'll read about a family's effort to conserve their organic farm in Cherokee County. Mainspring was able to secure funds to purchase the agricultural conservation easement, helping to sustain the farm operation.

New and exciting changes to Mainspring's environmental education program are showcased on page 8, and, along with this expansion, we will soon have staff certified through the North Carolina Environmental Education program.

On page 12, you'll read about the Honoring Nikwasi gathering in late August — which celebrated the hard work of many people who helped actualize Mainspring's vision of bringing together mountain communities around Nikwasi Mound in downtown Franklin.

The fourth addition to our popular Tessentee Bottomland Preserve (the original property purchase was in 1999) in Macon County is highlighted on page 20. This new farm acreage supports a herd of cattle and, at the same time, protects the water quality of the Little Tennessee River and Tessentee Creek.

You, and many others like you, make these projects possible. And, because you are consistent and generous with your giving, you perpetuate Mainspring's mission to conserve the land, water and cultural heritage of this area — the heart of the Southern Blue Ridge. *Definitely a reason to celebrate!*

Sharon F. Taylor
Executive Director

P.S. As you've likely heard, I will retire as Mainspring's executive director in February 2020. The new executive director is yet to be chosen, but, rest assured, the passionate, intelligent and committed staff will carry forward this organization's mission. I could not be more confident in, or proud of, this strong team of conservationists.

Cover photo: Country Gentleman, an heirloom variety of sweet corn from the Long Farm. Credit: Travis Long

The annual publication about the activities of Mainspring Conservation Trust

November 2019



Franklin | Murphy | Sylva 828.524.2711 www.mainspringconserves.org



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n Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI)
member, Harold Long farmed on
family land within the Qualla
Boundary with his wife, Nancy,
successfully running an heirloom
seed-saving operation and basketmaking business.

But he was running out of space, a common problem for farmers on the boundary.

A 2016 EBCI Land Dialogue Report (a project administered through Mainspring) supported Harold's first-hand frustration of expanding a growing farming operation within the boundary property limits. It found that the Qualla Boundary had only 600 acres of open space left, but needs 8,000 acres of farmland for food sovereignty for its members.

Years before the report was published, the Longs went searching off-boundary. After 10 years, Harold and Nancy finally found something suitable that would allow him to continue receiving Tribal member benefits (members must purchase land within one of three counties in western North Carolina to qualify for benefits).

"Suitable," however, may not be the appropriate description, because the Longs found a gem in the Appalachian Mountains. Located in Cherokee County just off the historic Unicoi Turnpike, an old trading path and part of the Trail of Tears route, the Longs purchased almost 32 acres, including a forest canopy for specialty crops, like ginseng and goldenseal, and pasture that includes Grape Creek stream frontage and excellent soil for planting.

EBCI historians believe this land was farmed and inhabited by Cherokee before the Removal in 1838. In 1900, the Lovingood family purchased the property and, a year later, they built the house, two barns, and a store that still stand today. The Lovingoods farmed the land for generations before selling it in 2007.

It's that history that makes the Longs love the property even more. "One of Harold's favorite parts of the job is putting life back into this old farm," Nancy says. "Whether it's clearing out areas, updating the buildings, or getting seeds from people and growing them out, Harold is all about revitalizing and reclaiming







a part of his heritage."

A natural marketer, Nancy enjoys what Harold calls "pencil farming"—the planning and research that goes into organizing a small farm with diverse crops. The Long Farm is an organic operation that specializes in heirloom and heritage varieties of produce and livestock. They planted a crop of hemp this year, and recently turned 100 seeds of Will West Long's Cherokee Blue Corn into four pounds of seeds, which they will share with other EBCI members through the Community Garden Kit Giveaway.

"We like to keep things interesting, always trying to find out what the next crop may be to hit the niche market," explains Nancy. Sara Posey Davis, Mainspring's Hiwassee Programs Manager, says the variety of heirloom vegetables the Longs plant and share preserves both horticultural history and protects the food supply. "When we're in a monoculture, we are more susceptible to insect blights, so people like the Longs, who plant genetically different types of the same vegetables, are protecting their source of income while helping to secure the long-term



history of the heirlooms."

The Long Farm is being conserved as a result of the 2014 Farm Bill, which awarded funds for the conservation of important farmland in western North Carolina farms. In addition to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, other partners in the project include the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, Brad and Shelli Stanback, the Community Foundation of North Carolina and Harrah's Cherokee Casino.

"We are so happy to be a small part of preserving a tract of farmland, and we hope we will be a launching pad for other small farmers to know about programs available to help save other important farmland in this region," says Nancy. "Growing up in Wisconsin, even at young age, I would be so sad to see farms come up for sale and then developed. Knowing this land—with so much history in the soil, that has brought together Cherokee and Appalachian cultures—will be forever protected, is a legacy we're proud of."

"Whether it's clearing out areas, updating the buildings, or getting seeds from people and growing them out, Harold is all about revitalizing and reclaiming a part of his heritage."

Nancy Long







or SIX YEARS, KIDS IN THE CREEK has been a staple program for Mainspring's Jason Meador.

The popular field days, created by the Tennessee Valley Authority and implemented through Mainspring, were designed for eighth grade students to learn about the importance of clean water, and are a great hands-on activity that exposes

students to the world in their own neighborhood.

But planning the annual event had its problems. "Over the years, the logistics became complex and super time-intensive," says Meador, an aquatic biologist. "Some districts in our service area don't have a centralized eighth grade, so we had to work with multiple school

schedules. All of the partners who helped at the four stations are full-time experts at other places and often couldn't attend when it was best for the teachers' calendars. That, combined with the necessity for an all-day commitment from the school system and hoping for good weather on the scheduled days, had us brainstorming how we can reach more youth more efficiently."

During Mainspring's strategic planning process, Meador proposed a new idea: provide a menu of options for kids of all ages from which interested teachers could choose to best suit their instructional needs.

The new program customizes each lesson for the class, Meador explains. "I can meet Essential Standards (state content standards set by the North Carolina Standard Course of Study) for any grade, working with a teacher to find out what concepts he/she needs help reinforcing and build a class around that," he says. "We can stay indoors

or go outside; we can meet for one hour or all day. In many cases, there are small areas on campus where I can conduct lessons with students within the class period, which is so much easier to plan logistically."

Meador thinks this program can create a strong foundation for future conservationists. "I really believe that being able to build on conservation concepts each year can make a big difference in helping the next generation care about this region. From searching for bugs as kindergarteners to understanding the value of macroinvertebrates as high schoolers, students can learn in an age-appropriate format what is important to healthy streambanks and clean water. It's inspiration through immersion, and that's good for all of us."

For more information about the Environmental Education program, contact Jason at jmeador@mainspringconserves.org.











Something for Everyone

Mainspring's Environmental Education program offers more than 50 options for kids and teens, grades pre-K through 12th grade.

Pre-K to 2nd Grade

- Outdoor Exploration
- Shapes and Movements of Fish and Animals

Pre-K to 8th Grade

- Project Learning Tree
- Project C.A.T.C.H. (Caring for Aquatics Through Conserving Habitats)

3rd to 7th Grade

• Growing Up Wild Program

3rd to 5th Grade

- Animal Skulls Game
- Stream Chemistry Measurements

6th to 8th Grade

- Stream Life: Fish Adaptations
- Tree Game: Competition for Resources

9th to 12th Grade

 Aquatic Ecosystems: Bio-Indicators, Habitats, Human Impacts, Survival Strategies



A Promise to the Future

Mainspring helps a couple realize their dream of protecting the land they've spent a lifetime caring for EORGE RECTOR AND JOAN BYRD are in excellent physical shape. It's difficult keeping up with the Jackson County couple and their rescued chow, Aslan. Walking the steep trails that zigzag through their property, they speak with ease, barely breaking a sweat. As they effortlessly navigate the trail and explain the unique conservation values of the property, their love and appreciation for this forested slope that protects Bo Cove, just minutes from Western Carolina University, is evident.

"Like all of our friends, we love to travel, but having both served two years overseas in the Peace Corps, we agreed when we married that it was time to settle down and save as much as we could of our own corner of the world," Byrd says. "We made a habit to set aside money every month to buy woodland acres around our home."

Their commitment to protecting their land has gone beyond purchasing property, ensuring it is conserved in perpetuity by donating three separate conservation easements to Mainspring over the course of 13 years, totaling more than 192 acres.

"After we had united three pieces of property in the mid-1990s, we were intent on learning how to protect this land we loved from future development," Byrd explains. "We heard Sharon Taylor speak at a resources management conference at Western Carolina University and realized this land trust would enable us to reach our goals."









Rector says there is often a lack of understanding about the restrictions placed on private land conserved by a land trust. "We talked to Mainspring staff and became aware that it is the landowner who determines the restrictions to be placed on the property. We appreciated the fact that they recognize each tract of land and its owners are unique, and they work closely with every landowner to realize specific goals for their land."

For those considering a conservation easement on their own property, Rector suggests getting involved with Mainspring. "Participate in volunteer workdays, or take part in hikes or other outings Mainspring offers," he says. "These events allow landowners interested in pursuing a conservation easement the chance

to become better acquainted with the staff, and to meet other likeminded conservationists."

Rector and Byrd wrap up the woodland tour and agree that their commitment to the land has deepened over time. "The development pressure in Jackson County has increased the urgency of our attempt to preserve the natural values of the area," Byrd says. "Helping to save our air, our water, our beloved mountains and all the earth is our legacy to future generations."

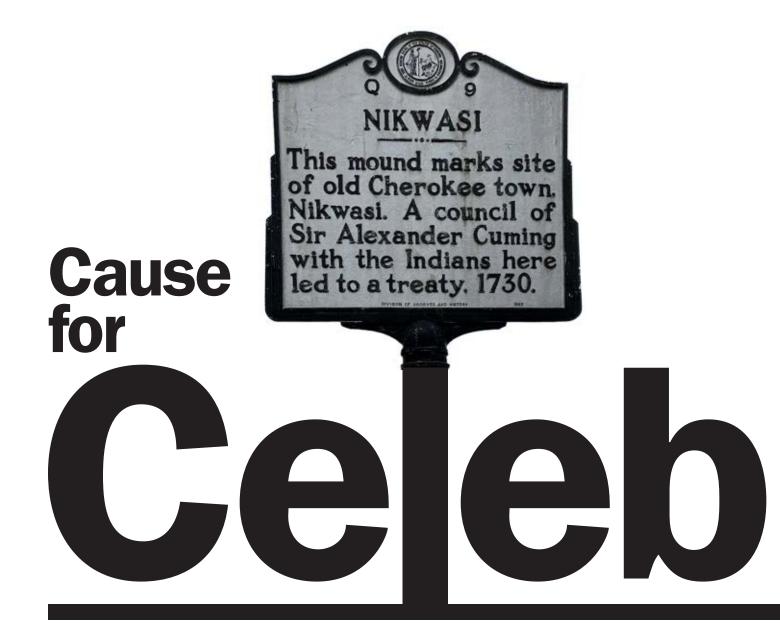
If you are interested in discussing the values of a conservation easement on your private property, contact Land Conservation Director Jordan Smith at jsmith@mainspringconserves.org.

"We agreed when we married that it was time to settle down and save as much as we could of our own corner of the world."

Joan Byrd

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MAINSPRING 2019



HAT A GREAT DAY THAT HAS been a long time coming," said Nikwasi Initiative board member Bob McCollum.

These words opened an Aug. 24 ceremonial event in celebration of the successful effort to unite communities and promote the cultural significance of this region.

The nonprofit Nikwasi Initiative first took root in 2014, when Mainspring brought Cherokee and Macon County residents together to develop a collaborative plan for the promotion of the Nikwasi Mound's historic value, an effort that would later become the Nikwasi Initiative. The organization includes representation from the Town

of Franklin, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Macon County and Mainspring Conservation Trust.

The summer event was designed to celebrate and bring honor to Nikwasi Mound, the work that it took to get to this point, and to discuss what lies in store for the ancient mound in the heart of downtown Franklin. The event was funded in part by the Cherokee Preservation Foundation and the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina.

Principal Chief Richard Sneed spoke about the significance of the native mounds in the area and

(continued on page 14)

A community comes together to honor a cultural touchstone

ration







"These are my ancestors. Their perseverance, their grit, their tenacity, is the reason our people remain today and their spirit is in our DNA."

Principle Chief Richard Sneed



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A historic photograph of Nikwasi Mound; The Principal People Dancers in front of Nikwasi Mound; Mainspring Executive Director Sharon Taylor stands with EBCI Principal Chief Richard Sneed and Nikwasi Initiative members Juanita Wilson, Barbara McRae and Tommy Cabe. (continued from page 12) reflected on what life must have been like for his people. For thousands of years, Cherokee lived in these mountains and raised families, hunted, farmed and traded, and had complex religious and social systems. "These are my ancestors," Sneed said at the event. "Their perseverance, their grit, their tenacity, is the reason our people remain today and their spirit of perseverance is in our DNA."

"It was a great day to culminate years of collaboration and ideas," says Ben Laseter, deputy director of Mainspring and a Nikwasi Initiative board member. "When I watched the Cherokee children dancing near the Nikwasi Mound, a place their ancestors considered sacred, it was a strong reminder that these stories and history need to be preserved for future generations."

Earlier this summer, an informational kiosk was installed on





"At a time when there is so much energy given to division and argument, the people in our communities... have chosen a different energy."

Bob McCollum, Nikwasi Initiative Board Member



Mainspring property across from Cowee Mound, with more interpretative sites planned in Cherokee and near Nikwasi Mound. Nikwasi Initiative also plans a bike trail to connect culturally significant destinations in Cowee. Additionally, the organization is supporting the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians as they study the feasibility of an eagle aviary on Hall Mountain, property that was conserved with Mainspring in 2007 and is owned by the EBCI.

McCollum summed up the sentiment of the day best: "At a time when there is so much energy given to division and argument, the people in our communities, the Eastern Band and the people in Franklin and Macon County, have chosen a different topic and energy," he said. "And that's the energy that has brought us together as partners moving into the future."

For more information about Nikwasi Initiative, visit nikwasi-initiative.org.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The crowd gathers at Nikwasi Mound to hear ancient legends from Cherokee Storyteller Freeman Owle; The new kiosk at the Cowee Mound Interpretative Site; The Principal People Dancers perform a traditional Cherokee dance.

MAINSPRING 2019





Growing Nantahala

HE U.S. FOREST SERVICE recently expanded the borders of the Nantahala National Forest, acquiring 16 acres of Mainspring's land at the western entrance of Panthertown Valley at Salt Rock Gap in Jackson County.

With support from Friends of Panthertown, Jackson County, Fred and Alice Stanback, and many others, Mainspring purchased the land in 2017 from a private owner, protecting it until the property could be conveyed to the U.S. Forest Service. While under Mainspring's ownership, Friends of Panthertown and Mainspring volunteers created a much-needed parking area for visitors accessing Panthertown Valley off Breedlove Road. The conservation project also protects two headwater streams that feed into the Valley, and a prominent knoll that overlooks the treasured recreation area.

"Mainspring thrives on working with private donors, other nonprofits and public agencies to protect the places that make this region special," says Sharon Taylor. "We're proud of the many partnerships that made this project possible and led to getting this important property into public ownership."

The view of Panthertown from Salt Rock Gap near Cashiers in Jackson County. Panthertown is part of the Nantahala National Forest and consists of more than 10,000 acres of protected land with clifftop views, at least eight major waterfalls, trout streams, rare plant species and diverse habitat for wildlife.

Tool Time

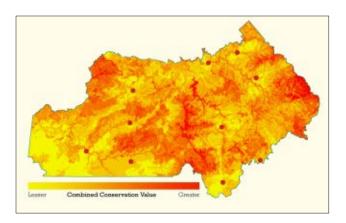


Mainspring publishes a conservation planning roadmap

N 2018, Mainspring began working with the Interdisciplinary
Geospatial Technology Lab at the University of Tennessee at
Chattanooga to create a Conservation
Focus Area Plan. With a service area of more than 1.6 million acres, it is critical for Mainspring to maximize its resources through smart, strategic planning.

Through the generosity of Ken and Amy Murphy, Mainspring published a 20-page overview of the process we used to whittle down our expansive service area to a set of seven focus areas. The publication also shares details of the five key factors we used to identify these priorities: land, water, cultural heritage, recreation and farmland.

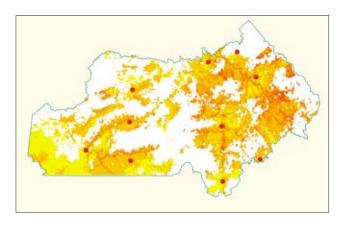
We will share the publication with landowners and key partners to help them better understand the positive impact conservation in the Southern Blue Ridge can have for the future. If you would like to receive a copy of "Facing Forward: The Mainspring Conservation Planning Tool," please contact Molly Phillips at mphillips@mainspringconserves.org.



Heat Mapping

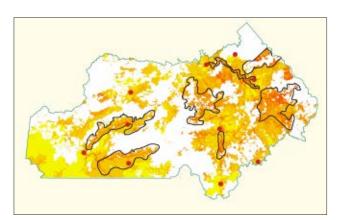
Mainspring assigned weights to the data based on its relevance to our mission and used the weighted system to create a heat map. The greater the combined weight of all the data at a location, the "hotter" it appears on the map. Hotter places have greater combined conservation value.

Excerpted from the publication, these "heat maps" detail the process Mainspring employed to identify focus areas for future conservation efforts.



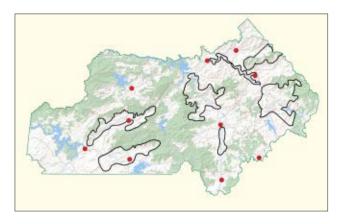
Limiting the Scope

Mainspring limited the scope of potential focus areas by excluding public and private conserved lands and lands owned by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.



Choosing Focus Areas

Mainspring then considered all remaining lands and selected large areas with the highest conservation values (hottest) as its seven focus areas.



Moving Forward

Mainspring will prioritize conservation efforts in these focus areas. Acting strategically will allow Mainspring to make the best use of resources and to have a greater impact across our landscape.

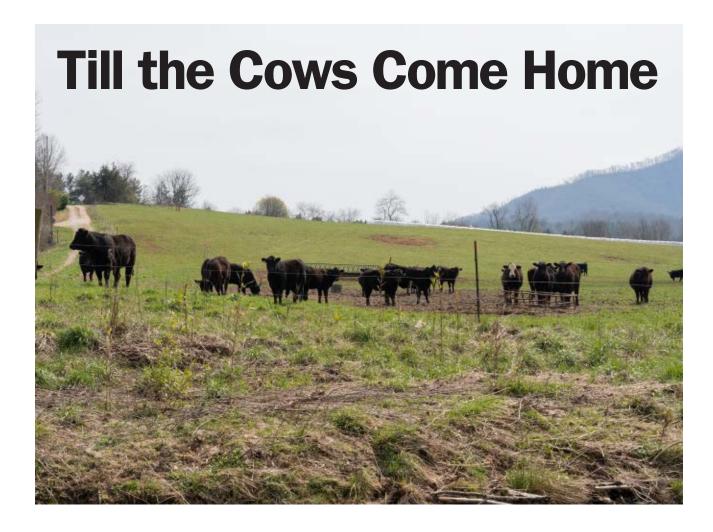
MAINSPRING 2019

Mainspring keeps a beautiful and productive piece of farmland safe from future development ISITORS TO MAINSPRING'S POPULAR Tessentee Bottomland Preserve can now look across Tessentee Creek and know the 40-plus-acre pasture is forever conserved.

Mainspring purchased the land in August from sisters Teresa Seay and Susie Seay Woleslagle. "Our father and mother, Roger and Bobbie Seay, purchased the Tessentee tract in the early 1990s, when their beef cattle operation required more pastureland," Teresa says. "They had been farming since their marriage in 1956 and had expanded to Limousin cattle. Daddy had a wonderful ability to take a piece of land and improve it to get its highest and best use. We can remember him being particularly proud of the hay production from this beautiful piece of land."

The excellent farmland. comprising 42.58 acres, has 3,900 combined feet of Little Tennessee River and Tessentee Creek frontage. Currently leased to a farmer and home to a herd of cattle, Mainspring will continue to contract the land for that purpose on a year-to-year basis. "Mr. Seay did a terrific job of creating alternative water sources to keep the cattle out of the creek and river, which is a best practice Mainspring appreciates," says Land Conservation Director Jordan Smith. "It makes it easy to transition ownership while still maintaining the current use for the land."

Executive Director Sharon Taylor said she was thrilled that Teresa Seay reached out to Mainspring. "Many times we don't learn an important conservation property is for sale until



it's too late," she says. "We're honored the family initiated the conversation with us first, so we could explore conservation options for the land."

Susie says it was great working with Mainspring: "They were supportive of our desires to have the property continue as a farming tract, and it was fun to see their excitement of adding it to the Tessentee Bottomland Preserve and the future possibilities ownership holds."

Teresa agrees: "As farming has sharply decreased in our region over the decades, our hope is this beautiful piece of property will, in some way, continue to be a productive farming tract for the future while supporting the Little Tennessee River as a vital natural resource."

Taylor said she was pleased to assure the Seay family the land would

always be conserved, either as farmland or, in the years to come, in a more natural state for the public to visit and enjoy. "Our goal is to conserve the waters, forests, farms and heritage of the region, so either use of this beautiful floodplain property fulfills our mission," she says.

The farmland joins the preserve's bottomland and river bluff land to total more than 112 acres, acquired over four transactions beginning in 1999. In 2015, Mainspring and the Seay family participated in the restoration of more than 2,000 feet of Tessentee Creek that lies between both properties, including reconstructing the stream channel to a more stable sinuosity and cross section, followed by sloping, matting and replanting the banks with suitable native shrub and tree species.

Aerial shot shows Tessentee Bottomland Preserve on left, Tessentee Creek, Seay Farm pasture.



Stewardship, Taylor-Made

As Executive
Director Sharon
Taylor announces
her retirement,
current and
former colleagues
reflect on her
legacy



Sharon's love of this region shines through in everything she does. Her commitment to collaboration and partnership is evidenced by the now successful and independent Nikwasi Initiative. Sharon has the ability to see the bigger picture, and, because of her effectiveness in working with people, Mainspring is the sound and thriving organization it is today. She is a true steward of the Southern Blue Ridge.

Connie Haire

Board Chair, 2017-Present

My first thought is always about Sharon's perseverance on the name change from the Land Trust for the Little Tennessee to Mainspring, which not only better reflected our work area, but advanced the ball in terms of our physical expansion. "Mainspring" was Sharon's idea, and she explained it in a way that overcame much of the initial resistance. She recognized a need for change, personally took it on her shoulders, and made it happen. No mere caretaker of a successful organization, that woman!

Ken Murphy Board Chair, 2011-2014



I first got to know Sharon during the early days of the work that led to the protection of what we now know as the Needmore Game Lands, while she was still a technician at Coweeta Lab. One day I fell into conversation with Sharon in the hallway, and she expressed her happiness that people like me and Paul Carlson were here leading such important efforts. Such modesty ill becomes her, and thankfully she has gotten over it. What we needed then, and what we've had with Sharon Fouts Taylor at the helm, is strong leadership with its roots based in her love of the landscape.

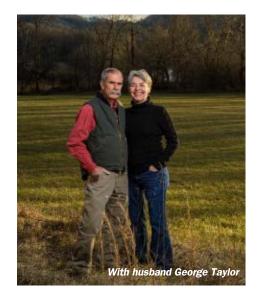
Bill McLarney

Senior Scientist, Mainspring Conservation Trust



When Sharon Taylor joined the fledging land trust 18 years ago, we were long on vision but short on accomplishments. She started work in the midst of the campaign to conserve the Needmore Tract. While





playing key roles in that effort, Sharon focused on aligning another two dozen riverfront conservation opportunities and, before we knew it, we'd gone from zero to over 36 miles of Little Tennessee River frontage conserved. Whether she was dealing with absentee developers looking to maximize their profits, with multi-generational farmers seeking ways to protect their family legacy, or with regional leaders exploring visionary ideas, Sharon earned the trust and respect of everyone with whom she worked. She built our land protection program into one of the most dynamic in

Appalachia, and as the second Executive Director she recruited a phenomenal next generation of staff while strengthening conservation programs across the region. While proud of my role as founding director, the single best thing I did was to convince Sharon Fouts Taylor to join the fledging land trust 18 years ago.

Paul Carlson Founding Director





IP McVay LOVED THE 48-ACRE Macon County property on Buck Creek Road that her parents, Birch and Hilda McVay, purchased in 1967.

"After the house was built in the mid-1980s, I would come up with my late husband, Bob Stubbs, at least four times a year to visit my parents, helping mom with her flower garden and my father with outside chores," she says. "They loved this land, and so did I. I am proud to be able to donate it for conservation in honor of them and their memory."

Kip's Kindness



Hilda and Birch McVay, Kip's parents

Sitting at 3,720 feet, the parcel rests along Buck Water and Hogback Mountains, with Buck Creek running through the wooded forest. Among the many conservation values, the high elevation protects rare plant and animal habitat.

McVay, who lives in Cherokee County, Georgia, speaks fondly of life in Macon County. "This place was a blessing to us flatlanders," she says. "My late husband liked to comment that the Bible never said anything about going to the flatland to find God — only to the mountains! I loved hiking the property, especially once I was joined by my rescue dogs. Over the years, we established great friendships with the neighbors. It is my desire that those neighbors learn of this donation and know that the beautiful piece of property that we enjoyed so much is in safe hands with Mainspring Conservation Trust."

"Mainspring is pleased to honor the memory of Kip's parents by conserving this special place that brought their family so much enjoyment," says Executive Director Sharon Taylor. "Her donation benefits all of us who live and visit this area by allowing Mainspring to further our conservation mission of protecting the region's beauty and unique natural and cultural resources."

The property will be permanently protected through a conservation easement, allowing the rare plant life and pristine water resources to thrive and flow. The conservation easement will allow for one sensitively located homesite to be placed on the 48 acres, as well as recreational enjoyment of Buck Creek and the forested property. The property will be listed through a local realtor, and Mainspring will use the proceeds from the property sale to support its newly created endowment fund and help with future projects and environmental education activities.

To view the listing of this and other properties for sale, visit mainspringconserves.org, and, under the "Be a Mainspring" tab at the top, click "Properties for Sale."

If you are interested in donating land as a gift or bequeathing land through your estate planning, contact
Mainspring's Land Conservation
Director Jordan Smith at
jsmith@mainspringconserves.org.

Open Classroom

by the mountains in Macon County, Paul Garner had never really thought deeply about the world of conservation. Like countless others, the Franklin-based marketing specialist had assumed the forest would always be there — its vibrant shades of green enduring for future generations.

That all changed on April 30, when Mainspring gathered together 17 young professionals — Garner included — for a day-long trip around a portion of Mainspring's service area, introducing the group to land conservation, including the ways in which high land conservation values often overlap with sites of strong cultural heritage.

The event was part of a Z. Smith Reynolds grant, administered through the Conservation Trust of North Carolina and awarded to land trusts around the state to conduct local outreach campaigns for millennials, communities of color and other relevant audiences that have not historically been active with land trusts.

"Mainspring's job is to conserve and steward lands that are really important to a community," said Paul Carlson, founding executive director of Mainspring and a speaker at the event. "And because we live in a place with such cultural significance, Mainspring has a stronger mix of cultural and natural heritage priorities than most other land trusts. That distinction is important for local people to know in order to understand the impact Mainspring has on this region."

Local businesses participated in this effort by allowing their employees to spend a workday with Mainspring — bringing together professionals from Drake Software, Tektone Healthcare Communications, Blue Ridge Public Radio, The Sequoyah Fund, 1040.com, Premiere Marketing and the EBCI Cooperative Extension Center.

"I learned a lot about conservation and what we're doing locally to conserve, which is really important to me," said Kaley Davis, a marketing coordinator at TekTone. "How the Cherokee history ties in with that is really interesting."

Garner, who works at Premiere Marketing, said his perspective on the places he drives by every day has changed forever. "I think, as young people, we go at a very fast pace and sometimes take for granted the things we should know about in order to pass it down. But as we learned, the burden of awareness is responsibility. Mainspring gained a new cheerleader today!"

"As we learned, the burden of awareness is responsibility. Mainspring gained a new cheerleader today!"

Paul Gamer







The Last Word



I hope they'll find evidence that I had been thinking of them, these future people that I won't ever know, but share my DNA. MOLLY PHILLIPS

Communications Coordinator

AST YEAR FOR CHRISTMAS, I received one of those popular home DNA kits. The process was simple:
Put your saliva in the provided vial, then mail it back to the company. In four to six weeks, I had the percentages of my "ethnicity estimate," and I was placed into a database where I could connect with potential relatives and learn more about my family tree.

I soon became fascinated with discovering the different years when my mom and dad's families chose to brave the Atlantic Ocean, looking for new opportunities and eventually connecting in the United States — either through fate or Providence — that resulted in my unique DNA combination.

Through my research, the word "legacy" kept popping up in my mind. Their legacy to me is probably something they never considered — it takes vision to consider one's impact on people 150 years from now — and yet, here I am, a small product of them.

Mainspring's 22-year history is full of stories about legacy, but the legacy goes beyond DNA. Choosing to conserve land you own — sometimes land that has been in your family for generations, sometimes purchased intentionally for that purpose — won't just affect the individuals with whom you share DNA, but also the strangers with whom you have no connection. What a legacy to leave.

You may be aware that

Mainspring is currently working to start an endowment fund. This fund will be used to build a foundation for general operating expenses as the need for conserving important land in this region continues to grow. Donors who have the capacity to go above and beyond an annual gift will make a huge impact on the

financial stability of

Mainspring — just another

example of the legacy to be left by our supporters. I can't talk about legacy without mentioning my boss, Sharon Taylor, She has dedicated much of her professional life to this region. helping build Mainspring into what it is today. You cannot drive in the six westernmost counties in North Carolina without seeing land she helped conserve — land that will remain protected long after we're gone. Her legacy to these mountains is truly great, and, when she retires from Mainspring in February 2020, she will be dearly

One day, my picture will appear in a database for my descendants to discover. There will be so much more information from this modern era (oh, the selfies!) that they'll have access to. Among my sarcastic Twitter posts, old yearbook photos and census statistics, I hope they'll find evidence that I had been thinking of them, these future people that I won't ever know, but share my DNA. I hope they can be proud of the legacy I left for them and their neighbors.

missed.

Legacy. What will yours say about you?





Happy Trails

AINSPRING HOSTED SIX HIKES IN 2019, including wildflower hikes in both the spring and fall. Interested in joining us for 2020 adventures? Make sure you're on our e-news list and have liked Mainspring on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. We hope to see you!

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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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