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MAINSPRING2021

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From the Director

I live in Bryson City, which means my commute to Mainspring is pretty spectacular — no matter which direction I travel. If I'm ever feeling uninspired in the mornings (a definite possibility when trying to herd a teenage daughter and third grader out the door), the 30-minute drive over Cowee Mountain or the nearly one-hour drive through Needmore helps me refocus, reminding me why I love leading this organization.

In fact, for me, Mainspring is a constant source of inspiration. While it's been another year of uncertainty, our team continues its steadfast quest to save "the best of the rest."

This past summer, I was inspired continuously during visits to Brett Riggs' archaeological class on-site at Watauga, where, each time, I heard about a new discovery. (Read the story on Page 14.)

I am inspired by the ways our aquatic biologists creatively research funding opportunities and work with partners to continue stream restorations, improving both water quality and habitat upstream. (Read more on Page 22.)

I'm constantly inspired by our land conservation team, who build relationships with landowners, diligently work through extremely complex transactions, and share a genuine passion for saving the places we all love.

If, for any reason, the past few years have left you uninspired, I hope this Land Steward offers you hope — hope for all the good things going on in the Southern Blue Ridge, and hope knowing that your donations help make those good things happen. Your support is inspiring, and we cannot thank you enough.

Jordan Smith Executive Director

> Mainspring staff on a conservation easement property along Tessentee Creek in Macon County.



Cover Photo: Deer graze at Bob and Judy Grove's property in Brasstown, North Carolina. Credit: Judy Grove

The annual publication about the activities of Mainspring Conservation Trust

November 2021



MAINSPRING CONSERVATION TRUST

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MAINS PRING2021

Contents

Four of a Kind

A special section highlighting four important projects
Butterflies, Birds, Trout, and a Giant6
Saving Soapstone8
Wild Onion10
Harvest of History12
Under the Surface Archaeologists discover secrets buried on Mainspring land14
Up the Creek Bringing back Little Tennessee headwaters
Estate of Mind Clay County couple makes big plans for conservation
Tanks for the MemoriesFrom an eyesore to an eyeful

And More

A Legacy of Leadership
The Last Word

PHOTOS p2, Jodi Ryske; p15, Robert Neitzel; p17, Brett Riggs; p26-27, Judy Grove; p30 and back cover, Fred Alexander; p31, Callie Lynch; all other photos, Mainspring staff



Page 12



Page 14



Page 22









ABOVE ALL ELSE

our job is to conserve land. As development and climate change continue to impact wildlife, forests, farms and access to clean water. Mainspring is committed to being intentional about its projects. This includes creating "exit strategies" for most of the properties we purchase outright, saving the organization from perpetual maintenance responsibilities and stewardship costs. It also means, when faced with new projects, we consistently refer to the Conservation Plan, developed in 2018 with the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, which condensed our expansive service region to a set of seven conservation focus areas.

This shift to key areas has actually increased our opportunities to conserve land with the most impact for keeping a rural sense of place and mitigating climate change. We've been busier than ever, but, more importantly, we've expanded our impact by connecting public lands, conserving forests with significant headwaters, and protecting fertile farmlands.

In the next few pages, read about some of our recent strategic land conservation projects and catch a behind-the-scenes glimpse of all that goes into protecting the places we love.



BUTTERFLIES, BIRDS,



Mainspring protects two pristine properties with both natural and cultural value N ITS 2020 MID-YEAR REPORT, Mainspring highlighted a 30acre conservation project in the Upper Tuckasegee Conservation Focus Area, at Jackson County's Caney Fork Valley. Since that publication, two new projects have been completed in the same area.

In fall 2021, Mainspring purchased High Knob and Judaculla Ridge, two inholdings surrounded by U.S. Forest Service land. Purchased just after they were listed for sale, "both are good examples of why it's important for land trusts to have financial strategies in place that allow us to be able to act quickly in the competitive real estate market," says Executive Director Jordan Smith.

Full of pristine and picturesque aquatic habitat, these inholdings and their conservation value piqued the interest of other nonprofits as well, including Trout Unlimited, a nonprofit dedicated to the recovery and preservation of native fish habitat. "Mull Creek and Coppermine Creek, both adjacent to Judaculla Ridge, are full of native brook trout that love all of this clean, clear, cool water," says



project manager Emmie Cornell, Mainspring's land conservation associate.

But brook trout aren't the only species to thrive on this property. According to Cherokee folklore, a seven-foot giant once roamed these hills — living high above the valley, atop Judaculla Ridge. (Read about the legend of Judaculla on Page 7.)

"The passing down of stories like Judaculla, from one generation to the next, is a significant component of cultural preservation for the Cherokee," Smith says.

Not only is the conservation of this land important for its cultural value, but it also ensures the protection of



OPPOSITE: Bee balm blooms in the early successional meadow on Judaculla Ridge.

LEFT: Mull Creek, shaded by old oak forest, teems with native brook trout.

TROUT, AND A GIANT

important headwater streams and natural resources, including goldenwinged warbler and brook trout habitat. And, in addition to the Blue Ridge Parkway viewshed, it's just a couple of miles from the Mountainsto-Sea Trail. Mainspring expects both properties to eventually transfer to public ownership, becoming a protected part of the wild and beautiful publicly accessible lands. "To be up here is pretty special," Smith says. "The rushing waters on Caney Fork can be heard from almost anywhere on the properties, and you're surrounded by forest except for one open area of early successional habitat that benefits many birds and pollinators. It's not hard at all to imagine a seven-foot giant living here." And now, the giant's home will be conserved forever. "It's not hard at all to imagine a seven-foot giant living here." Iordan Smith

SLANT-EYED MONSTER

ccording to one of the greatest Cherokee legends, Judaculla (changed from the Cherokee word Tsul`kalu, meaning ''great slanteyed giant'') was a seven-foot giant who lived on Judaculla Ridge. He guarded his hunting grounds from Judaculla's Judgment Seat, known today as Devil's Courthouse. In one such folktale, a party of disrespectful hunters came through Judaculla's land, and he chased them down the mountain. With a mighty leap, the angry giant landed near Caney Fork, on Judaculla Rock. Putting his hand down to steady himself, he left his mark on the rock's surface. To this day the impression of his hand can still be seen at the lower right corner of the rock. Judaculla's marks have also been seen on other boulders throughout Cherokee lands, including near the mother-town of Kituwah, a sacred and prominent Cherokee religious center.







You can help Mainspring protect a valuable mountain tract from development

SAVING SOAPSTONE

LSO IN THE UPPER TUCKASEGEE Focus AREA, Soapstone Ridge is a 246-acre parcel within a larger 3,010-acre complex that stretches from Panthertown Valley to the Tuckasegee River at the base of the Cowee Mountains. After years of laying the groundwork needed to pursue a conservation solution for this property, Mainspring, in partnership with The Conservation Fund, was able to secure a contract on Soapstone Ridge, scheduled to close on Dec. 20, 2021.

Within this property sits the prominent Big Knob. At an approximate elevation of 4,350 feet, with open knolls and excellent views to the north, this land is home to



golden-winged warblers and rich cove forest, with a diverse mixture of hardwood trees and wildflowers in the understory. An abundance of rare plant and animal species has been documented on the property, and more than 75 percent of the tract is





within the viewshed of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

"Soapstone Ridge and the adjacent tracts were slated for transfer from Crescent Resources to the U.S. Forest Service in the 1990s," says Executive Director Jordan Smith. In fact, the project was so far along that U.S. Forest Service Boundary markers can still be found demarcating the borders of the property. "For whatever reason, the project did not survive the political process, and the complex was again under threat of development. We're so excited that the current owners are willing to conserve it once again."

While Mainspring is the organization under contract for this 246-acre parcel, the entire project wouldn't be viable without its partners at The Conservation Fund. "Because this is such a large and impactful plan that will span years of work, we expect to work closely with them and the



other land trusts in our region including Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy out of Asheville and Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust — to conserve all 3,000plus acres," Smith continues.

But, in addition to partnerships, this project won't happen without help from Mainspring supporters. Soapstone Ridge is highly developable, complete with underground power to seven planned homesites and well-maintained gates on gravel roads that are ready to be paved. Because of this, Mainspring had to compete with multiple private offers and still must raise additional funds to close on this project.

If you would like to help fund the conservation of Soapstone Ridge, you can do so by donating online, by mail or through your financial advisor and be sure to specify the project during your preferred way of giving. After years of laying the groundwork needed to pursue a conservation solution for this property, Mainspring, in partnership with The Conservation Fund, was able to secure a contract, scheduled to close on Dec. 20, 2021.



LEFT TO RIGHT: A tributary of Robinson Creek; puff ball mushrooms sprout on the property; the property's iconic soapstone is revealed on one of the many rock faces found on Soapstone Ridge; breathtaking views from atop the ridge.

WILD ONION



Mainspring conserves a gift of wilderness

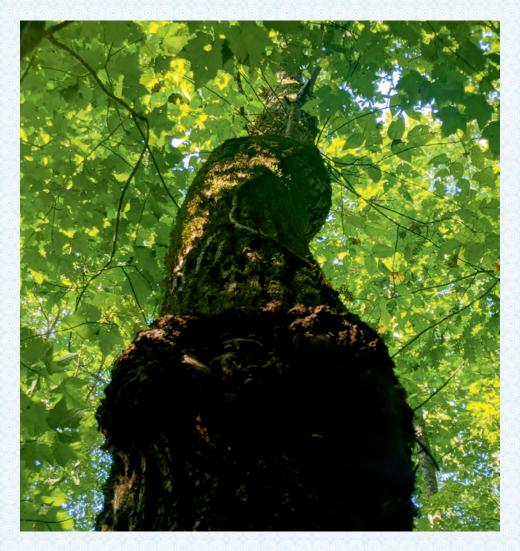
> Mainspring has plans to incorporate the property's existing primitive road into a twomile hiking trail, allowing others to enjoy all that Onion Mountain has to offer.

HERE ARE MANY LAYERS TO ONION MOUNTAIN and the ongoing story of its conservation: forests, views, development, roads, wildlife, and owners who care about the land.

In 2007, two major Mainspring supporters donated a conservation easement for 165 acres on Onion Mountain. The couple, who choose to remain anonymous, are passionate conservationists, so when a 325-acre property adjacent to their own came on the market in 2021, they approached Mainspring with a



compelling idea: They would purchase the land for conservation, donate it to Mainspring, and add to



the nonprofit's public preserves.

"From our standpoint, it was a nobrainer," says Land Conservation Manager Sara Posey-Davis. "We don't have any other public properties like this — our five other public preserves are in the valleys along rivers, so having a forested spot at a higher elevation offers something different for people wanting to get outside and explore."

The property sits in a very visible place, facing east-southeast toward Highlands at a peak elevation of 3,480 feet. It is downstream from Ellijay Creek, which, for years, has been a focus of Mainspring's Aquatic Biomonitoring program, as well as home of some of the best brook trout habitat in Macon County.

"The donors are very interested

in the concept of forever-wild conservation, giving this property the potential for showcasing that type of management approach," says Jordan Smith, Mainspring's executive director.

With that goal in mind, Mainspring has plans to incorporate the property's existing primitive road into a two-mile hiking trail, allowing others to enjoy all that Onion Mountain has to offer.

"The donors have been great partners in this project — not only gifting us the property, but continuing to be involved by helping with management costs, including a small parking area and directional signage," Posey-Davis says. "We really think it will become another outstanding place for people to get outside." "From our standpoint, it was a no-brainer. We don't have any other public properties like this."

Sara Posey-Davis





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: American columbo, a rare plant in North Carolina, is found all over Onion Mountain; a young oak sapling grows in the shadow of its parental tree; a hemlock tree sprouts in leafy undergrowth; mushrooms dot the forest floor, turning fallen logs and leaf litter into rich compost for the forest.







HARVEST OF HISTORY

Native culture and agriculture are saved for another thousand years

AINSPRING FIRST CONNECTED WITH THE TOWNSON FAMILY in 2017. after receiving a grant from the **Cherokee** Preservation Foundation to do ground penetrating research at an old cemetery on their Cherokee County property. The Townsons granted approval for Mainspring to study and clean up the cemetery, which contains the graves of John and Elizabeth Blythe Welch, a couple known to have given refuge to Cherokee when they were forcibly removed in 1838. The 107-acre property has been in the Townson family since the 1880s and sits along the Valley River in Cherokee County. In addition to its historically and culturally significant cemetery, the land is rich in conservation value, including prime farm soil and almost a mile of Valley River frontage, rated exceptional for aquatic habitat by the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program.

"As we got to know the Townsons, they expressed interest in conserving the farmland portion of the property and gifting the cemetery to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians," says Land Conservation Director Sara Posey-Davis. "Then, Mainspring hosted a training for the Hemlock Restoration Initiative on their property, where they were able to meet tribal representatives and learn about the EBCI's growing agricultural needs. They soon became interested in working with them to help."

Utilizing grants from the North



Carolina Agricultural Development Farmland Protection Trust Fund and USDA Agricultural Land Easement Program, Mainspring worked to place a conservation easement on the farmland. Those two entities will cover 75 percent of the easement value, and the landowners will contribute the remaining 25 percent. After the easement is finalized, the conserved land is expected to be sold to the EBCI and be used for farming.

Vicky Townson Grant remembers joining her brothers, packing a picnic and making the trek from their family home, through the woods and fields, up to the old cemetery that overlooks the Valley River. "Even then, we knew this was a special place," she recalls. "I feel fortunate to have grown up here, and now I feel a real calling to conserve the land and make it available to the EBCI for food production."

Historians believe the rich bottomland of the Valley River has sustained life for thousands of years. It will now be available for this use into perpetuity.





Rustic headstones dot the ancient cemetery on the Townson property, which includes the graves of John and Elizabeth Blythe Welch, who sheltered Cherokee during the Removal period.

Vicky Townson Grant and her brother, Tom Townson, under an oak tree that stands near the old homestead.





"I feel fortunate to have grown up here, and now I feel a real calling to conserve the land and make it available to the EBCI for food production." Vicky Townson Grant

Under the Surface

Mainspring's Watauga Mound property gives up its secrets about how the ancient Cherokee lived and flourished. HIS PAST SUMMER, 16 STUDENTS FROM WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY, led by Dr. Brett Riggs, Dr. Jane Eastman and field assistant Karen Biggert, drove each weekday from Cullowhee to Franklin to spend their days outside for more than four hot, sticky weeks. Their mission? Apply scientific techniques to discover archaeological evidence on Mainspring's Watauga Mound property, and learn more about what northern Macon County looked like hundreds of years ago.

Partnering with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Tribal Historic Preservation Office and using remote sensing technology and imaging software, the upper-level Archaeological Field Study students scanned the ground at half-meter intervals throughout the 70-acre field to discover, by direct observation and measurement, how the Cherokee people lived and thrived in this region.

"We knew from 18th century documents that Watauga was a very important town, but there was some question about whether the small





hillocks in the field represented the mound that [naturalist] William Bartram saw there in 1776," archaeologist Brett Riggs explains. Riggs serves as the Sequoyah Distinguished Professor of Cherokee Studies at Western Carolina University. "With new technology, we can learn a whole lot about village structure and site plan without digging, including where the mound actually is. Without it, it would have taken years of excavation to find out what we've found in four and a half weeks.''

"We found projectile points where (continued on page 16)

Artist renderings of an 18th century Cherokee council house, seated atop a mound, and town site.



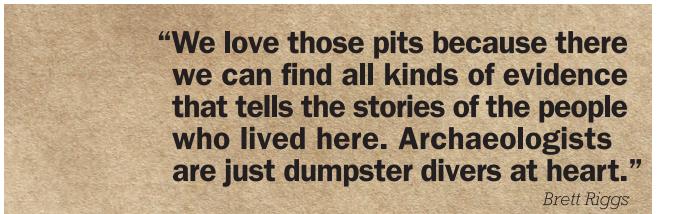
Under the Surface

(continued from page 15)

there was human occupation 7,000 years ago, with continuous occupation starting as early as 1,000 years ago," Riggs explains. "We can also see when the community starts to spread out, especially accelerating after the Revolutionary War."

Using a gradiometer, students found houses — octagons 23 feet

across with four long sides and four short sides — and pits dug into the ground to store food, particularly sweet potatoes, a popular crop in the 18th century. Those pits are especially important. "Once any of the potatoes rotted, the pits couldn't be used for food storage again, so instead they were used for trash," Riggs continues. *(continued on page 18)*



Dr. Brett Riggs explains what students have found at Watauga and shows visitors graphs of the gradiometer hot spots. This open field, atop an elevated plateau, was once the site of a bustling Cherokee town.







Buried Treasure

Sample artifacts from the dig

Items unearthed at Watauga Mound. TOP ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: a flintlock hammer, a ladder-stamped sherd. MIDDLE ROW: a carved stone pipe bowl, a checkered jar rim. BOTTOM ROW: the head of a trade axe.

Under the Surface

(continued from page 16) "We love those pits because there we can find all kinds of evidence that tells the stories of the people who lived here. Archaeologists are just dumpster divers at heart."

But the biggest discovery came from testing not one, but two small hills — bumps really — that are subtle landforms located in the pasture. Although both had been plowed significantly over time, the two hills had piqued the curiosity of several researchers over the years.

"We studied one hillock first, because the farmer was cutting hay on the field with the other hill," Riggs explains. "There, the gradiometry revealed remains of at least three superimposed council houses —

"The council house was used for astronomical observations. This area would be perfect for that because of the open fields on an elevated plateau — the Watauga Plains. The sun comes up and shines straight through the door."

Brett Riggs

WCU students at work on the archaeological site.





clearly evidence of Watauga Mound''

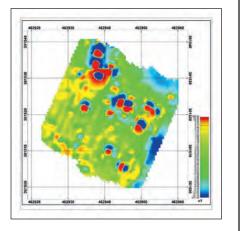
Those council houses were about 48 feet wide and 24 feet tall, with each lasting 20-50 years. The entrance to a council house faced south-southeast to perfectly align with the sunrise of the winter solstice. Once a council house needed to be rebuilt, the previous one would be burned and the new structure built on top. Riggs estimates about five to eight such houses were on Watauga Mound through time. "The council house was used for astronomical observations," Riggs says. "This area would be perfect for that use because of the open fields on an elevated plateau — the Watauga Plains. The sun comes up and shines straight through the door."

Once the farmer finished cutting hay, the WCU team explored the second rise in the pasture, and what *(continued on page 21)*

What Lies Beneath

🗖 ecause soil contains iron, D activities like burning a fire or digging a hole can realign the local magnetic fields in the ground, producing magnetic anomalies that contrast with those of the surrounding unmodified soils. Archaeologists use a geophysical technique called gradiometery to map subsoil magnetism and detect those local anomalies. Although gradiometers can only "see" about a meter deep, most magnetic anomalies that represent past human activities are within that uppermost layer, allowing

researchers to get a big-picture understanding of the site they are studying.

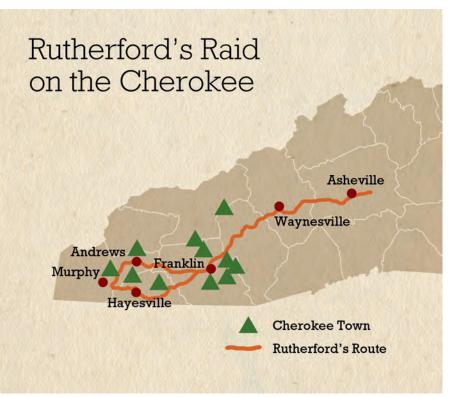


Under the Surface

A Path of Destruction



w atauga's council houses and surrounding town likely stood until 1776, when Griffith Rutherford, brigadier general of the Salisbury District militia, led 1,700 troops in an expedition against the Cherokee. After stoking considerable fear in white North Carolinians over a potential Cherokee alliance with the British during the Revolutionary War, Rutherford and his troops marched through the Cherokee Middle Towns - including Cowee, Watauga and Nikwasi — and burned crops, houses and livestock, eventually destroying 36 villages and leaving the Cherokee people to survive through winter on nothing but wild game and nuts, with no protection from the elements. Though the Cherokee eventually rebuilt, they spread their villages over a significantly larger area, hoping to avoid another total loss of resources if attacked again.



"No one has documented paired mounds, with paired council house structures, in the Southern Blue Ridge before."

Brett Riggs

(continued from page 19) they found astounded the experts. "We scanned the second mound and found another council house and pavilion, facing away from Watauga Town," Riggs explains. "No one has documented paired mounds, with paired council house structures, in the Southern Blue Ridge before."

This mound is offset from the larger one, but closer to water. Riggs said the house on it could have been used for anything communal. "It could have been a church, courthouse, dance house, or even a lodge reserved for groups of men, patterns observed in other areas of the Southeast," he explains. "In any case, this is unprecedented in this area."

Riggs says he is excited to bring other classes back to the historic Cherokee town for additional research. "So often, when archaeologists are brought in for projects, it's because some type of development is being planned for the site, so we're on a tight timeframe to complete our work," he says. "Having a place — especially one as special as Watauga — that is conserved forever means we can spend the next 30 years being diligent about the study and not be rushed to finish. It is such a gift for us, so I'm so thankful that the landowners were willing to sell to Mainspring and this important cultural site will be protected forever."







Archaeology students sift through samples at the Watauga site.

Up the Creek

Bringing back Little Tennessee headwaters

THE LAND STEWARD

the casual observer, north Georgia's Wolffork Valley is breathtaking picture-perfect mountains towering above a flat, sprawling valley boasting cultivated fields farmed for generations. It's a scene that leads most people to assume the area is healthy and vibrant, a natural space untouched by the modern world.

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Sadly, though, if it could talk, the aquatic habitat found in Wolffork Valley would disagree. For years, Mainspring has collected fish-based biological integrity data and limited macroinvertebrate data in Wolffork Creek, at the headwaters of the Little Tennessee River — and the results rated the basin as "Poor Bioclass."

Most of the damage was done more than 50 years ago, explains Aquatics Program Manager Jason Meador. "I don't think anyone intentionally degraded the waters. People did stuff based on the information they had at the time," he says.

Still, little had been done over and regulatory issues presented additional obstacles to the potential project, with North Carolina nonprofits like Mainspring precluded from obtaining funding for a project in Georgia. Additionally, river restoration projects come with their own unique challenges. For one, moving waters mean that, for every restoration project completed, the waters upstream or downstream need some type of management to continue the clean water initiatives.

"It does not take a rocket scientist to see that the Georgia section of the Little Tennessee is stressed," says Joe Kirsch, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Agencies are investing lots of money downstream because that is where the rare species are located. However, you have to patch together the watershed, and to do so, you have to work at a meaningful scale. This means working upstream at a large enough scale that is going to make a difference." Since landowners typically own smaller parcels of streambank, most restoration work is completed in tiny sections, rather than in a long, continuous tract.

To Mainspring, this project was worth the wait. "While locals tend to call this section Wolffork Creek, it's actually part of the Little Tennessee River," Meador says. "And, since it's such an important part of the headwaters, we definitely

want to help keep it

clean. So we persisted with potential solutions."

Now, change is coming for the Wolffork Valley, as Mainspring has developed a plan with new partners to help that habitat thrive once again.

Wolffork Creek received its big

break thanks to longtime Mainspring

volunteers David and Rita Rothmeier. who live in the valley. "One of David's outstanding qualities is his ability to get along with everybody," says Bill McLarney, Mainspring's senior scientist and aquatic programs specialist. And, for this project, the couple's connections paid off in a big way. In early spring

2021, the Rothmeiers introduced Mainspring biologists to the James family of Osage Farms, whose operations lie on a large, key swath of river frontage — right on Wolffork Creek.

With 139 acres in the valley — including 5.5miles of the Little Tennessee River and its two tributaries, Billy Branch and Keener Creek — Osage Farms was the perfect ally to help move this project forward. Luckily, the Rothmeiers' introduction paid off, and the Jameses were happy to help. They "saw the benefits of restoring the watershed and want to be good stewards of the river," Meador explains. "Since we were bringing the money and offering to do the work, they were more than willing to offer their farmland to the effort."

Because Osage Farms owns or leases so much of the streambanks in the Wolffork Valley, this effort will be the first of Mainspring's projects to focus on a single subwatershed. Moreover, it is the first opportunity that stands to impact so many continual linear feet within a specific basin. The multi-year, multi-phase project will include a partnership with landowners, the state of Georgia, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Once we've completed the restoration, there's no reason the fish we routinely find in North Carolina won't extend their habitat to live in the Georgia waters — fish don't care about state lines, only clean, unobstructed water," Meador says.

Finally moving forward after years of effort, this project is now coming together thanks to the

> connections of those in the broader Mainspring community. ''Our hope is that, once he works with us, his neighbors will see the value and our professionalism. and it will create a domino effect,'' Meador says. "But even so, we are still thrilled with the impact

we can make with this one landowner." He continues, adding: ''Mr. James asked me once if I thought we could really make a difference. My response to him was, 'If we can't make a difference with this effort. we might as well aet out of this business.'''

"While locals tend to call this section Wolffork Creek. it's actually part of the Little **Tennessee River.** and, since it's such an important part of the headwaters, we definitely want to help keep it clean."

Jason Meador

A variety of crops and quaint family farms dot the landscape in Wolffork Valley; shiners are native to the Little Tennessee River Basin.

Estate of Mind

"We have breakfast every morning with the deer."

A Clay County couple includes Mainspring (and conservation) in their plans. s you make your way up the half-mile driveway to Bob and Judy Grove's Clay County property, it's easy to imagine sharing mealtime with the wildlife each day; a deer watches, as if to welcome you to her home.

Judy is outside, patiently tending to small sprouts of bittersweet and stillweed. Using a handheld blowtorch, she burns the weeds down to the root, careful not to disturb the native plants that surround her home, which she shares with her husband of 51 years.

"These invasives are such a pain!" she says, laughing at her peculiar technique.

The Groves first purchased 30 forested acres in Brasstown in the early 1980s, then later bought the adjacent flat land, bringing their total

property size up to 51 acres. For the past 15 years, the Groves have stewarded the property utilizing a forest management plan, employing a selective harvest that promotes the growth of healthier trees in the Low Mountain Pine Forest portion of the property. Rock outcroppings and a small wetland harbor unique plant and animal species, allowing the Groves to enroll in a Wildlife Habitat Conservation Agreement with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. That management plan for the upper portion of the property is considered a Montane Oak-Hickory Forest.

When the couple began discussing plans for their estate, it was clear they both had similar goals. "We knew we didn't want this place subdivided, so we talked with our children and grandchildren about









their wishes," Judy explains. "They supported us giving the property to Mainspring. It is such a relief to know there are organizations that are willing to take the responsibility of maintaining the conservation values of it forever."

Land Conservation Manager Sara Posey-Davis has been meeting with the Groves since 2018 to discuss conservation options based on their desires for the land. They chose to both donate a conservation easement on the property and bequeath a life estate to Mainspring.

Posey-Davis explains: "Bob and Judy have taken exceptional care of this land. They've gone through extensive steps to protect and preserve its natural beauty becoming a Certified Wildlife Habitat Area through the National Wildlife Federation, earning recognition as an Appalachian Native Botanical Sanctuary by the University of Georgia Mountain Research and Education Center, and receiving a Certificate of Achievement from the North Carolina Native Plant Society. Their hard work has paid off with a place that is very close to what Southern Appalachia used to look like all over. We are so humbled they placed their trust in our services.''

If you're interested in conserving your property and/or gifting all or part of it to Mainspring in your will or trust, please contact Jordan Smith at jsmith@mainspringconserves.org. We encourage open dialogue with donors to ensure their desires and intent are accurately and respectfully enacted. Bob and Judy Grove, pictured above at Fires Creek, have taken exceptional care of their land, as evidenced by these scenes taken on their pristine property. VER SINCE MAINSPRING COMPLETED THE RESTORATION of the Brownfield site next to its offices in 2016, the most common question fielded to our staff has been, "What are you guys doing with those huge tanks?"

Tanks for the Memories

Mainspring's eyesore will soon become an eyeful Indeed, the tall, old, rusty tanks stand out. Back when the property was operated by the JH Duncan Oil Company, the tanks each held 12,000 gallons of fuel, ready to supply a nearby loading rack via underground piping. At the time of the Brownfield remediation, then-Executive Director Sharon Taylor and Deputy Director Ben Laseter chose to keep them a reminder of the site's former use.

"We were fortunate to secure U.S. EPA funding to remediate the site, which not only included removing above- and below-ground fuel tanks, but also allowed us to regrade the site to better manage stormwater and stabilize the river bank on the Little Tennessee River," Laseter says. "We had the option of completely wiping the site clean, with respect to its past use, but we wanted to keep the tanks as a way to tell the story of the site — and of the neighborhood, for that matter. We made the decision early in the process. This part of Franklin has so much history, from Nikwasi Town to industry to green space. There are so many layers of its story to tell.''

Now, Mainspring is moving forward. Scott Allred of Brushcan the artist behind many of Asheville's beautiful murals, including those at Sweeten Creek Antiques, the Lake James State Park Museum and Visitors Center, and Hi-Wire Brewing — is prepping our four tanks for a series of murals that depict the waters, forests, farms and cultural heritage of Franklin. Each will represent one of the four pillars of Mainspring's conservation efforts, as reflected in our mission statement.

"We're all looking forward to having Scott on-site and watching his



process unfold," says Executive Director Jordan Smith. "Scott's receptiveness to feedback and attention to detail have made him a pleasure to work with. In early conversations, it was clear that Scott was interested in our mission and in

creating a public art piece that tells Mainspring's story. We knew then that we'd found the right artist for the job."

Included on this page are Allred's concept drawings of the "water" and "forest" murals. Look for the finished products in the next few months!

BOTTOM: The tanks on Mainspring's property, in a photo taken directly after the remediation. Each of the four tanks will soon feature works of art. LEFT: Allred's conceptual drawings of the forest and water murals. **RIGHT:** Two examples of Allred's popular works.











A Legacy of Leadership

Founding Mainspring board member Barbara McRae passed away peacefully at her home on March 2, 2021. Below, Paul Carlson, Mainspring's founding executive director, celebrates her life and work with the land trust.

first met Barbara McRae in February 1995, when Bill McLarney set up a meeting for the three of us. After a two-hour discussion, we agreed that a land trust was needed for the Little

Tennessee Valley, and we began meeting regularly just a few months later, growing to a seven-person luncheon group, to lay the foundations needed for a new organization. In 1997, the land trust formally organized under the legal umbrella of the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy — and two years after that, the Land Trust for the Little Tennessee was incorporated as a conservation nonprofit, with Barbara serving as a founding Board officer. When defining our initial mission statement and work plan, Barbara firmly pushed to concentrate our focus along the Little Tennessee

and land conservation across the rest of the valley. The two proposals were submitted jointly and resulted in the first major conservation investment in the Valley of the Little Tennessee in 80 years, since the acquisition of National Forest lands in the river's headwaters.

As LTLT grew, attracting able people to its Board in the early 2000s, Barbara stepped down from the land trust's leadership to turn her focus to other community needs. She became the

> editor of the Franklin Press, where she continued to support the land trust's efforts by giving media attention to its most pressing issues — like the local vision to conserve the Needmore Tract — and to celebrate its milestones, like the return of Cowee Mound to tribal ownership and the conservation of key farmland tracts.

When LTLT, now Mainspring, decided to conserve and restore sites surrounding Nikwasi Mound, Barbara was among the first to be consulted. In subsequent years, when the land trust helped convene local Cherokee and Franklin leaders to work together for

River and to include cultural heritage conservation as part of our mission. LTLT's early effort to secure National Historic Register status for the Cowee-West Mill area was rooted in Barbara's guidance.

In 1997 when the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund first came online, Barbara (then working for Nantahala Power and Light Company) wrote a proposal on behalf of Macon County to fund the incipient Little Tennessee Greenway, while McLarney and I wrote a parallel proposal to support streambank the future of Nikwasi, Barbara offered her leadership, ultimately serving as the founding co-chair of Nikwasi Initiative.

Even Mainspring's home base, established on the east side of the Nikwasi Mound and along her beloved Little Tennessee Greenway, can be seen as a testament to Barbara McRae's early guidance and enduring legacy with the organization.

Barbara, we are forever grateful, and your presence will be dearly missed.

The Last Word

MOLLY PHILLIPS Communications Coordinator

hen my husband and I moved to western North Carolina 15 years ago, we knew the mountains were pretty, the rivers were beautiful and the weather was fairly temperate. What we didn't know was how welcoming the people would be.

We are both native Arkansans, where it's very common to ask, "Who are your people?" I remember visiting a small church one Sunday in a rural, eastern Arkansas town and asking a woman if she was from there. Her response? "Honey, I've been here for 40 years, and I'm still not 'from' here."

And, while we occasionally get questions about our heritage in Franklin, for the most part, we've been welcomed to Southern Appalachia with open arms.

Last year, an "old" Franklin family made the decision to sell the 124acre farm that had been in their family since 1860. The house on the property, built circa 1872, sits atop a knoll in a prominent spot in the Iotla community and is an iconic landmark — stately in nature, but not ostentatious either. Through a twist of fate, the family chose my husband and me as the next generation of stewards for this farm.

The responsibility we feel to nurture this place is real. We want to restore the house, but also keep the rural setting for the rest of the farm. The land is beautiful — and, frankly, highly developable. Maybe it's the "Mainspring influence," but I just can't imagine the 150-year-old house surrounded by new construction. It needs room to breathe. So, in addition to the house, we're researching ways to also restore the farm — shading the streams, reestablishing the wetland — in a way that we hope makes the family proud they entrusted us with their homestead.

This place — Southern Appalachia, western North Carolina, Franklin, Iotla — is our home. Whether ''your people'' have been here 200 years or 15 years, protecting the land, water and cultural heritage of this region can be inherent in us all.

P.S. Follow our journey of restoration at iotlavalleyfarm.com, or follow me on Instagram at @molly.p.



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Stewards of the Southern Blue Ridge

P. O. Box 1148, Franklin, NC 28744

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Leave a Legacy

The next generation should inherit the vital resources of this region: 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 executive director at 828.524.2711, or visit mainspringconserves.org.