

For the Benefit of All

2024 Annual Report



MAINSPRING
CONSERVATION TRUST



From the Executive Director



In 2024, we embarked on a strategic planning process to set Mainspring's priorities and goals for the next five years. By identifying the evolving needs of the region, we can allocate our resources more effectively.

Since its founding, Mainspring has proudly focused on conserving the waters, forests, farms and heritage of the Little Tennessee and Hiwassee river basins. This mission has guided us through decades of impactful work, protecting thousands of acres and safeguarding the natural and cultural resources that define our region.

Through extensive conversations with stakeholders, partners and community members, it became clear that the challenges and opportunities in conservation are changing. Climate resilience, regional growth, evolving land use and even the housing crisis have expanded the landscape of conservation priorities. We realized that to continue fulfilling our role as a trusted conservation leader, we needed a broader and more inclusive approach.

To that end, Mainspring is changing its mission statement to capture the full scope of all we do to conserve what makes this region so remarkable and worth protecting. Our mission is now: **To conserve unique and special places in the heart of the Southern Blue Ridge for the benefit of all.**

We are deeply grateful for your belief in Mainspring's mission and for your investment in a thriving, sustainable future for the Southern Blue Ridge. Together, we will continue to conserve the places that make this region so special — for the benefit of all.

Sincerely,

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

Jordan Smith
Executive Director
Mainspring Conservation Trust

P.S. Read more about our mission, vision and goals on page 6.

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A Welcome Balance

No one knows how long Karl Haiss has been volunteering with Mainspring — not even Karl himself.

“I’ve been an environmentalist since I was crawling on all fours,” he says, “but I don’t know how I even first heard about Mainspring.”

Regardless of who roped Karl into attending his first workday, he quickly realized that volunteering is a way to reconnect with what’s important.

“It adds a welcome balance to this world we live in,” Karl says. With busy lives and many problems, we can forget to simply enjoy life. He reflects on how trail building and removing invasive plants offer a peaceful pleasure, reminding us to step outside the tangle of our obligations and ground ourselves in nature. In the woods, there are no bills or chores — just the path to the summit.

Karl isn’t the only one who feels this way. Step into the woods with Mainspring, and you step into a sense of community that comes with being part of something greater. In all his years of volunteering, Karl has noticed that “people of all different walks of life are volunteering for the same reason, and that’s a special thing.”

Our perspectives can divide us, but no matter what path we walk, we can all agree on clean water, fresh air and thriving communities. Mainspring’s volunteer base is as diverse as the plants on our mountains and the fish in our creeks, but they all share one thing: the drive



“People of all different walks of life are volunteering for the same reason, and that’s a special thing.”

to give back to an Earth that gives them so much.

Volunteers as dedicated as Karl are a treasure. After planting countless trees at Tessentee Bottomland Preserve last year, he is the perfect person to advise aspiring volunteers.

The advice? “Just do it,” he insists. “You need it. Everybody needs it.”

Interested in volunteering? Mainspring is grateful for people of all ages and talents who want to help with office work, property improvements or management, biomonitoring or at outreach events. Sign up by visiting mainspringconserves.org/be-a-mainspring/volunteer.

Mission Control

Mainspring's 2024 land conservation highlights

1 King Meadows III
Graham County, 50 acres
 Mainspring completed this conservation project by conveying a conservation easement to the state of North Carolina.

2 Sharptop Ridge
Clay County, 32 acres
 Located entirely within the Appalachian Trail viewshed, this property was transferred to the U.S. Forest Service in 2024.

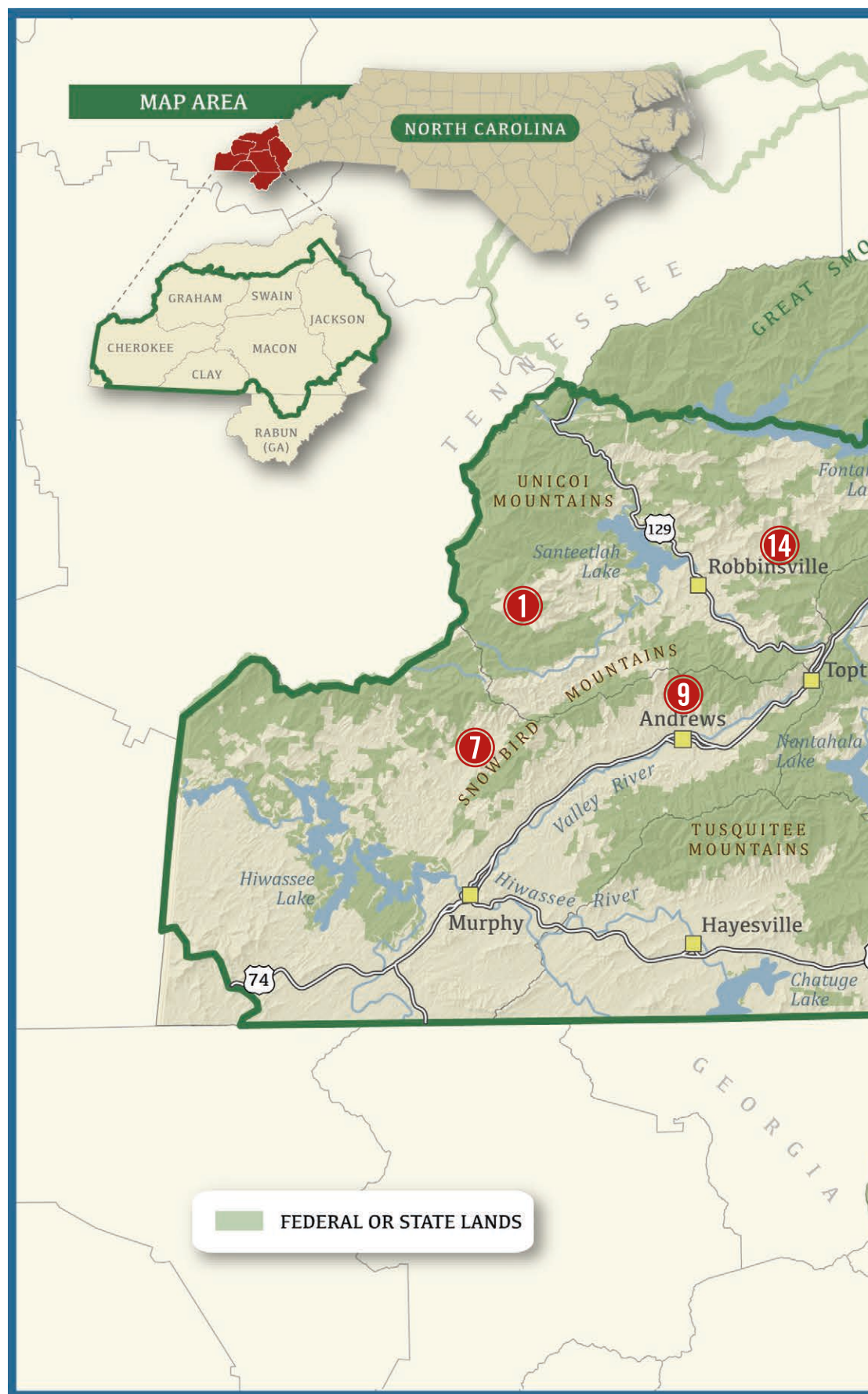
3 Pinnacle Park III
Jackson County, 152 acres
 An N.C. Land and Water Fund grant supported this acquisition and conservation. The land will eventually be incorporated into Sylva's recreation plan.

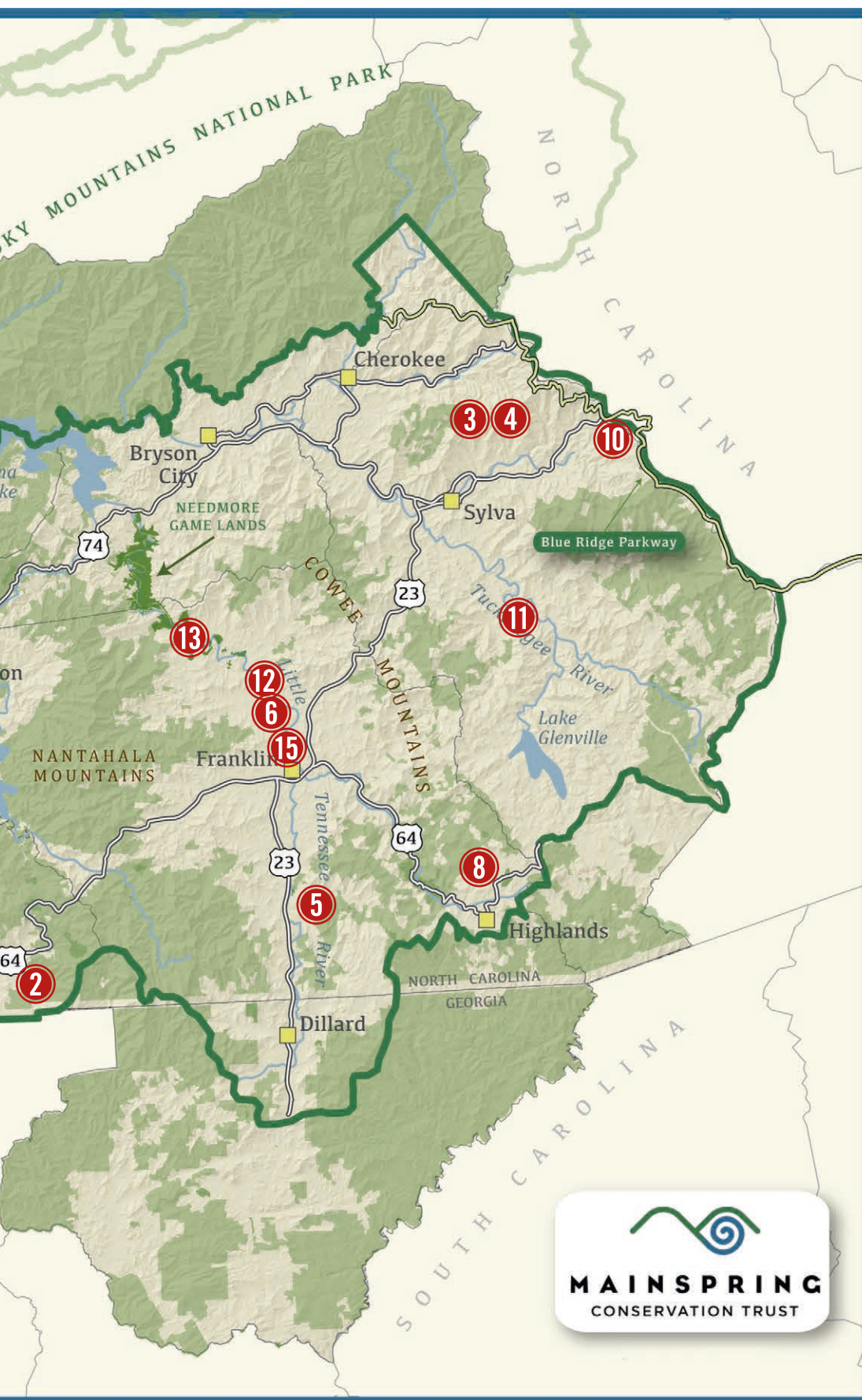
4 Pinnacle Park V
Jackson County, 16 acres
 This parcel was donated to Mainspring by the landowner to expand Pinnacle Park for the Town of Sylva.

5 Tassentee IV
Macon County, 43 acres
 The state of North Carolina now holds this conservation easement, while Mainspring will continue to manage the property as a part of the Tassentee Bottomlands Preserve in Otto.

6 Watauga Town IV
Macon County, 3 acres
 This small but significant project conserves the last unprotected portion of the second Cherokee Watauga Mound.

7 Hanging Dog I and II
Cherokee County, 150 acres
 Landowners donated two conservation easements, permanently protecting their private property.





8 Houston Branch I and II
Macon County, 45 acres

A native brook trout stream runs through these privately owned Highlands properties, now protected by conservation easements donated to Mainspring by the owners.

9 Cover Falls
Cherokee County, 57 acres

Mainspring plans to improve trails for better public access to this property and its striking spray cliff waterfall.

10 Cabin Flats I
Jackson County, 1,147 acres

One of Mainspring's largest conservation easements. See page 8 for details.

11 Cullowhee Mountain Forest Farm

Jackson County, 92 acres
Partnering with the N.C. Department of Agriculture, this conservation easement ensures continued forest management and protects thriving wildlife habitat.

12 Iotla Bridge
Macon County, 2 acres

Mainspring acquired this riverfront lot for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission to establish public river access.

13 Kelly Cove
Macon County, 95 acres

Mainspring transferred this property to the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission for public game lands management and access.

14 Simp Gap Access
Graham County, 13 acres

Mainspring transferred this tract to the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission to provide access to another 495 acres held by Mainspring, all of which will ultimately become public game lands with Appalachian Trail access.

15 Siler-Jones House
Macon County, 1 acre

The 200-year-old home on the National Historic Register will soon be restored for adaptive reuse.

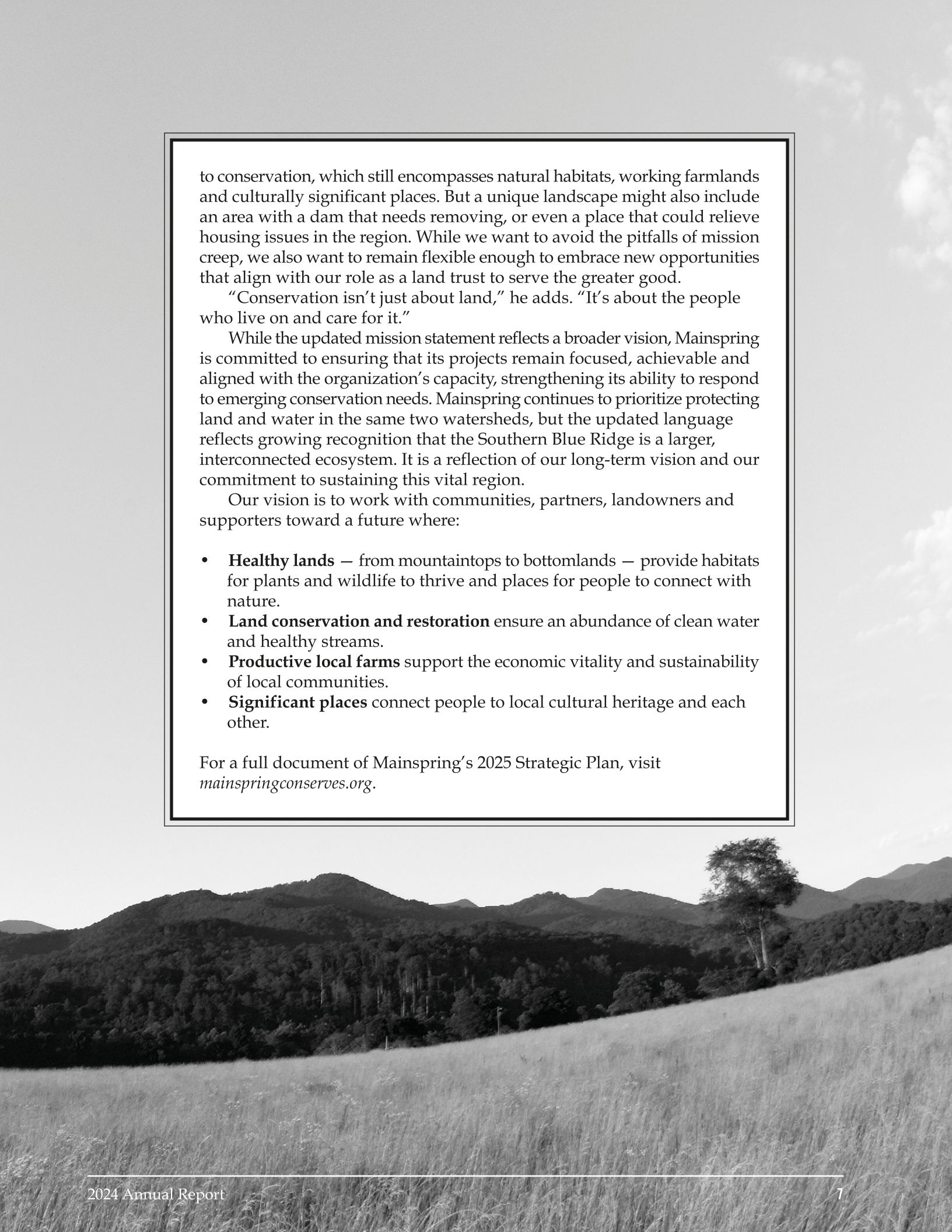
Best Laid Plans

Even the best trail maps need an update now and then. Over the past year, Mainspring staff took a deep dive into a new strategic plan — reassessing the organization’s vision and goals, how we respond to emerging challenges and opportunities, and ensuring our mission reflects the path ahead. The result? A refreshed mission statement that better captures the heart of our work and where we’re headed next.

“**M**ainspring’s previous mission, ‘to conserve the waters, forests, farms and cultural heritage in the Little Tennessee and Hiwassee River watersheds,’ has served us well for decades,” says Jordan Smith, executive director. “But the more our staff talked, the more we saw a need for a statement that reflected a broader vision and a more accessible message.”

The new mission, “To conserve unique and special places in the heart of the Southern Blue Ridge for the benefit of all,” does just that.

“‘Unique and special places’ was a phrase that was discussed and debated over lots of cookies, coffee and the occasional beer,” Smith explains. “At the end of the day, we wanted to highlight our comprehensive approach



to conservation, which still encompasses natural habitats, working farmlands and culturally significant places. But a unique landscape might also include an area with a dam that needs removing, or even a place that could relieve housing issues in the region. While we want to avoid the pitfalls of mission creep, we also want to remain flexible enough to embrace new opportunities that align with our role as a land trust to serve the greater good.

“Conservation isn’t just about land,” he adds. “It’s about the people who live on and care for it.”

While the updated mission statement reflects a broader vision, Mainspring is committed to ensuring that its projects remain focused, achievable and aligned with the organization’s capacity, strengthening its ability to respond to emerging conservation needs. Mainspring continues to prioritize protecting land and water in the same two watersheds, but the updated language reflects growing recognition that the Southern Blue Ridge is a larger, interconnected ecosystem. It is a reflection of our long-term vision and our commitment to sustaining this vital region.

Our vision is to work with communities, partners, landowners and supporters toward a future where:

- **Healthy lands** — from mountaintops to bottomlands — provide habitats for plants and wildlife to thrive and places for people to connect with nature.
- **Land conservation and restoration** ensure an abundance of clean water and healthy streams.
- **Productive local farms** support the economic vitality and sustainability of local communities.
- **Significant places** connect people to local cultural heritage and each other.

For a full document of Mainspring’s 2025 Strategic Plan, visit mainspringconserves.org.



Perseverance Pays Off

Nearly 4,000 acres of critical forestland in the Great Balsam Mountains will be permanently protected thanks to a collaborative effort between Mainspring, The Conservation Fund, the North Carolina Forest Service and private donors.

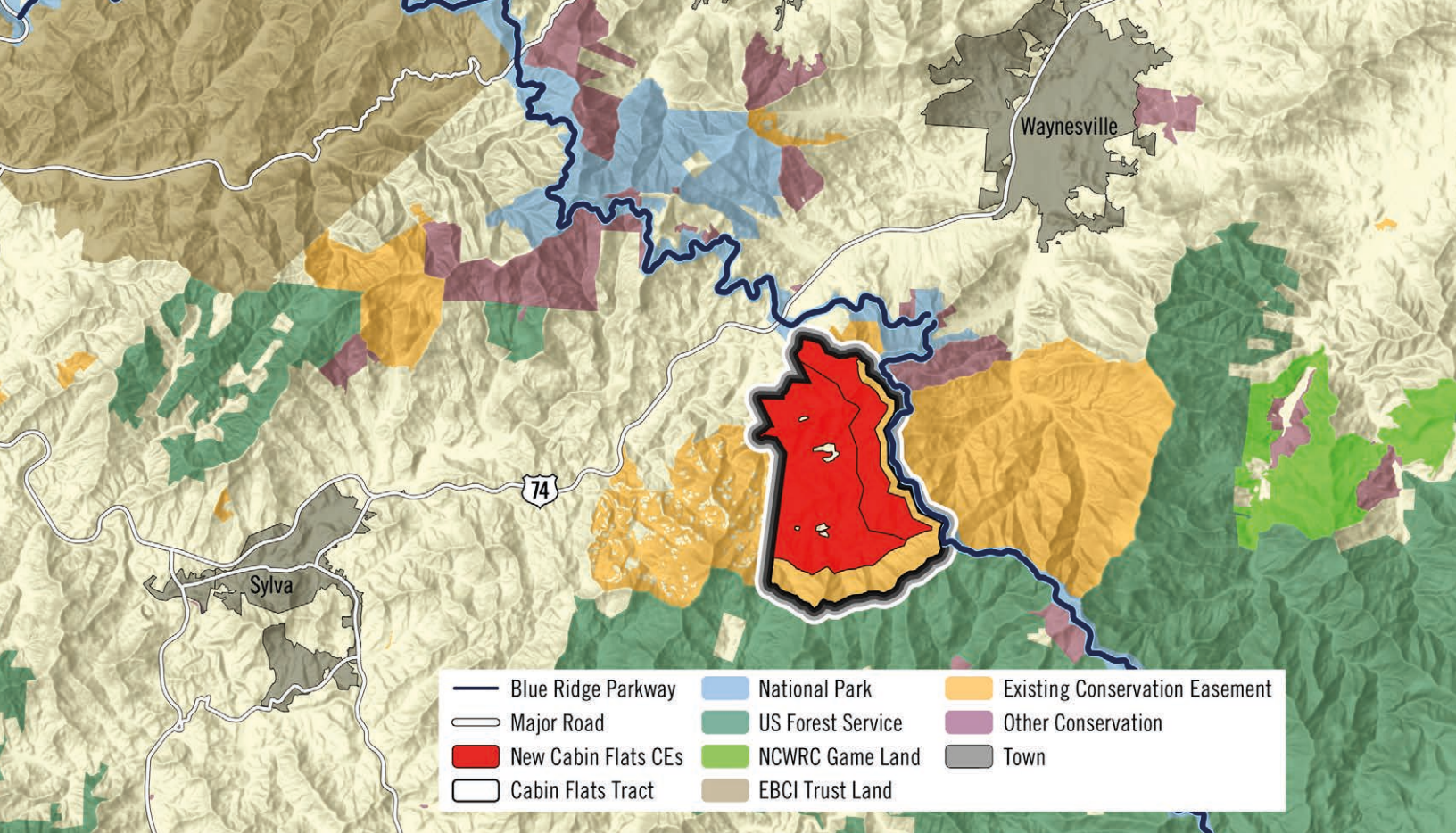
Bordering four miles of the Blue Ridge Parkway near Roy Taylor Overlook at Milepost 433, the two Jackson County properties — which include Cabin Creek, as well as sections of Dark Ridge and Grassy Ridge — boast scenic views that stretch over 17 miles. In 2023 alone, the Parkway generated \$1.4 billion in visitor spending, making the protection of this natural landscape a major boost to the local economy.

The private properties join roughly 55,000 acres of private and federally protected land in the Great Balsams. Mainspring now holds and will steward the 1,147-acre easement adjacent to the Parkway, protecting vital stream buffers, sensitive habitats and stunning vistas. Next

door, the North Carolina Forest Service's 2,700-acre working forest easement, held by the state, allows for sustainable timber production while safeguarding trout streams and other sensitive areas.

This project, which had been in the works since 1999, was not without its challenges. Despite early lobbying efforts led by Mimi Cecil, who co-owned The Biltmore Co. with her husband William A.V. Cecil, funding was cut from the final appropriations bill in 2002. "While our initial efforts were unsuccessful, and we feared we might have lost our chance for good, we kept at it," said Michael Leonard, senior advisor for The Conservation Fund.

After a long pause, discussions



resumed in 2019, but the project faced new challenges with grant compatibility issues. Mainspring stepped in to help clear the remaining roadblocks by agreeing to hold one of the conservation easements and providing the last piece of the funding puzzle, bringing both conservation easements across the finish line in 2024.

In an interview with the Asheville Citizen Times, Leonard says that Mainspring's involvement was a “major” help in speeding up the already lengthy conservation process. He also praises the Stanback family for donating money in honor of the Cecils’ effort to conserve the property.

“North Carolina is a special place, and the things that make it special for visitors and locals alike need to be protected,” Leonard says. “I’m thrilled that all the years of perseverance and all the strong partnerships brought about this rare second chance and a big

conservation success.”

Looking ahead, Mainspring’s stewardship team has the rewarding yet demanding task of stewarding this vast and rugged landscape. With elevations ranging from 3,550 to 5,580 feet and miles of trout stream buffers to oversee, the annual monitoring of the property will be extensive. Still, Mainspring Stewardship Director Kelder Monar says he looks forward to coming up with creative stewardship solutions to surveil the large property, including potential overnight camping trips. “It’s a gorgeous place to spend time,” he explains.

U.S. Representative Chuck Edwards praised the project, saying: “These funds invested in Western North Carolina will not only protect the natural beauty of the Blue Ridge Parkway, but it will also help spur recreation and tourism, which are significant drivers of our local economy — especially after the devastation of Hurricane Helene.”

“North Carolina is a special place, and the things that make it special for visitors and locals alike need to be protected.”

—Michael Leonard

At the end of 2024, Mainspring took a step toward deepening its impact in the westernmost region of its service area by opening a new office in Andrews, North Carolina. Made possible by a generous grant from Dogwood Health Trust, this move reflects a commitment to serving the communities and landscapes of this unique and ecologically rich part of the state.

Mainspring Heads West

“We’ve seen how effective conservation can be when it’s deeply connected to the community.”

—Jordan Smith

The watersheds in the far west, including the Valley, Snowbird and Cheoah rivers, are as distinctive as the people who live there, each shaped by its own geography, culture and conservation challenges. Conservation in these areas requires an intimate understanding of local nuances, from land use patterns to community priorities. By professionally and personally embedding staff in the region, Mainspring can better support the people who live there and build trust with the communities we serve.

The Andrews office will be home to two staff members: Conservation Outreach Coordinator Alina Martin and Land Conservation Associate Graham Garrett. Alina, who joined Mainspring’s staff in February, builds on the ongoing work of Conservation Outreach Director Skye Cahoon. Alina will organize outdoor activities like guided birding hikes and educational workshops that help people connect with nature and one another. Her goal is to spark a love for the outdoors and inspire people to care for the natural and cultural treasures of the far western part of the state.

Graham, who led the effort to secure the space, has been managing projects specific to the far western part of the service area since the

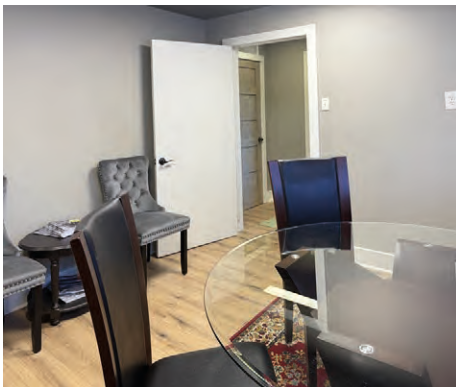
Andrews resident began working with Mainspring in 2022. From this regional outpost, Graham can work more closely with local landowners, navigate the complexities of conservation agreements and respond promptly to emerging opportunities.

The new Andrews office is the second satellite location Mainspring has established in the far western region of its service area. The first, in Murphy, operated for several years until the pandemic prompted Mainspring to end its lease.

“We’ve seen how effective conservation can be when it’s deeply connected to the community,” says Executive Director Jordan Smith. “Reopening a regional office builds on that success. Having our team members live and work directly in the area is a meaningful investment in the people, the place, and the unique landscapes we are committed to protecting.”

Additionally, Smith adds, “this milestone wouldn’t be possible without the generosity of our supporters and Dogwood Health Trust, whose belief in our mission allows us to continue expanding our reach and impact.”

The office is located at 379 Memorial Drive in Andrews, North Carolina.



Taking It to the Banks

In 2024, Mainspring Conservation Trust successfully completed a 12.3-acre floodplain wetland restoration project along the Little Tennessee River in southern Macon County. The project aimed to address significant environmental challenges while enhancing public access and ecological health.

Project Funders:

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
N.C. Land & Water Fund
Tennessee Valley Authority
N.C. Wildlife Resources
Commission

When Mainspring acquired the property in 2017, it was clear that years of land use changes had led to severe streambank erosion and the loss of critical wetland functions. High, vertical streambanks, exacerbated by artificial levees, had increased the river's transport energy, leading to sedimentation issues and a disconnect from its natural

floodplain. Additionally, historic agricultural practices had drained and ditched the land, erasing once-thriving wetland habitats.

Through collaboration with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and consultation with experts in geomorphology and archaeology at the University of Georgia (highlighted in the 2022 Land Steward), Mainspring



developed a thoughtful restoration plan that would stabilize eroding streambanks and revive a buried paleochannel — a relic of the river's past course from approximately 4,000 years ago.

Reshaping the streambanks to a gentler slope reconnected the river to its floodplain, allowing the river to dissipate energy during high-flow events, while also reducing erosion and supporting dense, native vegetation along the water's edge.

By reconnecting the functionality of the ancient habitat, the newly constructed wetland now serves as a crucial backwater habitat during floods, offering refuge to fish and other aquatic species. Additionally, the wetland enhances floodwater retention and groundwater recharge, contributing to overall water quality improvements. "We did have some damage to the restoration following

Hurricane Helene, but that often happens when new restorations are subject to high water events," says Jason Meador, aquatic programs manager. "Overall, the design held very well, and we expect the project to become even more stable as time passes and vegetation takes hold."

Beyond ecological restoration, this project has provided valuable public benefits, including easier access for recreational activities like fishing. Visitors can witness firsthand the transformation of this once-eroded landscape to a thriving wetland ecosystem.

Mainspring is committed to the long-term success of this restoration effort. Monitoring efforts and partnerships with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and Highlands Biological Station include ongoing maintenance, ecological stewardship and data research.

Mainspring also engaged local schools and universities in the project, inviting students to gain hands-on experience while learning about wetlands and floodplain health. Students from Bartram Academy helped transplant vegetation; Macon Early College attendees propagated new growth along the riverbanks by installing livestakes in areas prone to erosion; and Franklin High School students removed invasive fescue in the wetland to make room for native grasses and shrubs. Additionally, Highlands Biological Station is collecting pre- and post-construction data on wildlife species utilizing the area, and researchers from the University of Georgia and Western Carolina University have also expressed interest in studying the restored habitat.



TOP: Backwater areas provide pockets of slow-moving water during floods.

BOTTOM RIGHT: The wood placed along the bank, called brush toe, reduces the energy of the river and provides habitat for fish.

BOTTOM LEFT: Jason Meador and Laura Fogo of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service discuss the project on site.



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 Ripley-Moffitt, Carol &
 Matthew
Ritchie, Bruce*



Roe, Chuck & Charlotte
Jones-Roe*
 Roe, Pete & Wanda
 Rogers, Philip & Helen
 Ross, Jackie
 Russell, Janet
 Sakowski, Carolyn & Alton
 Franklin
 Samples, Candi
 Sanders, Joseph & Dana
 Schmidt, Maggie & Dick
Schweizer, Louis
 Semmelman, Karen &
 Bernard Ortwein
 Sexton, Rebecca & Ken
Sharp, Mike*
Shatley, Ed & Jane*
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In Honor of

Bud & Rosemary Branson
 Paul Carlson
 Rebecca & Deaver Collins
 Garrett Davis
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 Jeff & Maria Hawkins
 Jason & Jennifer Love
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Donor

Marjorie Branson
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 Kimberly Macauley
 Mainspring Staff
 Steve Meyer
 Russ & Helen Regnery
 Chuck Roe & Charlotte
 Jones-Roe
 Ann Stoneburner &
 Robert Wyatt

In Honor of

Gil Mayer
 Dr. William O. McLarney
 Jackie Palmer & David Smith
 Sam & Linda Pearsall
 Emma Roos-Collins & Daniel
 Tregeagle
 Rita Salain
 Deena Salvatore
 Rachel & Vance Sanders

 Jonathan Silber
 George & Sharon Taylor
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 Sizemore, Lisa
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Smith, Jordan
Smith, Karen*
Smith, Ramelle*
 Smith, Tom & Olga
Sobek, Chris*
 Spellman, Kevin
 Spencer, Narda
Spoon, Bill & Heidi
 Staples, Phil & JoAnn
 Steere, Ben
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 Stilwell, Kathy
Stoneburner, Ann & Robert
Wyatt*

Stork, George
 Stuart, Bridget
Sullivan, Dave & Ellie*



Sumner, David
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Sussman, Stuart & Carol
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 Mountains
 Upson, John
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Vogel, Robert
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Willis, Wanda & Bruce
Lockaby*
Willoughby, Lynn
 Wise, Jeanne
 Wolf-Spencer, Teresa
 Woodward, Cricket
 Wooten, Toni & Rick
 Young, Rob & LeighAnne

In Memory of

Fred Berger
 JoAn Brouwer
 Bryson Farm Supply
 Elizabeth L. Butler
 Adam Clawson
 Bill Crawford

Donor

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 James & Gayle Moller
 Warwick & Florence
 Norris
 Susan Parrott
 Tom & Sue Ann
 Reisdorph
 Rebecca & Ken Sexton
 Ed & Jane Shatley
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 Group

In Memory of

Bill Crawford (cont'd)

Bill Deck

Phil Haire

T.J. Holland
 George Kaye
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 Vanessa Miles
 Joe & Theresa Ramsey
 Nancy Ryman
 Terri Stenger
 Soni Vanhook
 Wynette Wiles
 Judith Loeffler
 Fredrica Bost

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John Beckman & Jane Finneran
Gary Bradshaw
Chris Brouwer
Paul Carlson
Peter Carlson
Sarah Carothers
Chris Carr
Mary Dodson

Mike & Betsy Fleenor
Bob & Judy Grove
Nancy & Bill Grove
Connie Haire
Jean Hunnicutt
Terrie & Martin Kelly
Carol Litchfield
Kenneth & Diana McKinney
Carla Norwood & Gabe Cummings

Donna Orford & Jerry Cheek
Cathy Ramos & Steve Barnes
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Susan Reinheimer & Greg Coyle
David Setzer
John & Cathy Sill
Craig & Ann Smith
Ramelle Smith

Sharon & George Taylor
Sylvia Walbolt
Larry Warren
Lynn Willoughby

Donors listed are those who have included Mainspring in their will or estate plan that we are aware of as of Feb. 15, 2024. If your name has been inadvertently omitted, we apologize. Please contact us so we can correct our records.

In-Kind Donations

Fred Alexander
Cherokee County Sanitary Landfill & Sheriff's office
Clark & Company Landscape Architect and Construction
Garrett Davis
Gooder Grafix
Eric Haggart
Jack Johnston
Law Offices of Ken Fromknecht, P.A.
Macon County Public Library
Papa's Pizza To Go Franklin
Penland Contracting Company
Penrose Environmental
Phil Houston
Purplecat Networks, Inc.
The Sequoyah Fund
Smoky Mountain Land Surveying
Wildcraft Kitchen
Winding Stairs Nursery
Wild Remembering School

Foundation Partners

Cannon Foundation
Cherokee Preservation Foundation
Community Foundation of WNC
Duke Energy Foundation
Revitalization of Traditional Cherokee Artisan Resources

Agency Partners

EBCI Office of Natural Resources

Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians
Jackson County Soil & Water Conservation District
Macon County, NC
Macon County Soil & Water Conservation District
Natural Resources Conservation Services
NC Brownfields Program
NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
NC Department of Environmental Quality
NC Forest Service
NC Land & Water Fund
NC Wildlife Resources Commission
Southwestern Commission Council of Governments
Swain County Soil & Water District
Tennessee Valley Authority
Town of Franklin, NC
Town of Murphy, NC
Town of Sylva, NC
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
US Army Corps of Engineers
US Fish & Wildlife Service
US Forest Service

Nonprofit Partners

American Rivers
Balsam Mountain Trust
Blue Ridge Conservation Science
The Conservation Fund

Cornbread & Roses
Cowee School
Graham Revitalization Economic Action Team (GREAT)
Highlands Biological Station
Land for Tomorrow
Land Trust Alliance
Mountain Findings
MountainTrue
NC Land Trust Federation
NC Wildlife Federation
Nantahala Learning Center
Nikwasi Initiative
Open Space Institute
Preservation North Carolina
Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual
Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy
Southern Environmental Law Center
Sylva Pride
Trail of Tears Association










Other Partners

Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
Alliance Land Surveying
Tayton Alvis
Bald Head Realty, Kelly Penland
Bruce Black Surveying
CDH Structural Engineering, Chris Hanners
CDN Appraisal
John Chamblee
Cherokee Central Schools
Cherokee County Schools







Coward, Hicks, & Siler
Equinox Environmental
FEI Land Surveying and Consulting, David Ivey
Keith Gibbs
Graham County Schools
The Hambidge Center
Inner Woven Wellness Yoga
Innovation Station
Jackson County Schools
James A. Payne
Jim Byrd Construction
Amy Kirkpatrick
Lance Law Firm
Lazy Hiker Brewing Company
Macon County Schools
The Marwin Group
Moore's Surveying
Nantahala Outdoor Center
Native Fish Conservation Area Partnership
Nichols Appraisals & Associates
Northbrook Carolina II, LLC
Outdoor 76
PastForward Design
Rabun Gap Nacoochee School
Southwestern Community College
Swain County Schools
Tallant Law Office
Tennessee River Basin Network
Them in STEM
Western Carolina University
Western Carolina Pacesetters
Wildland Engineering

2024 Mainspring Finances

2024 Source of Funds

Restricted Giving	\$2,942,900	44.8%	
Government Grants	\$1,481,159	22.5%	
Individuals (Unrestricted)	\$883,422	13.4%	
Other/Non-government Grants	\$480,875	7.3%	
Land Sale Proceeds	\$436,491	6.6%	
Rent/Interest/Sales	\$132,515	2.0%	
Stewardship Fund	\$119,936	1.8%	
Organization Grants	\$71,360	1.1%	
Program Services	\$31,082	0.5%	
TOTAL SOURCES OF FUNDS	\$6,579,740	100.0%	

2024 Use of Funds

Land	\$5,019,083	77.6%	
Water	\$466,539	7.2%	
Administration	\$421,111	6.5%	
Cultural Heritage	\$336,312	5.2%	
Communications	\$152,745	2.4%	
Fundraising	\$73,421	1.1%	
TOTAL USES OF FUNDS*	\$6,469,211	100.0%	

Pre-audit figures

*Amount released from restrictions and included in 2024 income/expense = \$370,851



MAINSRING

CONSERVATION TRUST

P. O. Box 1148, Franklin, NC 28744

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To conserve unique and special
places in the heart of the
Southern Blue Ridge for the
benefit of all.



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Join the Fun

Discover ways to connect with nature and explore conservation in action. Below are just a few of the events Mainspring has planned for 2025. For the full schedule and to register, visit mainspringconserves.org/events. See you outside!

Date	Event
5/10	BirdFest in Dillsboro
5/16	Botanical Illustration Workshop in Murphy
5/23	Sparks and Smores Firefly Fundraiser near Cullowhee
5/24	Dark Dinner Firefly Fundraiser near Cullowhee
6/28	Plant and Sip Workshop in Franklin
7/9	Plant ID Webinar Online
7/10	Full Moon Nature Walk in Franklin
7/12	Invasive Plant Management Workshop in Franklin
8/21	Invasive Plant Basket-Making Class, location TBD
8/22	Great Southeast Pollinator Census in Franklin

