

WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER

Rob Lamb, Board President

With election season upon us and divisive news coverage, it can be hard to recognize that most of us hold many more shared values than differences. Within my friends, family, and neighbors somehow arguments ensue when politics is brought up. We all care about each other, about the world we live in, and the world we create for our children and our grandchildren. We just have different ideas on how to get there.

Making group decisions can get messy, and so too can managing a forest on behalf of an entire community. Just ask the Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Partnership participants, including EcoForesters, who have spent over five years working towards a shared vision for our national forests.

For better or worse, we have to move forward as a community in this world despite differences, and how individuals and communities make forest management decisions impacts all of us. Appalachian forests are all connected. One landowner's decision to control invasive plants on their property improves the forest health of neighboring forestland, while the landowner that chooses an unsustainable high-grade harvest will degrade its neighboring forest.

This is why EcoForesters is focused on bringing landowners together towards shared stewardship ethics and decision-making. In this issue of The EcoForester, we highlight examples of how neighbors and communities are working together to manage their forest for a better future. Finding a path forward for our forests is sometimes messy, but it is necessary to achieve what we all care about: healthy forests today and for future generations.



NFPF members seeking common ground

Photo npforestpartnership.org

Sharing forestry knowledge with friends and neighbors works

Lang Hornthal

My neighbor and I often talk about our gardens. I marvel at his masterful, careful planning and execution and ask his advice on how to yield more tomatoes and less weeds. His advice includes stories of failed attempts and triumphs and suggestions of products; I always walk away with a new tip or planning method. The Master Gardner program offered by county Extension offices has likewise been a successful way to share gardening information. Learning from nonprofessionals provides a relaxed atmosphere for learning. There are lessons here for landowners needing a trusted source for woodlands management.



Landowner tours provide woodland owners the chance to talk shop

In graduate school and in our work I've learned how peer networks positively influence forest management planning. Traditional forestry outreach is studied so as to encourage woodland owners to seek management planning. I've examined peer forestry programs to learn how knowledge is shared and how best to increase the pace of stewardship. Sharing knowledge and stories with others results in an increase in stewardship activities and a positive view of forest management. EcoForesters sees this impact directly in our work.

Many landowners are passive owners, not proactively planning for their forests but waiting until a financial need or change in ownership requires action. EcoForesters' mission to restore and conserve forests however is grounded in education and active stewardship that intentionally aligns with

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landowner values. While woodland owners' stewardship continues to grow, two out of three landowners are without a management plan. This statistic and an increasing number of woodland owners drive the need for innovative approaches, one of which being the promotion of peer-learning opportunities.

When EcoForesters' restoration crew is working with a landowner, they often encounter neighbors that are curious about our work. We capitalize on this by encouraging our clients to talk with their neighbors about their planning efforts. This informal exchange of knowledge, neighbor to neighbor, is accomplished within the context of their existing relationship. Though this type of outreach in the Sandy Mush community, we've identified landowners with a commitment to managing their forests. These "opinion leaders" will share resources and endorse forest stewardship as a method of protecting an investment. Now in our second year, we're utilizing peer networks to train landowners, organize work groups, and share costs in forest management. We are encouraged by the landowner interest in working together.

Lastly, we continue to work with Extension offices to bring landowners together. Since their founding in 1914 Cooperative Extension offices have shared information with landowners and provide technical assistance with land management. Changes in land ownership create opportunities for landowner support and Extension's efforts to share forest management will play a leading role in bringing landowners together.

Like forests, human communities are diverse and they are most resilient when working together. Similarly, a diverse approach to education will be required to achieve forest stewardship on the scale needed for resiliency. Peer networking enables individuals to proactively make stewardship decisions. If you would like to learn more about peer networks or to speak with landowners, please let us know.



*NC Extension can help
woodland owners connect
with each other*

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Mountain Valley RC&D: McDowell Community Wildfire Network

Recent wildfires in the Western US serve as a reminder of the devastation that occurred in 2016 for much of Western North Carolina. Appalachian homeowners should be prepared before the next drought season creates condition that put forests, homes and lives at risk. Mountain Valley Resource

Conservation & Development serves eight counties in WNC and provides comprehensive information and resources to landowners interested in mitigating risk to their homes or community. Wildfire Preparedness Coordinator Jen Haas says the first step is identifying your home's wildfire risk and the second step is taking action.

Taking a community wide approach, the McDowell Community Wildfire Network seeks to spread awareness of our wildfire risk and combines resources to perform mitigation activities. Through partnerships with the NC Forest Service, municipalities and community leaders, preparation goes beyond individual homeowners and includes community wide planning. If your community is interested in becoming Firewise, contact jen.haas@mountainvalleysrccd.org.



Sandy Mush: Pilot Project's Goal is Community Engagement *Lang Hornthal*

While the pandemic has delayed our outreach efforts, we are using creative ways to meet with landowners and help them with forest stewardship. Taking hikes on their properties and listening to what they value about their land enables us to better understand how to help them reach their stewardship goals. Along the way we also hear great stories about chasing escaped cows and the efforts families must make to keep their lands profitable.

A second year of funding was secured through a generous, private grant to implement our stewardship plan. Forest restoration began on both conservation trust land protected by Southern Appalachian Highland Conservancy and the Sandy Mush Gamelands. We continue to provide incentives for landowners to take on stewardship projects and plan for the future. This flagship project for EcoForesters and our partner the Forest Stewards Guild strengthens our ability to promote community forestry and implement stewardship activities on a broad scale. We are also recording landowner stories to highlight the conservation values found in Sandy Mush.

Historic land uses have allowed invasive species to take hold in Sandy Mush today and for future landowners. Once home to mostly balds grazed by cattle, Sandy Mush has now been reforested in areas impacted by invasive species. Community interviews serve as a way to connect landowners that have similar land management goals. These videos will be available, along with training and educational videos on our YouTube channel. Subscribe for free to see the latest offerings.

As the number of private landowners increase, more community-wide outreach and education is needed to meet the challenges forest owners face. Success in Sandy Mush provides a template for future community forestry projects. To learn more, including how to get involved, please contact lang@ecoforesters.org



A bear print seen on a landowner hike

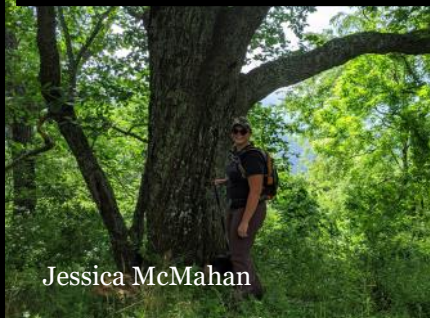
Highlights from the Sandy Mush Project



Vance Garrett Interview



EF crew on the Game Lands



Jessica McMahan



Christopher Jayne

LEARNING FROM OUR CLIENTS:

EASTERN BAND OF CHEROKEE INDIANS



Native American foresters at forestry meeting in Swain County

Picture courtesy NC State University Library

While EcoForestry and Community Forestry are relatively untried by many of today's forest management professionals, these concepts are not new. Over thousands of years in the southern Appalachian forests, Cherokee Indians practiced sustainable community forestry: harvesting what they needed while leaving enough for future generations. "We as native people did not neglect the land; we've worked in unison with the landscape," says Tommy Cabe, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Tribal Forest Resource Specialist.

Thousands of years of sustainable community forest management were disrupted in the early 19th century when the Cherokee were tragically removed from their homeland. Although in subsequent decades the Eastern Band purchased the Qualla Boundary, under economic pressures and the priorities of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, community forestry was neglected in favor of commercial timber production. Today the Qualla Boundary forests bare the same scars and health issues as most other privately owned Appalachian forestland. Cabe and fellow EBCI Natural Resources staff are creating healthier forests by combining traditional stewardship practices with current science. Since 2015, EcoForesters has written and helped implement a new Forest Management Plan for EBCI's 50,000-acres that prioritizes indigenous cultural values and sustainable forestry.

There is no better example of community forestry than EBCI's stewardship of the 108 acre Hall Mountain Community Forest, located adjacent to Cowee Mound and Little Tennessee River in Macon County. Using federal funds from the Community For-



(R to L) EBCI's Tommy Cabe, EcoForesters' Andy Tait, and Forest Stewards' Craig Breedlove

est Program in 2011, EcoForesters staff wrote the community forest plan for Hall Mountain. Recently EBCI received additional funding to expand the Hall Mountain Community Forest. Their goals are not only for sustainability and traditional use, but also for recreation, education with interpretative materials about natural and cultural features, and restoration efforts through prescribed burning, tree planting and invasive plant control. "The continuation of traditional use and forest management fits the values of Cherokee land stewardship," said Cabe.

EcoForesters is proud to partner with EBCI and support their use of traditional ecological knowledge to create a model community forest.



Baskets made from split oak require a sustainable forest resource

Burke County project leads with Community Forestry

by Andrew Kota



Just minutes from downtown Morganton, there is a 651-acre parcel of land located in the Oak Hill community of Burke County, NC, in the Canoe Creek watershed, a direct tributary of the Catawba River. Oak Hill is a mostly rural, low-density residential area northwest of Morganton, but filled with numerous conservation values. Inspired by the Forest Service's Community Forest Program, the idea was born to provide trails for hiking and mountain biking, use of the fields for community agriculture and forest restoration areas to educate the public about good forest stewardship and management. However, a conservancy-owned, preserve-like park for public use would be a completely new endeavor for our land trust. One looming question was would the community care about it and get behind the effort?

Foothills Conservancy proceeded to reach out to three public schools that are located within one mile of the Oak Hill property to ask whether they thought school students might benefit from a park where they could teach environmental education and promote physical education. We also hosted a community meeting at the Oak Hill United Methodist Church, which has a clear view of a section of the project property, to pitch the idea to the public. About 90 community members attended our first public meeting where we explained our vision for the property and gauged community interest. The response from the community was overwhelmingly positive and we were on our way!

We were able to raise almost \$3 million dollars to acquire the property, but now the hard work truly begins. We are not park planners, and we have no idea how to run a community agriculture program, or a public archeological discovery program (the land likely conceals Native American cultural resources), and the fundraising must continue for public parking, trailhead and trail construction.

To help plan the future of this property, Foothills Conservancy hired EcoForesters to complete a Community Forest Plan, a requirement by the USDA Community Forest Program grant. The partnership is perfect. A land trust and a non-profit forest management organization sharing the exact same vision for the future of the Oak Hill Community Park & Forest. What better way to tackle the hard work that lies ahead of us than with a trusted, knowledgeable partner like EcoForesters!

Andrew Kota is the Executive Director for Foothills Conservancy



Oak Hill Community Forest

2020 EcoForester Awards announced

EcoForesters is excited to once again recognize good forestry when we see it. While our annual meeting at the Wedge to celebrate our winners is in doubt, this years award winners could not be more clear. This years award winners are:

EcoForester of the Year

Given to a landowner that exemplifies good forest management, this year we award the Pitillo family. Forest stewardship is a family affair for the Pitillos. Landowners Bruce and Teresa and his parents are active on their land, controlling invasive species while focusing on actions that could improve their forest for wildlife habitat, biodiversity, forest health, and aesthetic beauty. Thank you Pitillo Family for being EcoForesters!

Root Cause Award

Valuing natural benefits is a necessary step to properly incentivize forest stewardship. This award recognizes the Asheville Watershed management team, led by Lee Hensley, for their work stewarding the 20,000 acre watershed that benefits the whole community. Clean and abundant water is a result of careful planning and wise forest stewardship. Lee and his staff are to be commended for their service and diligence.

Lifetime Achievement Award

Mark Megalos is the recipient of our Lifetime Achievement Award. For thirty four years, Mark has been a leader in North Carolina forestry, predominantly with Cooperative Extension. Mark is a professor with NC State College of Natural Resources and clearly fosters the relationship between landowners and their forest. His skills in conservation planning and dedication to landowner education is why we honor Mark with this award.

Past EcoForesters of the Year recipients

2016 Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians

2017 Warren Wilson College Forestry Program

2018 Barbara & Bob Strickland

2019 Linda & Ellis Fincher

A note from our donors

We did quite a bit of research before deciding to become legacy donors to EcoForesters. Based on what we found, EcoForesters is a unique organization. They are unique not only because their focus is on building and maintaining the health and resilience of forests in the Appalachian mountain region, but because they actually “walk their talk”.

The Appalachian forest is a North American treasure. Because of its long geologic stability and microclimates, it is one of the world’s most biodiverse temperate deciduous forests. We also have a personal interest in the health and resilience of these forests because we live in this region, as do millions of other people from Alabama to New York. The health and long-term sustainability of these forests and the ecological benefits they provide to the entire Eastern United States are important to us.

It’s important to protect and preserve these forested areas, but ultimately, that is of little value if the health of the forests is undermined, either by harmful human actions, or by harmful human inaction. While it may seem benign, inaction allows the native ecosystems of these forests to be undermined by invasive plants, insects, and diseases that humans have introduced to North America. Many organizations are working through land trusts to protect these forests, but in many ways that is only the first step. EcoForesters is the only nonprofit we’re aware of that is actively working to restore, maintain, and improve the health of these forests. That uniqueness makes their work that much more important.

At least as important and unique, EcoForesters is one of the very few non-profit organizations that puts boots on the ground to pursue its objectives. We’ve always believed that if you want to understand a person’s (or an organization’s) real values you should pay attention to what they do, not to what they say. EcoForesters is one of the rare organizations that actively pursues their ecological values every single day. They pursue a critical ecological mission to protect the health of one of the most biodiverse temperate regions on our planet. We recognized that they deserve our support – and the support of many other people as well.

Don Plants and Barbara Frew

Don and Barb are part of the EcoForesters community. They share in our passion for ecological forestry as both supporters of EcoForesters and active stewards of their Appalachian forest.



Don & Barb with EF founder Rob Lamb

Gifts of all size help expand our programming and engage more landowners in ecological forestry.

ECOFORESTERS BY THE NUMBERS: A DONATION OF \$5,000 SUPPORTS

- * Restore over 20 acres of conserved forestland suffocated by invasive plants
- * Outreach to over 12,000 landowners in need of management assistance
- * Provide technical advice and education to over 80 landowners
- * Hosting 100 people on a forest stewardship tour that helps them to better manage their forests
- * One year’s participation in the planning for our Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests
- * A comprehensive stewardship plan for 300 acres of permanently protected land.

Please consider a donation in support of regional forest conservation and restoration.

TO MAKE YOUR TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATION, GO TO [ECOFORESTERS.ORG](https://ecoforesters.org)

Nantahala-Pisgah Planning Update

Group submits historic comments

In June, EcoForesters submitted their comments to the US Forest Service in response to the draft revision of the Forest Management Plan for the Pisgah and Nantahala national forests. EcoForesters was proud to contribute to extensive comments presented by the Nantahala Pisgah Forest Partnership (NPFP). These comprehensive plan components were centered around ecological forestry and reducing conflict amongst user groups. Comments included*:

1. Call for forests to be certified as sustainable
2. Invasive control plan for disturbed areas
3. Increasing prescribed fire to restore native habitats
4. Leverage collaborations for increased forest restoration

The NPFP will continue to advocate for the active restoration and conservation of our national forests.

Your donation allows EcoForesters to participate in this long-term, but important process. By staying involved, we can help shape an all-lands approach to forest stewardship. Thank you for your support!

*visit npforestpartnership.org to read [full comments](#)



Fishing Community: Thinking Upstream

In the mountains, you only have to look upstream to see where your water originated. When the stream is cool and clear, you don't give forest management much thought. But when the water is cloudy, you may question where the sediment is coming from and how it could be prevented. Most likely, somewhere upstream, a landowner's streamside management zone was not following best management practices (BMPs) or under proper management. A result is eroding banks, loss of valuable cooling tree species like Hemlocks, or invasive species overrunning native plants.

EcoForesters prioritizes landowner outreach in important watersheds to best protect these resource for fish and humans alike. We work with partners like [Trout Unlimited](#) to identify important streams that would benefit from upstream land management. Ill-managed timber harvests and deforestation near streams result in sediment and the loss of native shade bearing tree species. This can be controlled through active stewardship and wise planning. Pay attention to your upstream community and be thankful for those landowners that contribute to healthy streams.



Native Brook Trout

Waterfall no match for Forest Restoration Crew

Mary Vann Johnston

EcoForesters' restoration crew went the extra mile when they encountered invasive species seed sources growing from the 150 foot tall Shunkawauken Falls in Polk County. Fortunately, our crew has three Outward Bound instructors that were certified climbers and up for the challenge. Besides being gorgeous, waterfalls provide unique community types for uncommon plants as well as habitat for all kinds of critters. Invasive species, especially aggressive ones like *Ailanthus altissima*, commonly known as tree-of-heaven or stink tree, threaten those delicate ecosystems by creating a monoculture of the non-native *Ailanthus*.



Certified climbers Ryan & Hannah Blue plan their route

With herbicide, hand saws, and hatchets in tow, the crew began treatments with the cut-stem and hack and squirt methods. Staff members Krishun Karau and Mary Vann Johnston ran support from the ground with two-way radios to communicate with the climbers, hauling equipment to the base of the waterfall, and treating *Ailanthus* that was easily and safely accessed by ground.

Why bother with such an effort? Eliminating seed sources are an important part of controlling invasive species. EcoForesters helps landowners plan and prioritize treatments so they can maintain control after our crew has left. This is why we train interested landowners in how to use the proper equipment and safely apply herbicide. By passing knowledge on to landowners, they are better equipped to share stewardship ideas with neighbors. We believe this strengthens community control while improving forest health.



Our Mission

EcoForesters is a 501(c)(3) non-profit professional forestry organization dedicated to conserving and restoring our Appalachian forests through education and stewardship.

**Please contact us
with any questions
about your forest
or our mission!**

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Virtual Learning and Training Opportunities

One of the biggest losses due to COVID19 is the inability to have our biannual landowner tours. We are optimistic they will return in Spring 2021 but in the meantime, there are plentiful webinars and video resources that will both assist with stewardship and educate the public on the benefits of ecological forestry. Please let us know if you would like us to present on any forestry topic or train your volunteers to treat invasive species.



Links to recorded webinars

Hendersonville Green Drinks—Positive Impact Forestry

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_xLEanzVP4

Forest Stewards Guild—Appalachian Cove Series: Managing Invasives in Cove Sites <https://youtu.be/dl-4Zb3Hzmo>

Training Opportunities

Invasive Species landowner training

Subscribe for free to [our YouTube channel](#) for more videos