



THE
EcoFORESTER
 WINTER 2021 NEWSLETTER
 FUNDING FOREST STEWARDSHIP

Collaborative Solutions and Innovative Funding

By: Lang Hornthal *Co-Director*

Since our last newsletter, we witnessed hurricanes wreaking havoc on forest communities and a delayed Fall, both reminders of the changes we are experiencing. Forestland owners struggle with the dynamics of restoring damaged forests and this issue will explore the important topic of funding forest stewardship. Private landowners and Public land managers alike face the prospect of restoring forests with smaller budgets and bigger challenges. It will require innovative solutions and working with dedicated partners in order to increase the pace of ecological restoration. Fortunately, there is opportunity for accessing resources and momentum for new collaboration. The Pisgah and Nantahala management plan will be released in December, presumably showcasing a new era of collaborative forestry that will add a new chapter to Modern Forestry. You can do your part by staying engaged in the forest planning process and advocating for collaborative solutions.



No longer 100-year events, devastating 2021 floods in Haywood County, North Carolina. Photo courtesy of The Mountaineer

The Need For Restoration Forestry

By: Andy Tait *Co-Director*

“Forestry isn’t rocket science, it’s much more complicated”, one of my colleagues likes to say. This quote is especially true in the southern Appalachians, the most diverse forests outside of the tropics. Over a hundred species of trees, and many smaller plants, animals, and fungi interact in a complex ecosystem, with rugged topography, diverse soil types, and plenty of water. These conditions also provide refugia - microhabitats for plants and animals to survive unfavorable conditions such as floods, drought, and heat brought on by climate change. Keeping all of this in ecological balance, while meeting the social and economic needs of society is very complex.

Humans have degraded our forests dramatically in the past 150 years in ways that now need mitigation. Forests have been converted to other uses, and previously intact forests have been fragmented by roads, powerlines, and other development. Climate change stresses trees by exacerbating extreme weather, from unprecedented flooding to severe wildfires.

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Staff

Andy Tait

Co-Executive Director,
Forestry

Lang Hornthal

Co-Executive Director,
Development

Gabby Hovis

GIS & Forestry Associate

Krishun Karau

Forest Stewardship Director

Joey Borders

Forestry Associate

Samuel Compton

Forestry Associate

Lauren Breitling

Outreach Associate

Reid Overton

Forest Restoration
Crew Leader

Will Bridge

Restoration Technician

Michelle Weymouth

Restoration Technician

Kelly Waldron

Restoration Technician

Samantha Trueman

Restoration Technician

Jon Shaffer

Forest Carbon Consultant

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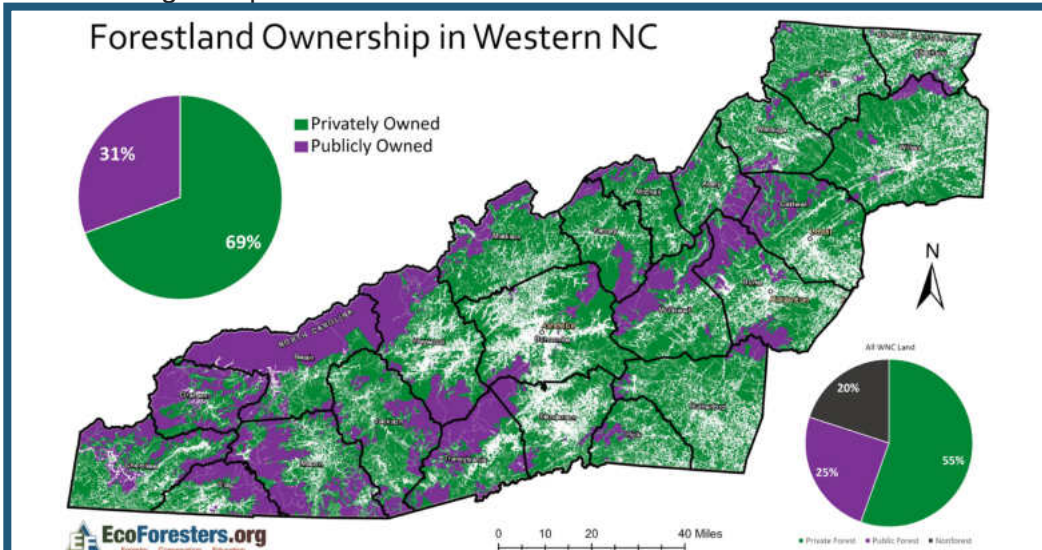
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Animals can migrate, but plants have a harder time adapting. Non-native, invasive pests and pathogens have wiped out the American chestnut, decimated elms and hemlocks, and are now eliminating ash trees while beginning to threaten oaks and other species. Invasive plants, such as kudzu, have overrun acres of natural forests and displaced, damaged, and even killed mature native trees. A hundred years of fire suppression has reduced fire-adapted species like oak and yellow-pine. Fire suppression also increases fuel loads which can lead to more severe wildfires. The diversity of our forests, which makes them more resilient, has been compromised and is at further risk.

Additional challenges in the mountains, like steep slopes, remote locations, difficult access, and many creeks complicates logistics and increases costs to manage forests well. This leads to the common logging practice of “selective” diameter limit cuts whereby all merchantable trees above a certain diameter (usually about 16”) are cut. This removes the biggest and the best trees - and their genetics - from the forest, leaving the rest, which degrades the forest. This “high-grading” is unsustainable; it is not forestry. However, it maximizes short-term profit by maximizing revenue and minimizing costs. This common practice over the past 100 years has reduced both the diversity and quality of our forests significantly. Degraded forests are less resilient, sequester less carbon, are poorer wildlife habitat, and produce less timber.

About two-thirds of forests in western NC are owned by families, less than a 1/4 of whom have a forest management plan; their inaction often contributes to the problem. My dad said he managed by “benign neglect,” but due to all the above mismanagement, nature cannot take care of itself any longer. It’s time for humans to have a positive impact on forests and mitigate these threats. Neglect will allow further degradation, it’s not benign anymore.

Our forests need help. They need active restoration and conservation through ecological forestry. Ecological forest management mimics natural disturbances, increases structural complexity, improves biological diversity, and leaves some high quality, merchantable trees to sustain and improve the future forest. Forests can be rest-ored with a positive impact on aesthetics, recreation, clean water & air, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, and sustainable forest products. All forest values: ecological, social, and economic, are integrated in ecological forestry to actively strengthen our forests. This makes them more resilient to all their challenges to provide more natural benefits.



Reaching the largest landowner base is pivotal to our mission.

Carbon Credits Help Landowners Fund Management

Few landowners budget for forest stewardship. Which is why cost share programs and tax incentives are vital to landowners interested in actively managing their forests. The funding mechanism of carbon markets are gaining in popularity, particularly as we learn how healthy forests are better suited to sequester carbon and mitigate climate change. While markets are still evolving, the below chart will give you an idea of some of the opportunities that are now available to landowners with 30+ acres of forest.

There appears to be opportunities for Appalachian landowners around deferring timber harvests. Some programs will pay landowners to defer for one year, while others will incentivize no timber harvests for 20-40 years. For families in Present Use Value (PUV), this is a potential opportunity to get paid for following your management plan. Many PUV management plans already defer harvests for decades, as the trees grow to maturity and the forest stands are improved ecologically. In these cases, funding could be available to offset management costs. However, it is important to completely understand the requirements and limitations of each program.

For those that are interested in accessing carbon markets, EcoForesters is here to help. We can help you understand landowner obligations and how your forest management plan may influence your decision. These markets are relatively new, so we are still learning about them and how much they stand to impact climate change. We do know that funds gained through these programs are an excellent way to acquire revenue from your forests and better equip you to pay for forest restoration. While carbon markets continue to evolve, we believe that some incentive programs are worth exploring. Call us if we can answer your questions or be of assistance.

Project Developer	AFF & TNC	Bluesource	EP Carbon	Finite Carbon	Forest Carbon Works	Natural Capital Exchange
Program	Family Forest Carbon	Forest Carbon and Working Woodlands	Forest Carbon	Forest and CORE Carbon	Forest Carbon	Forest Carbon
Market	Voluntary	Voluntary and Compliance	Voluntary and Compliance	Voluntary and Compliance	Voluntary and Compliance	Voluntary
Project	Growing Mature Forests, Enhancing Future Forests	AC, IFM, A/R	AC, IFM, A/R	AC, IFM, A/R	AC, IFM, A/R	Harvest Deferral
Minimum Acres	30	3,000 (Forest Carbon) and 2,000 (Working Woodlands)	Unknown	40 (CORE Carbon)	40	None
Contract Duration	10 or 20 years	40 years (voluntary) and 100 years (compliance)	Unknown	Unknown	125 years	1 year
Region	Pennsylvania (International pending review)	North America	International	North America	Lower 48 states (US)	Lower 48 states (US)
Harvesting Permitted	Yes (with restrictions)	Yes (with restrictions)	Yes	Yes	Yes, after the first 6-year period	No

AC – Avoid Conversion, IFM – Improved Forest Management, A/R – Afforestation/Reforestation

Carbon markets are still evolving, but are providing opportunities for landowners to fund their forest management.

Funding Stewardship Challenges on Public Lands Plan Update Release Will Create Opportunities and Challenges

Management plans written for the National Forests are not done in a vacuum. USFS must continue their work while responding to wildfires, flooding events, and their continued management of millions of acres. Even worse is that they are having to do the work with fifty percent less staff and budget. So constrained by budget and bureaucracy, the Forest Service has asked partners like EcoForesters to assist in the planning process, but more importantly, stick around for its implementation. After 8 years of talking, going back to the drawing board, meeting (man have we had meetings!), we expect to see the Final Plan released at the beginning of December.

Groups involved in the process are eager to see the plan and while we wait, we are also discussing what good projects look like. How do we build sustainable recreation opportunities while preserving wilderness? How do we create necessary wildlife habitat through forestry without harming current ecosystems? How do assure the Forest Service has the resources to properly care for this invaluable



Collaborating over Zoom wasn't easy, but successful!

resource? This process has revealed that the Forest Service does not have the capacity to implement all the work that groups have agreed is needed. Fortunately, many strong organizations are fulfilling their mission by getting involved and offering expertise and funding to leverage existing resources.

One example is the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program that brings together agencies and local partners to plan and implement prescribed burns, invasive species control, and ecological restoration in important areas on the Pisgah. Ten years of projects on the Grandfather District has created a successful template that was instrumental in securing funding for a Pisgah wide restoration project (PRI). Funding from the Farm Bill has given partners incentive to leverage resources to restore more acres using fire and invasive species control. This model is being replicated by EcoForesters through our FOREST Fund (see page 7) that is providing land trusts stewardship assistance through funding, training, and implementation.

EcoForesters is optimistic that the updated plan will be collaboratively written and implemented, providing a framework for how public lands can be supported.



Learn more about the upcoming plan with this reader's guide and get involved with your forest!

Prescribed Fire and Resources for Landowners

Fire is a natural part of the environment and many forests need fire to remain healthy and thrive. Prescribed fires are planned and intentionally ignited fires to meet certain land management objectives. There are many benefits to performing a prescribed fire on your property. Some of the benefits include invasive species control, regeneration of native tree seedlings, enhancing wildlife habitat, and reducing the threat of hazardous wildfires. Prescribed fires help reduce fuel build up, like dead vegetation and wood debris, which lowers the risk of a catastrophic fire. Fires also break down organic materials much faster than decomposition, thus renewing soil nutrients more quickly. This breakdown triggers a rebirth in the forest which helps to maintain native plant species, and provide more fertile soil. It also helps to expose seeds and attract insects which provides many important animal species food to forage, and promotes a native habitat for wildlife and tree species.

“Under the authority of the National Fire Plan, The USDA Forest Service’s Community Protection Grant Program was established to provide funding to states to help prevent wildfires and mitigate the conditions that lead to them in high risk communities within a 10 mile radius of National Forestland” (ncforestservice.gov) Treatments are performed by the NC Forest Service with funding support from the USDA Forest Service. The NC Forest Service will supply you with a burn plan for your property. To see if your land qualifies for this program contact your local county forest ranger through their website at ncforestservice.gov.

Land owners may choose to use a private company to perform the prescribed burn on their property. There are private contractors that will help landowners from start to finish with their burning needs. A list of contractors can be found online through the prescribed burn contractor database. Make sure to compare multiple service providers if possible. Always request a copy of their insurance policy, as well as a copy of the completed burn plan to ensure that it includes the objectives, contingencies, and maps.

By using prescribed burns it will reduce hazardous fuels, thus protecting human communities from extreme fires. It also removes unwanted plant species that threaten the native species of an ecosystem, and improves the habitat for native animals. There are many benefits to prescribed burning, and fire is essential to the health of our forests.



Prescribed fires are essential to the health of our forests. Photo courtesy of nps.org

Learning from Others

By: Rob Lamb
Board President



COLD HOLLOW TO CANADA

While EcoForesters work is currently primarily focused in the southern Appalachians, the problems faced and need for forest stewardship extends throughout Appalachian forests, from Georgia to Maine and from the Atlantic to the Mississippi. Thankfully, EcoForesters is not alone in addressing the challenges Appalachian forests and landowners face. In fact, we are actively learning from and adapting based on what other organizations are doing. Before EcoForesters launched a community forest restoration program in Sandy Mush 3 years ago, we met with Cold Hollow to Canada, a Vermont based non-profit organization that formed and began its work in a Vermont community a decade prior to when we began working with the Sandy Mush community.

The focus of Cold Hollow to Canada's work focuses on the Cold Hollow Mountains which stretch across seven towns in northern Vermont, making up the tip of the Green Mountain ridge line. This area is primarily owned by private landowners, and represents an important link in connecting northern forests from Vermont to Canada and the greater northern Appalachian forest region. Their mission is to maintain ecosystem integrity, biological diversity, and forest resiliency throughout the Cold Hollow to Canada region, with a focus on community-led stewardship and the conservation of our working landscape in the face of a changing climate.

One program EcoForesters is learning from is Cold Hollow to Canada's Woodlots Groups. When a landowner joins a Woodlots Group, he or she is welcomed into a community. In addition to quarterly gatherings in which neighbors share good food and connect around stewardship-related topics of interest, Cold Hollow to Canada provides technical assistance opportunities that allow each landowner to identify specific practices that can be incorporated into management activities. Monica Przyperhart, the Woodlots Program Manager for Cold Hollow to Canada, states, "landowners enrolled in our programs have reported many additional outcomes: a better understanding of forest ecology and stewardship, confidence in making land management decisions, social connections within the local community, land conservation through easements, and even enhanced affordability of forest ownership."

EcoForesters and Cold Hollow to Canada also face similar challenges in finding funding for forest stewardship. Both organizations are actively seeking funding to pair with costs of implementation and we share similar approaches. As Monica states, "active stewardship is costly and difficult to finance, particularly when landowners are working toward long-term forest resilience goals. Whenever possible, Cold Hollow to Canada works with partners--most notably the Natural Resources Conservation Service--to bring in funds to pay for this work. We can often arrange for work to be performed on several neighboring properties at once. This can bring costs down for everyone."

Cold Hollow to Canada's work reminds us that the importance of EcoForester's mission is shared far and wide, and that we are not alone in addressing the challenge of assisting private landowners and restoring Appalachian forestland. In addition to overcoming funding barriers, creating a network with shared interests provides the foundation for strengthening communities and taking action to improve forest health.



Shown here are the priority linkages researched and developed by 2 Countries, 1 Forest for preserving connectivity for wildlife movement throughout the Northern Forest. The Cold Hollow Mountains are part of the Northern Green Mountains priority linkage.

Local Businesses Provide Stewardship Funding for Land Trusts



Land Trusts do a remarkable job of preserving important lands that have high conservation values from being developed. Acquiring the land can take years of developing relationships and raising funds that will protect forests and ultimately support local communities with the natural services they provide. Funding the purchase can come from a variety of state and federal sources, private Foundations, individuals and local industries and municipalities. The expression, “It takes a village” is appropriately used to describe the important work of local land trusts in which we all benefit.

In an effort to assist land trusts in this important work, EcoForesters, with the help of the Community Foundation of WNC and local businesses, established the Forest Restoration and Stewardship Fund (FOREST fund) to give land trusts both planning and boots on the ground expertise that will further their stewardship implementation. Local industries provided matching funds to local land trusts as their way of saying we benefit from healthy forests. And the funds are already making a difference.

Conserving Carolina’s Pleasant Grove prop-



erty is an amazing stretch of riparian forest along the French Broad river in Henderson County. It was protected to restore this important stretch of the river and to provide spawning habitat for the native Muskie that are making a comeback in the region. The FOREST fund is providing both planning expertise, training, and invasive species control that will remove invasive monocultures of non-native privet hedges, some twenty feet tall, from the riverbanks so native river cane can be planted and help make this riparian ecosystem better prepared for flood events. It will also fund future planning assistance to assure volunteers are able to maintain this important stewardship.

Another example is restoration happening on the Oak Hill Community Forest project initiated by the Foothills Conservancy of NC. This 650 acre



EcoForesters crew helped the Foothills Conservancy remove invasive plant species.

acre tract was protected to provide Burke County residents with a place to recreate, farm, and experience nature. EcoForesters worked with their stewardship team to develop the comprehensive ecological forest stewardship plan, and remove kudzu and other invasive species. Funding will continue as the property is developed for community use, assuring healthy forests remain on the landscape.

The FOREST fund is an example of innovation and community support for forest stewardship. By involving community business leaders as partners in stewardship, we can get more accomplished and remind the public how our economic prosperity is tied to healthy forests. As this work continues, we will replenish the fund while looking for ways to reproduce this model of stewardship for other permanently protected forests.

Landowner Interview: Applying For Cost Share is Worth the Paperwork!

Brandee Boggs is a forestland owner in Sandy Mush who applied for and received NRCS cost share funding through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). This important landowner perspective will help dispel some myths and perhaps encourage others to take advantage of this important forest stewardship funding opportunity.

Why did you decide to apply for EQIP funding?

I have so many ideas/dreams/visions for the property I steward, yet limited time, knowledge and funds. EQIP seemed like a great tool to help me actualize my goals. Figured I had nothing to lose by applying but a little time.

What was the application process like? Was it difficult or time consuming?

I am fluent in bureaucracy, so it wasn't very complicated for me. I first applied electronically, before that version was acceptable locally, so it got lost in the ethers. I later had to fill out paper forms via email. I believe over the last year and half, their digital formats have improved greatly. A lot of it was over PDFs and did require a signature, but I was able to accomplish it digitally. Besides that hiccup, the hardest part was figuring out exactly which program funds to apply for, both from their programmatic hubbub and my own prioritization. They also have different pots of money to apply for. I narrowed down some starting needs under various categories and applied for a few different grants (ie. Invasive species control, timber stand improvement, sediment and erosion control for a previous and future skid trail, etc.). The NRCS staff are willing to help, so are EcoForesters and other consultants.

Are you pleased with the results?

Very much so! I was funded enough to hire EcoForesters to accomplish certain tasks that I didn't have as much experience with or the time to accomplish as thoroughly as the job they did! The results are obvious as I walk through my forest. I am stoked on the outcomes already and I'm only half way through my contract.



Any tips for landowners that are interested in applying?

Start with a solid Forest Management Plan(FMP) that clearly lays out all the goals you have for your land and keep in mind what you don't want done as well. I originally asked that my original FMP be as broad as possible, intimidated that if it was too specific I couldn't veer away from it if I chose to later or afraid I would be expected to perform certain tasks on certain timelines that didn't prove to be realistic. I now realize, starting with a comprehensive plan would have served as a better guide in all ways. The second thing to add is, start early!! It all takes time, getting the FMP approved, meeting the grant cycle timing, getting turned down a couple grant cycles, finally getting funded for the next year, having the work done, closing out with each funding cycle, etc. I am 4 years into the process and half way through my first 2 year grant. It's definitely worth the wait though!! If I might add, working with EcoForesters has been a great choice and I've gained great respect and trust in them as individuals and as an organization.

What were your biggest misconceptions about the program?

I am busy with other things in life and didn't want to be signing up for a huge commitment or feel intimidated to meet high standards that might be out of my control or constantly have government officials dropping by. I can say none of that is my reality. Everyone I've worked with has kept their focus on my goals and has been working together to meet them at my pace. I've been able to set all the appointments within a reasonable timeline and there are no random drop-ins. Everyone is just there to support your forest management plan, not concerned with your unregistered farm truck or whatever else you have going on.

Fulfilling Need and Growing Responsibly

EcoForesters is growing, both in our outreach and impact. Each day in the woods with our staff, clients and partners, we see opportunity to control invasive species, restore degraded forests, and plan for the future takes time and staff. EcoForesters is growing to meet the demand and we are fortunate to have smart, capable, and caring employees that make it happen.

Krishun Karau is now our Stewardship Director, coordinating our forestry crew in the field and meeting client and landowner objectives. Her crew is growing and currently led by Reid Overton. Team members include: Will Bridge, Michelle Weymouth, Kelly Walldron, and Samantha Trueman. Thank you for your hard work and devotion to ecological stewardship.

The writing of forest management plans is instrumental to our mission. It is the best tool for landowners to take ownership of their legacy and how they utilize their for-



Reid, Krishun, Kelly, and Sam on the Sandy Mush game lands.



EcoForesters staff working and playing at Navitat Canopy Adventures.

If you are interested in joining our team, please reach out to us for more information. info@ecoforesters.org

est. It is also where the most knowledge is transferred and the first step of stewardship usually occurs. We are fortunate to have Gabby Hovis handling our GIS services, but she also writes a great forest management plan. We are also glad to have forestry associates with diverse backgrounds and knowledge of ecology and natural resources. Joey Borders, Sam Compton, and Andrew Danner round out our forestry department, under Andy's leadership

And you wouldn't be reading this newsletter without Lauren Breitling, our outreach coordinator who among other things, pulls together this great newsletter. We must continue to get the word out about what is happening in the forests, so our communication will be key. Luckily, our talented staff are effective communicators. Thank you for supporting EcoForesters and the many people that make our mission possible. Please read more about our staff on our website.

Stewarding Our Mission With Your Support

Stewardship requires patience, dedication, and an understanding of what is needed to make the natural world healthier. Our mission directs us to conserve and restore forests by providing education and resources to landowners that need help. This takes a dedicated staff and our ability to provide adequate pay and benefits is part of our strategic plan. This is made possible by grant funding and most importantly, individual donations. Please consider making a donation today.

To Make Your Tax Deductible Donation, Go To
www.ecoforesters.org

EcoForesters also accepts donations of land and asks you to consider us in your legacy planning. Our work depends on your support!

Present Use Value (PUV) Program Offers Landowners Tax Incentives for Forest Management

To help forestland owners afford to keep their land forested (and not need to develop it for more money) NC offers major property tax savings to forestland owners that sustainably manage their forests. Here's a summary of the program and its benefits:

- Must live on the property, or have owned (or a relative owned) the property for 4 years, or continue PUV from the previous owner.
- Own at least 20 acres of forestland as individuals – and many other legal private ownerships



EcoForesters Director, Andy Tait, discusses a timber harvest with logger, Gary Cox.

e.g. LLC, LP, Trusts, Inc...) can qualify if they declare forestry as their main business.

- Have on file - or for new enrollees only submit one by Jan 31 (to be valid for that tax/calendar year) - a completed, signed PUV application and a current sound 10-year forest stewardship plan (this is where EcoForesters can help) with the county tax assessor.
- Get a significant property tax break (60-95%, depending on land values) on qualifying forestland by managing for sustainable timber production. You get the tax break just for letting the trees grow and then harvesting when it is financially profitable. EcoForesters specializes in environmentally and aesthetically responsible, but still profitable, positive impact forestry to improve your future forest.
- This is a voluntary program. You can stay in the program indefinitely, or withdraw from the program at any time, and only have to repay 3 years of back tax savings. So, if you are in the program for 4 or more years you will see permanent tax savings. To continue the PUV status of a property being acquired, the new owner needs to submit the PUV application within 60 days of acquiring the property.

Once enrolled a landowner needs to follow their plan and submit an updated forest stewardship plan every 10 years to stay in compliance and keep getting the significant tax break. The cost of having a forest stewardship plan created will usually pay for itself in tax savings in a couple of years.

SANDY MUSH PROJECT: Incentivizing Forest Stewardship

Our Sandy Mush pilot project is in its third year and making progress. This initiative was formed to provide restoration on conservation land, while also helping community landowners to manage their forests. Slowed by COVID, this community forestry program is picking up steam by helping landowners access federal funding and local grant dollars to incentivize planning and stewardship.

The first year of the project was spent getting to know landowners and the challenges they were facing and resulted in the creation of an Action Plan detailing opportunities for stewardship. We learned that landowners value the ability to profit from their land. Farms and grazing lands once dominated the landscape, but now landowners struggle to find a profitable replacement for tobacco and livestock. Interest in non-timber forest products like mushrooms or ginseng were nurtured by workshops and training. Landowners whose forests are in need of restoration have successfully applied for cost share funds and over \$75,000 has been provided to landowners, with prioritization given to conservation lands. The coming year will provide landowners with training opportunities, as well as landowner workshops that will provide resources for forest management.

We are pleased with the results so far and reminded that authentic community engagement takes time. But outcomes have been exemplary and we are looking for opportunities to expand this model into other rural communities.



Beautiful view of the landscape at Sandy Mush.

2021 EcoForester Awards Honors Dedication to Forestry

Each year, EcoForesters honors individuals or organizations that exemplify a commitment to ecological stewardship. Both of this year's recipients provide us with inspiration and are examples of the good happening in our forests.

EcoForester of the Year

Given to a landowner that exemplifies good forest management, this year we award **Brandee Boggs**.

Brandee's devotion to her property is seen through her dedication to fighting non-native invasive species and improving her forest stands. Her active management and use of cost share funds to strengthen her forest is why we honor her as the EcoForester of 2021.



Root Cause Award

New Belgium Brewing Company inspires environmental change through their brewing process and community support. By supporting local forestry efforts, they assure a clean supply of water that will continue to make great beer and a healthy resource that mitigates climate change. Their dedication to building community is seen through their actions and 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!**

How To Reach Us

Mail: PO Box 16007

Asheville, NC 28816

Email: info@ecoforesters.org

Phone: 828-484-6842

Website: www.ecoforesters.org

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Saying Goodbye To Haywood Road Location

It is with sadness that EcoForesters is moving from our shared offices at 167 Haywood Road. Our good friends, Wildlands Engineering, are expanding, so we will be moving by the end of this month. We will continue receiving mail at our regular PO Box and our phone number will not change. Having just spent 18 months working from home, we feel well equipped to meet your needs while working from home.

We are still looking for the right spot to accommodate 10 staff members and a growing restoration crew. Storage and parking are a priority. Please let us know of any opportunities, including businesses interested in subletting space.

Planning Ahead 2022

With 2022 less than two months away, we are already looking past winter and into spring! Our landowner tours will be back and training opportunities for invasive species ID and control. In January we are partnering with Buncombe County Extension to hold a forestland owner workshop that concentrates on funding opportunities for forest stewardship. Two other tours will be held that include a Forestland Owner 101 and accompanying field tour. Like us on Facebook and Instagram to receive event information.