

The Connestee Falls News

Caring for the Forests of Connestee Falls



Andy Tate of EcoForesters describes a healthy forest as more than just a lot of trees—it is a diverse forest with trees of different ages and sizes, a healthy understory, and a variety of species.

During his recent presentation to the Connestee Falls community, Andy explained that our forests have changed dramatically over the past 100 years. Historic logging, followed by decades of fire suppression, has resulted in forests dominated by middle-aged trees and dense understories. Species such as mountain laurel, rhododendron, red maple and sourwood have become increasingly common, while important fire-adapted species such as oaks, hickories and pitch pine are struggling to regenerate. Oaks are particularly important to the health and diversity of our forests, yet many are struggling to regenerate under the dense, shady conditions found in today's forests. Creating more open conditions can encourage young oaks and other desirable native trees to grow.

EcoForesters' Forest Management Plan for Connestee Falls includes a 10-year strategy to improve forest health, increase biodiversity, reduce wildfire fuels, and encourage regeneration of target species such as oaks, hickories, and yellow/pitch pines. The work moves through different Management Units rather than treating the entire property at once.

Inside this issue

From the NRSC 1-6
Caring for the CF Forests..1-2
Bird Migration Across WNC 3-4
NRSC Volunteer Appreciation..... 5-6
Mountain Gardeners..... 7
Upcoming Events..... 8
Kiddie Catches 9
From the Tennis Cm 10
ReThink Pink..... 11
Craft Beer Social Octoberfest..... 12
Bass Fishing Tournament .13
Genealogy Disc. Grp 14
From the Bocce Cm..... 15
Connestee Art League (CAL) 16-18
Women's Club Sharing House Toy Drive..... 19
CF Student Scholarship Program 20-21
YaGotta Reggata Recap.. 20-22
'Beauty of Connestee' Book..... 23
News from the Pro 24
October CFGA News..... 25
CF AED Locations..... 26-27
October Reminders..... 28
Next CF News..... 28
Contact Information 29

From the Natural Resources Stewardship Cm. cont...

The major focus in Year 1 is the Oakanoah/Taylor Demonstration Unit, a roughly 35-acre tract of relatively accessible, intact forest. Its accessibility and existing trails make this unit particularly well suited for residents to observe and learn about pro-active forest management. The plan calls for thinning some of the overly dense understory and smaller, overly abundant trees to reduce wildfire risk, improve wildlife habitat, and give oaks, hickories and pitch pines better conditions for growth. Because prescribed burning is not currently being used at Connestee Falls, EcoForesters has identified several alternatives, including cutting or treating selected vegetation and using machinery where appropriate to reduce dense understory.

The first several years focus on Oakanoah/Taylor, Kelly Mountain and East Fork, followed by work in the Ogana, Amakola, Salola and Dotsi Management Units. EcoForesters envisions an ongoing cycle of selective thinning, understory reduction, invasive-species control and fuel management. The treatments are intended to gradually create forests with greater structural and species diversity, healthier desirable trees, improved wildlife habitat, better oak regeneration and reduced wildfire risk. In short, EcoForesters' vision is to gradually transform selected areas of Connestee Falls from dense, fuel-heavy forests into healthier, more diverse and more resilient forests—and to use the Oakanoah/Taylor Demonstration Forest as a place where residents can see what that transformation looks like.

The goal is not to change Connestee Falls' forests overnight. Forest stewardship is a long-term investment, and the work EcoForesters has outlined is intended to build healthier forests, improve habitat and reduce wildfire risk for generations to come.

Watch the EcoForesters' Forest Management Plan presentation here: https://www.youtube.com/live/jrSjSEs6yN4

Read the EcoForesters' Forest Management Plan here: https://www.connesteefallsnrs.com/ managing-forest-health-draft



From the Natural Resources Stewardship Cm. cont...

Fall Bird Migration Across Western North Carolina

There's a special magic in Western North Carolina when late summer starts tipping into crisp autumn. As the leaves begin their slow shift into brilliant reds and golds, something equally incredible is happening overhead. Millions of birds—from tiny warblers (no heavier than a nickel) to large, soaring hawks—are making their way south right through our backyards and mountain ridges.

Our mountains act like a giant natural highway along the Atlantic Flyway. Whether they're stopping by for a quick rest, grabbing a bite of native berries or seeds, or settling in to spend the winter with us, our yards and woods play a huge role in their long journey.

What makes our neck of the woods so special and important for birds? Well, our mountain ridgelines create great air currents for big soarers, and our lush forests offer roadside diners for songbirds.

Fall migration isn't just one big day, it's a rolling parade that stretches across several months. Different species travel on their own schedules based on what they eat and where they're heading.

Before autumn even officially arrives, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds begin fattening up like crazy at neighborhood feeders, while early nesting songbirds quietly start creeping south along mountain streams.

September is prime time for warblers and tanagers! Most of these colorful little songbirds travel at night when the air is calm and cool. By morning, they drop into local trees and shrub patches to refuel on insects and wild berries. If you look closely in your trees in mid-September, you never know what you might see.

One of the coolest autumn sights in WNC is the Broad-winged Hawk migration. On sunny September days, Broad-wings gather into swirling, rising columns of dozens or hundreds of hawks—called 'kettles'—before gliding effortlessly toward Central and South America. Check out the Mount Pisgah Hawkwatch (mile marker 404.5 on the Blue Ridge Parkway) to see some of these migrating raptors.

By late October, the tropical travelers are mostly gone, but crisp-weather birds start filling in. Cute Yellow-rumped Warblers (lovingly nicknamed 'butterbutts' for their bright yellow rump patch), Dark-eyed Juncos, and White-throated Sparrows move in to make WNC their winter home.

How We Can Help Them on Their Journey

Traveling thousands of miles takes an enormous amount of energy. The great news is that even small tweaks in our yards and homes make a huge difference!

- **Serve Up Native Snacks:**

In the fall, songbirds need fatty, high-calorie food. Native shrubs like Spicebush, Flow-

From the Natural Resources Stewardship Cm. cont...

ering Dogwood, Arrowwood Viburnum, and Elderberry provide the perfect meals for them. Seed-heads on native sunflowers and goldenrod are also great natural bird feeders!



Bald Eagle over Ecusta Pond in Pisgah Forest, Photo courtesy of Deane Freudenberg

- **Prevent Window Strikes:**

Reflective glass looks like open sky to a bird. Adding window decals, hanging string arrays (like Acopian BirdSavers), or placing feeders either very close (under 3 feet) or far back from windows keeps birds safe.

- **Dim the Night Lights:**

Since songbirds navigate by the stars at night, bright porch lights can confuse them. Turning off unnecessary outdoor lights between 11 PM and dawn—or switching to downward-facing warm lights—helps them stay on course.

- **Offer Fresh, Moving Water:**

A clean birdbath with a solar fountain, mister, or simple hose dripper attracts tired migrants like magic. Moving water catches their eye from high above!

- **Keep Hummingbird Feeders Out:**

Don't worry, leaving your sugar-water feeders out in October won't keep hummingbirds from migrating. It actually gives tired late-stragglers vital fuel! Just keep the nectar clean (4 parts water to 1 part white sugar, please no red dye).

- **Keep Kitty Indoors:**

Exhausted migratory birds spend a lot of time foraging close to the ground. Keeping domestic cats indoors or in a catio saves millions of wild bird lives during migration season.

By making our yards a little more bird-friendly, we get a front-row seat to an amazing journey—and give these wonderful travelers a safe haven along the way!

To find out how many birds are migrating over Transylvania County, check out the birdcast.org tool which uses weather radar to detect and predict the numbers and flight directions of migrating birds.

Want to see some of these beautiful fall migrants? Join the Transylvania County Bird Club on one of our many free bird walks. Visit our website or Facebook page for our fall bird walk schedule. Everyone is welcome!

NRSC Volunteer Appreciation

The Natural Resources Stewardship Committee would like to extend a huge thank you to the many Connestee Falls residents who have volunteered their time and talents to care for our community's natural resources! Over the past several months, volunteers have contributed in so many ways—from removing invasive plants and protecting hemlocks to sharing their knowledge of Connestee's unique natural history.



A special thank you to **Andy McCumber, Kristine Buckley, Bill Buchler, Laurel Young, Pearse Webster, Dolores Brown, and Abby Braman** for their hard work

during our Japanese stiltgrass removal day. The team tackled thick mats of invasive stiltgrass at several locations, helping uncover native ferns and wildflowers that had been crowded out. We also want to recognize **Andy McCumber for going above and beyond to treat approximately 700 residential hemlock trees** and provide residential invasive plant consultations. His tremendous effort has helped protect some of the beautiful hemlocks growing throughout Connestee Falls. **Thank you to Bill Buchler** for planting a new legacy grove of hemlocks along Oakanoah Trail. These trees represent an investment in the future of our forests and will provide beauty and habitat for generations to come. We are also grateful to **Roger Witmer** for sharing his extensive knowledge of Connestee's geological history during his popular **Geology Walk and Talk**. Participants learned about ancient rocks, minerals, fossils, mountain-building events, and the geological processes that created our unique landscape. And a special thank you to **Bob Speare for leading his Fern Walk**, giving residents an opportunity to learn more about the fascinating ferns found throughout our forests.

Save the Date: Fall Hemlock Treatment

And there's more work ahead!

The NRSC is planning a Hemlock Treatment Campaign during the first week of November. More than 1,000 hemlocks were treated during our spring campaign, thanks to our incredible volunteers. This fall, we'll work to treat the remaining trees in common areas around trails and rights-of-way.

Exact dates, times, and locations will be announced soon.

If you'd like to help protect Connestee's hemlocks, please fill out the volunteer form to be contacted when the schedule is finalized:

www.connesteefallsnrs.com/volunteer

Thank you to everyone who has volunteered, participated in an educational event, planted a tree, pulled an invasive plant, treated a hemlock, or simply helped spread the word. Your involvement is helping preserve the natural beauty and ecological health of Connestee Falls!