

CATAWBA LANDS CONSERVANCY

WINTER 2010 ❖ VOLUME XX ❖ NUMBER 3

‘WE SPEAK FOR THE LAND’

Stories teach, inspire and compel us to think about our corner of the world in a broader context. In this series, we share the stories of people in our community who have a heartfelt connection to our local conserved lands.

A TREE TO CALL HOME

A haunting hooting sound echoes in the trees as morning light filters down through the canopy. The call is not mysterious. In fact, it's being played on Dr. Rob Bierregaard's iPod. Rob is an ornithologist at the University of North Carolina Charlotte who has done extensive research on the local owl population and other birds of prey. This morning, he's experimenting with playing back the territorial call of the Barred Owl to see if we can get a response from any owls in residence.

"This is perfect habitat for Barred Owls," said Rob. We're standing at the edge of Eastover Ridge Preserve, about 22 acres of land protected by the Conservancy just a few miles from Uptown Charlotte. Briar Creek runs through the preserve in an open area that is surrounded by woods with mature trees. It's those trees that appeal to Barred Owls as nesting habitat.

Rob started his study of Barred Owls more than 10 years ago. The study found that Barred Owls,

despite literature citing the species' need for old growth forest to succeed, are doing very well in Charlotte.

"It turns out that within 10 miles of Trade and Tryon, there are at least 300 pairs of Barred Owls nesting," said Rob.

Rob's research determined that the reason for their success was that Charlotte's tree-lined neighborhoods were actually acting as old growth forests by providing the owls with mature trees for nesting, as well as open understory for hunting.

His research sheds light on the Barred Owls' adaptation to our special urban and suburban environment and underscores the importance of the trees that make Charlotte unique – no longer are those trees just something nice to look at, but the home to a thriving species that depends on their existence. But, not all species can adapt as easily to developed areas.

"It's important to protect land in



Barred Owls have adapted to Charlotte's growth in part because of the city's tree-lined neighborhoods.

our urban and suburban environment, because while certain species are fairly adaptable to disturbed habitats, there are many species that need the basic infrastructure of a closed canopy and understory not destroyed by deer for breeding or nesting areas," explained Rob. "Many species, such as migratory birds, need even small undisturbed natural areas as refueling stops during their migration."

According to the recently released State of the Environment Report in Mecklenburg County, 65% of birds in that county alone are imperiled or vulnerable due to habitat degradation or loss.

"Land trusts can really speak for wildlife by going out there and preserving the tracts of land they need," said Rob. "The wildlife can't send us an email that says 'Hey, we're running out of space here.' Somebody needs to keep their eye on the ball and recognize the habitats that are being lost and those that are critical for the

survival of local species. Land trusts can then speak for our local wildlife through their actions, by protecting those local lands."

To see a video of a Barred Owl feeding its young recorded by one of Rob's nest cameras, visit catawbalands.org and click on "gallery."

DRAWN TO THE WOODS

"I didn't really know that I wanted to become a plant biologist, but I found that I was always drawn to the woods," said Dr. Jim Matthews, a longtime friend of Catawba Lands Conservancy. "I enjoyed identifying plants and learning about what they were, and I think that experience imprinted with me even before I got to college."

"A love for being in the woods has stuck with me my whole life," he said. Jim is standing at



UNCC ornithologist Dr. Rob Bierregaard has been studying Barred Owls in the Charlotte region for more than 10 years.

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FROM THE ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE

Dear friends,



Every fall, as the leaves change to vivid colors, it reminds me that the holiday season is just around the corner. To

many of us, the season is about spending time with family and friends, doing more to make a difference in the community, and reflecting on all the many things for which we are truly thankful.

As an avid supporter of Catawba Lands Conservancy and its mission, this time of year also makes me especially thankful for the many generous individuals and organizations in our region who have chosen to support local land conservation by making a gift to Catawba Lands Conservancy. If you are among those who have done so, my sincerest thanks and heartfelt appreciation; you have already made a positive and permanent mark on our region's landscape, our water quality, and our way of life.

In September, the Conservancy's Board of Directors and the recently formed Conservation Council came together to launch an unprecedented effort to secure \$400,000 in additional annual revenue for land acquisition and stewardship to safeguard the natural resources of our Southern Piedmont area – better put, OUR HOME – and it's not too late to help us make this effort a huge success before the year comes to a close.

The goals of our initiative are simple: build the organization's capacity to respond to an unprecedented opportunity to permanently conserve land in our region while conservation opportunities still exist. By acting swiftly, we can conserve more land now; permanently protecting local landscapes that we may never have another opportunity to save in our lifetime.

Our efforts are also focused around sharing the Conservancy's mission with new friends, neighbors, and organizations in our region. If we're going to be successful, we've got to get the

message out and expand our support! One way we're energizing and engaging these new audiences is by inviting a new generation of supporters to be a part of a giving society we're calling the Catawba Corps. Please see below for additional details and information on how you can get involved and contribute.

Our belief is that our combined efforts – inclusive of your support – will have a tangible and lasting impact on local land conservation. As your local land trust, the Conservancy continues to be dedicated to the preservation of a healthy, natural environment here in our own backyard... forever.

And that's something for which we can all be truly thankful.

Tommy Lee

Advancement Committee Co-Chair



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ONLINE AT
CATAWBALANDS.ORG**

INTRODUCING... CATAWBA CORPS!

The newly-created Catawba Corps is a membership group of individuals who feel a deep connection to the land, and understand that conservation is vital to the health and prosperity of our Southern Piedmont home. Through

philanthropic support, community engagement and fun-filled outings, Catawba Corps members will work to spread the Conservancy's message, steward land and connect lives to nature. If you're interested in

connecting with like-minded community members and serving as an ambassador for the Conservancy, we invite you to learn more about becoming a Catawba Corps member by visiting catawbalands.org.

APOLOGIES TO OUR PATRONS

A question that we're often asked is "What differentiates Catawba Lands Conservancy from other conservation organizations?"

An important point of distinction is that our efforts are solely focused on saving local land as opposed to national or international organizations not actively

conserving land in our area. We recently misstated in correspondence that the Conservancy is "the only land trust working to preserve local natural lands." In an effort to provide clarity about our local focus we made a mistake by failing to recognize the important efforts of other land trust partners actively

conserving land in the greater Charlotte region. We apologize to our patrons and communities for any confusion we may have caused, and we applaud the conservation advances by other land trust organizations active in our region.

Please contact Dave Cable at 704-342-3330, ext. 202 with any questions.



The federally endangered Schweinitz sunflower can be found on several of the Conservancy's protected properties.

the pavilion in the Catawba Wildflower Glen, a property owned by the Conservancy in northwest Mecklenburg County.

Toward the end of a 34-year career in higher education and academic research, Jim founded Habitat Assessment and Restoration Program (HARP), an environmental consulting group initially brought together to provide county inventories for the NC Natural Heritage Program. Realizing the need for environmental services during rapid development in the 1990s, Jim and Larry Mellichamp, a colleague at the University of North Carolina Charlotte, incorporated HARP in 1995.

The Catawba Wildflower Glen was discovered during a survey in 1993. In addition to the species diversity found in the Glen – more than 75 species noted initially – the rare Georgia Aster was located in the power line right of way adjacent to the Glen and the federally endangered Schweinitz's sunflower was located just below Mountain Island Lake dam.

Recognizing the value of Catawba Wildflower Glen, Jim approached

the Conservancy to see if it was interested in buying the land. The Conservancy seized the opportunity to kick off its land conservation mission, closing on the Catawba Wildflower Glen as its first conservation project on April 30, 1995.

“My strength is in discovery,” said Jim. “I’m able to go out in the woods and tell you what’s there. I don’t make the decisions about what to do with the information, but I can provide the science that tells something about a property’s importance.”

In 2006, the Conservancy called in Jim’s expertise to help provide data about the Ramah Creek Conservation area, approximately 500 acres of conserved land near Huntersville. The town was trying to determine the path of the Prosperity Church Road corridor expansion, a project that would have negatively impacted the conservation area significantly.

As part of the Conservancy’s routine stewardship activities, a baseline survey is required to determine the conservation values

of each property. The baseline provides important information about the property at the time of conservation, so that future monitoring visits can track the property’s conservation values over time.

In order to establish the conservation values on the entire Ramah Creek Conservation Area in relation to the proposed road corridors, the Conservancy asked Jim if he and his team would be a part of an

additional botanical analysis to determine which proposed route would have the least impact on the conservation area. Having this important baseline information, the Conservancy proposed an optimal road corridor that satisfied the town’s needs and minimized the impact on critical plant and animal habitats within the conservation area.



Dr. Jim Matthews, founder of Habitat Assessment and Restoration Program, helps the Conservancy with environmental assessment and land surveys.

“Our team walks a property and determines how much land has been disturbed, what species are there and if they’re species of concern,” said Jim. “Many of our species of concern in North Carolina occur on lands that have at one time been disturbed, such as power line rights of way. When

these disturbances occur on a property of interest, you can’t dismiss the importance of that habitat area.”

Native plants and other plant species of concern in our region are threatened by expanding development, burn suppression and herbicide use. Additionally, invasive species can take over native habitats, choking out the competition. Without the protection, active management and stewardship of natural lands, many local plant species may become threatened or endangered.

“Diversity of plant species is important because whole plant communities depend on many different species working together,” said Jim. “A monoculture may appear to be successful, but you’re essentially putting all your eggs in one basket. If that species becomes diseased, you’re left with nothing.”

After nearly 20 years working with the Conservancy on various projects, Jim is confident the organization is making a difference in the protection of healthy biological communities.

“The Conservancy is already having a lasting impact on plant diversity in our region,” said Jim. “Every piece of property has unique values, and if we can put together a working team focused on determining those unique values, we can continue to have a positive impact on our region.”

Stay tuned for more stories from the Conservancy's friends and neighbors that speak for our local lands. Check out catawbalands.org for videos of these and other stories, as well as photos from our conserved lands. ■

CONSERVANCY DEBUTS CONSERVATION VISION 2030



These growth maps illustrate the dramatic historical development in our community, as well as the region's predicted urbanization by 2030.

Have you ever wondered what our region might look like in 20 years? We've asked ourselves that very question. The Open Space Protection Collaborative (OSPC), led by Catawba Lands Conservancy, commissioned the Center for Applied GIS and the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute to study and forecast how urban growth will impact natural lands in the greater Charlotte area.

The Center used satellite images to map impervious surfaces, a key indicator of development, across the area since 1976. Extending those trends, the Center has estimated the extent of urbanization through 2030.

Prompted by the study's findings, the Conservancy launched an effort to create a comprehensive vision for how we can protect our region's green spaces. The effort has involved collecting data on the

region's natural resources, in partnership with the NC Wildlife Federation and the NC Wildlife Resources Commission.

The result is Conservation Vision 2030. The vision identifies four key focus areas: wildlife habitat, clean water, local farms and connection to nature. In each area,

the Conservancy has outlined objectives to improve water quality, protect wildlife and ecological diversity, preserve local farms and connect people with nature. In total, the Conservancy has set a goal of conserving 50,000 acres by 2030.

“Creating an effective plan for

conservation means looking at the whole picture,” said Tim Gestwicki, Executive Director for the NC Wildlife Federation, an important player in the NC Wildlife Action Plan and partner organization to the Conservancy. “Without protected natural lands, we risk losing wildlife habitat, clean water and other important natural resources. We need to intentionally

connect these issues to create a comprehensive plan for action, and the Conservancy is taking a significant step in that direction.”

The Conservancy plans to use the Conservation Vision 2030 as a guiding tool to measure progress in each focus area. Learn more at catawbalands.org. ■

10,000 ACRES BY 2010: PROJECT UPDATE

The Conservancy is working to permanently protect 1,600 acres of land before the year's end. The nine conservation projects are spread across the region. These local conservation efforts will bring the total acres protected by the land trust to 10,000 acres since its founding in 1991.

Recent closings include the Frye Farm in Lincoln County, which

protects valuable open space and supports farmland preservation. Goat Island Preserve in Gaston County was also finalized, and will serve as water quality buffer lands and a key connector in the Carolina Thread Trail.

The largest tract of land being conserved this year encompasses 589 acres in Catawba County on the Mountain Creek property,

future site of a public nature preserve and environmental education opportunities. This conserved property protects water quality, valuable riparian and woodland wildlife habitat, as well as diverse plant communities.



STAY INFORMED ON LOCAL CONSERVATION PROJECTS. SIGN UP FOR OUR MONTHLY E-NEWS AT CATAWBALANDS.ORG.

STATUS UPDATE: WE'VE GONE SOCIAL

It's official. The Conservancy is now fully engaged in interactive online media to share the latest happenings in our local conservation efforts.

Late this summer, we engaged the services of Henry Fleming and Company to move our website to a platform that is social media friendly. You may notice our

website looks a little, well, different. It's not a big shift as far as appearances go, but we hope to share more pictures, stories and invite our online friends to engage in a little friendly conversation. You can now watch videos, browse our photo galleries and post comments about

The Conservancy is deeply grateful to Henry Fleming & Company for its new, interactive website.

news items, events and multi-media.

Our social media presence is also an exciting step. Thanks to JLC Writing Services, we are making friends on Facebook and networking on LinkedIn. On Facebook, we're listed as a cause, allowing supporters to give

securely while on the site. We also are making use of a new YouTube channel, where you will see videos from this issue's "We Speak for the Land" interviews, as well as others. We hope to see you online soon!

To be connected to our social media sites, visit catawbalands.org and click on the icons to the left of the screen. ■

VOLUNTEERS CLEAR CAROLINA THREAD TRAIL SEGMENT AT PHARR YARNS PRESERVE



Volunteers came out to the Pharr Yarns Preserve to help construct approximately two miles of natural surface trail.

On Saturday, September 25, 45 volunteers helped the Conservancy and the Carolina Thread Trail to improve and clear a new, two mile natural surface trail on the Pharr Yarns Preserve in McAdenville. The trail winds along the South Fork Catawba River from the R.Y. McAden River Access to the River View neighborhood in Lowell.

Volunteers from the Piedmont Area Singletrack Alliance (PASA), Lowe's Home Improvement and Queens University, as well as community members, arrived just before 9 a.m. Work teams did everything from clearing a neighborhood entrance to digging up tripping hazards along the trail. Some volunteers used chain saws to clear fallen trees, while others helped erect new trail signs and

a fence at the neighborhood entrance to mark the trail.

The Conservancy and The Thread are incredibly grateful for the hard work done by this amazing volunteer crew. In addition to the donation of time and labor by the entire group, Lowe's contributed various trail building tools, a gift that will contribute to the ongoing volunteer trail building effort throughout the Carolina Thread Trail region. This summer, Lowe's made a \$250,000 contribution to The Thread for Iredell County, for which we are very grateful.

If you're interested in becoming a volunteer for The Thread, contact Amanda at 704-376-2556 ext. 215. ■

COME CHECK OUT THIS NEW TRAIL. VISIT CAROLINATHREADTRAIL.ORG AND CLICK ON "MAP."

CLEAN WATER FUNDING PRESERVES CATAWBA CREEK CORRIDOR

The Conservancy is in the process of finalizing the permanent protection of an 85-acre nature preserve just south of the City of Gastonia bordering the future Springhaven neighborhood. The land for the nature preserve was sold by Springhaven as a bargain sale to the Conservancy and will be part of the Carolina Thread Trail.

Daryl Greenberg, CPM, land coordinator for the property owner, sees conservation of the land as a way to make the property more attractive to prospective buyers.

"Having this preserve as a neighbor to our community will add value to the neighborhood," said Daryl. "When developers and groups like the Conservancy can work together on this type of

project, it really is a win-win for everybody."

Conservation of the preserve has been funded in part through a grant from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund. The preserve will protect 8,179 linear feet of riparian buffer running along both sides of Catawba Creek, preserving water quality in the critical Catawba River watershed area. In addition, the property provides conserved habitat for plants and animals.

The Springhaven preserve will be a key connector in Gaston County's master plan for the Carolina Thread Trail and is in close proximity to another



Springhaven Preserve

Conservancy property, the Catawba Creek Preserve. Both properties will take The Thread corridor into South Carolina. The county's master plan also proposes that The Thread will continue northeast from the Springhaven property and eventually connect with Gastonia's greenway system.

The project is expected to be conserved in the first quarter of 2011. ■

VOLUNTEER HONOR ROLL

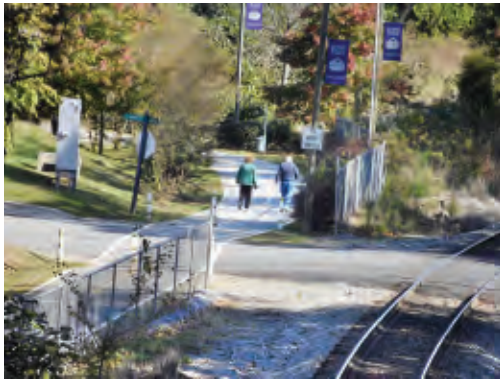
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Jennifer Morehead	
Jennifer Simmons	

'MARKING THE THREAD' FEATURES EIGHT TRAILS

From September 15 to October 9, eight communities along the Carolina Thread Trail hosted "Marking The Thread" celebrations in North and South Carolina as local leaders officially unveiled the newly-marked trails. Attendees had the opportunity to experience the trails and greenways that are weaving throughout 15 counties and connecting more than 2 million people.

Communities and organizations that hosted "Marking The Thread" events this fall included:

- Baxter Village - York County, SC
- The Broad River Greenway - Cleveland County, NC
- Davidson - Mecklenburg County, NC
- Landsford Canal - Chester County, SC
- Lincolnton - Lincoln County, NC
- McAdenville - Gaston County, NC
- The Nation Ford Greenway - York County, SC
- Oakboro - Stanly County, NC



The Marcia H. Cloninger Rail Trail in Lincolnton (Photo by Nancy Pierce)

Two of the communities who hosted "Marking The Thread" celebrations offer visitors a unique trail experience linked to a current or historic railway corridor.

"Rail corridors provide great opportunities for rail-to-trail conversions or trails beside rails," said Nancy Pierce, a longtime Conservancy member and supporter of The Thread who serves on the NC Rail-Trails board of directors. "Rails' connectivity and long, uninterrupted miles are great for recreation or bike commuting between towns. Also, since our region was built around railroads, they can preserve a piece of our history."

OAKBORO - STANLY COUNTY, NC

This trail represents one of very few examples of a "rail with trail" in the state. The Oakboro community partnered with the railroad to provide visitors with a glimpse at the history of the railway, up to the modern day.

This gravel trail extends approximately half a mile, and connects the local railroad museum to the Oakboro District Park. The park offers 40 acres of recreational fun, including lighted ball fields, horse shoe pits, picnic shelters, a pond, walking trails and restrooms. Parking is available at both ends of the trail at the museum or the park.

LINCOLNTON - LINCOLN COUNTY, NC

The Marcia H. Cloninger Rail Trail utilizes the former Norfolk Southern Railroad corridor. When the railway was abandoned, the corridor reverted back to the underlying property owners. The City of Lincolnton has worked diligently to purchase and solicit

donations of easements for the trail. Perfect for joggers, inline skaters, or families out for a stroll, this bench-lined paved trail runs about one mile through Lincolnton center from Pine Street to Motz Avenue, crossing underneath Main Street. The trailhead is on East Pine, behind the old railroad depot. Street parking is available across from the depot. ■



Oakboro's "rail with trail" corridor connects to the Oakboro District Park

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THESE TRAILS, VISIT CAROLINATHREADTRAIL.ORG AND CLICK ON "MAP."

CAROLINA THREAD TRAIL AWARDS \$563,795 TO COMMUNITIES FOR TRAILS

This fall, 13 communities along the Carolina Thread Trail were awarded implementation grants to help design and implement approximately 43 miles of trails. In September, The Thread's Governing Board approved trail project grant applications totaling \$563,795.

These trail implementation grants are reviewed by the Board on an annual basis to provide communities with catalytic funding to assist with trail corridor design, land acquisition and construction.

"Seven counties have created trail master plans and lots of local

momentum," said Ruth Shaw, chair of the Carolina Thread Trail Governing Board. "This round of funding will help put trail miles on the ground, a great example of thinking regionally and acting locally."

THIRD ANNUAL TRAIL FORUM ON DECEMBER 2ND

The Thread will be hosting its 3rd annual Trail Forum on Thursday, December 2nd at the Charles Mack Citizen Center in Mooresville. Session topics will include the economic impact of paddle trails, bridge and boardwalk construction, brownfield greenway development, and much more. In case you miss this year's meeting, you can read more about the presentations at carolinathreadtrail.org.

Trail projects funded in part by this year's implementation grants will take place in Cabarrus, Chester, Cleveland, York, Gaston, Lincoln and Mecklenburg counties. All counties that were eligible by virtue of having

completed Carolina Thread Trail master plans are represented.

To date, The Thread has awarded more than \$1.5 million in planning and implementation grants to communities. The grants are made possible through private capital donations and are used by communities as catalytic dollars to attract public monies to advance local trail segments. ■

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE GRANTS PROGRAM, VISIT CAROLINATHREADTRAIL.ORG.

THE THREAD WELCOMES GRANTS AND VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR



The Thread team at the Conservancy is excited to announce the addition of Amanda Anderson as Grants and Volunteer Coordinator. Amanda's role includes coordinating the organization's grants program to provide catalytic funding for communities along The Thread. She also oversees the volunteer program, engaging community members in the development of local trail segments.

"We're thrilled to have Amanda as part of our team," said Mike Mabry, chair of The Thread's Grants Committee. "Her dedicated attention to our grants and volunteer activities will enable The Thread to better support communities in developing local trail segments, as well as engage residents in volunteer activities throughout the region."

Amanda graduated with a Biology degree from Davidson College, and developed a passion for the outdoors and conservation while leading summer backpacking trips and traveling abroad to Kenya, Mexico and Dominica. Most recently, she worked as a project manager for two exhibitions at Discovery Place in conjunction with the museum's renovation. A native North Carolinian, Amanda

enjoys hiking, traveling, triathlons and spending time with her husband and pup. ■

LAND PROTECTION PARALEGAL JOINS THE CONSERVANCY



The Conservancy welcomes Tonya Harris, who joins the organization as Land Protection

Paralegal. Tonya assists with processing land protection projects and supports the land protection process through funding coordination and grant submissions.

"It's a pleasure to welcome Tonya to the land protection team," said Louis Stevens, Chair of the Conservancy's Land Acquisition Committee. "She brings a great deal of value to our organization by increasing our efficiency in processing land protection projects and boosting our capacity to identify and engage in new projects."

Tonya graduated from the University of North Carolina Charlotte with a degree in Business Administration. Upon graduation, she joined the City of Concord as a planner. Since then, Tonya has developed a broad range of experience in planning and land development working for a private consulting firm and both commercial and residential builders and developers. She enjoys spending her free time with her family. ■

GO PAPERLESS IN 2011

We're very grateful for your continued support in conserving local lands and staying informed through our newsletter. We're offering all of our newsletter recipients the option to receive their

newsletter via email. That means that as soon as a PDF version of the newsletter is available, we will email you a link to download the latest issue to your computer. The benefits of "going

paperless" are many! Not only will you receive your local land conservation news weeks earlier, you will also help us reduce our paper footprint, save trees, minimize printing and transport costs and prevent paper waste.

Simply send us an email or give us a call to tell us you'd like to get your newsletter by email. Contact Heike at 704-342-3330 ext. 210 or heike@catawbalands.org.

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Catawba Lands Conservancy is part of a network of land trusts that collectively have protected more than 309,361 acres of the places you love in North Carolina.



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