

The High Knob Herald

Official Newsletter of The Clinch Coalition

No. 13 Fall 2018

THE CLINCH COALITION CELEBRATES TWENTY ACTIVE YEARS



2018 Steve Brooks, Gerry and Joe Scardo and Dick Austin. Founding members at the 20th Anniversary Celebration.

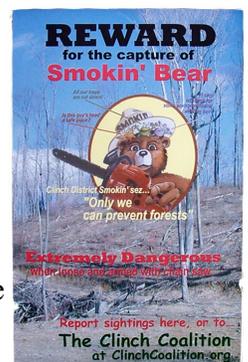


TCC members with ancient Doug Fir section that was touring the nation in 2004

It seems destiny decided The Clinch Coalition (TCC) needed to exist. The organization's origin runs deep, nurtured by people's appreciation of the forest, mountains, wildlife, rivers, creeks and streams. However, The Clinch Coalition's "big bang" came from a chance meeting between Steve Brooks and Otis Ward in 1998. They met each other on High Knob, started talking, found they shared a love and concern for the mountain and its beautiful forest. Steve had petitions asking the Forest Service to reconsider its extensive plans for the forest on High Knob. Otis signed the petition and asked Steve for more. Soon concerned citizens held a meeting at the old Tacoma schoolhouse and The Clinch Coalition was born. Founding members developed a mission statement that read: "To protect the forest, wildlife, and watersheds of the Clinch Ranger District of the Jefferson National Forest and surrounding area." This sentiment still serves and guides TCC activity and purpose. The mission statement motivates the non-profit volunteer group to be stewards of southwest Virginia's environment.

HIGHLIGHTS OF TWO DECADES OF TCC SERVICE

- 1998- Proposed timber sales prompt citizens to organize The Clinch Coalition
- 1999- Led first guided interpretive hikes on High Knob
- 1999- Stopped removal of surface rock for commercial use from Cliff Mountain
- 2000- Erected forest fire billboard "Reward for the Capture of Smokin' Bear"
- 2001- Congressman Boucher tours Big Stony Creek flood with TCC members
- 2002- Forest Service reduces Bark Camp timber sales from 1,400 to 620 acres
- 2003- Stopped 30 miles of ATV trails on Laurel Fork section of High Knob
- 2004- Received Outstanding Member Award from National Forest Protection Alliance
- 2006- "How do Trees Protect Streams and Animals in Our Forest?" first school contest theme
- 2007- First Naturalist Rally held at Bark Camp Lake Recreation Area
- 2007- Received \$40K VDCR grant to improve Benge Trail and began doing trail work
- 2011- USFS nominates TCC for Regional Foresters Award for Volunteer Groups
- 2012- Opposed Wells Branch Timber Sale eliminating new roads and 140 acres timbering
- 2013- Adopted Chief Benge Trail
- 2014- First Annual Hellbender 10k Race held to benefit TCC
- 2016- Hiked sections of proposed Nettle Patch Timber Sale and submitted comments
- 2018- The Clinch Coalition celebrates its twenty year anniversary by continuing to advocate for the conservation and preservation of the environment



GOOD LUCK ANNIE JANE



After two years serving The Clinch Coalition as Program Director, Annie Jane Cotten is pursuing a new career in nearby Kentucky. We will miss her boundless enthusiasm and all her good work!

She began working for us on December 15, 2016, and has since been a source of positive energy, optimism, and inspiration.

Annie Jane has been instrumental in shaping our fundraising activities, and in providing leadership for our High Knob Naturalist Rally, Earth Awareness Contests, nature hikes, and forest protection initiatives. She has joined the Letcher County Culture Hub as their new Organizer.

On a positive note, Annie Jane has said she would like to be a member of The Clinch Coalition Board so we will be able to continue working with her. We hope we will see Annie Jane at the 2019 Naturalist Rally sharing her love of local medicinal plants.

Congratulations to Annie Jane on her new job!



Flowering Dogwood

THANK YOU TO ALL THAT HELPED WITH THE NEWSLETTER!

Editors: Martie Bell, Maxine Kenny and Harry Warren, Diana Withen

Contributors: Steve Brooks, Wayne Browning, Frank Frey, Ryan Huish, Phil Shelton, Wally Smith,

Photography: Bonnie Aker, Chris Allgyer, Wayne Browning and Bill Harris

TCC Board Members 2018

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Wally Smith, Vice Pres.

Wise, VA

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Coeburn, VA



Red salamander



British Soldier Lichen

5th ANNUAL HIGH KNOB HELLBENDER 10K BRINGS OUT THE BEST IN RUNNERS AND COMMUNITY



Suzanne Herron from Wise celebrates the finish line.

A local Norton couple Bess and Brad Mathisen led the pack of 68 determined runners on October 6 to win fastest female and male in the fifth annual Hellbender 10K race.

The race draws attention to the threatened Hellbender salamander, North America's largest amphibian. Found in the Clinch, Powell and New River of southwest Virginia, these most interesting creatures can live up to 30 years in the wild and weigh as much as five and a half pounds. The event hopes to encourage sustainable economic development and promote and clear, fast-flowing well-oxygenated water critical the Hellbender's survival.

The Hellbender 10K began in 2014 with a handful of participants and has grown as runners recognize the unique challenge of High Knob with its 4,223 foot elevation including a steep 2,000 foot climb.

This year's race directors Deidre Donahue's and Katie Dunn organizational efforts resulted with runners from Tennessee, North Carolina, Indiana, Florida, Georgia, California, Kentucky and throughout Virginia experiencing the run's agony and ecstasy.



Thank you to race organizers! Katie Dunn and Deidre Donahue placing signs along the curvy, climbing Hellbender race route.

The race inspired community participation. Coeburn Scout Troop 301 directed traffic, numerous businesses provided support and hundreds of volunteer hours made the event possible.

Congratulations to our 2018 Winners



Overall Male

- 1st Brad Mathisen, 30, Norton, VA :53:35
- 2nd Owen Lindsey, 17, Norton, VA :56:08
- 3rd Nate Stalnaker, 38, Bristol, TN :59:55

Overall Female

- 1st Bess Mathisen, 30, Norton, VA :56:34
- 2nd Angela Frye, 35, Rockledge, FL 1:04:29
- 3rd Tommye Horton, 41, Kingsport, TN 1:06:13

Masters Male

- Shawn Becker, 41, Weber City, VA 1:01:06

Masters Female

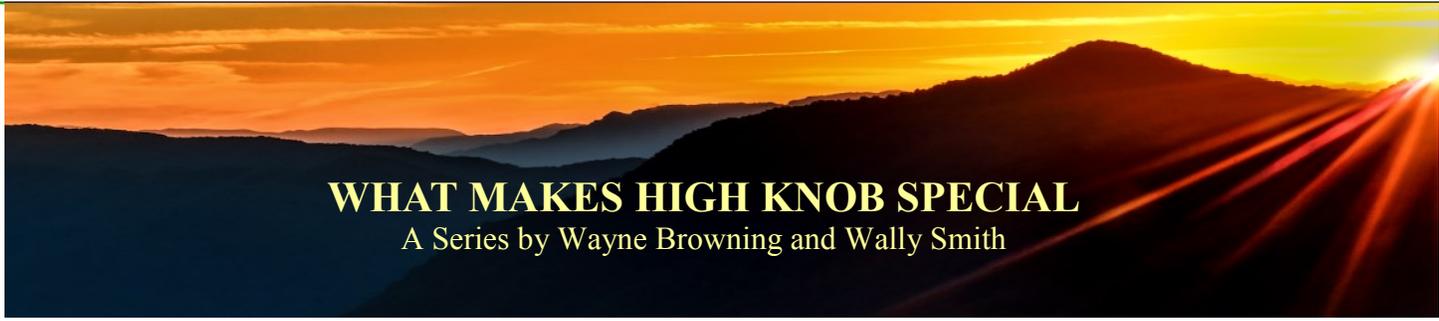
- Kristi Begley, 45, Fort Blackmore, VA 1:14:24

Grandmasters Male

- Michael Lovelace, 62, Kingsport, TN 1:30:59

Grandmasters Female

- Sharon Barody, 65, Kingsport, TN 1:33:16



WHAT MAKES HIGH KNOB SPECIAL

A Series by Wayne Browning and Wally Smith

The peak of High Knob rises along the southeastern edge of the Appalachian coalfields, overlooking a majestic mass of elevated terrain sprawling between the Duffield Valley and Guest River Gorge in far southwestern Virginia. It is unlike adjacent hills and mountains of the coalfields, with notable exception of Pine Mountain, and is a tectonically formed mountain by overthrusting and thrust-faulting in a manner more analogous to those of the adjoining Ridge & Valley and Blue Ridge provinces.

The roots of High Knob spread outward through an extended landform that geologists named the Powell Valley Anticline, the most dominant structural feature of the Cumberland Overthrust Block, a huge four-sided sheet of continental crust that was moved miles from its original position during final stages in construction of the Appalachians. This Anticline underwent breachment, with erosion of its core to open up a vast calcareous heart dominated by limestone and dolostone rock stratas, from southwest to northeast over time, with the apex of this erosional process being today visible at Powell Valley Overlook in Wise County. This means that not only was Powell Valley once inside of a great mountain but so were valleys to the southwest which today comprise most of Lee County and the low, rolling terrain farther southwest to Norris Lake in northern Tennessee.

Geological forces that folded High Knob essentially created a sky island, which sprawls outward for miles to contain the most lakes and wetlands of any singular mountain top in the Appalachians with an array of tumbling whitewater creeks feeding water into some of the most biologically diverse rivers on the North American continent. As Wally Smith explained, this has everything to do with the mountain's biodiversity, "those lakes and reservoirs work so well in part because the mountain provides reliable sources of clean water. The enhanced rainfall and snowfall it triggers feeds thousands of springs and headwaters streams, and the heavily-forested woods they flow through on their way downhill provide a natural source of water purification. Thick mats of soil, moss, and leaf litter provide yet another natural filter that rainfall percolates through well before it finds its way into nearby waterways."

An array of high valleys, hollows, and coves holding these lakes, wetlands, and headwaters streams have a climate more akin to the Great Lakes or New England than southern Virginia, which too is part of what makes High Knob special as it supports an environment attractive to species having northern affinities. When combined with its geographic location, and its non-glaciated landscape, this allows species with northern, southern, midwestern, and far eastern affinities to become components of its flora and fauna. But there is more to High Knob than meets the eye. Much more! Beneath the visible surface a vast three-dimensional network of vertical and horizontal passages contains life forms which are bizarre and other-worldly. Life sustaining waters fall vertically down shafts, drip from ceilings, and form pools within a subterranean wilderness which is ruled by gradients of pressure driven air through a world devoid of light inside caves that are the deepest east of the Mississippi River. **These are the opening paragraphs of a 5-part series by Wayne Browning and Wally Smith, TCC Board Members. Originally published in *The Coalfield Progress* (September 7- 25, 2018). To explore the depths of the High Knob – to venture far below its rugged surface beauty – go to www.clinchcoalition.net and read these articles in their entirety.**

PREVENTING THE NEXT “CHESTNUT BLIGHT” IN THE APPALACHIANS

By Ryan Huish

The precious Appalachian forest ecosystems and our human connections to them may be in greater danger than most realize. They have taken several strong punches over the past century from different tree diseases and pests. Those who truly understand these forests and their histories have a pang in their hearts when remembering the fall of the great American chestnut to the chestnut blight. And we are currently witnessing the decimation of the Eastern hemlock and ash trees. In contrast with the green hillsides, their dead bodies still stand testifying to our own irresponsibility and lack of stewardship that has led to these species' drastic declines. Are the oaks, maples, walnuts, beeches, and other trees next? Unfortunately, the answer to that question may be “yes”, if we don't take collaborative action now to prevent the spread of multiple pests and diseases—including “sudden oak death”—threatening to invade.

What effect would the loss of these trees have on the ecosystem, our economy, cultural heritage, water quality, and general quality of life? Is it worth investing significant resources in preventing these diseases from impacting our forests? Looking back retrospectively, what do we wish we would have done to lessen the impact of the chestnut blight? What genetic resources would we have preserved? What else could we have done? Well, let's do that now. Let's learn from history and make a different story for our noble oaks and other forest trees. Join the efforts citizens, government, scientists and others to protect these valuable resources. Get educated on this topic and reach out to contribute where you can. The future may depend more on our collective teamwork than we realize.

Contact Ryan Huish (rdh5b@uvawise.edu) for more information.

Volunteering in the Woods

Trail Work

Spearhead Trails helped with maintaining the trails on High Knob. This freed TCC to work on other Clinch District trails. Volunteers traveled to the North Fork of the Pound Roadless Area to do trail work this past year. With the suggestion of Lois Boggs from the Forest Service TCC worked the Red Fox, Laurel Fork and Phillips Creek trails all located on Pine Mountain along the Kentucky border. TCC logged 340 hours working on trails.

More Trail Work

This year we reported 108 hours of work on the Chief Benge Trail to the Forest Service, which was mostly done by Patty Bates and Bandit. Thanks Patty!

Survey Assistance

TCC assisted the Forest Service with recreation area assessment surveys this past spring. Ten members spent over 200 hours inspecting and reporting the condition of four campgrounds and six day use areas.

Happy Trails to You

Have Saw, Will Travel, Patrick Withen has cut and cleared countless fallen trees across trails. Unfortunately Patrick and his faithful chain saw plan to relocate from southwest Virginia to Idaho. Many thanks to Patrick and his ready chainsaw who for years helped keep paths through the woods clear and accessible.



Phillips Creek Trail Crew



Taking a break



Red Fox Trail Crew



Enjoying the views

We are always looking for new volunteers, and appreciate the help of everyone who comes out to support our mission. If you would like to volunteer, please contact us at clinchcoalition@gmail.com.



12th Annual High Knob Naturalist Rally

RALLY RETROSPECTIVE: ANOTHER GREAT COMMUNITY EFFORT

It takes a community to make a naturalist rally. That is exactly what happened this year when an estimated 225 people attended the 2018 High Knob Naturalist Rally. They came from four states and every county in southwest Virginia. Together they explored High Knob's unique environment and shared a free lunch. This year's attendees, ranging from preschoolers to octogenarians, proved your never too young or too old to enjoy and experience nature.

Isaac Newton said "nature is pleased with simplicity." "What is this?", the rally's most commonly asked question, reflected Newton's observation. Experts and educators provided the answer with more than 30 nature walks and programs ranging from raptor to reptiles.



Bays Mountain State Park brought raptors like a Red-tailed hawk.



A darter and freshwater mussel visit the rally. Costumes from Upper Tennessee River Roundtable



Taysha DeVaughn CRVI VISTA teaching Enviroscope



Beth Walker with the High Knob Master Naturalists sharing the magic of wild things with the young.



Darin Handy sharing his love of reptiles.

Rally Presenters and Activities

- Animal Adaptations- Lois Boggs
- Appalachian Voices
- Bears- Seth Thompson
- Birds- Betsy Grossman
- Clinch River Adventures
- Clinch River Valley Initiative
- Conservation thru Cultivation- Joe Gorman and Becca Holmes
- Edible Plants - Phil Meeks
- Enviroscape- Taysha DeVaughn VISTA
- Estanoa - Terry Vencil
- Forest Ecology - Dave Skinner
- HK Climate - Wayne Browning
- HK Geology and Beavers - Phil Shelton
- Insects -Chris Allgyer
- Local Flora - Stephen Grayson
- Maple Syrup- Alex Allen
- Medicinal Plants and Fungi - Eddie Yates
- Mussels- Tiffany Leach
- Nature Art - Katie Jessee
- Photos - Bill Harris and Bonnie Aker
- Pollinators - Stacey Adams
- Raptors - Bob Culler
- Reptiles -Tina Altizer and Darin Handy
- Rocks -Bonnie Aker
- Salamanders -Wally Smith
- Solar Development- Austin Counts, VISTA
- Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards
- Trees -Dakota Taylor
- Trout Unlimited
- Upper Tennessee River Roundtable
- Virginia Master Naturalists
- Wilderness Survival - Jane Sandt
- Wilderness Survival - Mark & Carol Caruso
- Wolfs - Julie Nutter



Young rally goers learn about snakes.

The Clinch Coalition would like to thank the US Forest Service, the Virginia Master Naturalists and the over 85 community businesses and organizations that made the 12th Annual High Knob Naturalist Rally possible.



Unnamed tributary that begins near High Knob Lake



Nature Art—Katie Jesse finding beauty in the woods

The day went smoothly, no emergencies, and the weather was dry with a hint of high country cool in the air. Recent rains made the forest come alive with the sound of cascading water down High Knob's many streams and creeks. Plans are already underway for the 2019 Naturalist rally slated for Saturday September 28, we hope to see you there!



Spring Peeper



Eddie Yates discussing wild mushrooms.

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

-Aldo Leopold

Got Trees?

TREES FIGHT GLOBAL WARMING

Plants, especially trees, play an important role protecting our planet's climate from increased warming. Living forests act as "carbon sinks" storing massive amounts of carbon in their bodies, up to 40 percent of their dry weight is carbon.

Photosynthesis enables plants to use solar energy to split water (H₂O). This releases oxygen into the atmosphere and then converts carbon dioxide into carbon based chemicals such as glucose. Over geologic time this process has changed the earth's atmosphere by removing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen into the atmosphere. The process makes life possible on this planet for humans.

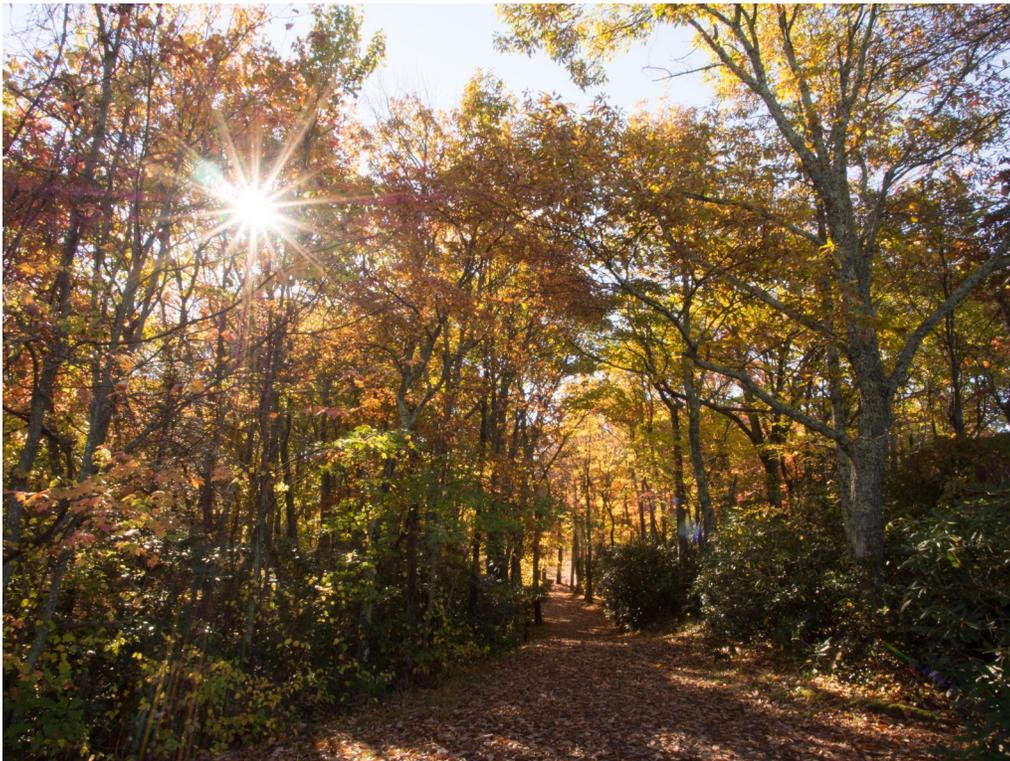
Carbon (CO₂) in the atmosphere acts as an invisible blanket warming the planet. Too little CO₂ and the Earth gets cold, too much CO₂ and Earth gets hot. Human activity is increasing CO₂ levels. Preindustrial concentrations of CO₂ was about 220 parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere. This past March, CO₂ levels have passed 400 ppm, the highest level in recorded history.

Deforestation and burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and natural gas is causing climate change. Burning and decomposition of the world's forest add CO₂ at the alarming rate of 1.4 tons of CO₂ being produced for every ton of dry weight burned. The Arbor Day Foundation reports that scientists estimate deforestation and land use changes now account for 23 percent of man-made CO₂.

WE CAN STOP AND EVEN REVERSE DEFORESTATION. Ideally protection and proper management of forests both on private and public land would be a priority. Unfortunately, locally privately owned forests have seen an increase in logging to provide wood chips to burn in power plants. Therefore it is extremely important to protect the forests on public land. The National Forest belongs to all of us, and we should and do have a right to voice concerns about their use.

What can you do to help? Every individual effort to drive less, reduce electricity use and eating a plant based diet helps. Our individual acts will slow global warming. Planting trees can help to save energy by providing shade and wind breaks as they soak up and store carbon dioxide.

Living forests still need people to stand up for them! The Clinch Coalition has worked for 20 years to reduce logging and burning on our public lands. TCC will continue to work for protection of the trees. But everyone's watchful, conservation eye is needed to safeguard the forest and guarantee future generations can answer "YES!" to the question GOT TREES?



TREES STAND TALL ON HIGH KNOB

Did You Know:

That without trees the Earth's atmosphere might be like that on Venus, covered with thick gas with a temperature of several hundred degrees.

Forest Watch

Nettle Patch Negotiations Continue

The Nettle Patch Timber Sale, first presented to the public almost three years ago, is now in its last stage. The Clinch Coalition along with two other parties presented objections to the final proposal this past spring and are now working toward a satisfactory agreement with the Forest Service. According to TCC president Diana Withen “We are feeling very confident that they are taking our concerns into consideration and will reduce both the timbering and prescribed burns proposed.” With the assistance of the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) the Coalition and other parties presented major concerns dealing with erosion and flooding, water quality, species diversity, invasive species, impacts on future recreation use, and climate change. A final decision should be announced very soon.



Blue Dasher Dragonfly



Canada Lily

Clinch Coalition Addresses ATV Impacts to Local Streams

The economic development swirling around increased outdoor recreation in southwest Virginia has been a blessing for our communities. For that, The Clinch Coalition is thankful. But might some of the increased activity also be a threat to the very resources that draw outdoor enthusiasts to our area?

The Clinch Coalition is concerned that the burgeoning, and sometimes illegal, ATV activity in our streams may ultimately bite the hand that feeds us.

What have we seen?

Photos and videos posted online this spring from ATV trail systems in Wise and surrounding counties are disturbing. The images, all of which were recorded from the Spearhead Trails system, show ATVs and other off-road vehicles driving up streambeds and through wetlands on what appear to be official, signed routes. Impacted streams included: Barts Lick Creek above the town of Haysi and several streams in the Russell Creek watershed near St. Paul. One of these trails appeared to have used a natural streambed as a vehicle route uninterrupted for the better portion of one mile.

What is harmed by ATV traffic in streams?

- The amount of dirt going in our waterways will rise – polluting streams where many rare and protected freshwater mussels and fishes are struggling to survive.
- Many of these streams drain directly into the Clinch and Russell Fork Rivers – the Clinch having some of the highest aquatic biodiversity on the North American continent.
- Specifically, damage to Barts Lick Creek that was being used as a roadway for vehicles flows into the Russell Fork directly upstream from confirmed localities for the federally-protected, Big Sandy Crayfish.
- More broadly, streambed disturbance from repeated ATV use in our headwaters has been shown to increase risks of erosion which can increase flooding in communities downstream.
- Federal and state agencies currently funding development of outdoor recreation in our region are sensitive about degradation of streams and wetlands and we don't want to lose their continued support.

How are we beginning to work together to develop sustainable outdoor recreation activities?

The Clinch Coalition believes that as southwest Virginia continues to search for new economic opportunities, honest, open communication among stakeholders and thoughtful, proactive planning is a must! We can help insure that our region's natural heritage is preserved while still providing economic benefits to our communities. To that end, TCC had meetings with Spearhead Trails this summer and early fall. We learned they have closed, or plan to close, a number of the trails that concerned us. Though some philosophical differences remain between TCC and off-road groups, we are grateful that Spearhead Trails has acknowledged potential water quality impacts on their trail systems and is taking steps to remediate those issues. We look forward to continuing to work together!

FROM THE US FOREST SERVICE: CLINCH RANGER DISTRICT

New Employees

Michele Davalos, District Ranger, started work in January 2018. Michele grew up in Bristol, Virginia. She earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Geography from James Madison University. Michele returns to the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest where she began her career in 1989. and began her Forest Service career in the George Washington National Forest.

Brandon Olinger, Recreation Program Manager joined the staff in mid-May 2018. Brandon grew up in Marion, Virginia graduating from Virginia Tech with a degree in Natural Resources Conversation with a concentration in recreation.

Jeff Buiting, Recreation Technician, started work this past October. Jeff was raised in Michigan and earned a degree in Outdoor Recreation and Environmental Education from Central Michigan University.

Kenneth Cooper, Supervisory Fire Engine Operator, joined the District in September. Ken is from Cleveland, Tennessee and worked with the Virginia Department of Forestry, Oregon Department of Forestry and most recently the Klamath National Forest in California.

Project Update

Nettle Patch Vegetation Management Project: The Forest Supervisor has met with the objectors and is reviewing the decision. The Forest Service expects resolution within the next month.

Turkey Cove Grouse Habitat Improvement Project: Located in the Wallen Ridge area, it's purpose is to follow goals and objectives of the Forest Plan; create and enhance wildlife habitats; maintain a healthy mix of tree species or varying ages; and harvest wood products to contribute to the local economy. An interdisciplinary team is currently analyzing environmental effects. A draft report will be available this fall/winter with 30 days for public comment.

Recreation Program: The Forest Service, as part of an overall national strategy, is working with the public and communities to address aging infrastructure and the limited capacity to operate and maintain recreation areas. The water system at Bark Camp Campground is scheduled to be replaced in the near future.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: THE VERSATILE SCOUT TROOP 301



Directing traffic at the HK Naturalist Rally



Hellbender 10K Race Aid Station

They direct traffic. They create information stations. They build trails, bridges and walkways through the woods. Sometimes it seems there is little Coeburn Scout Troop 301 cannot do.

Led by scoutmaster Teddy Huff, troop leaders include assistant scoutmaster Josh Meade, James Hicks, Tony Hamilton and Adam Couch with parent Jeff Boggs lending assistance.

Scouts currently in Troop 301 include Eagle Scouts Noah Huff, Isaac Meade, Spencer Boggs and Dominic Sluss. Scouts Mathew Hicks, Anthony Hamilton, Braxton Brummitt, Daniel Rose, Ethan Rose, James Oliver, Bracken Oliver, Luke McConnell, Alex Vincer and Austin Kilgore round out members of Troop 301.

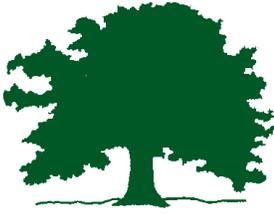
Troop 301 stands ready to perform any purpose that benefits the public. They created attractive information Kiosks at High Knob Tower and Flag Rock. The Troop maintains the section of Chief Benges Trail that connects the tower with the recreation area while making other trails more accessible with wooden bridges and gravel paths.

Their presence can be seen at numerous community events. The High Knob Naturalist Rally depends on them to park vehicles and direct traffic while they perform opening ceremonies for Hellbender 10K race. Sometimes the youngsters are seen working first aid stations and comfort stations at various events.

These young men regularly exhibit the Scout Law by being Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Kind, Obedient, Cheerful, Thrifty, Brave, Clean, and Reverent.

TCC feels fortunate to have Coeburn Troop 301 in our community. We thank every one associated with Troop 301 past, present and future for their commitment to service and conservation. The amount of time and the good work they do cannot be overestimated.





The Clinch Coalition
PO Box 2732
Wise, VA 24293

To:



The Clinch Coalition's Holiday Gathering
December 11, 2018 at 6:00
Potluck Dinner and Silent Auction
Speaker Gabrielle Zeiger
Zen and the Art of Mushroom Hunting

Split-gill Fungus

Get in touch with us...
www.clinchcoalition.net
clinchcoalition@gmail.com
or
Call us at 276-479-2176

It is the mission of The Clinch Coalition to protect and preserve the forest, wildlife, and watersheds in our National Forest and surrounding communities for present and future generations.