

HIGH KNOB HERALD

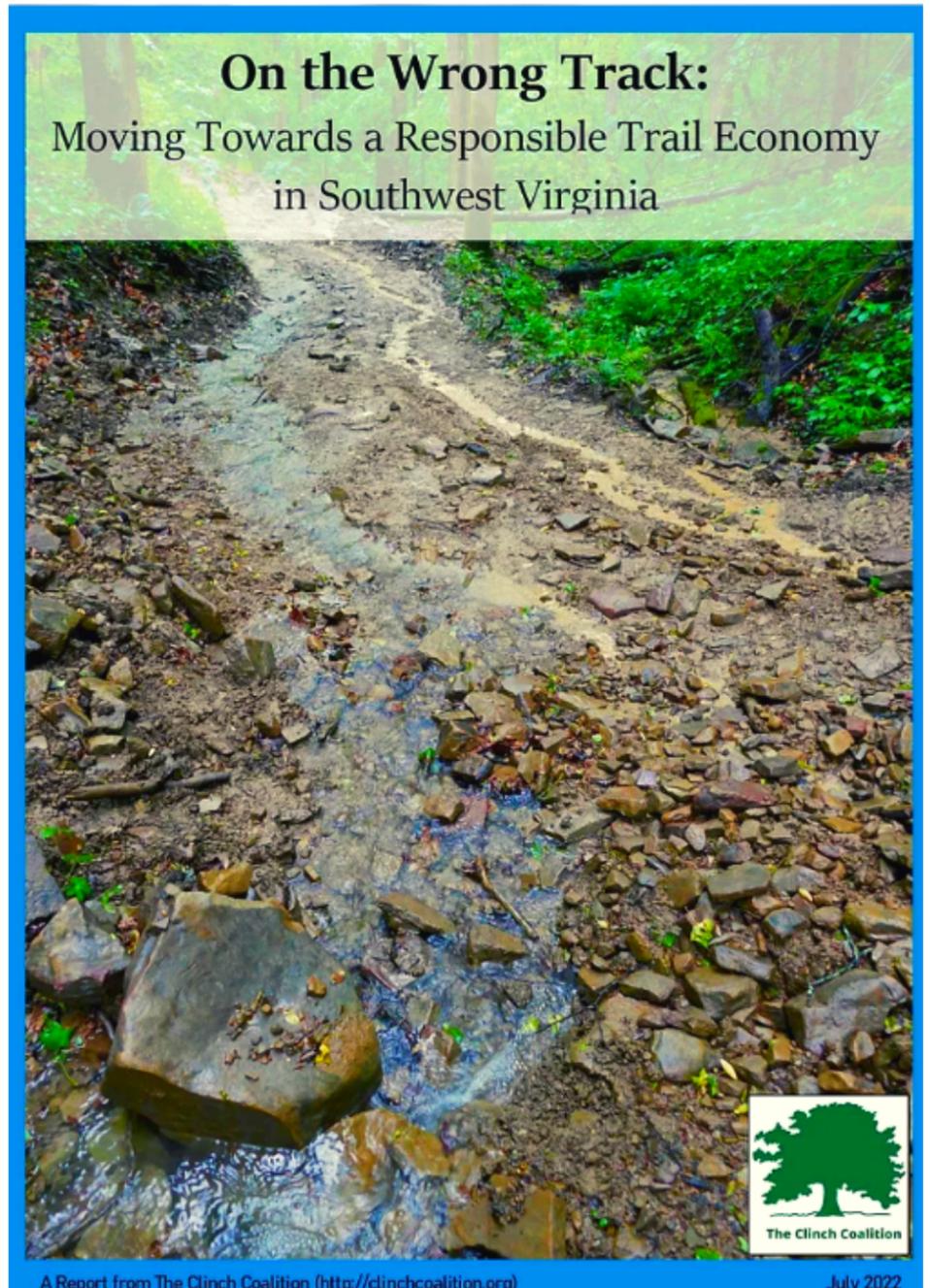
What is WOTUS, and why you should care

Federal jurisdiction under the Clean Water Act (CWA) is limited to “Waters of the United States,” or WOTUS for short, and defines where the federal government can require permits to protect rivers, wetlands, lakes, estuaries, and other waterbodies from pollution. According to the National Wildlife Federation, few laws have been as transformative to the nation’s quality of life as the CWA.

October 18, 2022 marked the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act and has resulted in incredible successes improving wastewater treatment, preventing industrial pollution, and protecting wetlands. But the CWA has limitations. Supreme Court decisions in 2001 and 2006 resulted in inconsistent application of CWA requirements and confusion among federal and state agencies about which waters were covered by the Act. Now the CWA has an uncertain future with the Supreme Court having heard oral arguments this fall challenging the scope of WOTUS in *Sackett v. EPA*.



Haynes Branch (New River watershed) in Tazewell County excavated into an ATV trail above Pocahontas, Virginia.



In July of 2022, The Clinch Coalition published a comprehensive report documenting damage to wetlands and streams, some involving possible CWA violations, on Southwest Virginia's Spearhead Trails network.

This case is about one thing – whether we can protect one of our most important natural resources: clean water. The worst polluters, including fossil fuel industries and developers, along with their pro-polluter allies in Congress, are using this case to hamstring the Environmental Protection Agency’s ability to protect communities, public health, and local ecosystems from harmful pollution. Polluters are pushing the Supreme Court to make it easier for them to bulldoze wetlands and dump waste into our streams, jeopardizing the waters our families and communities rely on. *(Cont. Page 3)*

Show Your Support for TCC Today!

Now is the time to become a new member or renew your membership. Also, consider making a tax-deductible donation. Your support is vital to helping us continue our advocacy for a clean and protected environment. In 2023, The Clinch Coalition enters its 25th year dedicated to working on environmental justice for our communities and protecting our forests, waters, and the vast biodiversity of Southwest Virginia. Only together can we conserve our natural heritage, create excellent recreational opportunities, and build a culture of land stewardship.

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Renew Membership or Become a New Member

___ Student \$10 ___ Individual \$25 ___ Family \$40 ___ Business \$50

Make check to: The Clinch Coalition, P.O. Box 2732, Wise, VA 24293

Make a Tax-Deductible Donation

Amount: _____

Make check to Virginia Organizing and write on memo line: The Clinch Coalition

Mail check to: The Clinch Coalition, P.O. Box 2732, Wise, Virginia 24293, or go to clinchcoalition.org and click on Donate.

Paypal/Credit Card: Go to clinchcoalition.org and click on Donate to be linked to TCC's PayPal.

If you have any questions or want more information, contact us at info@clinchcoalition.org.

Thank You!

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Photo by Bill Harris

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What is WOTUS, and why you should care (cont.)

People care deeply about clean water. Our rivers, lakes, streams and wetlands are vital to a healthy environment and a vibrant economy. As Southwest Virginia promotes tourism, clean water provides endless opportunities for swimming, fishing, kayaking, and other recreation. Above all, we need clean, safe drinking water to live.

TCC's **On the Wrong Track** report followed TCC's initial effort in 2018 to collaborate with Spearhead Trails on improving stewardship practices and then beseeching the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to follow through on enforcement for possible CWA violations that their own inspectors uncovered on the state-run trail system.

TCC's report includes recommendations for reform and calls upon local citizens to report areas of concern, advocate for sustainable trails, and educate others on the importance of water quality.

You can find the full report on our website at clinchcoalition.org/traileconomyreport.



Growing damage to an isolated wetland over time at St. Paul, Virginia's Mountain View ATV Trails in 2012 prior to the public trail system's opening, (top), in 2017 after several years of ATV use (center), and at the present day on lands now under management by The Nature Conservancy (bottom). Aerial imagery from Wise County, Virginia's GIS Department.



Photos show runoff from an active ATV trail on Tazewell County's Laurel Fork during low-flow conditions in Fall of 2021 – more than one year after being cited in state regulators' inspection reports and with no corrective action required by regulatory officials.

Having a Green Thumb: TCC Works with Norton Garden Club for Earth Day

This past April, the Clinch Coalition assisted the Norton Green Thumb Garden Club with their Earth Day event in an effort to highlight the wonderful strides being taken by other local organizations and clubs. Outside of the community center on Park Avenue, several members of the community banded together to plant a pollinator garden. If one were to tour the community center, which is just a short stretch away from Norton Elementary School, they would find a small garden and greenhouse tucked away behind the back gate. Inside of the small greenhouse there was a variety of plants being grown with different names of children and their signatures scribbled along gently anchored popsicle sticks.



Photography by Jay T.

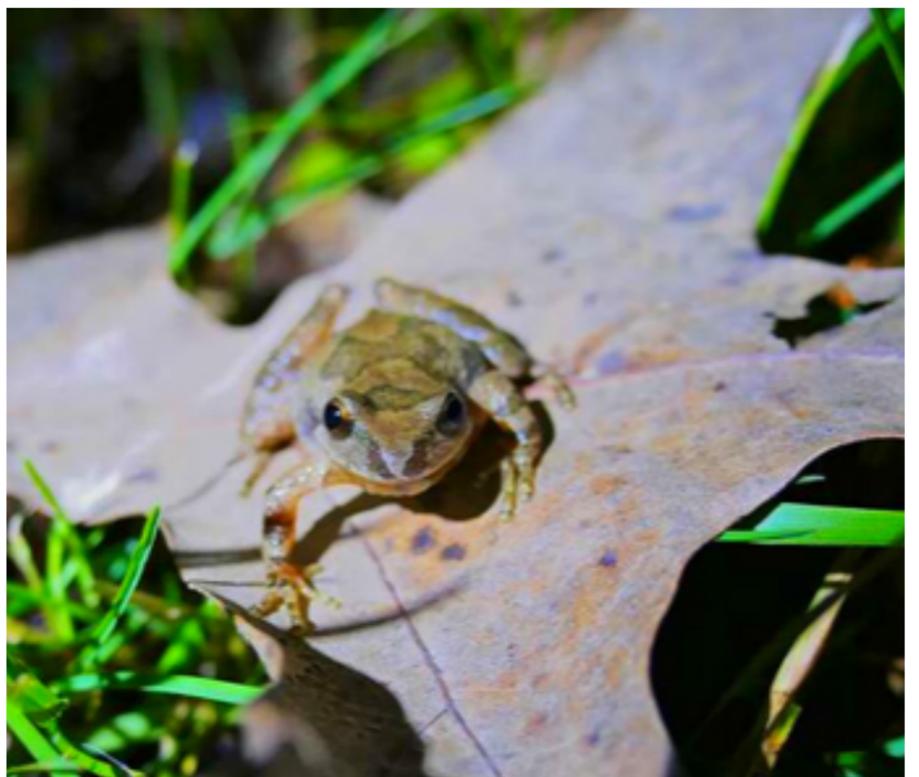
President of the Norton Green Thumb Garden Club, Sharon Taylor, stressed the importance of education for our youth.

"For most people that may come for a first time visit...they think [to themselves], 'I like plants, and I like growing stuff', yet they question their knowledge base. But no matter what experience level we all learn from each



other, like anything else in life. That's what we want to impart on our children."

TCC thanks NGTGC for their contributions to the local community!



The Mountain Chorus Frog

A relative of the Spring Peeper, Mountain Chorus Frogs are around the size of a ping-pong ball and resemble peepers in terms of their physical appearance. Exceptionally rare, Mountain Chorus Frogs are only found in select locations across our hills. From the time of the Civil War through 2018, in fact, only around 15 verified populations of Mountain Chorus Frogs had been recorded from Southwest Virginia, leading the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources to assign it with the second highest ranking of conservation need.

9th Annual Hellbender 10k 2022



Photo by Bill Harris

Congratulations to this Year's Winners!

Overall Male
Max Stallkamp

Overall Female
Meiwah Cheng

Masters Male
Daniel Kolasa

Masters Female
Amanda Tipton



This year, TCC hosted its 9th annual High Knob Hellbender 10K on October 1st, 2022. Despite the presence of rain, sixty-five runners participated in the six-mile climb from downtown Norton to the High Knob Tower. Katie Dunn, event coordinator, once again led and coordinated the event without a hitch. With the previous races being stifled due to COVID, Katie maintained an optimistic outlook for future races.

"Next year will be the Hellbender's 10th anniversary so we're hoping to organize some special activities in conjunction with the race to help celebrate that milestone," Katie states. "I do want to give a huge shout-out to all our volunteers and City of Norton crews that help make the race happen each year. They are the reason we've been able to have the event for almost 10 years now, and I'm really thankful for all they do to help make the race a success each year." TCC is grateful to the many local volunteers and sponsors, particularly local businesses that have helped to make the Hellbender a signature event for the region and such a long-term success. We will continue to aim for our goal of 100 runners, and cannot wait for next year!

TCC Thanks Bill Harris

The Clinch Coalition would like to extend its thanks to Bill Harris. Bill Harris retired in 2009 from teaching almost 40 years of physics, mathematics, and photography courses at Mountain Empire Community College. Afterwards, he taught as a math adjunct at UVA's College at Wise for another 10 years, and is currently teaching physics labs there. As an active board member, Bill has photographed essentially all TCC events in the years of his participation, including TCC's High Knob Naturalist Rally and the annual Hellbender 10K Race. His hard work and consistent effort has captured many a treasured moment in TCC history.



Bill Harris

Thank you for all of your contributions, Bill!

TCC's First In-Person Naturalist Rally Since Peak of COVID a Huge Success

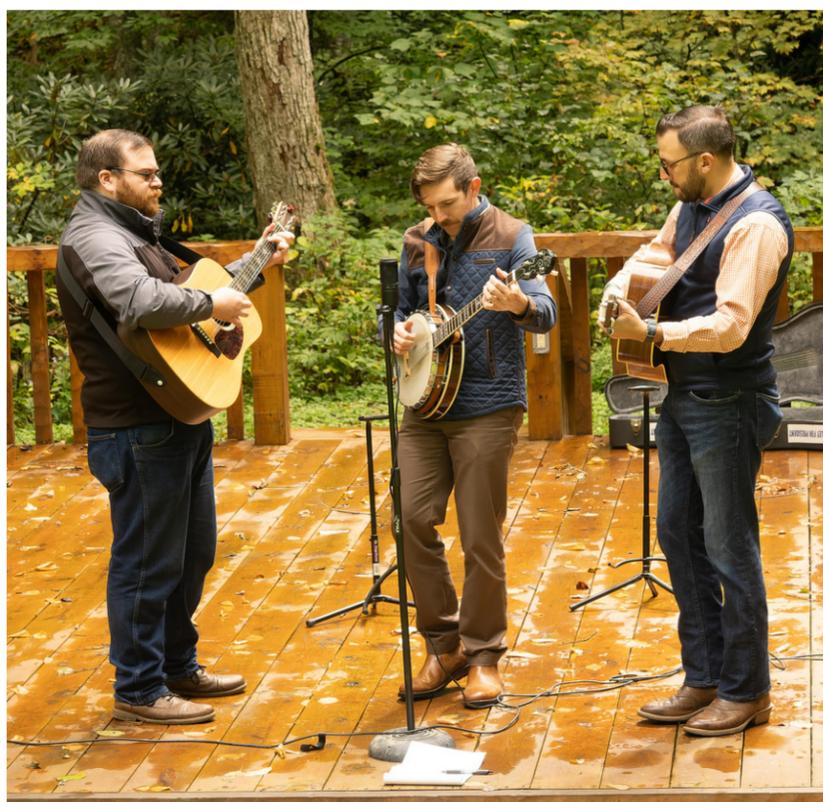
As the first event in person since pandemic, the rally successfully brings together local nature lovers.

September 24th, 2022 marked The Clinch Coalition's 16th Annual High Knob Naturalist Rally! It was a huge success due to all of the participants who came out to show their support.

Despite it being the first in-person event since the pandemic of COVID-19, as well as a rainy day, we were so thrilled to see that there were over 110 people in attendance at this year's rally!

The rally consisted of an abundance of experts, volunteers, students, and attendees that wanted to show their love of nature. There were speakers who spoke on topics ranging from ticks to water quality to reptiles. There were also hikes for attendees to partake in, as well as a health station where rally goers could have their blood pressure taken by the LPN students of MECC. Participants at the health station were also offered healthy snacks to fuel their naturalist adventure. Live music was performed by local group the High Knob Ramblers. Thank you so much to the members of our community for making the event a success.

Plans are already underway to continue our annual tradition of orchestrating the event, and TCC strives to make each year better than the last. See you next year!



Live performance of the High Knob Ramblers at the High Knob Recreation Area Amphitheater.



Group photo of attendees of the 2022 Naturalist Rally.



Reptile experts All Are God's Creatures presents on snakes to rally attendees.

TCC receives grant funding to support monitoring of local water quality

In response to local residents' concerns of wastewater discharge into the Pound River, apparent decrease in the population of fish, and complaints about runoff impacting streams and private property from poorly constructed and maintained ATV trails on the Spearhead Trails system, The Clinch Coalition formed a River Watch group in January of 2022.

The purpose of TCC's River Watch is to determine water quality in the rivers and their tributaries flowing in southwestern Virginia and to educate the public about our activities, findings, and ways they can ensure and maintain healthy water sources for themselves, their families and their communities.

To support the activities of River Watch, partial funding is from a grant award of



Jay Tyler, Program Director of TCC (left), and a USFS employee assist Dr. Wally Smith with Hellbender research.



Photo of the High Knob Recreational Area.

\$4,000 from the Anthropocene Alliance (A2) to train monitoring teams and educate about the importance of the environment and clean water to the health of local residents. TCC is a member of A2, the nation's largest coalition of frontline communities fighting for climate and environmental justice.

River Watch funding also comes from a \$1,500 grant from the Appalachian Community Fund (ACF) to support the purchase of water sampling kits, the cost of conducting water monitoring certified training, and staff support. ACF provides resources and support to grassroots group and community-based organizations working for social, economic, racial and environmental justice in Central Appalachia.

Major support has come from TCC's award of \$10,000 from the Clean Water for All Coalition to educate the public about the 50th Anniversary of the Clean Water Act and its current challenge before the U.S. Supreme Court in the Sackett v. EPA court case. (See article on page 1.)

TCC is one of nine organizations in the nation to receive this funding. Clean Water for All is a broad coalition of environmental, conservation, sportsmen, and community groups standing together in support of clean water.

The Clinch Coalition wants to thank all of its funders for their support.



TCC founding members Joe and Gerry Scardo with Dr. Turman.

UVA Wise Professor Collaborates with TCC on Archival Project

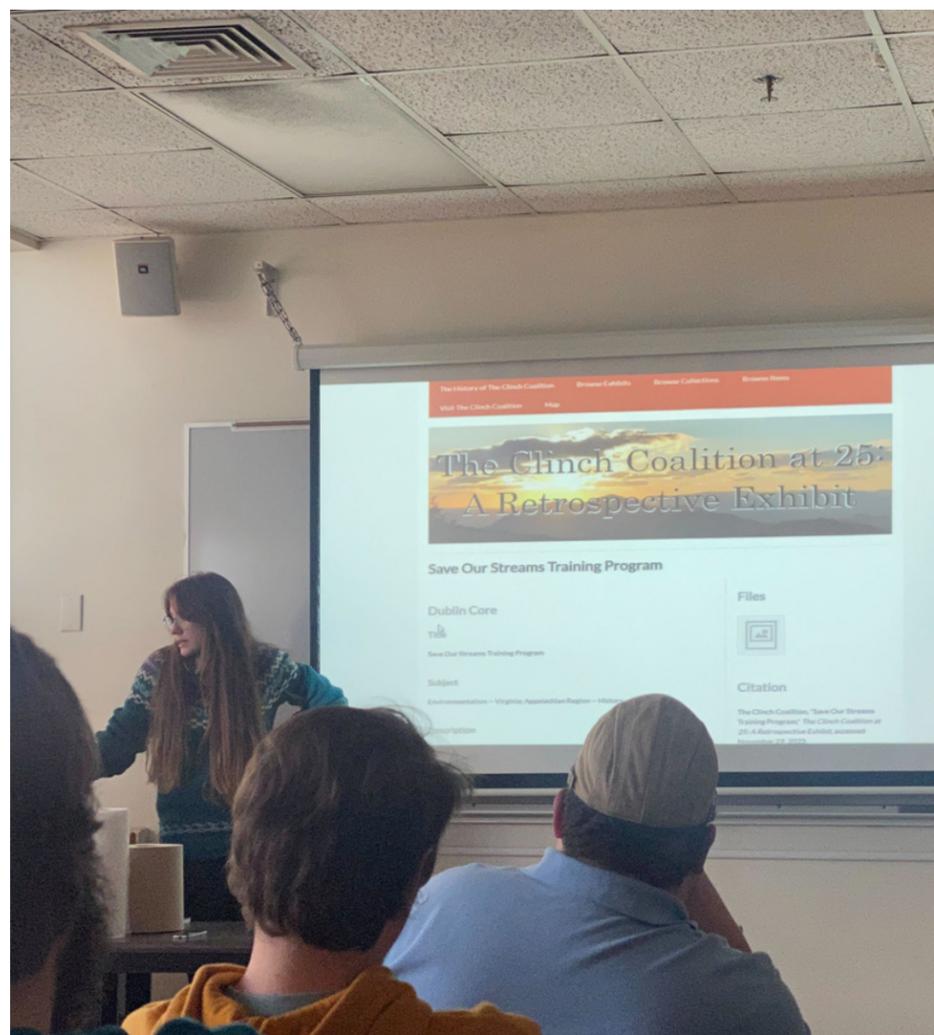
Since the fall of 2021, UVA Wise students enrolled in classes taught by Dr. Jinny Turman, Associate Professor of History, have worked on various phases of The Clinch Coalition's 25th Anniversary Project.

The Clinch Coalition will enter its 25th year of advocacy and education in 2023, continuing its mission to protect and preserve the forest, wildlife, and watersheds in our National Forest and surrounding communities for present and future generations. Over these years, TCC has preserved a treasure trove of papers and artifacts that have been kept primarily in boxes and scrapbooks.

Under Dr. Turman's guidance, the students have conducted oral histories, created infographics (visual representations intended to present information quickly and clearly), scanned and photographed numerous items, and created a website as a depository of TCC's collections. Relevant courses taught by Turman include Introduction to Appalachian Studies, Museums and Archives, and Introduction to Public History. Students participating in the project were Shayleigh Cire, Christian Sayers, Will Ireson, Austin Penley, Casey Wright, Kyle Titsch, Andrew Helton, Devan Mullins, Samuel Shackelford, Isaac Fairchilds, Jacob Johnson, Lillian Morris, Tyler Muncy, Hannah Robinson, Aidan Wells, and Jessica Wells. Providing assistance with photography has been Dr. Thomas Kiffmeyer, Associate Professor of History at Morehead State University.

Dr. Turman's research interests include modern U.S. history, Appalachian, environmental, and community/local history. As a public historian, she is also interested in using oral history, material culture, and the built environment to enhance understanding of the past and collaborating with organizations that employ history as a tool for promoting community building, economic revitalization, civic engagement, social justice, and environmental care.

The debut of the students' work will be in January, 2023 to help kick off the 25th Anniversary celebration of The Clinch Coalition.



Dr. Turman's students present on the archival project and demonstrate the online database for TCC's history.

TCC Works to Spread Education on the Natural World to UVA Wise Students

The Clinch Coalition has long upheld the importance of educating our youth and teaching them the value of the natural world around us. This longstanding desire for youth outreach has since been supported by TCC's collaborative efforts with The University of Virginia's College at Wise's Academic Community Engagement (ACE) Program.

This fall, members of TCC partnered with Dr. Anthony Cashio, UVA Associate Professor of Philosophy, to enrich in-class curriculum on Environmental Ethics with real world experiences with an environmental non-profit. The twelve students focused on three of TCC's main objectives: best logging practices, water quality monitoring, and trail maintenance. With the help of many skilled and passionate environmental leaders,



Dr. Wally Smith (left) educating the students on best logging practices.

The Clinch Coalition was able to show the class lessons to last a lifetime. They learned how to clear trails via our work done on the Red Fox Trail, received firsthand experience with water quality testing led by Matt Hepler with Appalachian Voices, and got to see firsthand the importance of sustainable logging practices.



UVA students try macroinvertebrate water testing.



UVA students clean Red Fox Trail in preparation for the Red Fox run.

This was a fantastic opportunity to rejuvenate the excitement and love for nature in our youth in a time where getting outdoors and being active often feels like a relic of the past. Many of the students while participating in these activities remarked on how good it felt to get outside and feel like they are part of something special.

Working with the students of Dr. Cashio's class was not a oneway transaction, however. By supporting their education, TCC received immeasurable support towards our causes. We led our first trail maintenance excursion in almost four years, and we were able to take our very first step towards water quality testing for our River Watch Initiative thanks to the dedication and motivation of this class. Thank you so much to Dr. Cashio and the perseverance of these twelve intelligent and inspiring students. Let's change the world for the better, one step at a time!



Volunteers for USFS Pollination Planting in March gather to plan the day ahead.

TCC Revives Forest Watch Group Amid Future Partnership with USFS

As the world slowly regains its routine, The Clinch Coalition also seeks to restore balance within its mission's focus. The presence of COVID-19 restricted many of the organization's activities.

Unfortunately, this included the longstanding efforts of trail maintenance for the local area.

This year has been a huge success for the revival of TCC's Trail Maintenance group. We have made great efforts to work closely with the forest service on a number of projects this year. In spring, TCC worked hands on with some of USFS' local biologists to reduce the invasive presence of Autumn Olive in the area. We also worked closely with them on a pollinator garden on High Knob in an effort to restore local pollinator populations.

Currently, TCC is working towards establishing an official partnership with USFS. By having a formal partnership with USFS rather than simply being volunteers, TCC can contribute more to the local area and take on larger, more hands-on projects that the forest service may not have the time or resources to allocate manpower to.

We look forward to our potential future partnership with USFS and seek to further uplift the beauty of our region.



Left: *Lauren Reker, Natural Resources Specialist for USFS, demonstrates how to perform cut stump herbicide application.*

Right: *TCC members, Phil Shelton & Gena Kiser, tackle Autumn Olive roots.*



Movement Hub with Local Organizations Spread Hope for Humanitarian Efforts



Since The Clinch Coalition's founding in 1998, the grassroots organization has never had a permanent office or building for its work, although there have been locations that have been used in the past, such as the former Tacoma elementary school. As such, TCC has been searching for an opportunity to have a working space and a meeting place where members of the community can learn more of TCC's advocacy.

And fortunately an opportunity has come our way. This past year of community outreach has allowed for a collaborative efforts among local organizations. The Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards (SAMS), a long-time partner organization with TCC, has been seeking to establish a home base for advocacy organizations in Southwest Virginia. Based out of the new community center in Big Stone Gap, VA, community partners have developed The Movement Hub. The physical building is being renovated to serve as a base for many local community organizations. To date, four organizations will be housed at the Movement Hub: SAMS, TCC, and local offices for the Stay Together Appalachian Youth Project (STAY) and the Appalachian Community Fund (ACF). The concept of the Movement Hub is an organizing framework which will facilitate synergy and capacity building by local grassroots organizations with like-minded missions. In their shared physical proximity, the Hub will allow for more collaborative steps towards advocating for environmental justice, providing outreach and education, holding community events, all informed by the shared cultural knowledge our organizations hold.

UNITY Prioritizes Community Feedback with County Wide Listening Sessions

In relation to collaborative efforts being taken among several local organizations, TCC has partnered with SAMS and Appalachian Voices to begin listening sessions in the area. The triad collaboration, called UNITY, seeks to listen to the voices of locals in the area. UNITY is a joint effort advocating for various overlapping social, economic, and environmental issues.

UNITY Stands For **U**nderstanding the **N**eed for **I**nnovation by **T**alking with **Y**ou. It is composed of three member groups of the New Economy Network: Appalachian Voices, Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards, and The Clinch Coalition. The New Economy Network (NEN) is a group of local citizens who are interested in economic development,

diversification, and transition work in the seven coalfield counties of Southwest Virginia. The sub-organization had its first session in late September where community leaders could have the chance to express the issues they believe their local community has and ways to improve them. From there, the group hopes to have a monthly listening session in different towns to gather opinions that can be shared with their local leaders. It is hoped that by giving community members a voice, they will want to take more active roles in the improvement of their community where UNITY can facilitate change.

The next listening session will be in Lee County on January 26th, 2023 at 5:30pm. It is located in Jonesville at the Town Council building in Cumberland Bowl Park.

TCC Receives National Public Lands Day Award

The Clinch Coalition, in partnership with the Clinch Ranger District of the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, was awarded a National Public Lands Day, U. S. Forest Service Health Grant by the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) to support the promotion of healthy activities on America’s public lands. NEEF’s National Public Lands Day is held annually on the fourth Saturday in September. The Clinch Coalition’s 16th Annual High Knob Naturalist Rally was held on September 24, 2022 at the High Knob Recreation Area in the Jefferson National Forest, following two years being virtual due to the COVID pandemic.

Studies show that quality time in nature improves our daily well-being and long-term physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. “During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, America’s public lands acted as a safe haven for recreation, conversation, and the simple enjoyment of being outside the confines of our homes,” states NEEF.

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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.