

THE HIGH KNOB HERALD



TCC Celebrates Progress Towards Addressing Problem Areas on the Spearhead Trails Network, Urges More Rigorous Enforcement

Throughout 2021, The Clinch Coalition (TCC) has continued to engage state regulatory agencies about environmental damage on the Spearhead Trails network. The Spearhead Trails effort involves a network of more than 600 miles of all-terrain vehicle trails managed by a state government authority and is funded annually by Virginia taxpayers through the General Assembly.

In May of this year, TCC learned that the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) had formally notified Spearhead Trails of more than fifteen potential violations of state environmental laws on the trail network. Issues highlighted by DEQ inspectors included damage to waterways from ATV use and improper erosion and sediment control practices, as well as a failure to obtain legally-required permits from state and federal environmental agencies prior to trail construction.

DEQ's findings came in large part as a result of TCC's work on this issue over the past three years, including numerous complaints from residents living near the trail system and forwarded to TCC.

In response to these findings, DEQ and Spearhead Trails entered into a voluntary agreement this spring to address issues throughout the five-county trail

network. TCC is appreciative of both DEQ's ongoing efforts to inspect problems on the trail system and Spearhead Trails' promises to improve its environmental practices following DEQ's notice of violations. However, we are also concerned about an ongoing lack of transparency from DEQ and trail officials, particularly related to how inspections of citizen complaints involving the trail system are handled and how the results of inspections are communicated to the public.

TCC will continue to engage on this issue going forward, and we urge DEQ officials to undertake more rigorous enforcement action for problem areas on the trail system that are still impacting nearby landowners and Southwest Virginia's waterways, despite inspectors' discovery of violations at those locations more than one year ago.

We also encourage host landowners for the trail system, including The Nature Conservancy, to fund rehabilitation efforts for the many waterways that have been damaged on portions of the trail network that have been closed in response to citizen concerns in recent years.

We also encourage those with environmental concerns about specific areas on the Spearhead Trails network or elsewhere to contact us through our "Leave a Tip" tool.

(See Page 3 for more information on "Leave a Tip".)

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 work. As a small grassroots organization, The Clinch Coalition is dedicated to working on environmental issues affecting our public lands in Southwest Virginia, as well as advocating for public land protection throughout the United States. Only together can we conserve the national heritage of Southwest Virginia, create excellent recreational opportunities in our National Forest, and build a culture of land stewardship.

Contact Information

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip code: _____
 Email: (To receive The Clinch Coalition's Monthly Newsletter)

 Phone: (Optional) _____

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.

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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Leave A Tip – The Clinch Coalition receives citizens’ complaints on environmental damage

In the spring of 2021, The Clinch Coalition (TCC) created a tool on its website that allows residents to submit their complaints about local environmental damage.

Over many years, TCC has received calls, emails and had one-on-one discussions about water runoff creating damage to private property, destruction of sensitive wetlands caused by inadequate trail constructions, or logging operations not abiding by environmental regulations.

Leave A Tip is part of TCC’s Forest Watch Program that seeks to be on the lookout for activities that may be causing environmental damage to the air, soil, water and forests of the region’s public and private lands.



Big Caney River running into McClure River, 2019 photo. Big Caney and McClure Rivers are tributaries of the Russell Fork of the Big Sandy River.



Photo by Jamie Goodman

Mountaintop removal shown behind a house.

The Clinch Coalition is often a conduit to the public and regulatory agencies, interceding for citizens who have become frustrated from not having their voices heard.

Citizens who want to leave a tip can provide contact information so TCC can follow up on any actions taken, or the information can be submitted anonymously. The information reported should be as detailed as possible, such as the location of the activity, what activities may be causing environmental damage, and the name of the company or individual doing the activity, if known.

Leave a Tip is found on TCC’s website under Get Involved at www.clinchcoalition.org.

“I am concerned about the condition of the water in the Pound River. The number of fish in the river has dwindled to nearly nothing. I live way down South of the Mountain right on Pound River nearly on the Dickenson County line.”

Comment on Pound River from ‘Leave a Tip’ on February 18th, 2021

TCC submitted this comment to the DEQ.

“I have concerns with mine run off in the creek. Its located in Clintwood Virginia on Ticky George Hollow off of Camp Creek. I have pictures and a gallon of water from the creek.”

Comment on mine runoff from ‘Leave a Tip’ on March 5th, 2021

TCC reported this to the Department of Energy (DMME).

Virginia Council on Environmental Justice holds meeting in Southwest Virginia

After almost two years of operating on a temporary basis, the Virginia Council on Environmental Justice became permanent when Gov. Ralph Northam signed a bill establishing it as an advisory body to the executive branch in 2020.

The bill created the twenty-seven member council to provide recommendations to the governor that are intended to protect vulnerable communities from disproportionate impacts of pollution. The body includes representatives of Native American tribes, civil rights organizations, and the public health and higher education sectors, among others.



Photo by Jala Tyler

Some members of the Virginia Council on Environmental Justice meeting in October at UVA Wise. Others joined virtually.

Environmental justice is defined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, faith, national origin, or income, in the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

No population, especially minority, low-income, or historically-underserved communities, should face higher levels or greater impacts of pollution than other populations. Some of these communities face more severe environmental degradation, which disproportionately affects public health and quality of life. Each state agency has been required to incorporate environmental justice into their daily operations.

TCC Supports Diversity & Environmental Justice

The Clinch Coalition is committed to creating a welcoming, inclusive, and equitable community. Undergirding this commitment is the conviction that all human beings are interconnected, not just with one another, but with all of nature. We will fulfill this commitment by recognizing and addressing racial inequality, systemic injustices, discrimination in any form, and being a social movement for environmental justice to encourage and allow all people to enjoy our public lands.

-Unanimously passed by the TCC Board, October 3rd, 2020



Funding Received to Support TCC's Grassroots Advocacy for Environmental Justice

The Clinch Coalition received this fall a two-year grant totaling \$45,000 from the Building Equity and Alignment for Environmental Justice (BEA) Fund.

“Frontline communities experience some of the first and most serious impacts of environmental injustice. Despite their rich analysis, lived experience of these injustices, and their leadership in creating solutions to address root causes, they continue to be under-funded and under-resourced,” states the BEA Fund.

The BEA Fund recognizes that for the environmental movement to be successful, grassroots groups must be supported and resourced to support community-based solutions to the ecological crisis.

Upon receiving notification of the grant award, The Clinch Coalition President, Sharon Fisher, responded, “The Clinch Coalition is grateful to receive this recognition and support as a long-standing, local environmental organization with the mission to protect and preserve the forest, wildlife, and watersheds of our National Forest and surrounding communities for present and future generations.”

The Clinch Coalition points out numerous environmental injustices affecting local residents

On October 25th, the Virginia Council on Environmental Justice (VCEJ) held its meeting in Southwest Virginia at the University of Virginia's College at Wise. Taysha DeV Vaughn, President of the Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards (SAMS) and a member of VCEJ, was instrumental in bringing the statewide organization to our region.

The Clinch Coalition was given the opportunity to speak to the members of the VCEJ. TCC's Program Director, Jala Tyler; Vice President, Wally Smith; and President, Sharon Fisher, delivered a fact-filled presentation on three areas of concern: the lack of regulatory authority of the Virginia Department of Forestry, the lack of enforcement by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality to oversee and address environmental violations by Spearhead Trails, and the lack of focus and research spanning decades on the environmental impact of mining on the health of local residents.

The Clinch Coalition made the following recommendations to the Virginia Council on Environmental Justice:

Recommendations for Stronger Regulations by Department of Forestry on Commercial Logging

- An application and permit process could be put into place.
- A NEPA-type process could be put in place to ensure state and federal listed endangered species be protected.
- Best Management Practices (BMPs) should be requirements, not recommendations.
- Loggers should have to follow more environmental laws other than the Clean Water Act.
- Logging impact on neighbors and communities needs to be assessed.
- The Commonwealth should look into Forest Banking for forest management.

Recommendations for Transparency of the Southwest Regional Recreational Authority (SRRA) and Enforcement of Environmental Regulations

- Core Issue: Many state authorities' operations in SWVA are shielded from public view and exclude citizens from decision-making processes.
- SRRA does not routinely seek public comment for proposed projects, make trail development plans available for public review, or even publicly disclose the identity of its board.
- Clear guidelines are needed from the General Assembly establishing mechanisms for public input and requiring transparency in state authority operations.
- Regulatory agencies are hesitant to enforce Virginia's environmental laws on state-funded projects, even when violations are discovered, since doing so would amount to the state engaging in enforcement action against itself.
- The Commonwealth should clarify that environmental regulations apply to all public entities and ensure that enforcement for violations is consistently applied.

Recommendations for Addressing Public Health

- Provide funding for research to advance the knowledge related to the effects of the environment on the health of citizens of Southwest Virginia.
- Provide adequate funding and resources to regulatory agencies to address current and long-standing deficiencies in enforcement of environmental policies and laws.
- **Bring environmental justice to Southwest Virginia!**

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8th Annual Hellbender 10k 2021



Photo by Bill Harris

This year, TCC hosted its 8th annual High Knob Hellbender 10K on Saturday, October 2nd. In spite of the continued pandemic, the Hellbender had seventy-four runners who all participated in the six-mile climb from downtown Norton to the High Knob Tower.

Event coordinator, Katie Dunn, is looking positively towards the future of the annual event. With the threat of COVID-19 still very much at large, Dunn assures that precautions were still maintained for this year's event. "Last year was very stressful, for sure," Dunn states. "But we maintained our precautions for both last year and this year, and had no problems."

Through the annual 10k, about \$1,500 was raised towards TCC and our mission. "We're excited about next year's race, it will be the 9th annual event. We hope to continue holding the event to meet our goal for having 100," says Dunn.

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. The City of Norton and the Clinch Ranger District have also played a key role in allowing for this event to occur and be so successful over the past seven years

Congratulations to this Year's Winners!

Overall Male
Matt Clabaugh

Overall Female
Rachel Blevins

Masters Male
Shawn Becker

Masters Female
Rachel Wade



A complete list of participants and race photos can be found at the event website at <http://highknobhellbender.wordpress.com>.

TCC Thanks Katie Dunn

The Clinch Coalition is extremely grateful to Katie Dunn. As a Volunteer, Katie has coordinated TCC's annual Hellbender 10K Race from the City of Norton to High Knob Tower for the past eight years. Her hard work, untold hours, and organization has made the Race a success each year with over seventy runners participating in 2021.

Registration fees of the runners and support by the local community allows TCC to offer this recreational event each year and support its mission. Thank you, Katie!



Photo by Bill Harris



Katie Dunn

15th Annual High Knob Rally Exceeds Expectations

TCC made the difficult decision to once again hold our rally virtually this year. Despite the hardships faced amid the pandemic, however, the event exceeded the expectations of those involved. We had an array of talented speakers present on topics both through video and live virtually. Thank you so much to these invaluable people for contributing to our rally and mission! These videos remain for viewing on TCC website.

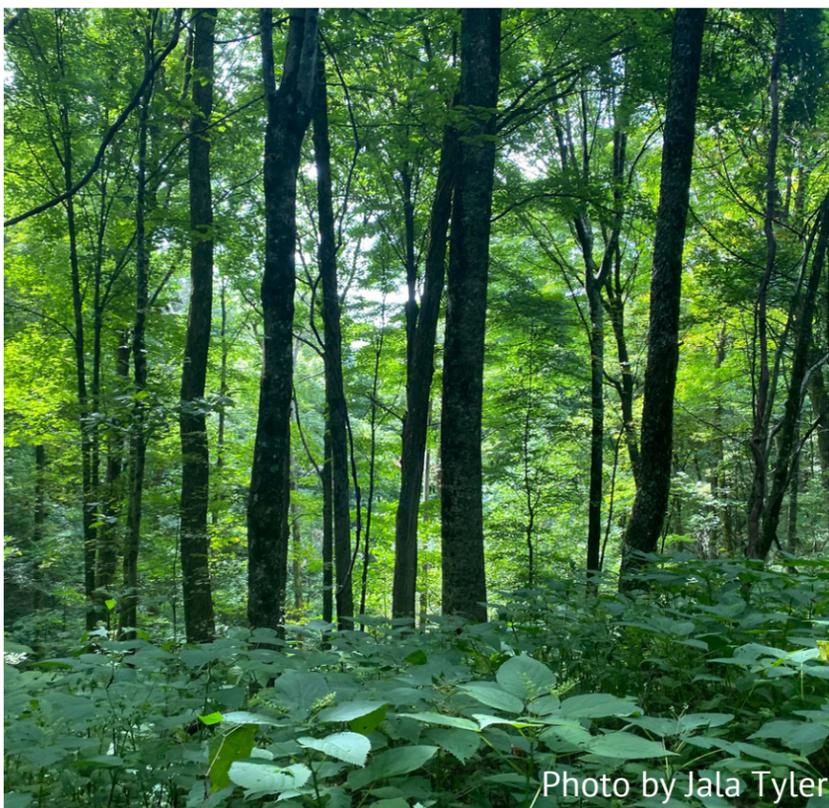


Photo by Jala Tyler

TCC brings on new program director

On January 1, 2021, The Clinch Coalition welcomed its new Program Director, Jala Tyler. Her stated goal was, “I want to connect with people, to help them see the importance of what we are fighting for.”

Tyler is a native of York, Pennsylvania and a graduate of James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia with a BS degree in biology and a concentration in environmental science.

To begin her community outreach, after just two weeks on the job, Jala created The Clinch Coalition’s online newsletter which has become a monthly feature. Her work involves organizing and delivering educational, recreational and conservation activities.

Tyler also works with the Forest Watch program to ensure protection and best management of the forest, wildlife, and watersheds in the Clinch

2021 Virtual Presenters
Find the videos at www.clinchcoalition.org.
Enjoy!

- Ticks and Chiggers** Phil Meeks
- Solar Energy for SW VA** Austin Counts
- Critical Zone Studies in the High Knob Area** Teresa Brown
- Dragonflies and Damselflies** Chris Allgyer
- Driving to Net Zero** David Hrivnak
- 9 Deadly & Poisonous Fungi** Adam Boring
- Water Pollution** Carol Doss
- Sustainable Energy Lifestyle** David Hrivnak
- Slowing the Spread of White Nose Syndrome in Bats**
Forest Service
- Restoration Research of the American Chestnut** Forest Service
- Hope for the Hemlocks: Restoring Balance** Forest Service
- The Golden Winged Warbler in Virginia** Seth Thompson
- Black Bears in Southwest VA** Seth Thompson
- Virginia’s Elk Reintroduction** Seth Thompson
- Nature Journaling** Diana Withen



Jala Tyler

Ranger District of the Jefferson National Forest and other forests in our surrounding communities.

Starting her position during the COVID-19 global pandemic has required flexibility on her part. “The Clinch Coalition was delighted to bring Jala on board,” says President Sharon Fisher. “Her youth, enthusiasm and extensive skill set, together with the dedication and conservation experience of our Board members, is helping to further the engagement of our community in the protection and enjoyment of our unique natural environment.”

New guide draws attention to High Knob trails

“Standing at just more than 4,200 feet above sea level, Southwest Virginia’s High Knob is likely the most important Appalachian summit you’ve never heard of.”

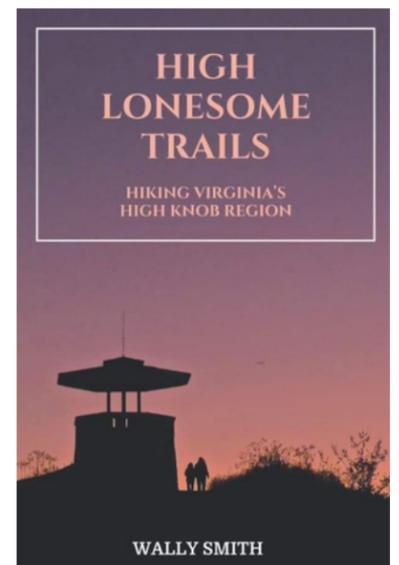
This begins the newly published trail guide, ***High Lonesome Trails: Hiking Virginia’s High Knob Region***, recently published by Wally Smith, Vice President of The Clinch Coalition.

Dr. Smith is a conservation biologist and Associate Professor of Biology at The University of Virginia’s College at Wise.

To highlight “one of central Appalachia’s most underrated hiking destinations,” Smith, a lifelong hiker, mountain biker, and trail runner, describes twenty-five hiking trails in the High Knob region, including an overview of trails in the Natural Tunnel State Park.



Wally Smith



The guide forms the first comprehensive summary of trails published in print for the High Knob area of far Southwest Virginia.

The guide’s trails are within much of the Clinch Ranger District of the Jefferson National Forest, extending from Pennington Gap on the west and eastward to St. Paul. The guide’s southern boundary extends to the Clinch River, home to Virginia’s newest state park, while the northern region is framed by the crests of Stone and Pine Mountains.



Protecting and Preserving our National Forest

The Clinch Coalition’s Position on Logging

Many people are surprised to learn that the United States Forest Service (USFS) is within the United States Department of Agriculture. As such, logging is promoted in our National Forests, which were to be managed like a crop, according to the first head of the USFS when it was transferred from the Department of the Interior in 1905. Logging is not allowed in our National Parks, which are under the Department of the Interior.

The Clinch Coalition (TCC) formed in 1998 when local residents challenged the Clinch Ranger District of the Jefferson National Forest on their plan to clear cut twenty-eight new timber sites from High Knob down to Bark Camp Lake. Following a petition with 1600 signatures and meetings with The Forest Service, the logging site was cut in half.

In 1999, The Clinch Coalition formalized its logging position: **The Clinch Coalition supports the termination of commercial logging on National Forest and other public lands. In the meantime, we support the development of truly sustainable forest management on National Forest lands, including limited timber harvesting.**

Quiz:

The United States Forest Service is part of which federal department?

- A) Department of the Interior***
- B) Department of Agriculture***
- C) Bureau of Land Management***

In 2021, opposition continues on three current and/or proposed logging operations with interesting names.

Logging in Operation

In 2016, the Clinch Ranger District proposed a **Nettle Patch** timber sale near the Tacoma, Wise County entrance to the National Forest. This original plan was opposed by The Clinch Coalition, the nonprofit law firm Southern Environmental Law Center and the Sierra Club citing concerns about erosion, flooding, water quality, species diversity, recreation and other issues.

In 2019, the three environmental groups reached an agreement with the U.S. Forest Service where the agency dropped its plans to log Pickem Mountain and reduced commercial timbering from a proposed 1,419 acres to 577 acres. The Forest Service also cancelled the project's use of prescribed fire and agreed to other measures to protect water quality, including conducting thorough reviews of future logging roads.

In the first half of 2021, members of The Clinch Coalition made monitoring visits to two different Nettle Patch logging sites to ensure Best Management Practices (BMPs) are being enforced. TCC notifies the Clinch Ranger District of its plans and notifies the loggers of the reason for their presence with no interruption of the logging operation. One visit was accompanied by a USFS employee. Both visits verified that the Clinch Ranger District is providing oversight and enforcing environmental regulations.

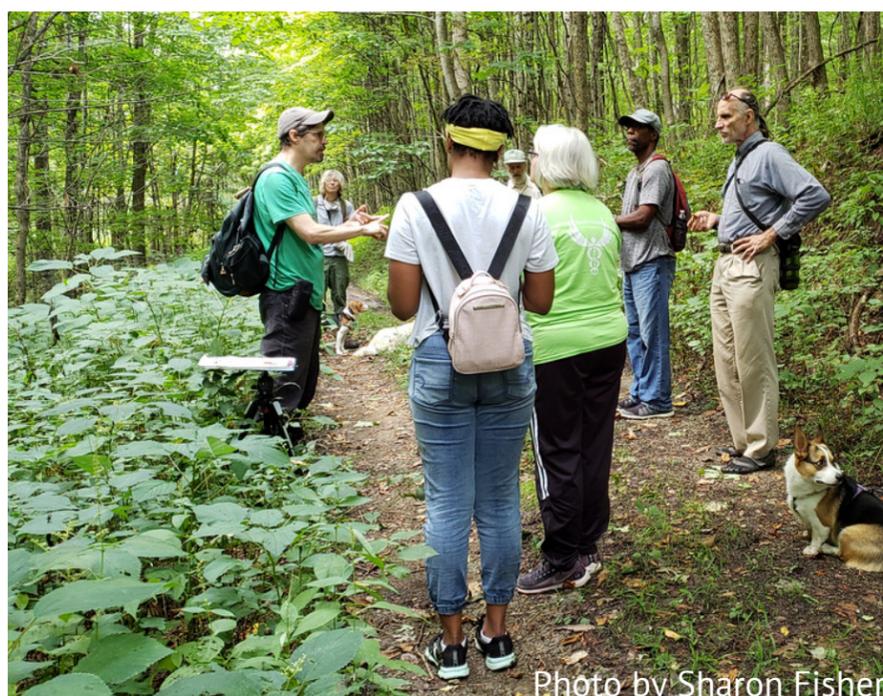


Photo by Sharon Fisher

Members of the TCC Forest Watch Group and friends during an excursion at Devils Hens Nest.

Logging in Mid-Operation

In 2019, the Clinch Ranger District entered into a Stewardship agreement with The Ruffed Grouse Society to manage the logging of an area which stretches from Jasper Road in Lee County to U.S. 23, south of Big Stone Gap, Wise County, called **Timberdoodle**.

The Clinch Coalition used the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to get a copy of the agreement to clear timber to create habitat to hunt Ruffed Grouse. The acres of timber cutting will run parallel to the Wallens Ridge Trail, a beautiful and popular hiking and horseback riding trail within the National Forest. Requests for bids from commercial loggers are expected to be out in the next few months.

Logging Proposed

In 2021, the Clinch Ranger District proposed a vegetation management logging operation encompassing over 13,000 acres, called **Devils Hens Nest**. This area is between Big Stone Gap and Duffield and is located in Scott County.

The Clinch Coalition, along with the Sierra Club, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and others, has provided extensive comments regarding this operation.

According to the Clinch Ranger District, they are drafting an Environmental Assessment, taking into account comments they have received and further analysis. They hope to have it made available to the public for review in early 2022.

Two excursions have been made by members into this pristine area, documenting old growth trees and plant diversity. A copy of TCC's detailed written opposition to the Devils Hens Nest logging operation are available by sending your request to info@clinchcoalition.org.



Photo by TCC

TCC has been monitoring logging sites for many years.

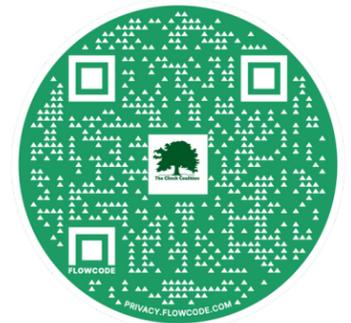


Photo by Wayne Browning

Birch Knob of Pine Mountain

Increasing physical activity through activities like hiking has positive physical and mental health effects. Physical activity increases circulation to the muscles in the arms and legs, helps reduce weight, and lowers blood pressure. Physical activity also reduces risk of depression and anxiety and improves sleep. For safety and comfort considerations, all hikers take backpacks with water and snacks. Many hikers use walking sticks that help maintain balance on steeper terrain.

If you are interested in joining our email list for an invitation to hike with us, email TCCHikingClub@gmail.com or use the QR code to the right with your device.



TCC begins Oral History project

As The Clinch Coalition approaches its 25th Anniversary in 2023, TCC Board members Tauna Gulley and Gerry Scardo and TCC Associate Director Steve Brooks are working with Dr. Jinny Turman at UVA Wise to record the stories of some of the founders and early members of TCC.

Dr. Turman, Associate Professor of History, is a public historian interested in using oral history and material culture to explore and comprehend the past. During the fall semester of 2021, Turman’s twenty-four students in her Introduction to Appalachian Studies course have begun their interviews mostly using Zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions.



Dr. Jinny Turman, Associate Professor of History at UVA Wise, is overseeing the oral history project for TCC.

The recorded interviews will be archived at the newly opened Library of Appalachia, located at Mountain Empire Community College’s (MECC) Center for Workforce Innovations located in Appalachia, Virginia. MECC has partnered with the Lonesome Pine Regional Library to provide a public library presence in Appalachia. According to Dr. Michael Gilley, Director of Library Services, Archives, and Cultural Heritage Programs, “In addition to providing materials to serve the faculty and students, the Library of Appalachia will have a closed stack archives/museum to house manuscripts, audiovisual materials, and artifacts of our Appalachian service region, the culture, history, people, nature, and places.”

Clinch Coalition Board Members Start Hiking Club

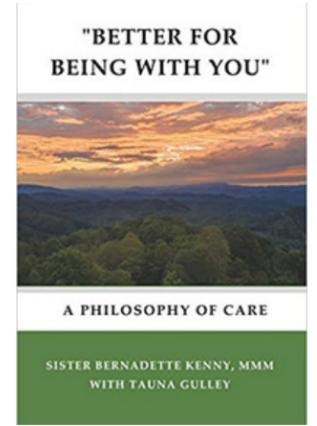
In the summer of 2021, Tauna Gulley asked Gena Kiser to lead a hike on the Red Fox Trail in Pound, Virginia. Gena agreed and five individuals hiked the trail. Tauna and Gena are both members of The Clinch Coalition Governing Board.

The hike was all downhill which was nice for first-time hikers. The hikers took many photos and identified ferns, trees, and birds. Nine orange salamanders were seen during the short hike which was about 1.5 miles. Since that first day, Gena has coordinated three more hikes: Bull Hole, Bark Camp Lake and Chestnut Flats. Each hike was unique in history and terrain, and the number of hikers has also increased.

A philosophy of care brings the Health Wagon to rural Appalachia

"Better for Being with You" A *Philosophy of Care* gives us the story of Sister Bernadette Kenny, who has served the rural residents in Southwest Virginia for more than forty years as a member of the Medical Missionaries of Mary (MMM) and created the Health Wagon, a mobile unit that traverses the mountains and hollers of Virginia and Kentucky.

Dr. Tauna Gulley, the book's co-author, is a Nurse Practitioner with the Health Wagon, Chair of the RN to BSN program at the University of Pikeville, and a member of the Governing Board of The Clinch Coalition. As Sister Bernadette writes, "When Tauna and I began writing about my experiences, we asked for advice from several people. We met with Helen Matthews Lewis, author and social justice advocate, to talk about the book. Helen told us, 'talk to the people. Talk to lots of people. Get lots of stories.'"



Dr. Tauna Gulley, TCC Board Member, co-authored the book with Sister Bernie.

"Better for Being with You" is a guide to developing a philosophy of care that is holistic, culturally sensitive and mindful of the environment. *Published by Pacem in Terris Press, 2019.*



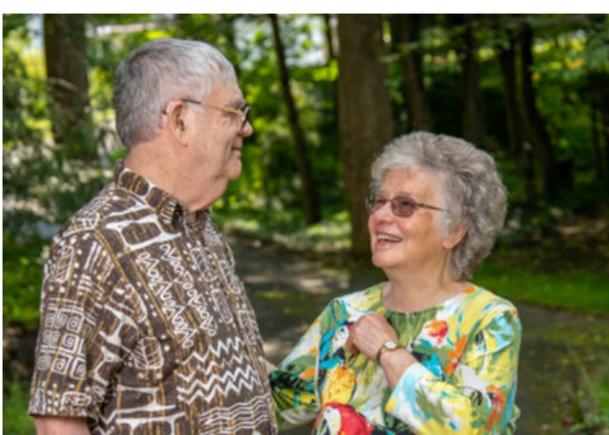
Photo by Sharon Fisher

Sister Bernie writes in her book, "In the beginning, I knew care had to be mobile. So many small communities were scattered in and between the rolling hills of southwest Virginia, and public transportation was not available." The first Health Wagon was a bus purchased for \$1.00. With the support of many donors, the current fourth Health Wagon is state of the art, with three examination rooms and a lift chair for non-ambulatory patients.



Scardo represents Central Appalachia before the United Nations

Gerry Scardo, a long-time resident of Clintwood, Virginia, and with her husband Joe, one of the founding members of The Clinch Coalition, represented the Central Appalachian region and spoke on climate change via video on October 15th at the United Nation's International Day for the Eradication of Poverty 2021, "Building Forward Together: Ending Persistent Poverty."



Joe & Gerry Scardo. Photo by William Earl Neikirk

Of the experience, Scardo says she was honored to be part of the Fourth World Movement. "Each year the UN ensures the knowledge, contribution, and experiences of people living in poverty are recognized and celebrated."

The day offered an opportunity to hear from those around the world who are in the forefront of fighting poverty while facing COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of climate change.

Gerry, a retired social worker, does not just look back over her thirty-three years of concern for the health of our planet and her and Joe's twenty-three years actively protecting our national forest, primarily in the Clinch Ranger District of the Jefferson National Forest. She looks forward to what can still be, "One thing I am doing is assessing what I have done, can do, and help my family do. Our country is on the edge of taking some steps to mitigate climate change. Every little bit helps. We are the lucky ones. And working together is so much fun."



The Clinch Coalition
PO Box 2732
Wise, VA 24293

To:



You're Invited!

**The Clinch Coalition's
Virtual Holiday Gathering**

December 14th, 2021

6pm-7pm: Social Hour

7pm: Presentations from David Hrivnak & Wally Smith

8:30pm: Drawing for Door Prizes and Half & Half

For more information, please reach out to info@clinchcoalition.org!

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.