Youth Outreach Program Growing Strong

Exploring streams and discovering birds, making art with vegetables and flowers, and visiting a working farm to learn how food is grown—these are just some of the things kids in our area are doing this season with New River Land Trust’s Youth Outreach Program.

We expanded our Stream Field Trips for 4th graders to five schools in Montgomery County: Kipps, Harding, Prices Fork, Gilbert Linkous, and the Blacksburg New School. On a conserved property, students do a macroinvertebrate sampling from a stream, participate in a stormwater and watershed awareness activity, and complete a history of the land activity. Funding for the program comes from the Town of Blacksburg, and our volunteers are from the Virginia Master Naturalists and the Canaan Valley Institute.

“It’s great to get kids out on the land, in the water, learning about water quality, stream ecology, and the uniqueness of our local watersheds,” Melissa Henry, Coordinator of Youth Outreach said. “It’s much more exciting for them to learn about the life within our streams by actually catching and observing aquatic insects, which are important indicators of stream health.”

A new program this year is Kids in the Dirt, a series of workshops in collaboration with Glade Road Growing. From seed starting to harvesting, garden art to feeding the animals, this fun and interactive series gets kids up close to local food production and continues into August. To register for a workshop, visit GladeRoadGrowing.com.

Another first is our new summer camp. In partnership with Children’s Garden, it’s nature-based learning for kids ages 5-8. Every morning for a week, kids spent time outside exploring, learning, and playing. We plan to offer more camps next year.

Early Birders, a program we started last year to introduce kids to bird watching, is also growing. Our birding kit, which includes 30 pairs of binoculars and field guides, is free for schools and youth groups to borrow. We are seeking additional funding to make Early Birder kits available to five more counties in our service area.

Brush Mountain Park Project Update

The New River Land Trust has closed on the purchase of the second property that will make up the new 553-acre park on Brush Mountain in Blacksburg. The park will be home to multi-use trails for community recreation while protecting an ecologically sensitive area. We purchased the first property in 2018. The park will expand the popular recreation areas of Heritage and Gateway Parks and the Jefferson National Forest. The Poverty Creek Trails Coalition, who worked with the Land Trust to obtain grant funding, will help develop the trail system. The Land Trust will turn the properties over the Town of Blacksburg to manage the park.
NRLT Earns National Accreditation Renewal

One thing that unites us as a nation is land: Americans strongly support saving the open spaces they love. Since 2002, the New River Land Trust has been doing just that for the people of the New River region. Now, we have renewed our land trust accreditation – proving that, as part of a network of over 400 accredited land trusts across the nation, we are committed to professional excellence and to maintaining the public’s trust in our conservation work. We earned our original accreditation in 2013.

“Renewing our accreditation shows our ongoing commitment to permanent land conservation in the New River region,” said John Eustis, Executive Director. “We are a stronger organization for having gone through the rigorous accreditation renewal process. Our strength means special places – such as the 2,800-acre Little Stony property and the 715-acre Little Meadows property (below) in Giles County – will be protected forever.”

The Land Trust provided extensive documentation and was subject to a comprehensive third-party evaluation prior to achieving this distinction. The Land Trust Accreditation Commission awarded renewed accreditation, signifying its confidence that our conserved lands will be protected forever. Accredited land trusts now steward approximately 20 million acres – the size of Denali, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Glacier, Everglades and Yosemite National Parks combined.

“It is exciting to recognize New River Land Trust’s continued commitment to national standards by renewing this national mark of distinction,” said Tammara Van Ryn, executive director of the Commission. “Donors and partners can trust the more than 400 accredited land trusts across the country are united behind strong standards and have demonstrated sound finances, ethical conduct, responsible governance, and lasting stewardship.”

New River Land Trust is one of 1,363 land trusts across the United States according to the Land Trust Alliance’s most recent National Land Trust Census.

Little Meadows Property Conserved

The New River Land Trust received an $82,000 grant from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) to fund a portion of the costs to conserve the 715-acre Little Meadows Property in Giles County, VA near the Baily Gap and Wind Rock sections of the Appalachian Trail. The easement purchase closed this spring. The project is a collaborative effort between NRLT, the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) and the United States Forest Service (USFS).

The protection of this property builds on the conservation of the adjacent 2,800-acre Little Stony easement completed in August 2018. The Land Trust has been working on conserving the properties since 2012, when we identified them as one of the highest conservation priorities in the region using our Geographic Information Systems (GIS) models.

The Little Meadows property is near Jefferson National Forest, the Mountain Lake Wilderness, and Cascades National Recreation Trail. It contains rare species, trout streams, and a large area of mixed hardwood forest.