

# CATAWBA LANDS CONSERVANCY

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## PRESCRIBED BURN HELPS CREATE EARLY SUCCESSIONAL HABITAT

Across North Carolina, birds like the Grasshopper Sparrow and Northern Bobwhite are being impacted by loss of habitat, and as a result, sightings are not as common as they once were. Changes in land use patterns and agricultural practices have decreased the amount of early successional habitat in Catawba Lands Conservancy's (CLC) service area. The N.C. Wildlife Action Plan, compiled by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC), identifies 29 priority species associated with piedmont early successional habitat.

At our Buffalo Creek Preserve in Mt. Pleasant, we are actively managing areas for early successional habitat. In late September, we conducted a prescribed burn to set back the growth of woody vegetation and pervade the soils with nitrogen to create a piedmont oak-savannah.

Early successional habitat, like piedmont oak-savannahs, consists of grasslands and shrubs. The prescribed burn will help CLC manage for an open natural area that is conducive for the growth of native warm-season grasses, weeds, wildflowers and shrubs - providing an ideal habitat for Grasshopper Sparrows and populations of wild turkey, quail and other birds. These

birds build their nests, hunt for food, and seek protection from predators and the elements in grasslands. According to Kacy Cook, a land conservation biologist with the NCWRC, Buffalo Creek Preserve – the savannah in particular – hosts important areas for ground nesting bird population growth.

“There are significant declines in Grasshopper Sparrow populations throughout their range in North America that are probably due to their need for landscapes with many grasslands greater than 50 acres,” said Kacy. “This protected area in our region will allow this bird species to breed successfully and have plenty of access to the grassland it needs to survive.”

Fire is a natural part of both the forest and grassland ecology. According to John Isenhour, a technical assistance biologist with



the NCWRC, this prescribed burn is important because it will suppress woody regeneration and restore populations of native plants and grasses important to North Carolina's wildlife. The prescribed burn will also help remove fuels from the ground and reduce the potential for wildfires.

“Savannah habitats are vital to many species of wildlife and are among the most rapidly declining ecosystems in the state,” said John.

The North Carolina Forest Service conducted the burn successfully with assistance from CLC's Land Stewardship Director Sharon Wilson, GIS Director Sean Bloom and Land Stewardship Associate Andy Kane. The N.C. Forest Service operated from a burn plan that was designed to accomplish the objectives of the controlled burn, and manage the fire conditions and smoke to ensure the safety of surrounding residential properties and natural areas. ■



*Field Sparrow photographed by Jack Ogburn for the Carolina Bird Club*

### BIRDS, BIRDS, BIRDS!

Our work to create a savannah will help increase the amounts of early successional habitat for many birds who already call Buffalo Creek Preserve home. A local bird expert, who has been listening and watching for various birds for

months, is generating a species list for the property. He identified a Colonial Waterbird nesting colony and Grasshopper Sparrows breeding. A Field Sparrow nest was spotted by CLC staff while preparing for a trail workday for The Thread. ■



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# LOCAL LAND CONSERVATION: A LIFELINE FOR REGIONAL COLLABORATION AND SUSTAINABILITY



*CLC Executive Director Tom Okel, in the yellow jersey, building trail with volunteers at Buffalo Creek Preserve.*

We're at the end of another year, a time when families and friends are gathering to celebrate the holidays, reflecting on the past year and looking ahead to the upcoming year. So, during this special time, I want to wish you and your family a safe, happy and healthy holiday season and share a few highlights from this year which Catawba Lands Conservancy is so thankful for.

I'm grateful to meet, connect and communicate with many of you who do so much and care so deeply about preserving our corner of the world. People are attracted to this region for many reasons, and our natural landscape, outdoor amenities are atop that list. Our region - from rural family farms to our urban business sectors - all benefit from conservation. So, we know firsthand that land conservation is critical to enhancing the livability, viability and marketability of our region. There are more than 1,000 people who make up CLC. The combined effort of these volunteers, landowners and financial supporters is what allows this organization to impact this region. Together, we are all helping to make local land conservation strong.

It's been an exciting year of many firsts. For example, our "Taste for the Land" fundraising event raised more than \$30,000 for CLC and secured memberships into the Catawba Corps. It's the first event hosted by Catawba Corps and we're harvesting this excitement and energy to introduce even more people in our region to conservation.

With your support, we continue to maximize land conservation opportunities that arise due to the state of the real estate market. We know that this window will not last forever, so we have aggressively pursued opportunities for land donations from developers, banks and private landowners. This year we pursued each inquiry and potential acquisition, and did some proactive strategic outreach to banks and other entities. Not only will this work continue to help us acquire land, but allow us to garner support and raise funds to maintain and steward the more than 12,000 acres of land we currently preserve.

We've had two consecutive record breaking years for land conservation. We are currently working on projects, scheduled to close late this year or early next year, that will protect more than 2,000 acres of important natural land. However, we know the pace of land conservation has slowed dramatically in recent years, largely due to cutbacks in state funding. So, I've been working hard with other land conservation groups in North Carolina to talk with lawmakers about the importance of conservation to local and regional economies. To this effort and with the leadership from the CLC Board, Thread Trail

Governing Board and staff, I'm happy to share that we've been awarded more than \$480,000 in funding from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund to build trails along conservation corridors in our area. This funding will help us continue our efforts to connect people to open space and nature via the Carolina Thread Trail.

We're taking an active lead in a new initiative, TreesCharlotte, that will allow us to partner with the City of Charlotte, and Charlotte area residents and businesses to plant trees and protect the city's tree canopy. Under the leadership of former CLC Executive Director Dave Cable, this community volunteer effort is a great opportunity for many people to learn and understand how important trees are to our community and the conservation benefits they provide. Planting trees is a tangible way the community, especially children, can get involved, connect with nature, and immediately see the community and public benefits. This grassroots effort is underway now and we'll continue to organize community tree plantings throughout the spring.

We still have much work to do, but I'm proud and encouraged by the large amount of community and corporate support for conservation. We're truly investing money, time and effort to protect places that matter most right here in the Southern Piedmont, and I can't be more thankful for your support.

  
Tom Okel  
CLC Executive Director

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS AND GIFTS

As 2012 draws to a close, I want to thank you for your contributions to CLC and share a quick synopsis of our fundraising efforts to date. In an effort to take advantage of this window where depressed land values are creating extraordinary opportunities for conservation, we've been focused on introducing the impact of CLC and The Thread to

a broader audience across the region. This effort comes at a time when individuals are closely analyzing their private contributions. CLC has always been dedicated to making the most of the investment you make to secure land around the region and is keenly focused on stewarding your financial donations and gifts.

Over the past 21 years, every dollar donated has, on average, been leveraged 10 times for public benefit. Simply put, a \$250 gift is leveraged to create \$2,500 of value - that's pretty impressive! Thanks to your leadership and support, CLC now has 162 properties and 12,453 acres of natural land

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# THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO ATTENDED “TASTE FOR THE LAND”

*Catawba Corps’ “Taste for the Land” signature fundraising event, held Oct. 25, was a huge success!*

Thank you to all of the supporters, volunteers, partners and sponsors who attended “Taste for the Land” and helped raise more than \$30,000 for Catawba Lands Conservancy. These funds raised will go directly towards land conservation and stewardship efforts within our region.

“Taste for the Land,” title sponsored by Piedmont Natural Gas, was held at Dressler’s Restaurant at the Metropolitan in Uptown Charlotte. The chefs prepared delicious food that was locally grown or from regional food suppliers: vegetables from Bradford Farms (Huntersville, NC), grits from Anson Mills (Columbia, SC), shrimp from the North Carolina Coast, chicken from Prestige Farms (Charlotte, NC), wine from North Carolina wineries, and pumpkins from Lineberger’s Maple Springs Farm (Dallas, NC). Local band, The Bad Daddies, played music from several different genres and kept event goers dancing.

“Thank you to our many sponsors and friends who helped make this event a success,” said CLC’s Development Director Margaret Brantley. “I was very pleased with the high level of enthusiasm and dedication to Catawba Lands Conservancy. Local land conservation efforts cannot advance without our community’s help, so we sincerely appreciate everyone’s great effort and support.”

The event was also a recruitment drive for memberships into CLC’s Catawba Corps. Nearly 60 memberships were purchased at \$250 each. Catawba Corps is a

new affiliate group that is dedicated to promoting awareness, volunteerism and support for CLC.

Through a myriad of different volunteer opportunities, Catawba Corps members will help lead efforts to provide resources to permanently protect available precious land and natural resources right here in our Southern Piedmont home.

“This was a great opportunity for people to come out and get involved in an effort that is helping to sustain and enrich our region by protecting our local preserves, trails, rivers and farms,” said Jenny Ward, CLC board member and event steering committee co-chair. “Conservation is positively shaping the landscape,

health and sustainability for the future of our region, and Catawba Corps members can play an immediate integral role developing and sustaining these efforts.” Ward is also the sustainability engagement manager for Duke Energy.

If you’d like to join the Catawba Corps or want to learn more, call or email Margaret at 704.342.3330, ext. 218 or [margaret@catawbalands.org](mailto:margaret@catawbalands.org). Or, go to our website at [www.catawbalands.org](http://www.catawbalands.org) or use the associated QR code. ■



*Photo by Amanda Anderson Photography*



*CLC Development Director Margaret Brantley and Executive Director Tom Okel with CLC supporters Addison and Rand Ayer.*

*Photo by Amanda Anderson Photography*



*CLC Supporters Peter and Patricia Daniel attended the event with CLC Board Member Jarred Cochran.*

*Photo by Amanda Anderson Photography*



## THANKS TO ALL OF OUR GREAT SPONSORS FOR THEIR GENEROSITY AND SUPPORT!



# YOU MAKE CLC AND LAND CONSERVATION GREAT!

Local land conservation saves the natural places we love, right here in our own backyards. When we work together for conservation, the entire community benefits from our work to

protect wildlife, save local farmland and keep our drinking water clean. We're helping to improve our region's quality of life. Conservation is also about generous, like-minded

people...people who are willing to permanently protect their land, donate money, attend events, and volunteer time to monitor our properties, build a trail or plant a

tree. Thank you for helping to save our corner of the world...one person, one native plant, one riparian buffer, one acre, one trail, and one bog turtle at a time! ■



*Naturalist Mary Stauble led a guided fall nature hike through the winding trails of the Catawba Wildflower Glen. This unique 20-acre preserve is located near Mountain Island Lake in northwestern Mecklenburg County and one of this area's most outstanding natural areas for rich woodland wildflower habitat. It's also CLC's first conserved property.*



*Jim Burke, NCSU Extension Agent and Amy Nason, CLC landowner are examining the Schweinitz sunflower in full bloom at the Adam Hunter Prairie at Redlair in Gaston County. This sunflower is an endangered species and thrives on this magnificent small prairie.*



*Jay Nelson, CLC volunteer, is putting the finishing touches on the DiMicco Preserve sign. Jay built the frames and set the posts of the DiMicco Preserve forest on Youngblood Road.*



*Carolina Thread Trail and CLC Volunteer Chip Sell and Sandra Aboudrahim, a CLC intern, are getting ready to help CLC staff monitor the Rock Springs Park, a 117-acre preserve in Lincoln County.*



*CLC Landowner Mary Lou Buck and Volunteer Chip Sell take a break from volunteering to pose with this magnificent umbrella magnolia at the Buck-Smith-Long Preserve in Gaston County.*



*Kathryn Henderson, a senior at Queens University of Charlotte, helped clear invasive privet shrubs from a small paw paw patch at the Spencer Mountain Wetland. With the help of volunteers, we are restoring the forested areas along the South Fork River by removing invasive plants and encouraging the growth of native plants like spice bush, silver bell and paw paws.*



*Many community and corporate volunteers, like those from Bank of America and Duke Energy, are working hard and putting in many hours of sweat equity into building a 2-mile segment of The Thread at our Buffalo Creek Preserve.*



*Queens University of Charlotte CORE students and Myers Park Baptist Church's Saturday of Service volunteers worked for hours sprucing up the South Fork trail along the Pharr Preserve. Activities included trash pick-up, improvements to the trail tread, re-seeding and planting.*



# CLC LEADS NEIGHBORWOODS EFFORT OF TREESCHARLOTTE

*The community effort aims to recruit volunteers to help plant trees in several Charlotte communities*



The City of Charlotte, known for its financial centers and large number of places of worship, is also known for its trees. If you walk down many Charlotte streets, you'll be greeted by big, majestic trees that have been part of the local landscape for decades. Charlotte's tree canopy is the city's most recognized natural treasure and resource. But, it's threatened. The city lost approximately three percent, or 9,475 acres, of its tree canopy between 2002-2008, and additional losses are projected from natural degeneration and development.

There's currently a public/private collaborative effort underway, called TreesCharlotte, that is focused on addressing the need to plant, preserve and protect Charlotte's trees to help make the city a more greener and healthier place to live, work and play. TreesCharlotte, initiated by the Knight Foundation, Foundation For The Carolinas and City of Charlotte in partnership with the

Charlotte Public Tree Fund and Catawba Lands Conservancy, has a community goal to increase the city's tree canopy by 50 percent by 2050.

This effort to plant trees, raise awareness in the community of the canopy and educate the public on tree care is being led by former CLC Executive Director Dave Cable. He believes TreesCharlotte is an important community catalyst for civic engagement and a natural fit for CLC.

"TreesCharlotte is a great way the community can get involved, volunteer and make a difference in the health and sustainability of our region and in advancing urban conservation," said Dave, who is the director for TreesCharlotte. "Trees play an important role in our region's landscape - in addition to their beauty and benefits of increasing real estate values - trees provide many environmental and community benefits that are essential to our physical and social health." Dave added that trees also clean our air, reduce storm water run-off, cool our

streets and reduce energy use.

CLC will lead the NeighborWoods program of TreesCharlotte, an effort that will manage the planting of nearly 3,500 trees each year. NeighborWoods will strategically align communities that have a reduced amount or little existing tree buffer with volunteers who can plant small or medium maturing trees. CLC will recruit and manage corporate and community volunteers to plant trees in these various neighborhoods. CLC will also work in conjunction with the City of Charlotte which will identify the communities, schedule tree plantings and seek partners or sponsors. Heike Biller, CLC's administrative director, is managing the NeighborWoods planting events and volunteer recruitment.

"This is a great and tangible way many children and families can actively participate in an effort to



*Volunteer tree plantings were held in March and November in the Peachtree Hills community of Charlotte. Property owners chose among four different types of trees to be planted in front yards and open spaces within their community. Several volunteers participated and have planted nearly 170 beautiful trees.*

help improve our community and make a lasting difference for conservation," said Heike.

CLC is recruiting volunteers now for monthly TreesCharlotte NeighborWoods tree plantings. Upcoming tree plantings are scheduled for Dec. 1, 2012 and Jan. 12, 2013. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Heike at [heike@catawbalands.org](mailto:heike@catawbalands.org) or 704-342-3330, x210. Please go to the CLC website, [www.catawbalands.org](http://www.catawbalands.org), for more information on tree plantings around Charlotte. ■



## RANKIN OAK REUNION BRINGS TOGETHER FRIENDS, MEMORIES OF A ONCE MAJESTIC TREE

Near the spot where a giant oak tree once stood, Mamie Allison Cole, Neil Crouse and a few of their friends gathered for the Rankin Oak Reunion



on Oct. 20 to recall heritage, history and childhood memories. Once listed in the book "Trees of the Southeastern States" as the largest Southern red oak in North Carolina, the 'Rankin Oak' stood

tall in the middle of CLC's Stanley Creek Forest and graced the forest's canopy until it died from a lightning strike in

the early 1950s.

Over the years, there were stories. Over time, fond memories grew. Richard Rankin, who owns property adjacent to and whose

family once owned Stanley Creek Forest, organized the reunion. He wanted to learn more about the tree's significance on those who grew up around it. He also was hoping to find the exact location of where it once stood.

For Mamie, the tree was a place where her family played, shelled peas and prepared fruit for canning. She was happy to come back home to help locate the place of this special tree.

Six others who lived and played near this tree in Mount Holly joined Mamie and Neil deep in

the forest at a large stump which they all believed was a part of the remnants of the 'Rankin Oak.'

Now mostly in their 80s and 90s, they recalled baseball games with friends and neighborhood gatherings that brought families together around this spectacular tree.

"This reunion was so very special to all of them and underscores why conservation plays an important role in our community history as well," said CLC's Land Stewardship Director Sharon Wilson who also attended the reunion. ■

# THE CAROLINA THREAD TRAIL MARKS ITS FIFTH ANNIVERSARY AND 100TH MILE OF OPEN TRAIL

The Carolina Thread Trail celebrated its fifth anniversary



and marked its 100th mile of trail open to the public on Nov. 17.

Launched from a community process lead by the Foundation For The Carolinas to identify our area's most pressing environmental need, The Thread aspires to connect a 15-county region with a network of hundreds of miles of trails linking more than two million people to regional destinations, parks, towns, neighborhoods and conservation corridors. Initial startup funding for The Thread came from Foundation For The Carolinas, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the C. D. Spangler Foundation, the Turner Family

Foundation, Bank of America, Duke Energy and Wells Fargo.

"Five years ago, our region's leaders had a vision to create a connected trail system to make our corner of the world a healthier, greener, and more attractive place to live, work and explore. Today that vision is becoming a reality mile by mile," said Ann Browning, project director for The Thread. "Our fifth anniversary and 100th mile are significant milestones that we celebrated with our trail users, volunteers, government leaders and corporate partners - all of which have made significant contributions to support and

advance The Thread."

At the event, a special 100th mile marker was unveiled at the West Branch Nature Preserve. A photo contest is now underway to encourage trail users to take photos and share their outdoor adventures on The Thread via Facebook. From Nov. 17 to Dec. 10, trail users will be able to post photos and vote for their favorite trail picture out on The Thread. For more information and to participate, go to The Thread's Facebook page at [facebook.com/carolinathreadtrail](https://facebook.com/carolinathreadtrail) or on the website, [www.carolinathreadtrail.org](http://www.carolinathreadtrail.org). ■

## NEW BRIDGES IMPROVE THE SOUTH FORK TRAIL IN GASTON COUNTY

Thanks to a \$12,037 grant from the Glenn Foundation, CLC was able to construct three new bicycle/pedestrian bridges along the South Fork Trail in Gaston County. These new bridges span over a river tributary and stream flowing into the Catawba River.

Trail users can now walk, bike or hike the entire 2.1-mile trail

without any worries of getting themselves or their equipment



*Construction on pedestrian/bike bridges is now complete and walks along the South Fork Trail are being enjoyed by all.*

wet. The South Fork Trail is part of Carolina Thread Trail and is

located on the Pharr Yarns Preserve in Gaston County. Construction began in the summer and lasted for approximately eight weeks.

"This grant has made a significant difference and helped improve the connectivity and usability of

the trail for walkers, joggers and bikers," said Carolina Thread Trail Community Coordinator Randi Gates. "The local community has been looking forward to the construction of these bridges since we opened the trail in 2010. We thank the Glenn Foundation for its support and funding for these bicycle and pedestrian connections."

Founded in 1972, the Carrie E. and Lena V. Glenn Foundation provides philanthropic support to Gaston County communities by facilitating tangible, positive change "where it is needed most and will do the most good." ■

*Continued from Page 2*

preserved and, along the Carolina Thread Trail, 1,300 acres of land are protected and more than 100 miles of trail are open across our region.

### HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MANY GREAT STRIDES IN 2012:

- Thank you to Duke Energy, Piedmont Natural Gas, Bragg Financial Group, Marsh Properties and all of the many corporate

partners who responded to Duke Energy's \$50,000 challenge and helped us meet our goal to secure this matching grant in August.

- Memberships to the Catawba Society have grown 10 percent over the last year.
- The Catawba Corps, a new affiliate group, launched with an annual event on Oct. 25 in an

effort to grow new supporters. This group hosted a party for more than 300 guests to promote our mission through volunteerism, leading family activities and increasing financial support.

As the end of the year approaches and you are considering where to invest your year-end contributions, we ask that you continue to support

CLC to create a legacy for generations. Know your philanthropic dollars, when given to CLC, will make significant, lasting returns across our region for generations. Again, thank you for your generosity and continued support.

*Sincerely,*  
*Margaret Brantley*  
*CLC Development Director* ■

# HUNGRY GOATS...AN ANSWER TO AN ONGOING EFFORT TO FIGHT KUDZU AT SEVEN OAKS PRESERVE



goats used are from Wells Farm in Horse Shoe, NC.

Kudzu is an invasive plant species native to Asia that has been problematic in southeastern United

States for decades. The plant's vines grow rapidly over trees and shrubs, killing them by heavy shading. However, kudzu is high-quality fodder for livestock and other grazing animals, thus the reason why goats are so effective for its removal.

“We thank Duke Energy for the grant that has funded efforts to reduce the kudzu at our preserve,” said Sean Bloom, GIS director for CLC. “This project is so important to help us restore this land to a

healthier natural state while supporting our community partner, Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden, in its efforts to protect and enhance their grounds.”

In July 2011, CLC partnered with the Garden and Clean Water Management Trust Fund to conserve the 77-acres Seven Oaks Preserve. This wooded land serves as an important wildlife habitat corridor and provides a natural filter for water draining into Lake Wyle, a major drinking water source for many local communities. The preserve connects the Garden with Lake Wylie and will host a 2.3-mile segment of the Carolina Thread Trail.

After the goats ate the kudzu, CLC staff assessed the soil and tree conditions for damage and erosion. To prevent regrowth, targeted herbicide was used to kill the kudzu's extensive root system. ■

Here's a location infested with kudzu before the goats arrived and after showing the great job they did feeding on kudzu.



Here's a location infested with kudzu before the goats arrived and after showing the great job they did feeding on kudzu.



# REHABILITATED BARRED OWL RELEASED BACK INTO THE WILD AT LONG CREEK CONSERVATION AREA

Newton is now free to be with other birds. Spreading his wings, he gracefully flew to a tree within CLC's Long Creek Conservation Area, a 175 acre permanently conserved natural area within ReVenture Park™.

Newton, a rehabilitated barred owl, was released back into the wild on Oct. 17 after months of medical attention and rehabilitation to his damaged wing. The owl was found in Mecklenburg County after being hit by a car and was admitted to the Carolina Raptor Center's Rehabilitation Center in June.

Long Creek Conservation Area hosts a variety of trees and natural habitat areas while also providing significant watershed protection that helps keep our waterways clean - making it the perfect setting for the release and a suitable habitat in which Newton could

call home. This area also hosts a 2-mile segment of the Carolina Thread Trail that connects to other trails at the U.S. National Whitewater Center.



“When we permanently protect land, it's a conservation benefit for the entire community as well as for the wildlife which can call that natural area home. This is especially important within our region's most

dense population centers like Mecklenburg County,” said Tom Okel, executive director for CLC.

According to the Carolina Raptor



Center's Philanthropy Manager Heather Moeller, the area provides a great habitat for this owl to live and thrive. She also said discarding food on roadways - even a piece of gum - from our vehicles is one of

the top reasons why raptors are injured. “We all can take small steps to ensure that we are doing our part to help raptors survive. Just by properly discarding trash, we can make a significant difference in their injury rates.”

As the developer for ReVenture Park, Tom McKittrick, president of Forsite Development adds, “We are delighted to be able to provide a thriving environment for the rehabilitated barred owl. Environmental stewardship is at the core of everything we are doing at ReVenture. We have committed to multiple wildlife habitat enhancement projects throughout the park and have received the Wildlife and Industry Together (WAIT) certification by the NC Wildlife Federation.” (For more information: [www.reventurepark.com](http://www.reventurepark.com)) ■



Catawba Lands Conservancy is part of a network of land trusts that collectively have protected more than 311,000 acres of the places you love in North Carolina.

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