

# ANNUAL REPORT



- CATAWBA -  
LANDS CONSERVANCY  
LAND | WATER | FARMS | NATURE



CAROLINA  
THREAD TRAIL

LACE UP YOUR SNEAKERS AND JOIN US IN CELEBRATING NATIONAL TRAILS DAY!

*Photos from previous  
National Trails Day  
celebrations*



**What:** FREE public programs hosted by Carolina Thread Trail and partners

**When:** Saturday, June 1

**Where:** Various locations across the region

**More info:**  
[carolinathreadtrail.org/ntd](http://carolinathreadtrail.org/ntd)

Photo by Nancy Pierce



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# GREEN PLACES

## RESTORING POCKETS OF NATURE IN CHARLOTTE

If you drive through the Biddleville or Greenville neighborhoods of Charlotte, you probably won't notice the quiet, unassuming little parcels of undeveloped property scattered throughout. These unremarkable, some might even say unsightly, little pieces of land are owned by the City of Charlotte. Despite their current state, the City's Tree Canopy Preservation Program (TCPP) team sees potential. It is using the parcels to create public green spaces, called the Urban Arboretum Trail (UAT), and Catawba Lands Conservancy is collaborating with TCPP to advise and provide guidance on the work. The City's vision for the UAT has long been in the works: a string of revitalized natural spaces, connected with sidewalks and paths, providing oases of nature within the urban environment and encouraging outdoor recreation.

During this partnership, supported by a \$25,000 grant from Bank of America, the Conservancy team will be working with Tree Canopy Programs Manager Tara Moore, and the rest of the TCPP staff, to plan and implement restoration work on a number of the UAT parcels. That could mean planting native species of trees, bringing in pollinator plants or finding other ways to activate the space for the community. Each property will have a unique approach, based on its individual location and characteristics.

"We're thrilled to collaborate with the City on this project. The Conservancy team is providing our expertise on restoring native habitats, which we have used to improve our conserved properties for decades. By working together, we'll be able to transform these parcels into pocket parks, green spaces...maybe even a native grassland habitat," said Will Ruark, Conservation Preserve Manager for the Conservancy. "These enhancements will

have a positive impact on the entire area, offering valuable green space for the community and providing crucial habitat for creatures that call Charlotte home."

Tara Moore, the Tree Canopy Programs Manager for the City of Charlotte, is just as energized by the possibilities. "Working with the Catawba Lands Conservancy to improve UAT is an amazing opportunity. We'll be able to better understand what areas of Charlotte to target for tree canopy conservation, and be more focused in those efforts."



### ADDRESSING ENVIRONMENTAL INEQUITIES

Biddleville and Greenville, both historically majority-Black neighborhoods of Charlotte, have suffered from a lack of green infrastructure, making them more susceptible to air pollution, flooding and higher temperatures, while also depriving residents of the health and economic benefits provided by trees and green spaces. With some strategic planning and partnership, these spaces will provide those much-needed community benefits. The UAT also overlaps with the Carolina Thread Trail near Irwin Creek Greenway in West Charlotte, providing residents with additional opportunities to explore and experience nature.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



### GREEN PLACES CONTINUED

## A PROVEN PARTNERSHIP

This isn't the first time the Conservancy has worked with the City of Charlotte to protect our tree canopy. Over the years, we have worked together to conserve more than 230 acres of land across Charlotte, protecting tree canopy, clean air and water quality. That partnership is ongoing, with 75 more acres currently in the conservation pipeline.

Every conservation project, large or small, has an impact on the quality of life – building up resilience and giving communities a place to connect with nature. With a blank slate provided by the UAT properties, and a proven track record of collaboration, it's clear that this partnership will make a significant impact.



## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### BART LANDESS

Our region is thriving! New businesses open every weekend, in towns and cities across our region. Just last year the Charlotte metro area was included in the Top 10 Best Places to Live by U.S. News & World Report. It is clear that this region is a desirable place to live. Easy access to the outdoors, great weather, Southern hospitality, clean air and water, arts and culture...all these ingredients play into our popularity.

How long before the boom causes a bust?

I have talked before about the importance of quality of life in ensuring that our region thrives. This issue's feature article addresses the elephant in the room: that not everyone in Charlotte has a high quality of life. Historically underserved communities have not had the same access to green spaces as more affluent areas.

Our region is estimated to gain 2.7 million new residents in the next 35 years. How will that impact our quality of life? We need to act now and boldly to assure that, as we grow, we maintain or improve our quality of life by adding parks, trails, nature preserves and greenways while land is still available. We can provide a better quality of life for all if we put our hearts and minds to it.

# 2023 BY THE NUMBERS

5



NC YEAR OF THE TRAIL PROGRAMS

331



VOLUNTEERS

12



NEW OR IMPROVED TRAILS OPENED



VOLUNTEER EVENTS



7 NEW PROPERTIES PROTECTED



ACRES CONSERVED

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[catawbalands.org/latest-news](https://catawbalands.org/latest-news)





# DONOR PROFILE

## LEGACY GIFT TO BENEFIT THE CAROLINA THREAD TRAIL



Danny Myers was a modern day Renaissance man—his life was full of adventure, hard work, and reinvention.

Over his 79 years, he had several careers, including college teacher, nursing home administrator, home inspector, and business owner. He had a Master’s degree in Philosophy. He loved art and music. He was an avid hiker and camper. He visited many museums on his travels around the world. He also loved working out at the YMCA in Belmont.

In 2022 Danny was diagnosed with leukemia, and told he had somewhere between 6 months and two years to live. He started thinking about what kind of legacy he wanted

to leave to memorialize his parents, brother, and longtime partner, Sarah.

Danny and Sarah both loved nature, and wanted to help preserve the natural beauty of the area for future generations. He also wanted to ensure that access to nature and outdoor recreation would be free and available for everyone in his community. These values led him to leave a significant bequest to the Carolina Thread Trail. Another gift from Danny was made to the Stowe YMCA in Belmont.

Danny’s legacy will be honored at a future bridge on the Carolina Thread Trail in Gaston County. He requested that the bridge have a plaque reading “Sarah and Danny’s

Bridge,” with two joined hearts.

People like Danny, who have made planned gifts to help save land and connect lives to nature, have made a transformational difference for nature and people in our region. If you are interested in finding out more about ways you can make a lifetime gift, or how your legacy could make a difference, we would love to speak with you or send you information. Or, if you have already set up a planned gift, we would like to know so we can recognize and thank you now. Please reach out using the QR code, or call us at 704-342-3330.



**JOIN US** AT ONE OF OUR PROGRAMS OR EVENTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR!

## CALENDAR

### UPCOMING EVENTS & PROGRAMS

#### APRIL 6

Toxic Beauty: Mayapple Hike at Forney Creek Trail

#### APRIL 17

Clays for Conservation

Sponsorships and team registration available now! Visit [catawbalands.org/clays](http://catawbalands.org/clays).

#### JUNE 1

National Trails Day

Join us for a series of public programs across the region!

#### OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER

Hike at Kings Mountain National Military Park

Hike at Buffalo Creek Preserve

Hike at Murray’s Mill Historic Site

*National Trails Day 2023, Buffalo Creek Preserve, Cabarrus County.  
Photo by: Jennifer Clark*





# FIELD NOTES



Photo by Will Stuart

## COLLABORATING TO CONSERVE

At the end of 2023, our Land Conservation team supported partner land trust Davidson Lands Conservancy in protecting Washam Farm South, a 54-acre property in Huntersville. The property adds to the more than 800 acres of permanently protected land in the Ramah Creek Conservation Area, and Catawba Lands Conservancy is the backup holder on the conservation easement.

## THREAD TRAIL ADVANCES IN GASTON COUNTY

The plan for the 23-mile Matthews-Belk South Fork River Corridor took a step forward last fall when Lowell and Gaston County both approved an interlocal agreement to accept construction bids for two Carolina Thread Trail segments connecting to and through George Poston Park.

## PRESERVING LOCAL AGRICULTURE

We are proud to share that the American Farmland Trust awarded us a \$100,000, 4-year grant to engage with local farmers around conservation efforts. We have worked with local farmers for years to protect agricultural lands, and we're excited about the potential to further increase our capacity to save prime agricultural soils and strengthen our local food economy.



## ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION IN CATAWBA COUNTY

With funding from the nonprofit Society for Ecological Restoration, and in collaboration with Microsoft's Datacenter Community Affairs team, we are implementing a large-scale project to restore more than 80 acres of land and streambank in Catawba County. This multi-year project will remove invasive plants from two sites at Mountain Creek Park, and replant these areas with natives. We'll also be re-seeding an eroded streambank with native plants that will mitigate erosion and form a natural barrier against pollutants. This project will contribute to the overall health and sustainability of this large natural area and the stream, which flows into Lake Norman.

## GRASSLANDS PROJECT EXPANDS TO GROUND-NESTING BIRD COUNTS

Grasslands habitat is crucial for ground-nesting birds, and soon we will know how bird species are using the restored grassland at Buffalo Creek Preserve. Over the next two years, we will be conducting year-round counts of migratory and resident birds on the site, supported by funding from the JEM Foundation.

## GOOD FIRE SEASON

Our Stewardship team continues to bring back "good fire" to a number of properties we conserve, reintroducing a beneficial natural process to ecosystems where humans have suppressed it for centuries. During the 2024 fire season (generally February-April), we hope to conduct five prescribed burns on three protected properties.





# TRAIL FORUM

## SELLS OUT FOR 2ND YEAR IN A ROW

A sold-out crowd of nearly 300 people gathered in Mooresville, NC in December for the 16th annual conference all about trails and outdoor recreation. This was the second consecutive year with a sold out event! In addition to networking and educational breakout sessions throughout the day, attendees heard from lunch keynote Amy Camp, founder of Cycle Forward. Amy shared examples and lessons of how communities around the country are embracing trails and thriving. The event also highlighted the impact and momentum gained through 2023 NC Year of the Trail, and honored Mara Malakoff as the Saxby Chaplin Volunteer of the Year.

TRAIL FORUM IS PRESENTED BY



*Mara Malakoff (far right) was named 2023 Saxby Chaplin Volunteer of the Year.*

## SPRING BLOOMS

Spring weather means more people are getting out in nature...and it means native plants are back in bloom! Here are a few species to keep an eye out for when you're exploring.



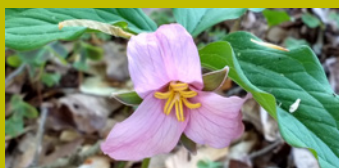
### MAYAPPLE

A woodland and floodplain plant with pretty, white blooms hidden underneath its expansive leaves. All parts of this plant are toxic, so use caution when viewing!  
*Look for it at: Forney Creek Trail, Denver, NC*



### SPICEBUSH

A shrub with yellow blossoms that fill the air with a deliciously sweet-spicy scent when it blooms in early spring.  
*Look for it at: Mineral Springs Greenway, Mineral Springs, NC*



### TRILLIUM

A spring ephemeral wildflower that carpets woodland hillsides in a short-lived, but beautiful display.  
*Look for it at: Girl Scouts Hornets' Nest Trail, Statesville, NC*



# 2023 CATAWBA LANDS CONSERVANCY AND CAROLINA THREAD TRAIL DONORS

Our donors' generous support each year enables us to pursue our mission of saving land and connecting lives to nature. This list reflects combined gifts to both organizations that were made during the 2023 calendar year.

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