

# Appalachians

DISPATCH

FALL 2024

EXPANDING  
BOUNDARIES

REFRESHING  
APPROACH TO  
BARRIER REMOVAL

UNLOCKING NEW  
POTENTIAL FOR LAND  
PROTECTION

The Nature  
Conservancy 

*Photo: A quiet moment at a freshwater pond along  
the Discovery Trail in the Nags Head Woods  
Preserve, NC. © Ben Herndon*



# From the Director's Desk

*Collaboration in the Appalachians opens new opportunities*

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Dear partners, supporters,  
and colleagues,

On behalf of everyone working to conserve the bounty and beauty of the Appalachians, I'm thrilled to share this edition of the Appalachians Dispatch. Your support is helping make significant, tangible progress toward a brighter and more sustainable future for our planet's people and wildlife.



The Nature Conservancy designated the Appalachians a global priority for conservation in 2021. These are places where scientists have determined that going “all in” with expertise and resources will result in lasting positive change for biodiversity and the climate crisis we face today. This approach is actively unfolding across the Appalachians today, with recent successes you'll read about in the following pages. Conservation at a continental scale is making a difference in the lives of people and for wildlife with whom we share this planet.

From the air we breathe and water we drink, to the beautiful natural places that nourish the soul—we are all deeply connected to the natural world. Together we can deepen those connections, and protect the forests, waterways and wildlife that sustain us all.

With gratitude,



**Heather Furman,**  
Appalachians Director  
The Nature Conservancy

*Photo: The Angel Oak tree, in Charleston, South Carolina, is a living testament to the enduring power and beauty of nature. Its sprawling canopy hosts a thriving ecosystem, exemplifying the vital role of old-growth trees in conserving biodiversity. © Tracie Joyner/TNC Photo Contest 2023*

# Unlocking New Potential

Catalytic investments connect conservation with community benefits



Male red fox and his kit pose for a photograph in the North Quabbin Region of Massachusetts in the town of Athol. © Ricard Flematti/TNC Photo Contest 2016

Ambitious land conservation projects and the benefits they provide to communities cannot be achieved without deep partnerships between The Nature Conservancy and local land trusts, municipalities, tribes, and other partners.

This is especially true in the Appalachians, where smaller, strategic projects can make all the difference in securing important habitats and bolstering landscape connectivity at scale.

Recognizing this, the Appalachians Program of The Nature Conservancy awarded over \$1.2 million to land trusts and other organizations in May 2024, supporting 27 projects through its new **Resilient and Connected Appalachians Grant Program**.

Importantly, the grants leveraged an additional \$28 million to support projects that will collectively contribute to the protection of over 10,000 acres of land in Maine,

Vermont, New Hampshire, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Jersey.

A goal of this program is to support projects that will enhance the well-being of people and communities impacted by the effects of climate change. This is particularly critical in communities with less access to high-quality green spaces, communities experiencing heightened impacts of climate change due to systemic under-investment and poor infrastructure, as well as traditionally marginalized communities of color.

The footprint and funds for these grants continue to expand as support for the program grows. For the Program's FY25 round, all 18 states in the Appalachians will be eligible for project funding.

## BY THE NUMBERS

7  
STATES

\$1.2M  
AWARDED

27  
PROJECTS SUPPORTED

\$28M  
LEVERAGED

10k+  
ACRES PROTECTED

*"This grant program expands access to resources so those leading on-the-ground conservation efforts can do so at the most effective scale and pace possible." Heather Furman, Appalachians Director*



## A Refreshing Approach

Working across boundaries to remove barriers to freshwater health and connectivity

Nature Conservancy freshwater staff across the Appalachians stay busy managing dam removal and culvert replacement projects, which can involve many steps such as permitting and engineering.

Often, though, these projects face hurdles such as funding and capacity issues that can delay or complicate progress. In these cases, a small amount of funding makes it possible to keep these projects moving and open up miles of river for fish and communities.

That's where the Appalachians program comes in. Thanks to a new funding model developed by the **Reconnected Appalachian Rivers** strategy team, readily available resources are provided to TNC staff and their partners to get through important stages of barrier removal projects, keep these projects moving forward, and leverage millions of additional dollars in public funding.

When adequate resources are readily available at moments of critical need, more Appalachian rivers are reconnected, improving habitat and migration routes for fish and other aquatic life. Often, nearby communities also benefit from reduced frequency and severity of floods.

With only 2% of rivers remaining as free-flowing in the U.S., progress throughout the 267,000 stream and river miles within the U.S. portion of the Appalachians makes a notable positive impact for people and planet. With this new and growing funding model, The Nature Conservancy can connect increasingly more partners, projects, and waterways.

*Column on right: Projects recently supported by RAR (2023-2024).*

## Projects made Possible

### Maine

Training local engineers to develop engineering plans for aquatic connectivity projects in partnership with the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians

### Vermont

Contracting with a local engineering firm to evaluate eight high-priority sites for dam removal with local conservation partners

### Connecticut

Conducting reconnaissance studies on two dams on a tributary of the Naugatuck River

### New Jersey

Completing surveys for endangered and threatened mussels and supporting design and permitting for four dam removals on the Pequest River

### West Virginia

Conducting culvert assessments at 300 sites in the Cheat River Watershed

### North Carolina

Purchasing monitoring equipment to support a dam removal and reconnect over 26 miles of streams along the Mills River

### Georgia

Completing design for two high-priority stream crossing replacements, conducting assessments for over 300 road crossings, replacing up to 12 barriers in various locations



*Photo: TNC staff and partners gather for an SARP Culvert Assessment training in Georgia's Coosawattee River watershed. © Tiffany Fenland / Georgia Department of Natural Resources.*

# MILESTONES



*Members of the Central Appalachians fire crew pose for a photo during a burn at Mare Run in Bath County, VA, April 2024. © Kyle Laferriere.*



**LAND**

The Nature Conservancy in Kentucky finalized the largest conservation easement in the state's history, permanently conserving nearly 55,000 acres on the Cumberland Forest Wildlife Management Area in Bell, Knox and Leslie counties.

The easement was made possible through a partnership with the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. The property is now permanently open to the public and part of the Cumberland Forest Project, an impact investment fund operated by TNC that manages 253,000 acres spanning Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia.



**WATER**

In February, the 14,600-acre Follensby Pond deep in the Adirondacks, was permanently protected for future generations. The agreement is one of the largest ever in New York State. Benefits of the 15-year project include the establishment of a first-of-its-kind freshwater research preserve, new public access area at the Raquette River, and plans for publicly recognizing the long-term relationships Indigenous Peoples have with the region.

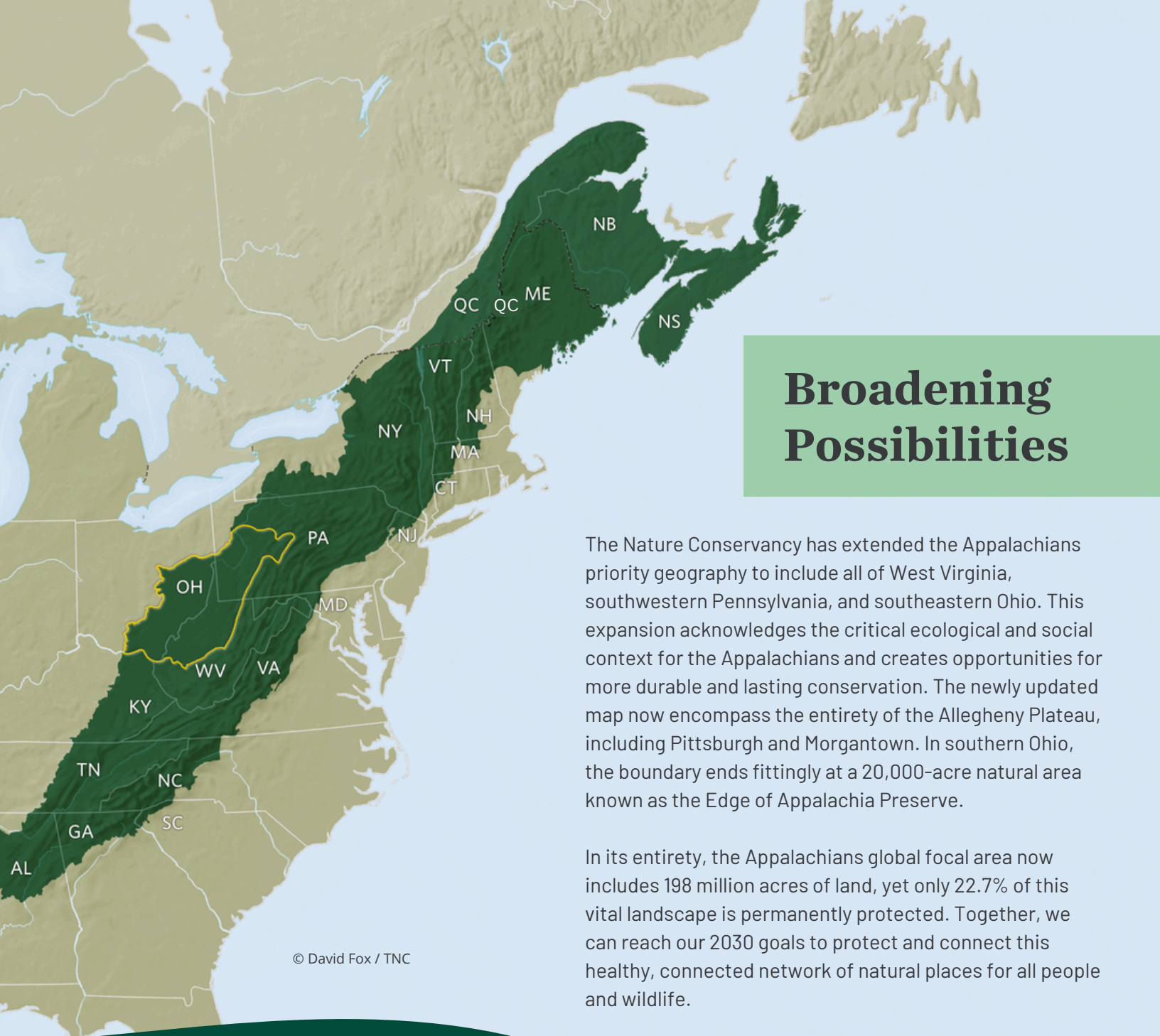
The Nature Conservancy will retain ownership of the property, and New York State will hold two conservation easements for the Follensby Pond and Raquette River areas.



**FIRE**

With the capacity, skills and trust built through the Fire Learning Network over the past 18 years, fire practitioners tackled one of the largest contiguous controlled burn projects to date in western Virginia, burning a total of 6,670 acres during seven operational days between March and April.

The Nature Conservancy and USDA Forest Service began collaborating on the Warm Springs Mountain Restoration Project (WSMRP) in the Allegheny Highlands in the 2018. Since then, partners have tackled increasingly large, controlled burns by combining adjacent units for greater efficiency and ecological benefit.



© David Fox / TNC

## Broadening Possibilities

The Nature Conservancy has extended the Appalachians priority geography to include all of West Virginia, southwestern Pennsylvania, and southeastern Ohio. This expansion acknowledges the critical ecological and social context for the Appalachians and creates opportunities for more durable and lasting conservation. The newly updated map now encompasses the entirety of the Allegheny Plateau, including Pittsburgh and Morgantown. In southern Ohio, the boundary ends fittingly at a 20,000-acre natural area known as the Edge of Appalachia Preserve.

In its entirety, the Appalachians global focal area now includes 198 million acres of land, yet only 22.7% of this vital landscape is permanently protected. Together, we can reach our 2030 goals to protect and connect this healthy, connected network of natural places for all people and wildlife.



## Appalachians Almanac

- 393,640 stream miles
- 198,000,000 acres of land
- 84 focal landscapes identified for conservation
- 36 million people's source of drinking water
- 22.7% of the forest carbon stocks (contiguous U.S.)
- 20.3% protected (U.S. portion)
- 18 U.S. states (fully or partially included)
- 3 Canadian provinces (fully or partially included)
- 1 opportunity** to conserve an irreplaceable landscape

Photos, clockwise: Rainbow over a project area in the Cumberland Forest, Kentucky ©TNC. Eastern Box Turtle, State College, PA © Chris Murrell. Red Trillium, Jamaica State Park, VT © Jerry and Marcy Monkman/EcoPhotography. Drone view of the Israel River and Lancaster, New Hampshire © Jerry and Marcy Monkman/EcoPhotography.

# WORKING TOGETHER TO FIND A WAY

(right) The Appalachians team discusses forest restoration and land protection with Keith Tassin, Deputy Director and Fire Manager for Alabama TNC, from atop Flagg Mountain, the southern most peak of the Appalachians. March 2024. © TNC



**Alabama:** The Nature Conservancy in Alabama celebrated Earth Day 2024 with a dedication ceremony at its new 1,000-acre preserve at Flagg Mountain, the southernmost peak of the Appalachian Mountain range. TNC purchased two tracts of land adjacent to Flagg Mountain to establish the new preserve. The preserve's name, Fenvkvcĕkv Creek (pronounced finuh-guh-jee-guh), comes from the Muscogee People who were the first caretakers of the land. Fenvkvcĕkv is also the original Muscogee name for the bordering Finikochicka Creek.



**Tennessee:** In May, members from The Nature Conservancy's Appalachians team visited eastern Tennessee with United States Forest Service (USFS) staff. In addition to celebrating the longstanding partnership between the groups, everyone had the opportunity to see Tennessee Dace in breeding colors that will be released into Citico Creek, a critical waterway for biodiversity. In partnership with the USFS, TNC will replace seven culverts and remove one small dam on Citico Creek and its tributaries to provide habitat for the Tennessee Dace and other species of concern.



**West Virginia:** On May 10, TNC and the US Fish and Wildlife Service celebrated the recent 1,971-acre addition of Big Cove to the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge in West Virginia. Conserving Big Cove will help protect rare species and wildlife habitat, increase public access to hunting, fishing and recreation, and help secure the area's clean water supply. Big Cove also expands protection of the largest intact wetlands complex in West Virginia as well as all of the central and southern Appalachians.

Our Vision:

*In the Appalachians, people and nature flourish within a healthy, connected network of forests and freshwater spanning the continent from Alabama to Nova Scotia. The responsibility of caring for this vital landscape is shared globally, resulting in thriving communities and a livable climate for all.*

Your support makes a lasting impact.

Let's connect:

Meredeth Winter / Greg Edwards

[meredeth\\_winter@tnc.org](mailto:meredeth_winter@tnc.org) / [gedwards@tnc.org](mailto:gedwards@tnc.org)

