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Profile of a Conservationist Caitly Embly

In November 2023, Caitly Embly joined The Nature Conservancy's Maryland/DC chapter as the western Maryland stewardship field assistant. In this role, Embly is responsible for managing thousands of acres of land and visitor infrastructure across several TNC nature preserves that are located in TNC's critical Appalachian focal landscape. She will also be a visible member of the community, managing volunteers and numerous local partnerships—including TNC's partnerships with Garrett College and the Allegany College of Maryland (see adjacent article for more).

"Western Maryland is such a special place, and I am privileged to work here. But don't just take my word for it; come check it out for yourself! Join me at one of our preserve volunteer workdays, or enjoy hiking one of our public access trails," says Embly about her new role.

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Professor Marie Perrin Miller (far left) from the Allegany College of Maryland's Forest Technology program and her team visited a controlled burn at TNC's Sideling Hill Creek Preserve. © Severn Smith/TNC

The mission of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR) is to lead Maryland in securing a sustainable future for our environment, society, and economy by preserving, protecting, restoring and enhancing the State's natural resources. When it comes to achieving the highest possible conservation impact, MD DNR is unquestionably The Nature Conservancy's most important partner in Maryland. Given our overlapping missions and priorities, TNC and MD DNR have been working together on myriad projects and initiatives for decades. And with the staff capacity and budget that comes with any state agency, MD DNR is often TNC's answer to "scalable solutions."

A significant portion of MD DNR's workforce comes from the state's 16 two-year technical colleges, including Allegany College of Maryland (ACM) and Garrett College, both located in the Appalachian Mountains of western Maryland. The Appalachians are one

of TNC's four Global Focal Areas due to their high biodiversity, climate resilience, and carbon sequestration.

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Southern flying squirrels (*Glaucomys volans*) depend on healthy Appalachian forest habitat. Look for new species trading cards in future magazine editions.



Southern Flying Squirrel

Glaucomys volans

Creating pathways to conservation-compatible jobs for people living in Appalachian communities—from Alabama to Canada—is one of the best ways to achieve durable, lasting results in this focal landscape.

“I started with Garrett College in the late 1980s, and the partnership with TNC precedes even me,” says Kevin Dodge, Director of the Natural Resources and Wildlife Technology program at Garrett College. For more than 30 years, Professor Dodge has found tremendous value in getting his students out of the classroom and into the field, working alongside TNC staff. “We’ve done trash clean-ups, tree plantings, invasive species removals, visitor infrastructure maintenance, hydrological monitoring, peat bog monitoring, and probably more,” he says. “These types of projects provide our students with real, hands-on, resume-building experience, not to mention inspiration and motivation.”

For more than 20 years, students in the ACM Forest Technology program have been involved with TNC’s projects, ranging from prescribed burns and pesticide application to invasive species control and vegetation monitoring. ACM’s Forest Technology program is



Professor Kevin Dodge, Director of the Natural Resources and Wildlife Technology program at Garrett College, often brings students to TNC nature preserves to gain hands-on experience in being a natural resources professional. © Garrett College

a two-year program designed to train the next generation of land stewards and prepare them for forestry and natural resource jobs. According to Marie Perrin Miller, ACM’s Forestry Program Director, one of the most important ways to train students effectively for these roles is to get them out in the field doing hands-on work on the lands they are trying to conserve. “We love to give the students hands-on experiences with agencies and organizations that could potentially employ them in the future,” says Professor Perrin Miller.

Approximately 12–15 students per year are invited to help with TNC projects across the region, and almost every student who goes through the program gets to learn from TNC experts in some way. Perrin Miller shares, “This two-way partnership provides a great opportunity not only for TNC to get extra boots on the ground, but also to allow students to see first-hand how the recommendations they will make as a forester or land manager will be

implemented across the landscape. I love these projects with partners because they show students how hard the work that you typically just see on paper actually is. Partnering with The Nature Conservancy is great for demonstrating to the students exactly why we’re doing certain management activities and what our intended result is. I think the students really appreciate going out and doing hard work and knowing that it’s for a good reason.”

All across Appalachia, two-year technical colleges like Garrett College and Allegany College play a critical role in local workforce development and youth retention. At TNC, we understand that conservation success in the Appalachians depends on more than simply investing in landscape conservation. Social, cultural and economic investments and partnerships will also be critical to our success. We envision a healthy, resilient and connected Appalachian landscape that supports the co-prosperity of people and nature for generations to come.

Southern Flying Squirrel

Found in deciduous and mixed forests all over the eastern half of North America, the southern flying squirrel uses excess skin alongside its body to help it glide between trees while searching for food at night.

Flying squirrels do best in healthy, mature forests. By conducting controlled burns and removing invasive species, we help maintain an open canopy that is suitable for gliding and a diversity of native food-providing plants. Periodic fire also creates snags (standing dead trees) that provide ideal nesting spots.

photo: © Joe McDonald

The Nature Conservancy 

The Nature Conservancy
425 Barlow Place, #100
Bethesda, MD 20814

Maryland/DC
maryland@tnc.org
nature.org/marylanddc

The Nature Conservancy 

 facebook/natureDCMDVA
 instagram/nature_dcmdva