Carolina Mountain Club Conservation Corner July 2026

Luke Bennet, Councilor for Conservation

Mount Mitchell Spruce-Fir Workday Recap







Earlier in June on top of Mount Mitchell, conservation partners with the Southern Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative gathered alongside a small army of dedicated volunteers. The volunteers represented multiple organizations including Carolina Mountain Club.

Even for Mount Mitchell, the weather felt unseasonably cold. Wrapped in puffy jackets and bouncing up and down to stay warm, we were ready for the workday. The workday included transplanting nearly 200 Fraser fir trees from a site that will be impacted by a Mount Mitchell infrastructure improvement project to a restoration site where over 300 red spruce trees were planted in 2023 (read more). Adding Fraser fir trees to the restoration site is a big continued step toward the overall goal of restoring the site to spruce-fir forest.

Southern Appalachian spruce-fir forests are characterized by high moisture – often immersed in cloud cover – and are widely considered a relic from the last ice age. Made up primarily of red spruce and Fraser fir trees, these forests are home for plants and animals found nowhere else in the south, and in many cases, nowhere else in the world. They're home to federally listed spruce-fir moss spider and Carolina northern flying squirrel; as well as a long list of species of conservation concern including the northern saw-whet owl, brown creeper, black-capped chickadee, and numerous salamanders (read more).

We're so grateful for all the volunteers who stepped up the challenge and made this workday a big success!

Cerulean Warbler & Avian Diversity Study





Our national forests in North Carolina contain a significant proportion of the remaining old-growth forests in the Southern Appalachians, which total approximately only 4-5 percent of all public lands. The national forests of Western North Carolina are a biodiversity hotspot and provide critical habitat for cerulean warblers along with numerous other species of concern such as worm-eating warbler and acadian flycatcher.

The North Carolina Wildlife Federation in partnership with the National Parks Conservation Association, the Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, MountainTrue, and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission with support from the U.S. Forest Service are hosting a cerulean warbler and avian diversity survey focused on the last remaining patches of old-growth forests and maturing second-growth forests within the Craggy Mountains – Pisgah National Forest where presence of ceruleans and many other avian species is largely unknown. This project began in 2024 and will in subsequent years continue into public lands adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway, Appalachian Trail, and Mountains-to-Sea Trail in North Carolina.

Our goal is to fill area-specific knowledge gaps to provide best available information for future decision making in forest management and conservation efforts including support for the proposed Craggy National Scenic Area. To achieve this goal, we are using acoustic recording units (ARUs). The units are mounted to trees within suitable habitat and automatically record songs at dawn and dusk everyday for weeks at a time. ARUs record everything and paint a picture of all the birds within these areas including species associated with similar habitats and in decline.

The North Carolina Wildlife Federation is looking for volunteers to join us in the field in July and August. The Craggy Mountains are known for their rugged terrain, steep slopes and mature forests. Volunteers will be expected to hike 5 + miles off trail in sometimes physically challenging conditions to reach target sites and install ARUs. Volunteers will start with a team lead and training will be provided. If you are interested, please contact Luke Bennett and John Ribes conservation@carolinamountainclub.org

Restoring Butternut Forest Health



Butternut trees are a naturally rare species that support wildlife, contribute to ecosystem diversity, and have been culturally important for thousands of years. However, populations have declined drastically due to a lethal disease: butternut canker. Most remaining trees are infected, but a small number are still thriving. Finding and studying diseased and disease-resistant trees is critical to restoring them.

That's why Morton Arboretum and Purdue University's Department of Forestry and Natural Resources have partnered with Adventure Scientists to locate remaining butternut trees, assess their health, and collect leaf samples from trees that may hold disease-resistant genetics. If you love to hike, bike, or explore forests, you can turn your next adventure into meaningful conservation by helping locate rare butternut trees, some of which may hold the genetic key to prosperous forests.

Volunteers are needed across a huge range of forests in the eastern United States, where there are significant gaps in research. Project locations span national forests, state forests and land trusts (over 1000 acres in size) in Alabama, Arkansas, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Wisconsin, and West Virginia.
Butternut trees grow along streams and rocky hillsides. Once trained, you will receive access to a map with possible butternut tree locations and be able to choose an area you're comfortable with.

If you're interested, sign-up now! Sampling equipment is limited, and each tree must be found in the summer while leaves are still green. There are also opportunities to save other tree species like the American beech! If you have any questions you can contact Luke Bennett and John Ribes conservation@carolinamountainclub.org and we'll get you in touch directly with Adventure Scientists.