

November 2015

2015-2016 AFHA AmeriCorps Positions Still Available



The Beverly Heritage Center, the site of one of the open positions. Photo from their [website](#).

There are still some 2015-2016 AFHA AmeriCorps positions available! If you know somebody who is looking for an opportunity to make a difference for West Virginia, encourage them to apply. Positions include working with the Elkins MainStreet, the Beverly Heritage Center, and a position, starting in the spring, with PRO ON TRAC, in Parsons. More information is available at our website, [here](#).

Working Toward A Natural Forest

By AFHA AmeriCorps Members serving with The Nature Conservancy



SITES



~ OF THE ~ MONTH

Experience the heritage of your area! *Sites of the Month* spotlights events and locations within the region, based on AFHA's four themes: forestry, history, culture, and nature.



[Pierson Hollow](#), in Nicholas County's Carnifax Ferry Battlefield State Park, contains 30 acres of old growth forest, one of the few remaining such stands in the

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The TNC crew doing invasive species control. Photo by Ben Rhodes, Esq.

Many people are familiar with the overall mission of The Nature Conservancy, which is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. The specific means and methods by which that mission is pursued may be less well-known, especially when one is asking about local issues and efforts to resolve them. As you might suspect, there are a variety of environmental challenges specific to the Appalachian region which require specialized solutions, and a commitment of years or even decades, to be resolved.

While the work of TNC in West Virginia is quite varied, the field crew comprised of AFHA AmeriCorps volunteers is primarily focused on two main projects: Red Spruce restoration efforts and invasive species control. Red Spruce restoration is multi-faceted, but primarily focuses on spruce planting and spruce release. Spruce planting is fairly intuitive: seedling spruce trees are planted in areas that were historically dominated by that species, especially when the planting area helps to connect remaining stands of spruce forest. Spruce release involves removing competing tree species from areas where spruce are already established but are not yet the primary forest component. In both cases, the intended effect is to accelerate the natural ecological succession of the forest in order to restore a functioning spruce-dominated ecosystem in as much of its original range as possible.

Growth Forest Site by the Old Growth Forest Network. The stand consists of varied species such as yellow poplar, hemlock, and red oak. Some of the trees in this area are as much as 400 years old.



The [Elkins Coal and Coke Company Historic District](#) in Preston County consists of 140 beehive coke ovens, and held the distinction of being the last operating coke oven in the United States. The site was designated a National Historic District in 1978, and as a National Historic Landmark in 1983. The ovens and many of the other structures were built in 1906, and originally numbered closer to 400. However, in 2003, a number of the extant buildings were destroyed. Most beehive coke ovens stopped production following World War I in favor of newer technologies, although the Elkins Coal and Coke Company coke ovens continued to operate into the 1980s.

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public and private lands. Not all invasive species are equally problematic or cause the same type of issues, but in general they tend to interfere with the established ecological processes of an area and often come to dominate it due to a lack of predators and parasites that would limit their success and promote diversity in their natural habitat. Exotic species that provide little or no ecological benefit to the rest of the food web compared to native species can alter the ecological balance of an ecosystem and reduce or destroy the populations of other species that require the native plants to survive. Removing such invasive species is therefore often necessary in order to allow the local ecosystem to recover.

In both spruce restoration and invasive species control, the AmeriCorps volunteers are boots on the ground, serving on both public and private lands with the goal of restoring the ecological integrity of forested habitats that have been weakened by generations of stress from agriculture, mining, timber extraction, development, and other human activities. These stresses have changed the environmental character of the entire region, by causing the loss of much of the old growth forests (spruce and hardwood both) and by facilitating the establishment of aggressive exotic species that impair or prevent the ecosystems from regenerating naturally. In a place where the mountains and forests and rivers are so closely tied to the culture of the people who inhabit it, the destruction of the lands and waters is essentially an assault on the identity of the people who call them home.

Welcome Center Celebrates Diversity

By Samantha Helman

AFHA AmeriCorps Heritage Team Member

[Mountain City Traditional Arts](#)

is a public folklore outreach arm of Frostburg State University in Allegany County, MD. MCTA presents traditional arts and music, while also providing a venue for traditional artists to sell their work. It is a partnership of the Allegany Arts Council, Frostburg State University, the Frostburg First Main Street Program, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the FSU Foundation, and Maryland Traditions of the Maryland State Arts Council. It is entirely run by students at FSU with assistance from their professor, folklorist Dr. Kara Rogers Thomas.



[Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area](#)

is a well-loved site in Pendleton County, containing many natural attractions including Spruce Knob, which at 4863 feet above sea level is the highest point in both West Virginia and the Allegheny Mountain Range. Smoke Hole Canyon, a gorge recognized for its rich biological

they would have a lot to share!

Since opening its doors in 2006, the Welcome Center has been supported by its dedicated volunteers, all active members of the Elkins community. These volunteers have shaped the Center since its early days, proving they are the best source of knowledge on all things West Virginia, and are more valuable than any informational brochure. In the past year alone, volunteers have contributed 1,162 hours to the operation of the Center and continue to be its driving force.

The volunteers have welcomed over 290,000 visitors during the past nine years. In 2015, visitors have traveled from 41 different states and 18 different countries to visit the Elkins community. This cultural and geographic diversity inspires the Welcome Center to continue its vital interactions with visitors. One can easily see why travelers from all over are attracted to Elkins: unique performance and visual arts, a rich heritage and history, and picturesque state parks and national forests.

Over the years, the Welcome Center has taken on many new projects including the Ramps and Rails Festival and Rampage 5K, which will take place on April 30, 2016. The Center's involvement with the community is significant, as it assists visitors during some of the city's major events, such as the Mountain State Forest Festival and The Polar Express.

The Elkins Depot Welcome Center anticipates being an informative hub for locals and visitors alike for years to come. For more information regarding the Elkins Depot Welcome Center or to request information about volunteering, please call (304) 635-7803, or visit at 315 Railroad Ave, Elkins, WV, 26241. The Welcome Center can also be found at elkinsdepot.com and on [Facebook](#).

Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area was established by congress in 1965, making it the first National Recreation Area to be designated in the USDA Forest Service.

Do you have a suggestion for *Sites of the Month*? Email us at: info@appalachianforest.us and let us know your favorite sites throughout AFHA!

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Elkins Depot Welcome Center. Photo by Josh Chrysler

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