

October 2015

## 2015-2016 AFHA AmeriCorps Members Sworn In



AFHA's new AmeriCorps members. Photo by Heather Foster

Although most have been at their service sites for a month now, the 2015-2016 AFHA AmeriCorps members were all sworn in during their stay in Charleston last week, while attending the Faces of Leadership conference. We're excited to see the great work they do this year to further the mission of the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area!

## The H.O.T Report

By Kate M. Kocyba

AFHA AmeriCorps Hands On Team Member

For the past month the Hands on Team - Molly Greenhouse, Jenny Hart, Katie Sammons and me, Kate Kocyba - spent the



Our next concert is Wednesday, October 28th at 7:30pm featuring Darrin Hacquard at the Darden Mill. For more info, visit the [event page](#) on facebook.

## 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.

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has been an adventure and no small task, even Anne Hartman joined our team a few days each week as we installed a cedar shake shingle roof. Unlike asphalt shingles, cedar shakes are not uniform. Every shingle is hand split, so wonky shingles can cause a roof to turn ugly quick. However under the capable guidance of our HistoriCorps leaders, John Bales and Jon Williams, we the "H.O.T. Girls" managed to accomplish our task even with the rain delays of late September and a shortage of shingles in the beginning of October.

Over the course of the weeks at Stuart Pavilion all of us learned different skills. We all can set up scaffolding and break it down in a blink of an eye. All of us know how to use roofing safety harnesses, some of us better than others. I have learned that I should always carry a first aid kit with me. Katie has learned to kill "giant spiders" with her hammer and how to lay a course of shingles with great efficiency. Molly is a master with the nail gun and Jenny used a jigsaw with such ease that the hips on the roof are capped to near perfection. By the end of this project we acquired a new mantra of "Pick a Stick" for there is no perfect shingle, so one must pick one, nail it down and carry on, or otherwise we would still be on the roof.

On that note our first project is complete as of October 9 and we are moving onto our other projects. What will the future hold? Well really only Alison T. (our AFHA Hands On Team Leader) knows.

The [Olson Observation Tower](#), in Tucker County, is one of the few remaining fire lookouts in the Monongahela National Forest. The original tower at this site, built in 1922, was the first fire lookout in the state of West Virginia. It was replaced by the current tower in 1963. At an elevation of 3726 feet, plus the 133 steps to the top, the lookout affords a commanding view of the surrounding area. Although no longer used for monitoring the forest, fire lookouts were an important part of early forest management.



[George Washington's](#)

[Headquarters](#) in

Cumberland, MD, is a small log cabin built in 1754-55.

Washington used this building as headquarters on two separate occasions.

First, during the French and Indian war, when he was just beginning his military and political career, and



CCC Pavilion-Before. Photo by Kate M. Kocyba



CCC Pavilion-After. Photo by Kate M. Kocyba

## Dammed Now, Restored Later

By Emily Peters

AFHA AmeriCorps Conservation Team Member

The sun has set on my first year as an AFHA AmeriCorps member, and the dawn is breaking on my second year. I will once again be serving at the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service West Virginia Field Office in Elkins. Keeping true to the "AmeriCorps way", my decision to stay for a second

cabin is the only remaining structure from Fort Cumberland, and has been moved two blocks from its original site to its present day location in Riverside Park.



[Kultur Haus Helvetia](#) is a non-profit organization in Helvetia that houses a number of important community services, including the General Store, the Fasnacht Mask Museum, the Helvetia Alpen Lodge, Post Office, Research Center, and Emergency Center. The Fasnacht Mask Museum contains several donated masks made by community members and others for use in the pre-Lenten celebration of Fasnacht in this Randolph County community.



[Greenland Gap Preserve](#), in Grant County, is a 250 acre

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My first week back in action proved that this will be another exciting year as I dive head first into a public relations project involving the removal of several dams on the West Fork River. Actually, a better way to describe it would be that I was thrown into deep, shark infested waters and expected to both keep myself afloat and not get eaten alive. Up until that point I had only dipped my toes into the water, not realizing it was about to become a roaring sea.

For several months now, my office has been buzzing with involved conversations about the removal of the dams. I knew it was kind of a big deal, but then quickly understood the multitude of the project when one day my co-worker approached me with a list of tasks and said “welcome to the chaos.” My job was to prepare educational outreach materials for a public meeting about the removal of the dams. I had one week to learn everything there is to know about the dam removals, write an informational article that hit all of the necessary key points, have it be proofread several times over to ensure political correctness, and complete any other duties as assigned. I would also like to point out that the list of key points was a ¾ page list and the article could only be one page, double sided! just saying. However, I faced the challenge head on and wrote the story of the dam removals which goes something like this:

feature of the Preserve is the gap itself, which has 800 foot cliffs of Oriskany Sandstone formed by the North Fork of Patterson Creek. The Nature Conservancy is currently using this site for research on the Allegheny woodrat, a species which is found at the Preserve, but declining through much of its range.

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Do you have a suggestion for *Sites of the Month*?

Email us at:

[info@appalachianforest.us](mailto:info@appalachianforest.us)

and let us know your favorite sites throughout AFHA!

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*Snuffbox mussel; a species of interest in the West Fork River. Photo credit: fws.gov*

In 2008, the rising public safety and liability concerns that accompany the West Milford, Highland, and Two Licks dams on the West Fork River prompted the Clarksburg Water Board (CWB) to request assistance from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) to explore the removal of the low-head dams. More than 336 deaths have been associated with low-head dams in the U.S. since 1960 and 227 of them have taken place in the last 15 years, largely due to increasing recreational use of our nation's rivers.<sup>[1]</sup> This pattern promises to increase along the West Fork River if the dangerous low-head dams remain in their current state. The most recent deaths include three canoeists in 2000 and the drowning of a young woman in August 2015.

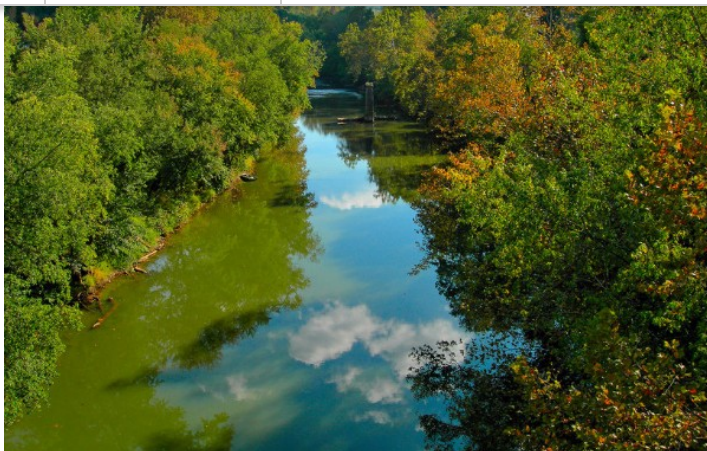
The USFWS West Virginia Field Office and its Partners for Fish and Wildlife program readily volunteered to take on the dam removal project. Not only would removing the dams eliminate the threats to public safety, but it would also increase fish and wildlife habitat. Species of particular interest to the USFWS include endangered freshwater mussels. Mussels, in general, have significant ecological benefits as natural water filters, improving water quality for fish and other aquatic-dependent wildlife as well as the citizens of Harrison County.

The Harrison County Commission has indicated an interest in acquiring the dams, but it has not made clear how they will fund the needed safety improvements and maintenance.

Without the funding to retrofit dams for safety or boat passage, stopping the dam removal project will mean keeping the status quo. This includes the public safety hazards, costly liabilities, mandatory safety inspections and frequent maintenance expenses. To date these costs have been covered by CWB revenue, but now may be passed on to the taxpayers of Harrison County.

The removal of the dams has obvious benefits to the community. The restored pool and riffle habitat will create a safe and scenic retreat for families and fishermen alike. The project will significantly enhance the West Fork Water Trail by providing safe and unobstructed paddling for a 60 mile stretch of river. [\[ii\]](#) Paddlers will no longer have to navigate the dangerous and difficult portage around the dams.

With the removal of the dams, there will be a significant boost in the local economy. Species such as smallmouth bass, sauger, walleye, and other game fish will increase creating an unprecedented WV destination fishery. This will attract more sport fishermen, anglers, and fishing clubs who boost the local economy by spending money on a wide variety of goods and services including food, lodging, equipment, fuel, and supplies. Dam removal will also increase riparian habitat for waterfowl species, which could attract more waterfowl hunters to further increase profit to local businesses and industries. The socioeconomic benefits of the stream restorations are well documented, and can lead to an average profit of \$500,000 per restored river mile in the surrounding communities. [\[iii\]](#)



*West Fork River, 1996. Photo credit: city-data.com*

This project will restore the ecological integrity of approximately 40 miles of the West Fork River and 964 more miles of adjoining streams and tributaries. The removal of the structures will restore approximately 12.5 miles of artificially ponded river habitat and change the water levels there to be similar in appearance to current sections of undisturbed reaches upstream of the pools and immediately below the existing dams. The removals will also restore the natural riffle pool structure of the river for federally listed species such as freshwater mussels, which are important to the overall health and ecological balance of the river as natural filters.

The new, lower water levels will decrease the chances of floods but also expose many years of trash and debris. The USFWS has offered assistance in removing the exposed debris and restoring riparian land through plantings and seedings, at no cost to the landowner. The USFWS is also offering services to livestock farmers at no cost. Cattle using the river as a water source deposit fecal matter into the system, contaminating drinking water for the local community. The USFWS will provide fencing and alternate water sources on the landowner's property to ensure protection of the river from this contamination.

While dams historically benefited society, they also cause

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dam removal is often the preferred approach to restore a river's ecosystem and riverside communities. After getting involved with this project, learning what there is to know about dam removals, and listening to comments on both sides from citizens of Harrison County, conservation partners, Harrison County Commission, and Clarksburg Water Board, there is a real possibility that the dams will stay in place. However, I am hopeful that the hard work and long hours put forward by the USFWS and other partners will not be wasted, with or without dam removal.

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[i] Tschantz, 2015. Documented Drownings at Low-head Dams in the U.S. (1960-2015). Consulting Engineering, Knoxville, TN.

[ii] US Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service: Position Statement Regarding the Dam Removal and Water Trail projects on the West Fork River in WV

[iii] Charbonneau and Caudill. 2010. Conserving America's Fisheries; An Assessment of Economic Contributions from Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Conservation. Division of Economics, Fish and Wildlife Service, Arlington, VA.

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