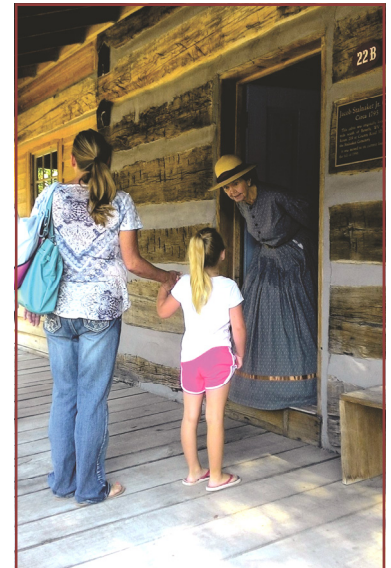


AFHA Accomplishments for 2017

Promoting rural community development through heritage tourism and forest conservation.

Appalachian Forest Heritage Area celebrates the central Appalachian forest: its history, culture, natural history, forest management and products. This grassroots partnership works in West Virginia and western Maryland to explore the relationship between the Appalachian highlands forest and the people who live there.

- **Appalachian Forest Discovery Center** – AFHA Museum in downtown Elkins encourages visitors to explore sites all across our area. The Discover AFHA exhibit showcases Nature, History, Culture, and Forestry. “Forestry: Healthy Forests for the Common Good” was the featured exhibit for the 2017 season.
- **Tourism** – AFHA is developing new on-line Thematic Story Map Tours of AFHA sites. The first Tour, on “Early Settlement,” is at: www.appalachianforest.us/visit.htm
- **Interpretation** – AFHA partnered to develop new interpretive signs for the Northland Loop Trail at Dolly Sods.
- **Conservation** – AFHA supported non-native invasive species awareness efforts and the planting of native trees.
- **Partnerships** – The US Forest Service recognized the value of AFHA partnership with an honorable mention in the 2017 Chief's Honor Awards for Volunteerism and Service. AFHA expanded partnerships with HistoriCorps, the Mountain Music Trail, Potomac Highlands Tourism Consortium, and invasive species control collaborative.
- **National Recognition** – National Heritage Area designation will bring national recognition and more capacity to help local communities. AFHA is active now as a grassroots heritage area, including membership in the Alliance of National Heritage Areas.



Complex Forests Many Benefits

Canopy
The canopy, or overstory, is what most people think of when they think of a forest. These are the trees that store carbon, are harvested and made into wood products, and also provide habitat to many wildlife species. Forests provide clean water for people and animals. Forests create shade and cooler water temperatures along streams benefiting native fish like brook trout.

Understory
Plants under the larger canopy trees include tree seedlings (the future forest), shrubs, and other plants including some people like to eat such as ramps. The forest understory is also a place where many wildlife species find food and shelter. A forest provides habitat – the combination of food, shelter, water, and space to raise young – for many grass and non-grass animals.

Soil
Forests start from the ground up with acids and soil (the decaying plant material) just above the soil. Carbon is moved to leaves and where nutrients are recycled and made available to plants on the site. Undisturbed soils and full layers reduce soil erosion resulting in less sediment in streams and rivers.

Recreational and Environmental Benefits
Forests provide scenic beauty, wildlife habitat, ecological diversity captured carbon from the atmosphere, and give people opportunities for recreation, camping, hiking, hunting, bird watching, and wildlife.

Quality managed forests can continue to provide benefits like clean water and wildlife habitat to non-commercial forest products while also providing economic benefits to a landowner through sustainable harvest of timber.



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Appalachian Forest Heritage Area AmeriCorps

Benefiting West Virginia Communities

In 2017, 77 AFHA AmeriCorps members served over 64,000 hours at 32 various sites in West Virginia. They improved 2,985 acres of public land and served over 38,000 people. Members provided service for the environment and for rural communities.

Conservation:

- Restored ecosystems on 1272 acres including planting over 16,000 native trees.
- Managed 156 volunteers who pulled over 13,640 pounds of invasive garlic mustard. AFHA AmeriCorps field crews treated 1482 acres to control invasive species such as autumn olive, Japanese knotweed, Japanese stilt-grass and multi-flora rose.
- Restored wetland habitat that benefited over 40 miles of streams with increased native trout.
- Reached over 3500 people through environmental outreach programs.

Historic Preservation

- The AFHA Hands On Team partnered with 15 organizations to complete 19 rehabilitation projects.
- They restored a CCC cabin, relaid an historic brick sidewalk, repointed brick buildings in Philippi and Belington, painted and repaired plaster in Elkins City Hall, and restored windows for historic community buildings.

Heritage Tourism and Community Development

- Members served with 9 museum sites, 3 cultural organizations, and 5 community development and tourism initiatives.
- AFHA AmeriCorps helped organize community events, including Beverly Heritage Days, Arthurdale New Deal Festival, and Elkins Ramps and Rails Festival, and improved visitor experience for over 50,000 tourists.
- Preserved community history by collections management, oral history, and the creation of public educational exhibits.

Volunteer Capacity

- AFHA AmeriCorps members managed 1,708 volunteers, and 16 sites reported improved volunteer management practices.
- A recent impact study of Volunteer Management for sites assisted by AFHA AmeriCorps found significantly higher volunteer capacity than sites without AmeriCorps members.
- All organizations receiving volunteer management support from AFHA AmeriCorps members reported that these volunteers helped the organizations be more effective.

Members provide one year service to their sites. They gain professional experience and an Education Award. AmeriCorps instills volunteer ethics in our members, which they then take with them and share with others throughout their lives.

