

GROWTH RINGS

Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area News



Photo by Vernon Patterson

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Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area promotes and supports a network of partnerships based around our unique Forest Heritage. We work in 16 West Virginia counties and 2 counties in Western Maryland.

To learn more about us and the work we do, including our AmeriCorps program, visit www.afnha.org.



Management Planning Update

2020 Reflection:

The Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area would like to thank all those who made Management Planning successful in 2020! We know it was difficult, especially moving everything to virtual Zoom meetings, but YOU made it a success! We were able to host almost 75 stakeholders in our first public virtual meeting in June. Our consultants came for separate and socially distanced visits and were able to see the region that you know is special. Our Task Groups kicked off and have accomplished so much already! So, thank you! Thank you for everything. We hope that you will continue to join and engage with us in 2021. Hearing from YOU is important to our future!

Task Group Updates:

The Organization group continues working with the planning consultants scheduling one-on-one interviews with some selected stakeholders representing a broad range of partners. More updates will follow once these interviews are complete.

The Interpretation group subcommittee continues to work on writing themes and has made some progress. We initially tried writing three short theme statements based on our discussion in the meeting, and several folks offered feedback on those. From the feedback, it seemed like we were missing the articulation of why our area is important - how we are different from anywhere else. So we backed up a bit to try to summarize significance statement that our themes will be based on. This effort is still underway, and we hope to have something to share with you for review fairly soon.

The Stewardship and Enhancement group continues to gather information for our Asset Inventory. Email us at planning@afnha.org if you'd like to get involved in that! One more follow-up meeting for natural, conservation, and outdoor recreation efforts is on **January 27, at 1:30 pm**. Find the Zoom information on our [website](#).



MLK JR DAY OF SERVICE



OUR AMERICORPS MEMBERS HAVE BEEN ENGAGING IN ACT OF SERVICE TO HONOR MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. WE WANTED TO HIGHLIGHT A FEW OF THEM:

Hannah Studdard (on the left), serving with the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge, an adaptive ski student on tethers (middle), and an adaptive ski employee (right). The adaptive ski program at Snowshoe Mountain provides modified ski equipment and lessons to all age groups dealing with physical and/or mental handicaps. They have a large volunteer base and a passionate group of employees that ensures the program runs smoothly each ski season. The participants come from all over, this one came from North Carolina!



Sam Urban, serving with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, organized a food drive with Tyrand Cooperative Ministries. Pictured here with his father, Sam collected donations that helped create many food boxes for those in need at the local food pantry!

For a week in December 2020, AFNHA AmeriCorps members decorated the Randolph County Humane Society buildings in Elkins, WV for a holiday adoption event. They shared pictures and videos of the animals on the social media page to increase adoptions. During the week long project the members were able to find 23 new homes for the sweet fur babies. Adoptions continued to flood in even after the event because of the circulating videos on the RCHS Facebook page.

AFNHA Members that were part of the project included: Kaitlyn Deskins, Morgan Glup, Patrick Hecht, Kristen Stanford, Alex Brown, Emma Pringle, Lindsay Dobrovolny, Cassidy Attanasio, Spencer Kuchle



Adventures from Canaan Valley By: Emily Langer

To say life in Canaan Valley was an adventure would be an understatement. The longer I am here, the more I believe that your service year is what you make of it. The opportunities with Canaan Valley and AFNHA have seemed endless.



I am fortunate enough to be serving with the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge in their biology department. Day 1 on site, we dove head first into field work beginning occupancy surveys for the threatened Cheat Mountain Salamander. Sometimes the best way of learning, is by doing and so I was eager to get my hands dirty. Being in the field can often be challenging, messy work but it is also some of the most rewarding. We certainly earned a good rest after hiking miles up the mountains and through the forested terrains in search of these small creatures.

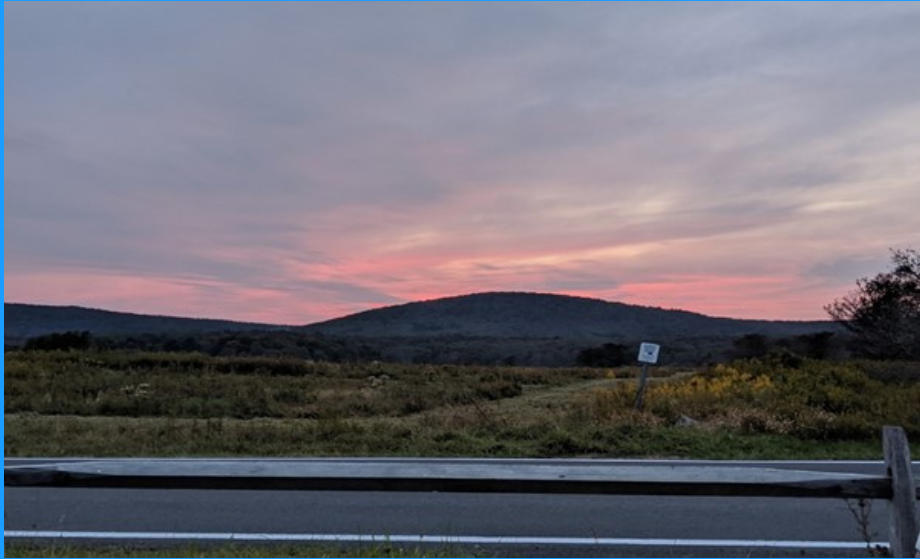
Soon, long days turned into long nights as we set out to capture a new species, the *American Woodcock*. These silly looking birds migrate at night, so mist nets were set up at sunset and the search began at nightfall to capture and fit a few individuals with GPS trackers to gain a better understanding of their migration patterns. It was a race against the clock as we tried to capture these elusive birds before they began their trek south for the winter months. In the end, we captured only one female but the experience was certainly memorable.



The weather in Canaan Valley can sometimes pose a challenge, but we don't let it slow us down. Sometimes, we simply need to find creative ways to get the job done. When the first snow fell in Canaan, data still had to be collected from the weather loggers that were scattered throughout the valley. This data is important for the Cheat Mountain Salamander research that is ongoing, so we strapped on some snowshoes and headed up the mountain trails. Other times, skis proved to be more suited when surveying trails.



While there is still so much in store with spring ahead of us, I have already gained skills that I will carry with me for the rest of my career and have met some amazing people along the way. I am especially excited for the spring when we will be studying vernal pools and continuing salamander surveys. My project will also be in full swing where I will be studying the Canaan Valley white-tailed deer population and the effects of chronic wasting disease. I am looking forward to the adventures that the rest of the year has in store in beautiful Canaan Valley!



Winter Activities in our Region

Click on the links below for more information.

#GetOutThere #ExploreAFNHA

