



2023

ANNUAL REPORT



The Pisgah Conservancy works in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service to provide key resources for the benefit of Pisgah and its visitors for generations to come.

Greetings to all and thanks for your generous support in 2023. Because of that support we accomplished a lot in 2023, much of it focused around new work crews.

In our early conversations about establishing TPC we talked about what this organization would do if we created it. We identified areas where we thought we could contribute and some we'd best avoid. In one discussion a U.S. Forest Service (USFS) employee made a comment that surprised me a bit at the time. He said what we really needed was more maintenance. He said we needed a return to the past when we had well-trained, well-equipped USFS crews going out every day to repair and maintain the trails.

His comment stuck with me as we moved forward. It wasn't the most exciting or sexy concept; not like funding a bridge or relocating a trail. But it was critical to the trails and the forest.

This doesn't mean that maintenance work wasn't already being done. We are fortunate to have a number of well-established user groups, such as the Carolina Mountain Club, Pisgah Area SORBA, Trout Unlimited, Backcountry Horsemen of Pisgah, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Council, the Carolina Climbers Coalition, and others that perform regular maintenance on trails, rivers, and roadways. We have worked with these groups since our inception to try to support and enhance what they do.

But what happens when Pisgah suffers a catastrophic storm, with two one-hundred-year floods in a week? That was Tropical Storm (TS) Fred in 2021. It literally tossed giant boulders around like pebbles, washed out numerous bridges, and relocated river and stream paths. It hit the Pisgah Ranger District hard. That's when our experience and relationship with the USFS allowed us to put our maintenance efforts into high gear.

We first assisted the USFS in cataloging and quantifying the damage from TS Fred, a task that itself took over a year to complete. We then helped the USFS take advantage of disaster relief funding that had been made available and quickly put qualified boots on the ground to tackle the challenges that had been identified. As a result, we now have the work crew we envisioned in those early conversations. We have a core staff of experienced trail specialists going out every day with specialized trail equipment and materials to tackle the hundreds of repairs needed after TS Fred. That's a big success for TPC in 2023 and for the forest for years to come.

In a broader sense, "maintenance" can also refer to eliminating non-native invasive species (NNIS). I'm happy to report that we are also on the verge of establishing for the first time a dedicated crew to tackle some discreet NNIS infestations. We've done NNIS removal work for years, but for the first time we will have a dedicated crew addressing that need on a daily basis. We have funding lined up to support this crew for a couple of years, and we are working hard to find ways to extend that effort (as well as the TS Fred crew) indefinitely. I see NNIS as one of the most significant challenges in the Pisgah Ranger District, and I'm excited we are now able to start addressing it in a systematic, ongoing manner.

Storms and invasives happen. It's how we deal with them that matters. TPC upgraded its response capability in 2023, and that calls for a bit of a celebration as we head into the new year.



John A. Cottingham
Founder & Executive Director

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INTRODUCING OUR NEW MISSION STATEMENT

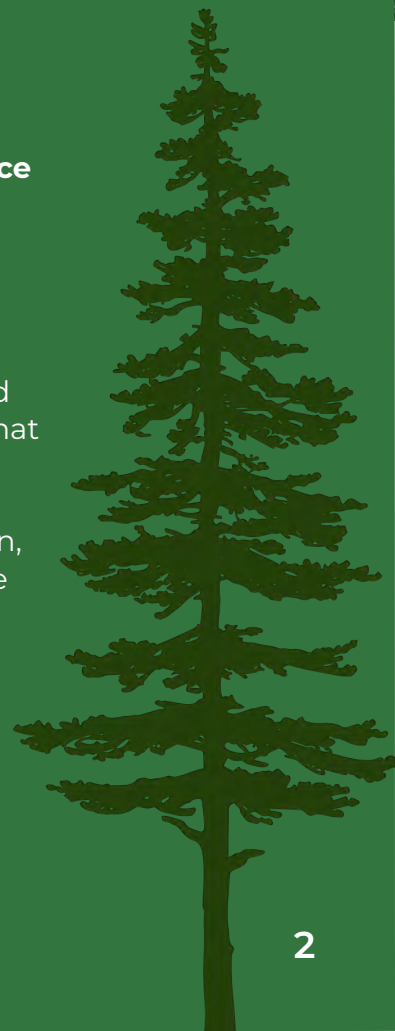
We're stepping into 2024 with a new mission statement:

“The Pisgah Conservancy works in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service to provide key resources for the benefit of Pisgah and its visitors for generations to come.”

Our original mission statement, “To preserve the natural resources and scenic beauty of the Pisgah Ranger District and to enhance the recreational experience of all visitors to Pisgah,” was perfect for our early years. It depicted our overall purpose while our fledgling organization was still determining what the “how” portion of our work looked like.

As we continue to build an on-the-ground workforce; prove our ability to plan, fund, and implement major projects; and boost the community’s knowledge of and support for TPC; we felt the time was right to update our mission statement. The intention was to describe – succinctly – how we support the Pisgah Ranger District now that we are 8+ years into this journey and have many accomplishments under our belt.

Thank you for being part of our journey so far. We’re excited to see what the future holds for Pisgah and for all that we’ll accomplish together!





2023 CREW



ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF:

Nina Ardle, *Chief Administrative and Development Officer*

Jeff Maitz, *Chief Operating Officer and Program Director*

TRAIL STAFF:

Simon Farr, *Trails and Recreation Technician*

Michael Bagwell, *Trail Crew Leader*

Alexis de Seze, *Trail Crew Leader*

Kate Bergbower, *Seasonal Trail Crew Member*

Kevin Mathews, *Seasonal Trail Crew Member*

Layton Stephenson, *Seasonal Trail Crew Member*

PISGAH RIVER RANGERS:

Rachel Hess, *Lead River Ranger*

Skylar Deaton, *River Ranger*

Maddie Robuck, *River Ranger*

K'nai Nelson, *River Ranger*

Autumn Wright, *River Ranger*



BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

John Cottingham, *Founder and Executive Director*

Peter Barry

Allen McMurtry

Amos Beason

Beverly Melenzyer

Nancy DePippo

David Pharr

Clark Gallivan

Kent Satterfield

Elizabeth Jackson

Adam Skoog

Gail Kinard

INAUGURAL YEAR OF THE TPC TRAIL CREW

TPC's first ever, full-time professional trail crew hit the ground running in May, filling a long-held need of the District and its extensive and heavily-used trail system. Made possible through an agreement with the USFS, this crew is providing much-needed on-the-ground support to repair trail damage caused by Tropical Storm Fred in August 2021.

The crew completed extensive trail improvements throughout the District in its first 7 months, including constructing multiple large trail bridges, building numerous locust staircases, turnpiking, installing bog bridges, getting into some long-overdue heavy brushing, and more.

Federal funding is currently in place for the Trail Crew for a 3-year period, however, TPC hopes to build upon our successes and garner community support to continue this program well into the future.

Led by full-time co-leaders Michael Bagwell and Alexis de Seze, the 2023 Trail Crew also included three seasonal members who joined TPC from October through December to augment our workforce and allow us to complete larger scale projects.



2023 TRAIL CREW ACCOMPLISHMENTS

NEW BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION ON:

- **Cat Gap Loop**
(30-foot trail bridge)
- **Pink Beds Loop**
(32-foot footlog style bridge)
- **Fork Mountain trail, upper section**
(12-foot footlog style bridge over a washed-out drainage)
- **Buckhorn Gap trail**
(40-foot footlog style bridge)
- **Looking Glass Rock trail**
(16-foot dimensional lumber bridge to replace a failed bridge)

The Trail Crew also repaired, decked, and added a handrail to a 20-foot log-stringer bridge on Pilot Cove-Slate Rock trail.

HEAVY BRUSHING WORK ON:

- **South Mills River trail** - *Fully logged out and brushed all 12 miles of trail and camped out to clear the interior sections, which are among the most remote areas of the District and had not been brushed for many years.*
- **Flat Laurel Creek trail** - *Brushed entirety of trail.*

MAJOR TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS ON:

- **Art Loeb trail between Ivestor Gap trail and Tennent Mountain** - *Construction and filling of a 55+ step staircase with incorporated water diversions to restore a deeply entrenched section of trail.*
- **Bradley Creek and South Mills River trails** - *Construction of 45 feet of turnpike through boggy areas and of locust steps and waterbars on severely entrenched sections of trail.*
- **Yellow Gap trail** - *Construction of 48 locust steps and waterbars on a heavily entrenched section of trail.*
- **Courthouse Falls trail** - *Removal of a damaged bridge; construction of a stone retaining wall, steps, and locust box steps; and replacement of failed deckboards.*

PROGRAM AND PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

MACEDONIA CHURCH ROAD CLEANUP

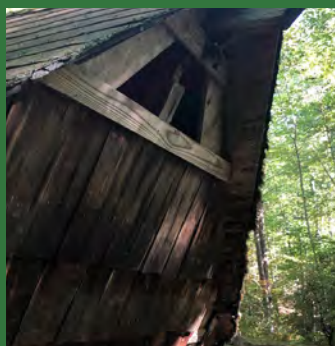
TPC partnered with Headwaters Outfitters and the USFS in February to clean up, rehabilitate, and block off an illegal dumpsite along the North Fork of the French Broad River near the junction of Highway 215 and Macedonia Church Road in the Balsam Grove area. Thanks to these efforts and the hard work of community volunteers, this beautiful riverside corner of Pisgah is now free of waste and wreckage and ready for all visitors to enjoy. A total of 7,920 pounds of trash was removed from the site, impacted areas were rehabilitated and seeded, and boulders were strategically placed to prevent pull-through dumping abuse while maintaining the public parking needed to access the area.



CONSTRUCTION OF BUTTER GAP SHELTER

With the assistance of volunteers from the Conservative Anabaptist Service Program (CASP), TPC completed construction of the Butter Gap trail shelter on the Art Loeb trail following demolition of the previous, dilapidated shelter in late 2022. Construction went smoothly and swiftly: from raising the rough-cut 6x6 posts, installing joists and floorboards, setting the ridge beam, and framing out the floor and walls to hanging rafters, installing siding, and roofing the structure. The new trail shelter is now complete and ready to safely and comfortably accommodate backpackers on the Pisgah. This project was made possible by funds from the Great American Outdoors Act. Stay tuned for the reconstruction of the second trail shelter at Deep Gap in 2024!

BEFORE



AFTER





VISITOR INFORMATION

With design and content development complete, new signage is currently in production for the well-loved and heavily visited Cat Gap-John Rock and Black Balsam-Tennent Mountain trail complexes. In addition to wayfinding signage along the trail, a new multi-panel kiosk at the Cat Gap-John Rock area will provide visitors with in-depth information on the unique human and geologic histories of this very special area.



COLLABORATIONS AND SUPPORT

As an organization dedicated to connecting all of Pisgah's stakeholders and user groups, collaboration with and support of like-minded partner organizations is crucial to TPC's mission and everyday operations. Whether through providing direct funding for specific partner-led projects (such as funding we provided to support Pisgah Area SORBA's installation of trail counters to collect user data in three popular trail complexes), serving as a liaison with the USFS for moving mutually beneficial projects forward, or providing on-the-ground personnel support, TPC has collaborated with many great local organizations on a variety of projects related to trails and recreation, coldwater conservation, wildlife habitat improvement, trash cleanup, education, and non-native species eradication.

Special recognition goes to TPC's Trails and Recreation Technician, Simon Farr, who is a key collaborator with our partner groups in the field. Simon regularly joins our partner groups on trail projects across the District, teaches crosscut certification classes, coordinates on overnight volunteer trail work trips, and more.

Here's to all of our collaborative partners we have worked with on projects in 2023! Great thanks to the U.S. Forest Service, Back Country Horsemen of Pisgah, Carolina Climbers Coalition, Carolina Mountain Club, Conservative Anabaptists Service Program, Pisgah Area SORBA, Pisgah Cowboys, FIND Outdoors, Trout Unlimited, NC Fish and Wildlife Conservation Council, Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards, MountainTrue, Transylvania County Extension Master Gardeners, and Waterfall Keepers of North Carolina.



NEW TRAIL CONSTRUCTION

BLACK MOUNTAIN CONNECTOR TRAIL

In late 2023 we completed construction of a new .2 mile trail connecting the new Black Mountain parking lot with the Black Mountain and Sycamore Cove trail complex via Thrift Cove Road (FS 5061). In addition to building the trail itself, the team of local trailbuilders from Trail Dynamics installed a bottomless arch culvert with accompanying drystone masonry spanning 10 feet over a perennial seep in the trail corridor. This structure will both minimize negative impacts to the water source and provide an aesthetic, iconic, and well-constructed entryway into this extremely popular Pisgah trail system. Thank you to the Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority, The Hub and Pisgah Tavern, REI, and the National Forest Foundation for their support of this project.



SEARCY CREEK CONNECTOR TRAIL

Construction of the new Searcy Creek Connector trail began in 2023 and is continuing into 2024, with local trail builder Shrimper Khare and his crew on the ground building this 1.15 mile trail that will connect FS Road 5095 with the top of the Butter Gap complex. Providing increased trail connectivity and loop opportunities, this trail will also offer access to a stunning part of Pisgah with winter views of Looking Glass Rock, Cedar Rock, and the Pisgah Ledge. Excitingly, this new trail marks the first ground broken on the larger Butter Gap project, a partnership project with Pisgah Area SORBA, which, after years of planning and compliance work, will ramp up in earnest in 2024. Thank you to the Fernandez Pave the Way Foundation for their generous support of this project, and to The Hub and Pisgah Tavern and Cane Creek Cycling Components, whose generous support over the years has made projects like this possible.



PISGAH PROJECT DAY

Pisgah Project Day (PPD) was held on Earth Day (Saturday, April 22nd). On that day, more than 350 volunteers helped us accomplish 26 improvement projects throughout the Pisgah Ranger District, including:

- ✿ Construction of a new 16-foot trail bridge on Lower Sidehill trail
- ✿ Full re-decking of a 70-foot suspension bridge on North Mills River trail
- ✿ Preparation and abutment work for the construction of a new 30-foot trail bridge on Cat Gap Loop trail
- ✿ Graffiti removal, maintenance, and viewshed improvement at Looking Glass Falls
- ✿ Installation of three bog bridges and rock armoring across the slide on Daniel Ridge trail
- ✿ Heavy mechanized trail improvement projects on South Mills River and Cove Creek trails
- ✿ Horseback trail clearing of 20 total miles on Horse Cove, Cantrell Creek, and South Mills River trails
- ✿ New turnpike construction on the Exercise, Estatoe, and Cat Gap Loop trails
- ✿ Dumpsite cleanup off of Highway 215 across from Courthouse Creek Road
- ✿ Gardening projects at the Ranger Station and Cradle of Forestry
- ✿ Non-native invasive species (NNIS) removal along Avery Creek Road and at Ledford trailhead in Bent Creek
- ✿ Demolition and removal of an illegal structure in Fate Osteen Cove

Thank you to our generous PPD 2023 sponsors:

Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority, Hunter Subaru, Blue Ridge Orthodontics, D.D. Bullwinkel's Outdoors, Fisher Realty, Mast General Store, Motion Makers Bicycle Shop and Sycamore Cycles, Oskar Blues Brewery, Pilot Cove, Range Urgent Care, Sierra Nevada Brewing Co., Vulcan Materials Company, Adventure Pisgah, Bartlett Tree Experts, Comporium, GRAYL, Looking Glass Realty, O.P. Taylor's, Pisgah Coffee Roasters, Piney Mountain Bike Lounge, Pisgah Map Co., REI, Water Oak Dental, 3oak Handcrafted, Altura Architects, Brevard Insurance Company, ELEVATE Physical Therapy, First Citizens Bank, FYZICAL Therapy & Balance Centers, Gaia Herbs, PLATT, and Unplug with Nature Hiking Group.

Thank you to our dedicated PPD 2023 partners:

U.S. Forest Service, Back Country Horsemen of Pisgah, Carolina Climbers Coalition, Carolina Mountain Club, FIND Outdoors, Further Trails, NC Fish and Wildlife Conservation Council, Pisgah Area SORBA, Pisgah Cowboys, Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards, Trail Dynamics, Transylvania County Extension Master Gardeners, and Trout Unlimited.



PISGAH RIVER RANGERS

The Pisgah River Rangers had a successful fifth season providing outreach and education, restoring habitat, and assisting with cleanup efforts along the Davidson River corridor. In just two and a half months, interns delivered nearly 30 formal education programs to community members, engaged more than 1,700 visitors, and reached more than 170,000 people on Facebook.

Their on-the-ground work consisted of remediating 40 illegal campsites along vital waterways, dismantling 45 rock structures from rivers, and removing nearly 200 pounds of trash from streams, picnic areas, and trails.

Special congratulations to 2022-2023 Lead River Ranger, Rachel Hess! Immediately after the 2023 season ended, Rachel secured a permanent position as the manager of the Pisgah Visitor Center. This is another success story for the Pisgah River Rangers program in developing future public lands leaders.



About Pisgah River Rangers:

Pisgah River Rangers is an outreach and education program designed to promote and protect the ecological health of Pisgah's natural resources. This program focuses on environmental stewardship, public education, and outreach focused on stream health. Pisgah River Rangers is a partnership program supported by TPC, the USFS, the Pisgah Chapter of Trout Unlimited, and the Public Land Corps.



PISGAH PROJECT BIKE RAFFLE



For the seventh consecutive year, Cane Creek Cycling Components brought together a group of premium cycling component manufacturers to build an iconic bike perfect for exploring Pisgah's trails.

Our lucky winner was Russell Turpin from West Columbia, SC! Russell is thrilled to hit the trails with his one-of-a-kind mountain bike. He also received a two-night stay at Pilot Cove, which is the perfect place to stay for a trip to Pisgah!

The 2023 Pisgah Project bike raffle raised more than \$41,000, which brings the total raised by this partnership since the first Pisgah Project bike raffle in 2017 to over \$250,000! We are blown away by the support from Cane Creek Cycling Components, our bike build and display partners, and everyone who has purchased a raffle ticket over the years.



The 2023 Pisgah Project bike raffle was organized by Cane Creek Cycling Components and backed by remarkable partnerships with REEB Cycles, Industry Nine, Thomson Bike, Continental Tires, Crankbrothers, Fizik saddles, TRP, Endless Bike Co., and Pilot Cove.

Thank you to our friends at The Hub and Pisgah Tavern, Gravelo Workshop, REI Asheville, D.D. Bullwinkel's Outdoors, Motion Makers Bicycle Shop, Piney Mountain Bike Lounge, The Riveter, and Oskar Blues Brewery for hosting the bike on its tour around WNC!





COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

ASHEVILLE BLOCK PARTY

We had a blast at the Asheville Block Party hosted by Looking Glass Realty. It was the perfect spring day to jam out to live music performances, shop the local vendor market, sip local craft beer, chow down at a food truck, and play some lawn games on South Liberty Street, all in support of our year-round efforts to improve the Pisgah Ranger District. More than 1,500 people attended the event and more than \$11,000 was raised for TPC! Big thanks to our generous host, Looking Glass Realty Asheville, and the sponsors, musicians, vendors, and volunteers who helped to make the day a success!



SUGARLOAF MOUNTAIN JAM

Thank you to Deerwoode Reserve, Oskar Blues, Jupiter Coyote, Nuthin Fancy, and everyone else who was involved in putting together a successful 2nd Annual Sugarloaf Mountain Jam! We loved meeting new faces and selling beer that was generously donated by Oskar Blues to raise more than \$3,000 for TPC.



CAFFEINATION + COLLABORATION

Throughout the month of April, Pisgah Coffee Roasters sold bags of their specialty “Ranger Roast” blend benefiting TPC! Half of the proceeds from each bag sold were donated to us and thanks to the community’s support of this partnership, nearly \$1,100 was raised for TPC! We’re also grateful to Pisgah Coffee Roasters for keeping our volunteers warm and caffeinated on Pisgah Project Day 2023.



MAST FRIENDS DAY

We were thrilled to be selected as the nonprofit partner for Mast General Store’s Asheville and Hendersonville stores. A portion of the day’s sales were donated and customers were given the opportunity to add a round-up donation all weekend long, resulting in an incredible \$6,025 raised for TPC.

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS



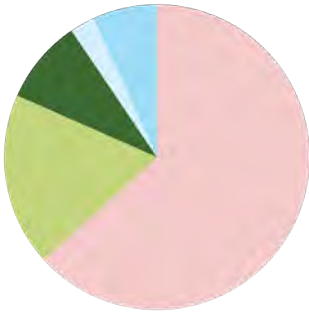
THE OUTDOOR ACADEMY

Jeff Maitz (TPC’s COO and Program Director) served as a panelist for students from The Outdoor Academy. Jeff and other experts led a discussion and answered student questions about human ecology, interacting with nature, and understanding the wilderness on the banks of the Davidson River.

SOCIETY OF OUTDOOR RECREATION PROFESSIONALS (SORP)

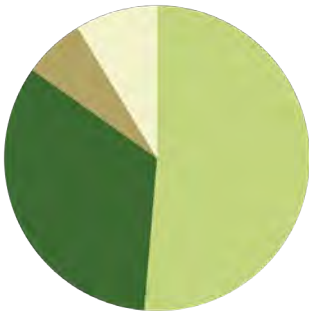
Jeff also spoke to a visiting group from SORP about collaborative trail planning and management and led a tour of recently completed collaborative trail projects in Bent Creek. SORP is a national nonprofit that provides leadership for the outdoor recreation profession through skill development, networking, and technical guidance.

2023 FINANCIALS



EXPENSES

- Program - 63%
- Development - 18%
- Administration - 9%
- Marketing/Advertising - 3%
- Other - 7%



REVENUE

- Direct Public Support - 51%
- Government Agency Support - 34%
- License Plate Revenue - 6%
- Other Revenue - 9%



GET INVOLVED

DONATE

TPC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. We rely on the community's support to continue providing key resources to the Pisgah that benefit every single visitor. Donations can be made online at pisgahconservancy.org, by mail (159 W. Main Street, Unit 2138, Brevard, NC 28712), or by calling 828-782-1418.

GET A PISGAH LICENSE PLATE

NC residents can purchase a TPC license plate for just \$30 when you register or renew a vehicle, and \$20 from each purchase comes right back to TPC! To get your Pisgah license plate, visit your local NCDMV License Plate Agency or visit ncdot.gov.

STAY CONNECTED

Visit pisgahconservancy.org to join our email list, where we send our monthly e-newsletter, event and project updates, job opportunities, and more. You can also follow along with us on social media.

