



The High Knob Herald

Official Newsletter of The Clinch Coalition

No. 10 2015

News From The Knob



9th Annual High Knob Naturalist Rally



Hikers departed at 10am with experts in the lead: **Salamanders**, Wally Smith, UVA-Wise; **High Knob Geology**, Phil Shelton, UVA-Wise; **Wetlands**, Lois Boggs, USFS; **Edible Wild Plants**, Phil Meeks, VA Extension; and **Mushrooms**, Johnny Stanley, Dickenson Co. forager. New hikes included: **Medicinal Plants**, Willie Dodson, Appalachian Voices; and **Wilderness Survival**, Mark and Carol Caruso, local outfitters, Pathfinders. Morning talks by NASA DEVELOP and SAMS were followed by **Mushroom Identification**, Johnny Stanley; and the **Unique Biodiversity of the Clinch Valley**, Brad Kreps, The Nature Conservancy. At mid day the group broke for a free lunch, a chance to make new acquaintances and to connect with nature loving friends. After lunch, live animals took the stage with speakers: **Birds of Prey**, Mitch Whitaker, master falconer, Raptor Rehabilitation Center (Letcher Co, KY); **Snakes and Reptiles**, Chuck Hurd, serpentologist (Scott Co. Va); and **Wolves**, Rhonda Shipley, educational interpreter, Bay Mountain Park (Kingsport, TN).

The 9th annual High Knob Naturalist Rally was a success, despite a rainy start. We had a record 245 people who attended and spent the day appreciating the unique environment of High Knob. Hike leaders and participants explored High Knob, one of the most biologically diverse locations in North America. Conservation and Nature presentations were staged in front of beautiful Bark Camp Lake.



Photos by Bill Harris

Va-Wise Hellbender Survey:

Students at the University of Virginia's College at Wise are partnering with the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to catalog citizen sightings of hellbenders in Southwest Virginia. The Eastern Hellbender (*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis*) - also locally called a "waterdog" or "grampus" - is the largest salamander in North America and a resident of Appalachian rivers and streams that is declining all across its range. Hellbenders are huge animals for amphibians, reaching sizes of up to two feet, and have unique places in Appalachian folklore. Here in Southwest Virginia, though, scientists lack a complete picture of exactly which streams harbor hellbender populations, and this lack of information hinders scientists' abilities to conserve this special creature.



Have you seen a hellbender while fishing or swimming in a local stream? You can help! A sighting made 30 years ago is as good as a sighting last week. If so, please share your observation with students and faculty at UVa-Wise by completing their online survey at <http://tinyurl.com/swvahellbenders>. Photographs of hellbenders are especially encouraged since these provide a verifiable record of a sighting, and photos can be sent directly to Dr. Wally Smith at whs2q@uvawise.edu. Reports without photographs are still incredibly helpful. Please feel free to spread the word with family and friends, scientists need your help to better understand this unique resident of Southwest Virginia!

TCC Supports Better Mining Regulations To Protect Streams

On October 26, The Clinch Coalition joined with 23 other organizations to comment on the need for better regulation of surface coal mining to protect endangered freshwater species. Comments were submitted by the Center for Biological Diversity on behalf of the groups, which also included the Wise County based Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards. A new proposed stream protection rule is being considered by the federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE).

"It is imperative that OSMRE maintain the 1983 stream buffer rule and the 100 foot buffer that rule put into place. This measure is particularly imperative for protecting aquatic dependent wildlife and the waterways that species and our communities rely upon." the comments stated.

According to a study* released last year, by Virginia Tech professors, long-term monitoring since 1979 has documented significant declines of mussel populations in the Virginia section of the Clinch River. The study noted that the Clinch River in southwest Virginia is among the most diverse and ecologically important freshwater systems in North America, with 46 freshwater mussel and 100 fish species of which 20 mussel and five fish are federally endangered or threatened. Thus the Clinch and neighboring Powell River have the largest concentration of federally endangered aquatic species in North America.

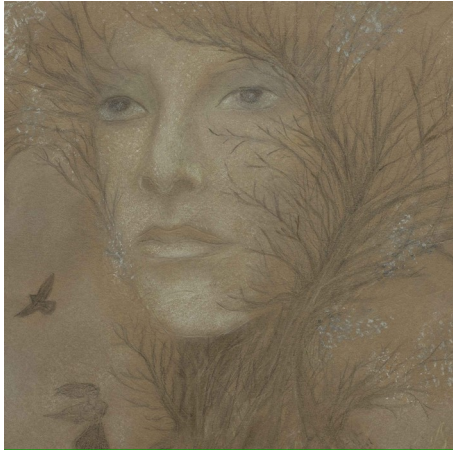
The comments requested "that for mine sites with ESA (Endangered Species Act) listed or proposed species in the mine site, the adjacent area, or ten-miles downstream, OSMRE clarify that no variances from the 100 foot buffer will be allowed." The full comments can be found on the TCC web site/News & Updates.

* Price, Zipper, Jones & Franck (2014). Water and sediment quality in the Clinch River over nearly five decades. Journal of the American Water Resources

Earth Awareness Art and Essay Contest

The Clinch Coalition believes some of the greatest gifts we can share with future generations are clean air, clean water, richness in plant and animals species, and the ethic of stewardship for our planet. The theme for 2015 Earth Awareness Art and Essay Contest was “My Spot in the Woods”. We want to inspire children to get outside and connect with nature, then submit an original piece of art or a short essay detailing their experiences.

The winner of the high school essay contest, Megan Wheatley from Eastside High, wrote about how being in nature clears her thoughts and improves her schoolwork. “As I sit on the stump by the creek and look around I think about life and all of the mysteries it can hold. I can hold. When I sit down to begin my schoolwork, I realize how stressed and anxious I was before my trip to the creek,” she wrote.



Laci Collins
1st Place High School Division

Eastside student Kody Bledsoe described in his essay how his “Spot in the Woods” affects his attitude. “When I go to my favorite place in the woods and sit for a while when I come back home, I am a totally changed person.”



Madison Fields
1st Place Middle School Division



Jessalee Evans
1st Place Primary School Division

The Clinch Coalition would like to thank all the students and teachers who participated in this year’s contests. Visit www.clinchcoalition.net to view more winning students' artwork and to learn about the 2016 contest.

2015 Earth Art and Essay Contest Winners

Laci Collins– Eastside High School- 1st place High School Art Division

Madison Fields– L.F. Addington– 1st place Middle School Art Division

Jessalee Evans– St. Paul Elementary- 1st place Primary School Art Division

Megan Wheathly– East High School- 1st place High School Essay Division

Elizabeth Roberts– Gate City Middle School– 1st place Middle School Essay Division

John Galloway– Elk Knob– 1st place Primary School Essay Division

Logan Hamilton– Gate City High School– 1st place Digital Media Division

High Knob Hellbender 10k



This year's 6.2-mile race, which boasted more than a 2,000-foot elevation gain and one-of-a-kind wooden medallions with the hellbender logo as finisher awards, brought 41 runners and their families to High Knob. The race started in downtown Norton and climbed to the High Knob Observation Tower. Participants endured wind and rain to complete the challenging course.

Nick Whited, from Bluefield, W.Va., won the race in 50 minutes, four seconds. Matt Clabaugh, from Kingsport, Tenn., placed second with a time of 51 minutes, 40 seconds. Rachael Sanchez, from Anna, Texas, placed third overall in 57 minutes, 49 seconds. Sanchez also won the women's race. The 2016 race will be held Saturday, Oct. 1. Registration will open next summer. Visit www.highknobhellbender.wordpress.com for more information.



1st place winners Nick Whited and Rachael Sanchez



10k runners with finisher awards



The Clinch Coalition would like to thank the following businesses and organizations for their support in making this year's High Knob Naturalist Rally and Hellbender 10k successful: Virginia Star, City of Norton, Food City, Cinema City, Coalfield Progress, Walmart, Pathfinders, R-Mac Realty, Clinch River Adventures, Lowes, Tucker and Becky Coleman, The Clapboard House, Pizza King, Renos, Save A Lot, UVA Wise Bookstore, Wildcat Pharmacy, Pound IGA, Pizza Plus, Burger King, Applebees, Sonic, Big Boys Pizza, Home Hardware, El Castillo, Counts Insurance Agency, Subway, Wise County Animal Hospital, Juste Music, McDonalds, Food Lion, Bank of Marion, Cavalier Pharmacy, Ingles, Jim Elam, EHS Ecology Club, CSE Insurance, Frank Frey, David Jackson—CPA, The Applehouse, Payless, Pet Sense, Mi Finca, Cheryl Skeens, Steven E. Nauss—DDS, Bill Harris Photography, The Scardos, Broadwater Trading Co, Quality A/C and Heating, Pound Veterinary Hospital, Jack Kennedy—Clerk of Court, David Redwine.

Trail Work



Trail work in 2015 has been extremely productive. We surpassed our 300-hour goal for this year by attaining 580 hours. Thanks to our many volunteers, we installed signs, re-blazed trail markings, cleared downed trees and brush and picked up litter. Our work improved the Chimney Rock Trail, Devil's Fork Loop Trail, Keokee Lake Trail, Stone Mountain Trail, Chief Bengé Scout Trail, High Knob Lake Trail, and Roaring Branch Trail on the Clinch Ranger District of the Jefferson National Forest.

We look forward to continuing this work in 2016. If you would like to volunteer, please contact us at clinchcoalition@gmail.com.



The Clinch Coalition would like to thank the following volunteers who have helped with our trail work efforts:

Alicia Marshall
Andrew Chapman
Blake Lane
Blake Lawson
Casey Gray
Catherine Nixon
Connor Stanley
Dakota Currier
David Hrivnak
David Li
David Skinner
Dennis Spjut
Diana Withen
Finley Willow

Frank Frey
Gena Kiser
Gena Kiser
Greg Hawkins
Hunter Taylor
Ishmael Richardson
James Taylor
Jorge Hersel
Jose Velasco
Katie Dunn
Kay LaBella
Lucian Undreiu
Owen Barbour
Patrick Withen

Rick Meadows
Ricky Bentley
Riley Grecol
Shannon Dwyer
Stephen Grayson
Stephen Grayson
Stephen Shook
Steve Brooks
Suzanne Seiler
Trevor Makal
Wally Smith
William Yearout
Willie Dodson



Devils Fork Trail

The Devil's Bathtub, located on the Devil's Fork Trail, has recently become a popular hiking destination. This scenic, yet strenuous hike leads to a deep pool scoured out of surrounding rock on the lower slopes of High Knob. Small waterfalls and sluices are also present. The hike requires more than 10 deep creek crossings each way, all of which might be difficult or impassible during cold weather or periods of high water. An optional, but very difficult and hard-to-follow, 7-mile loop continues past the Bathtub. Yellow blazes and signs mark this path.

The trail's sudden popularity has created several problems. As there are currently no trash cans or bathrooms, it is important to practice Leave No Trace principles and pack out what you pack in. Parking is very limited, so it is important to obey all signs and park only in designated areas. The Clinch Coalition, U.S. Forest Service, and several other area groups are working to resolve these issues. In the meantime, we encourage everyone to be respectful of this beautiful and unique area.

Directions to Devils Bath Tub Parking area:
 From Fort Blackmore (jct. of VA-65 and VA-72), drive north a short distance on VA-72 and turn left onto signed SR-619. Follow this road approximately 4.2 miles - bearing right along the way to stay on SR-619 (High Knob Road) where SR -653 (Hunter's Valley Road) angles left - and then continue to follow SR-619 left across the bridge. 0.2 miles later, a rutted, one-lane gravel road turns left beside a white house and sign. Follow this road to its end to the parking area



TCC Board Members 2015-2016

Executive Committee:	Board Members:	Advisory Board:	Honorary Members:
Diana Withen, Pres. Wise, VA	Jerry Scardo Clintwood, VA	Ben Prater Asheville, NC	Jr. Moore Coeburn, VA
Frank Frey, Vice Pres. Norton, VA	Joe Scardo Clintwood, VA	Mark Miller Lexington, VA	Nancy & Otis Ward Coeburn, VA
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	Catherine Nixon Coeburn, VA	Phil Shelton Wise, VA	Deidre Donahue, Director Ewing, VA
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	Trevor Makal Wise, VA		
	Gena Kiser Pound, VA		
	Walter Smith Wise, VA		

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT!

As a small grass roots organization, The Clinch Coalition (TCC) takes pride in our ties to the community and our dedication to working on environmental issues affecting our public lands right here in Southwest Virginia. The Clinch Coalition depends on community support to continue our work. Only together can we conserve the natural heritage of Southwest Virginia, create excellent recreation opportunities on our National Forest, and re-build the culture of stewardship that once defined our great region.

Please consider becoming a TCC sustainer, by completing a form that will activate automatic bank account withdrawals on a monthly basis through our fiscal sponsor, Virginia Organizing. Even if you cannot make a financial contribution, there are other ways to show your support! We are always looking for volunteers to help with mailings, events, trail work and our programs. Consider coming to a meeting, or even joining the Board of Directors. Meetings are normally held on the second Tuesday of the month at the Tacoma Community Center in Tacoma, Virginia at 6:30 PM.

For more information on The Clinch Coalition please contact Steve Brooks at 276-479-2176 or clinchcoalition@mounet.com. To donate send a check made out to **VIRGINIA ORGANIZING** (our fiscal sponsor) with TCC in the memo line, along with the form below to: **The Clinch Coalition PO BOX 2732 Wise VA 24293**

THANK YOU!

Patagonia	Harris and Frances Block Foundation	Roger and Brenda Whitaker	Steven Hopp
Todd Cassel	William Wasserman	Sharon Daniels	Dick Austin
Sam Dillion	Diane Copas Photography	Bill Harris	Robert Findley
Jerry and Joe Scardo	Robert Gillenwater	Marilyn and William Maxwell	Eastman
Mark Spencer	Thomas Keller	Mario and Makayla Jaramillio	Trudy Swan
Peggy Matthews	Barbara Kingsolver	David J. Hrivnak	Jim Elam
Jim Thompson	Mary Darcy and David Rouse	Diana and Patrick Withen	Nicole Farrar

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<input type="checkbox"/> ___ Student/Low Income:	\$10	<input type="checkbox"/> ___ Individual:	\$25	<input type="checkbox"/> ___ Family:	\$40	<input type="checkbox"/> ___ Business:	\$50
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I am a new member! Please send me a T-shirt and Bumper Sticker.
Size (circle one): S, M, L, XL, 2X, 3X Color (circle one): White, Green

☐ **MAKE A ONE TIME TAX-DEDUCTABLE DONATION!**

☐ **SEND ME INFORMATION ABOUT BECOMING A SUSTAINING DONOR**

If you have any questions or would like more information contact Steve Brooks at 276-479-2176 or clinchcoalition@mounet.com.





The Clinch Coalition

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To:

Get in touch with us...

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Photo by Bill Harris

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