

Down by the River

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TVA awards Roundtable with habitat restoration award

Tennessee Valley Authority recently awarded Upper Tennessee River Roundtable with a habitat restoration award based on accomplishments achieved in the Copper Creek watershed. Melanie Carter with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service nominated the Roundtable for the award. Carter attended a TVA meeting in Chattanooga, Tennessee to accept the award for the Roundtable. Melanie coordinates the Copper Creek project with the Roundtable.

The habitat restoration work is funded by U.S. Fish & Wildlife, Virginia Environmental Endowment and includes the establishment of riparian buffers and stream bank stabilization. The award will be shown at the fall Roundtable dinner meeting.

Public Lands Day set at Stone Creek park, classroom

To celebrate Public Lands Day, Upper Tennessee River Roundtable invites the general public to help with plantings and litter pickup at Stone Creek Outdoor Classroom and Community Park near Pennington Gap. The event will begin at 10 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 26, and conclude with pizza at 1 p.m. Roundtable staff, volunteers and project partners will provide all supplies as well as activities for kids. Come out and help care for your public lands.

Rain gardens

New rain gardens help filter storm water before it flows to Lewis Creek in Honaker. The Roundtable utilized funds from DEQ and Dominion to build the gardens last month. QC Landscape Architects designed the gardens and Davis Brothers installed them at New Peoples Bank.



Rain gardens are featured in front of the bank and on the side to capture storm water.

Photos by
Nathan Brown



Roundtable dinner to debut new character costumes

By Carol Doss, Executive Director

Instead of a typical meeting agenda, the fall Upper Tennessee River Roundtable dinner will feature a debut of four new character costumes recently developed by designers Amanda McMullen and Linda Hinchey. Funded by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the character project resulted in the creation of a hellbender salamander, mussel, darter fish and damselfly.

At the dinner, the character costumes will be worn by volunteers in a skit coordinated by OSMRE/VISTA Lilli Pickens. Lilli collaborated with former Roundtable contractor Nicole Vachon Hanlon to develop the skit. Nicole wore the old mussel costume at special events, including the Earth Day Fair, and was instrumental in the project to make new costumes. Nicole and family recently moved to Massachusetts. We miss them, but wish them well. I'm always writing in these newsletters about people who come and go through the Roundtable, but I must say a special thank you to Nicole for all the work she did in

a variety of capacities. I also want to thank Willie Dodson, former Clinch River Valley Initiative OSMRE/VISTA, for all of his hard work. He accomplished a lot for CRVI and for the Roundtable and we all appreciated his service very much.



members, Josh Larsen and Nicole Tucker, shown above, surprised me with a visit to our office recently. They live in Arizona and I was so happy to see them. I appreciate them and the others who served with the Roundtable. Thank you!!

Fall Roundtable Dinner

The fall dinner meeting is set for Thursday, Sept. 17, at 6 p.m. at the golf course in Gate City. Cost for the barbecue dinner is \$10 per person. To reserve a meal, call the Roundtable at (276) 628-1600 by 5 p.m. Monday, Sept. 14.

Other important people who helped the Roundtable and the region over the years are featured on the inside pages of this newsletter. These folks served as Office of Surface Mining/Volunteers In Service To America with the Roundtable. Since 2015 is the 50 year anniversary for AmeriCorps, I was asked earlier this year to help compile personal VISTA testimonies. In doing so, I received great stories from some former members. I decided to feature a few of them in this issue. We've worked with other VISTA members, too, but we couldn't include everyone. But know that we appreciated each and every one of you. Two former

Biggest cleanup planned in Virginia's smallest city: Norton

The City of Norton has a distinction as the smallest city in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Keep Southwest Virginia Beautiful decided to play up that fact by hosting a city-wide cleanup to clean the entire city in one day. The big event is set for Saturday, Oct. 3, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Teams of volunteers will divide the city into sections to make the cleanup manageable. Everyone is asked to pick up litter in front of their homes and businesses. The event will conclude with pizza and prizes. To help, meet at the Norton Community Center to pick up supplies and join a team of dedicated volunteers.



KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL AFFILIATE

Septic repair work ends this month in Guest River tributaries

By Adam Wells, Guest River Coordinator

Upper Tennessee River Roundtable's Guest River Septic Program is nearing a successful conclusion. The program is funded by a grant from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and the Dominion Foundation and is nearing the end of its second and final year.

UTRR obtained funding from VA DEQ in 2013 to implement aspects of the Guest River TMDL plan. Activities funded included completing the Implementation Plan, working with DMME to remediate an Abandoned Mine Land feature, launching a pet waste awareness and cleanup plan and finally, the residential septic program. While all of the action associated with the grant helps to improve water quality, the residential septic program has garnered the most interest from the community. That's likely because the program offers to pay up to 75 percent (in some cases 100 percent) of the costs of septic repairs or replacements.

Over the years, the Guest River has been subject to many uses and abuses. This led to the river being classified as an impaired waterway by the Commonwealth of Virginia. One of the more infamous of those abuses has been straight piping raw sewage into its waters. Thanks to other grants from DEQ and TVA, many of those straight pipes were eliminated in the late 90's and early 2000's. Thus, as a result of a concerted effort, the main channel of the Guest River was taken off the impaired list a few years ago.

However, there are still some tributaries of the river that remain hot spots for sewage issues. Those tributaries are Tom's Creek, Crab Orchard Branch and Sepulcher Creek. It may surprise folks to hear that the issue isn't straight pipes any more, but rather the culprits are old septic systems that have either deteriorated over time, or were never constructed properly. These types of pollution sources present an even greater challenge to address because often times they go unnoticed by residents- unless something dramatic and smelly happens.

The septic program has already funded 53 septic tank pump outs, and, at completion, will have funded 11 septic repairs, replacements or sewer line hook ups. Through a combination of grant funding and homeowner cost share, the total investment in the septic program will exceed \$93,000.

Education, outreach generate awareness, reach hundreds of people

By Lilli Pickens, OSMRE/VISTA

Education and outreach are central to the Roundtable's mission. Getting out in communities and spreading awareness about the challenges our watersheds face is imperative for actualizing change over time. We spend a large percentage of our time and resources educating and engaging young people. These events vary considerably as we try to reach a wide audience through festivals, schools, farmer's markets, camps, and more. We do interactive demonstrations utilizing top of the line educational technology such as EnviroScape® models. See P. 6



AmeriCorps VISTA alumnus receives prestigious award

OSMRE/VISTA Alumnus Shane Barton received the “Community Solutions Spotlight Award” June 29 in recognition of his service as an AmeriCorps VISTA and his continued service to the 54 Appalachian counties of eastern Kentucky. Barton currently serves as the assistant director of the University of Kentucky Appalachian Center which is an interdisciplinary center that emphasizes community-university partnerships and facilitates stronger connections between students, faculty and communities from across the 54 counties. The award was presented by AMeriCorps VISTA Director Paul Monteiro with current VISTA members, alumni and representatives from Corporation for National and Community Service and sponsoring organizations gathered in Berea, Kentucky to celebrate 50 years of AmeriCorps Volunteers In Service To America.



Barton served as an OSMRE/VISTA with the Upper Tennessee River Roundtable on the Appalachian Coal Country Watershed Team from 2005-07. As a VISTA, Barton worked with a variety of partners including local watershed organizations, government agencies, non-profits and municipalities including Cedar Bluff, VA to address water quality issues, ecological diversity, local economic development, and education. He wrote grants for ecological restoration using low impact development and interpretative historical trails to increase access to the outdoors, health, wellness and local history in the rural Appalachian community he served.

Barton said of his VISTA service, “The philosophy and the approach I learned from being a VISTA, the philosophy of valuing the people that you are working with, and respecting the inherent assets of the places and people we serve, is something that I have carried with me.”

Along with project development and management duties, and creating community partnerships to develop practicum experiences for students, Shane directs an extensive internship program including the UK Tomorrow Corps, a long term tutoring and mentoring program in partnership with local libraries and family resource and youth service centers that provides opportunities for University of Kentucky students to serve Appalachian communities. There are approximately 30 students in the field this summer working on a variety of projects including community and economic development, local museum support, farm to school programs, and the tutoring and mentoring programs. The capacity building elements of VISTA service such as partnership development, fundraising, and program development can be seen in Barton’s current work.

When asked if he has any advice for current VISTAs, Barton said that he learned an important lesson from a community volunteer during his first month of VISTA service: “In our relationships with communities it is incredibly important that we under-commit, and over-perform because by doing the opposite we create detrimental impacts for our partners and our projects.”

“...the philosophy of valuing the people that you are working with, and respecting the inherent assets of the places and people we serve...”

Salute to our current and former AmeriCorps VISTA members!

VISTA term her changed life

By Andrea Rocchio

It's not a stretch to say that AmeriCorps VISTA changed my life for the better. This great program gave me opportunities to important professional skills and development leading to new jobs and exposure to different career fields. In addition to professional skills, I learned more about people and public interactions, and even how non-profit organizations run (large and small). I also learned the ups and downs of the non-profit world, including the long, hard and thankless hours many employees and volunteers selflessly pour into their groups mostly because they support and love the cause. That love can often be the thing that sustains a group through hard times.

Some of my fondest memories with Upper Tennessee River Roundtable were working and socializing with my co-workers in all different situations. Whether it was orchestrating a large-scale event or doing the everyday office tasks, we often had smiles on our faces. In addition to having fun, I learned the importance of trust between co-workers and partners. That trust, respect and even love has stayed with me years later.

During my time with Upper Tennessee River Roundtable, I gained significant experience regarding environmental education teaching all groups of peo-



ple, which inspired me to pursue career choices focused in environmental education for the public. The skills from AmeriCorps gave me the confidence and competence to be a better educator, and I will forever be thankful!

Networking is also critical in VISTA, and I am glad I made the countless connections during and after my term. Those connections have served me well. After VISTA, I continued working with UTRR and our other partner organizations because of those great connections. The trust, respect, connections, and important skills learned on the job, my term with Upper Tennessee River Roundtable in AmeriCorps has made the difference in my life and career that I will always remember and cherish.

AmeriCorps VISTA experience led alumnus to VISTA leadership position

By Samantha Lukasiewicz

I started my AmeriCorps VISTA journey in April 2010 in Lee County at the Daniel Boone Soil and Water Conservation District. I was able to use my degree in Environmental Science to help start a mapping project for a potential blue-way on the Powell River, worked on spreadsheets which compiled data about AMD sites and wastewater projects in the area, and worked with the SWEET team (Southwest Virginia Environmental Education Team) to put on events in the area. I think the best part about my year of service in Lee County was the people I met. I made a lot of connections with folks in nonprofits and state agencies, as well as a lot of VISTA Members I still stay in contact with today.

My year of service in Lee County furthered my interest in the VISTA program and led me to a VISTA Leader position with The Advancement Foundation in Roanoke. I used the things I had learned through my first year- including nonprofit management skills, team facilitation techniques, and just basic scheduling, prioritizing, and time management, to lead a group of 17 VISTA Members who were placed all over the Commonwealth. Through my service at The Advancement Foundation I had a chance to advocate for and mentor over 70 VISTA Members throughout my three years as a Leader. The organization gained status as an AmeriCorps State Intermediary, and was able to hire me as the Program Director. I can, without hesitation say, that without that first year of service in SWVA, I would not be where I am today.



Roundtable's first VISTA member developed useful job skills

By Stacy Fowler Horton

I was the first Upper Tennessee River Roundtable OSM/VISTA and I had the opportunity to serve from November 2003 thru November 2004. My work entailed time in both the Clinch River and the Holston River watersheds since part of my position was funded through a grant from Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere (SAMAB) which required time to be spent in both watersheds. The Office of Surface Mining (OSM) also kicked in some funds for the position which ensured that the majority of my time was spent in the Clinch River, a watershed impacted by coal mining.

I really enjoyed my term of service. I assisted local watershed coalitions in the Clinch River and Holston River watersheds and recruited and trained water quality monitoring teams in the Virginia Save Our Streams (VASOS) Rocky Bottom Method of benthic macroinvertebrate monitoring. My primary contacts were with the Clinch River Headwaters Association (CRHA) and the Friends of the South Fork Holston. I helped them with local watershed endeavors such as grant writing and training volunteers. Since the CRHA served a watershed that was impacted by coal mining, I also worked with volunteers on the development of an acid mine drainage monitoring protocol as well as a training program for volunteers. I also assisted the CRHA in getting acid mine drainage monitoring kits into the hands of volunteers.

As an OSM/VISTA, I coordinated illegal trash dump clean-ups, assisted with a watershed conference, hosted outreach booths, attended the National River Rally and gleaned great information from OSM/VISTA training sessions. I was tasked with building capacity and sustainability within watershed coalitions so that they could function as independent entities, capable of finding funds and maintaining momentum with minimal to no outside assistance.

A big part of my service was grant writing which turned out to be something I really enjoyed. I assisted Upper Tennessee River Roundtable in the writing and implementation of several grants. Who knew that grant writing could be such a ticket to the world? As a result of my grant writing skills, I was asked by Frank Kilgore of Mountain Heritage, Inc. to assist in authoring a book about the Clinch River, tailored to ninth grade standards



Stacy showing Emory & Henry student how to identify bugs.

of learning. From there, other positions came available to me, all involving writing and/or natural resources. I enjoyed many short-term and part-time experiences until I landed a full-time job with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation in August 2006 where I have been employed for about 8.5 years. Every day I enjoy the challenges that the position brings and I find myself adding to the skill set I developed as an OSM/VISTA.

I believe my year of service with AmeriCorps was crucial to my development as an employee and an individual. I met many partners who appreciated my work and I gained many valuable skills. Without my OSM/VISTA experiences, I do not think I would have been so fortunate to have worked with the people and organizations that I have had an opportunity to assist nor do I believe that so many doors would have been opened up to me. I am grateful every day for the chance to serve and it is my hope that I made a difference in the local conservation of natural resources as well as in the lives of others through my service.

Education and Outreach Continued from Pg. 3 We get young people in the water through field days, Kids in the Creek, and Save Our Streams trainings. We provide a creative space for kids to make their own trash to treasure items where they can explore the concepts of reuse and recycling. Through these events we introduce new concepts and reinforce the SOLs taught in schools. So far in 2015 we have reached about 2580 youth with more programs ahead. Through these lessons we encourage stewardship and hope to cultivate lifelong interest and investment in the environment.

VISTA service with Roundtable affected future grad study

By Spencer Moss

In September of 2009, I left my home in Northwest Missouri and moved to Abingdon to be an AmeriCorps OSM/VISTA with the Upper Tennessee River Roundtable (UTRR). Even though I worked in a nonprofit while in college, working with the UTRR was my first experience in a gritty grassroots nonprofit organization. It was an opportunity to wear many different hats, working on fundraisers, grant applications, K-12 educational presentations, and community engagement through river recreation, all skills that I took with me to my subsequent positions and educational endeavors.



Spencer (center) participating in an environmental education workshop.

I look back on this year with fantastic memories of getting lost without cell phone service on the side of a mountain, sharing a tiny office with the sweetest supervisor anyone could ask for, rainy canoe trips, and lots of festivals. My time in Southwest Virginia was a learning and growing experience. I “grew up” during this year. I learned to look for, and not ignore cultural subtleties—a skill that has taken me far in the five years since. I learned about outreach to a community that isn’t available electronically. I learned to care about the environment, which has inspired much of my work as a graduate student, focusing on sustainable food and farming practices.

Finally, the biggest lesson that I learned from this experience is that taking a leap and doing something that I have never done before has the biggest rewards.

Roundtable teaches at 4-H camp; helps with shoe re-use

By April Grace, Volunteer Educator

UTRR goes to Camp

Lilli Pickens, OSMREVISTA and April Grace, UTRR Volunteer headed off to camp this summer. Lilli and April taught a “Trash to Treasures” class at the Washington County 4-H camp in June. The class covered topics such as water conservation, pollution prevention, recycling and reuse. The campers were given the task of creating something out of items that we would normally throw away. Prizes were given for the best inventions. The class had a total of 30 students and one teen helper. This was our fifth year at Washington County 4- H camp and we hope to continue the tradition next year. Staff also assisted with a “Maker Camp” for a separate Washington County camp. Campers created arcade games.



Girl Scout Shoe Collection Contest

UTRR and Keep Southwest Virginia Beautiful (KSVB) held a shoe collection contest for scout troops. Three Girl Scout troops participated with a total collection of 606 pairs of shoes. The winning troop 451 collected 406 pairs and was rewarded with a moustache themed party. The Moustache Bash, organized by Lilli Pickens, VISTA, held at Grace Studio of Motion & Dance and included lots of

fun activities. Scouts decorated moustache cookies, made crafts, played games and had a photo booth with props and moustache face painting. The shoes collected are sold to Funds2org and sent to developing countries to be refurbished and sold. This is a KSVB fundraiser and is ongoing. Shoes can still be donated.

Students initiate environmental projects with mini grants from Virginia Department of Forestry

By Willie Dodson, former OSMRE/VISTA

With funding from Virginia Department of Forestry to Upper Tennessee River Roundtable, mini grants were awarded to three schools following the Clinch River Youth Summit. Student groups at the three South-west Virginia schools have completed or are currently engaged in watershed related service and education projects in their communities.

On Friday, March 15, ecology students working with Diana Withen at Eastside High School in Coeburn held a watershed education day for Coeburn Primary School's fifth graders. With support from Clinch River Valley Initiative VISTA Willie Dodson, Eastside students led stations on tree identification, the life cycle and habitat needs of trout, amphibians, benthic macro-invertebrates as well as a watershed EnviroScape® lesson. After cycling through all stations, Eastside students led the fifth graders through watershed art projects to illustrate what they learned.



On an ongoing basis through the summer, students of Susan Wilder's agriculture classes are traveling to various Big Sandy headwater streams in Dickenson County and surrounding counties to gather water data as part of a hellbender salamander mapping project. The students are using a quality assured, quality controlled method developed by the Smithsonian Institute to gather water samples which they then hand off to Dr. Wally Smith of UVa's Wise, the program's local participating scientist. These samples are then analyzed in a lab for hellbender DNA, which becomes present in the water where they live through the muci-lage secreted through the salamander's skin. At the conclusion of their samplings, the students will make a DVD on their project.



At Gate City High School, Dawn Williams' students utilized funding from the Youth Summit to acquire materials for building garden beds and a rainwater catchment system on their campus, Lake Fleming wetlands outdoor classroom.

Shown in top photo is the Gate City Lake Fleming Outdoor Classroom. Eastside students present in left top photo, Clintwood in bottom left photo and Gate City in bottom right photo.

Next Youth Summit set for Saturday, Oct. 24

By Willie Dodson, former OSMRE/VISTA

Despite what my friends and I in Wise County now refer to as "snowpacolypse," the first ever Clinch River Youth Summit on March 14 at St. Paul Elementary School was a huge success! The event brought together 50 students from five high schools in five counties to learn about environmental issues in Southwest Virginia, and to explore ways that we can work together to serve our watersheds and communities.

Organized by the Roundtable, Southwest Virginia Environmental Education Team, and the Clinch River Valley Initiative with funding from the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF), the summit featured a keynote address from Shane Barton, a Dickenson County native and 2005 Roundtable VISTA, now working as the programming director for the University of Kentucky's Appalachian Center. Barton spoke about the history of central Appalachia, explaining the roots of the modern hillbilly-stereotype. He went on to debunk that stereotype, along the imagined version of Appalachia it inhabits, before casting our young people in the role of stewards, change-makers and entrepreneurs. According to evaluations completed by students and teachers at the conclusion of the day's activities, many found Barton's address to be illuminating and quite rousing.

Second Annual Youth Summit is set for Saturday, Oct. 24 at Dungannon Depot. Schools are encouraged to attend and to apply for mini grants offered through Upper Tennessee River Roundtable with funding from Virginia Department of Forestry and Clif Bar Family Foundation.



Following Barton's talk, the students split into small groups to rotate through stations on the Roundtable's SOS and EnviroScape® projects, the Clinch Coalition's trail maintenance work, US Fish and Wildlife's riparian restoration project in the Copper Creek watershed of Scott County, and UVA-Wise's partnership with the Smithsonian Institute on mapping our region's remaining hell-bender salamander populations.

School groups then worked on applications for one of several \$200 mini-grants available to summit participants. The winning applicants were announced two weeks later. These were Gate City High School, Eastside High School and Clintwood High School. More on their projects can be found in another article elsewhere in this newsletter.

With continued funding from VDOF and a new source of support from the Clif Bar Family Foundation, the second annual Clinch River Youth Summit is scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 24 at the Dungannon Depot. It will follow the successful format of the earlier event, but now thanks to our increased funding, we will offer two mini-grants in the amount of \$500 each and two in the amount of \$250 each. Additionally, we are exploring ways to improve on the already awesome event, such as including a service project in the day's activities.

Eastside teacher Diana Withen works with her students. Willie Dodson leads discussions at left. At right UVA Wise Professor Wally Smith shares information with students as they think and plan their mini grant applications.



HHW Collection in Tazewell

Funding from an anonymous donor paid for household hazardous waste collection with 55 cars bringing four tons to the Tazewell County Fair-ground. The Roundtable organized the collection in collaboration with Tazewell Soil and Water Conservation District.



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