



BLUE RIDGE CONSERVANCY



SAVING THE PLACES YOU LOVE
ANNUAL REPORT 2018

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Cover photo by Lynn Willis/High South Creative

Panoramic view of the distinctive Grandfather Mountain ridgeline with Hanging Rock and Peak Mountain in the foreground.

Shot from 4700' in Banner Elk at the home of BRC supporter David Brooks.

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ACCREDITATION RENEWAL

The accreditation seal is a mark of distinction in land conservation. It is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.

Each accredited land trust completes a rigorous review process and joins a network of organizations united by strong ethical practices. This trusted network of land trusts has demonstrated fiscal accountability, strong organizational leadership, sound transactions and lasting stewardship of the lands they conserve.

The seal is awarded by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance. The volunteers who serve on the Commission represent a diverse group of land conservation and nonprofit management experts from around the country. For more information, please visit landtrustaccreditation.org



Last year was one of transition and accomplishment for Blue Ridge Conservancy. We celebrated Walter Clark's leadership and successes as he left to become Executive Director of North Carolina's Clean Water Management Trust Fund. Walter will continue to accomplish great things for North Carolina. BRC is proud and thankful for his many years of service. We are just as proud and thankful for the steady leadership and direction provided by Eric Hiegl as Interim Executive Director. In October I was delighted to join a smoothly operating and efficient land conservancy staff that has over 125 years of experience in land and water conservation, natural resource management, environmental education, nonprofit management, real estate and law.

Due largely to our staff's expertise and professionalism, the Land Trust Accreditation Commission has awarded BRC a renewal of our Certificate of Accreditation. Accreditation is the highest national distinction for land conservancies. It is only awarded to organizations that exemplify standards of excellence, uphold the public trust and ensure conservation achievements are permanently protected. BRC is again proud to be recognized as a national leader in land and water conservation.

In 2017, a land protection milestone was reached when the total cumulative acreage conserved by Blue Ridge Conservancy surpassed 20,000 acres! In the following pages you will see descriptions of some of our exciting ecological and farmland protection projects, as well as public access trail projects involving the Spruce Pine Greenway/ Overmountain Victory Trail, and Peak Mountain in Avery County. The Middle Fork Greenway was significantly advanced in 2017 by securing funding to build the Trailhead and Section One which will connect The Town of Blowing Rock to the Foley Center, a distance of 1.3 miles. Additionally, funds were procured to make Section Four shovel ready. Section Four connects the existing Greenway at Tweetsie to Goldmine Branch Park, to be built at Niley Cook Road.

Thanks to the efforts of BRC's dedicated staff, trustees, supporters and volunteers much was accomplished in 2017. Still, we must look forward and plan for the future. We have begun a new strategic planning initiative to address and refine our mission and to meet our future challenges. Much work has been done to gauge and understand our stakeholders' interests in BRC's future direction. The new strategic plan, to be adopted before the end of the year, will provide us with a clear vision for the future. The plan will advance our commitment to continue BRC's core investments in land conservation and will identify new strategies to increase our effectiveness. We are thankful for your support, honored by your trust, and eagerly look forward to another year of accomplishments worthy of your investment in our mission to save the places you love.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlie".

Charlie Brady



OUR MISSION

Working with willing landowners and local communities to permanently protect land and water resources with agricultural, ecological, cultural, recreational and scenic value in northwest North Carolina.

Welcome, New BRC Board Trustees!



Margaret Newbold

Margaret Newbold is a driving force for land conservation in North Carolina. Margaret recently retired after 20 years with the Conservation Trust for North Carolina (CTNC). She served CTNC as Associate Director, Senior Associate, and Interim Executive Director. Margaret will continue to play an integral role in the conservation community. She is an avid outdoorswoman and is looking forward to many new adventures in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Margaret was recently honored with the Order of the Longleaf Pine by Governor Roy Cooper. She was named the 2017 Land Conservationist of the Year by the

North Carolina Wildlife Federation at their Annual Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards.

She is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a bachelor of arts in Religious Studies and holds a master's degree in Public Administration from N. C. State University. Her career path has clearly been driven by her passions for recreation, travel and exploring other cultures, and conservation.

“Getting out and enjoying nature has always been what renews my spirit. Being able to do that and encourage others to experience nature in their own way has been a great gift.”

Margaret is encouraging the conservation sector to work closely with the economic development sector to chart a course that fosters healthy, whole communities because land is the foundation of this work and the common ground that connects us all.



Jesse Pope

Jesse is the Executive Director of the non-profit, Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation. Jesse has 16 years of experience working for the nature park in many capacities, most notably as Backcountry Ranger, Animal Keeper, and Chief Naturalist. More Recently Jesse has worked as the Assistant Vice President helping oversee day to day operations of the park.

Jesse was born in Baraboo, Wisconsin, not far from the famous shack purchased by Aldo

Leopold and inspired his famous book, *A Sand County Almanac*. Jesse's family moved to Grayson County, Virginia while he was only 11 months old.

While Jesse wasn't technically born in Appalachia he grew up on the banks of the New River on a small family farm, often listening to old time bluegrass music, wandering through the fields and forests of rural southwest Virginia and embracing the culture and rich history of the Appalachians.

Jesse attended Lees-McRae College for his undergraduate degree and Montreat College for graduate studies in environmental education. He is very passionate about the Stewardship Foundation's mission to inspire conservation of the natural world by helping guests explore, understand and value the wonders of Grandfather Mountain.

Welcome, New BRC Staff!



Caroline Gandy Development Associate

Caroline was born and raised in Drexel, North Carolina. She moved to Boone in 2006, after receiving an undergraduate degree in Political Science from American University in Washington, DC.

She completed master's degrees in Appalachian Studies and Geography at Appalachian State University, and served as the Executive Director of the Valle Crucis Community Park from July 2009 until May 2018. Valle Crucis Community Park is an immensely popular community

resource. Caroline not only ensured the Park's financial sustainability, but also expanded the park's environmental education programs, community events, and amenities.

BRC holds a donated conservation easement on the Park's riparian corridor. Before joining as an employee, Caroline served on BRC's Land Protection Committee.

In her free time, Caroline enjoys hiking with her husband and dog, reading, and watching live music.

“Land conservation has been a passion of mine for many years, and I am thrilled to have the opportunity to devote my time and talents to an organization I care so deeply about.”



Tristan Thomas Digital Media Intern

Tristan Thomas is a senior at Appalachian State University with a double major in Graphic Arts & Imaging Technology and Biology.

A love of animals and the environment led to her decision to become a Biology major and later a second major in Graphic Arts & Imaging Technology to express this passion in an artistic form.

Her biology degree allows her to develop a deeper understanding of the environment and the organisms that inhabit it.

It is her hope that through a graphic arts degree she can use her talents to educate others about the environment and allow them to develop a love for being outside and protecting nature.

Tristan loves Boone because being in the Blue Ridge mountains brings her a sense of excitement and calmness. From all the breathtaking experiences that happen in the mountains like sunrise hikes to just sitting on the porch, the mountains are her favorite place to be.

When she's not designing you can find Tristan exploring the High Country, training for triathlons, or playing with any dog she can find.

LAND PROTECTION & STEWARDSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

BRC has protected **20,807** acres in **231** places.



13,607 acres in **144** conservation easements

and **7,200** acres in **87** fee simple land acquisitions.

Tater Hill Bog, Watauga County

BRC continued its work to acquire important land adjacent to the Tater Hill Bog Preserve by purchasing two tracts on Harmon Knob, totaling 200 acres, resulting in the expansion of the Preserve to 1,600 acres. The latest acquisitions are the third and final phase a multiyear project, ultimately adding 369 acres of land to the Tater Hill Bog Preserve on Harmon Knob. An additional 10 acre tract, which is home to three rare plant species and a cranberry bog, was purchased by BRC and added to the Preserve. The Tater Hill Bog contains a rare bog ecosystem, an array of endangered and threatened plant species, and many significant natural communities.

Harmon Knob is a part of the Amphibolite Mountains, a unique mountain chain spanning portions of Watauga and Ashe counties. Amphibolite is a mineral-rich rock type yielding a more neutral soil pH than typically found in the Blue Ridge Mountains that supports plant species not typically found in the area. Lying at elevations ranging from 3,600 to 4,800 feet, Harmon Knob supports extensive mature, contiguous hardwood forests housing a variety of rare plants.

Funding for these projects was made possible by the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund and a matching donation from Fred and Alice Stanback. The Tater Hill Bog Preserve is managed by the North Carolina Plant Conservation Program, a division of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Resources.



Eric Hiegl educates BRC hikers about the excellent water quality found at Harmon Knob.



Alleghany Farmland

BRC received a generous donation of a conservation easement protecting 186 acres of productive farmland in Alleghany County. The landowner, Marvin Mann, contacted BRC with interest in conserving his farmland used for agriculture, forestry, and recreation. The land is located adjacent to Doughton Park on the Blue Ridge Parkway and two other BRC conservation easements.

BRC recognizes the need to protect the rapidly vanishing rural landscape and farmland in Western North Carolina. Forestlands in rural landscapes provide valuable benefits, such as the protection of wildlife habitat for threatened and endangered species, and viable economic options for landowners.

Eleven other private conservation easement properties are located within a 5-mile radius of Mr. Mann's property, as well as four state or federally managed conservation lands including Stone Mountain State Park, Thurmond Chatham Game Land, Bullhead Mountain State Natural Area and the Sparta Bog Conservation Site. These large tracts of undeveloped land adjacent or in close proximity to one another promote healthy wildlife connectivity to support needs for breeding, feeding, and migration.

BRC received a grant from the Conservation Trust for North Carolina to help cover the transaction costs associated with the conservation easement.

“I enjoy the natural beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains. My goal is to preserve the beauty of this property through the ages for the enjoyment of people forever and for the benefit of wildlife.”

-Marvin Mann, Landowner



Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County

Bordering the Watauga River, the Valle Crucis Community Park is an immensely popular community resource. It is the most popular park in Watauga County and provides visitors access to playgrounds, open fields and the Watauga River. To protect open space, as well as the Watauga River's water quality, BRC accepted a donated conservation easement on the park's riparian corridor in 2007.

In December 2014, the park purchased an adjoining 3 acre tract expanding the park's walking trail and preserving a critical piece of the lower valley. It consists of bottomlands, traditionally used for agriculture, and is surrounded by other existing BRC conservation easements. It borders the Watauga River and is within the Valle Crucis Rural Historic District. BRC purchased a conservation easement on the 3 acres and the park used the proceeds to help repay a portion of the loan taken out to originally purchase the property. The property will now remain as open land available to the park. Funding for the project was provided by the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund.



Peak Mountain, Avery County

BRC purchased two additional properties totaling 45 acres on the south slope of Peak Mountain in Avery County adjoining the 265 acres purchased in 2016. The two acquisitions expand upon the land already owned by BRC and can provide future public access from the south side of the mountain. Numerous other conservation properties are in close proximity including Grandfather Mountain State Park, the Town of Seven Devil's Otter Falls Park, and Bear Paw State Natural Area, collectively referred to as the "Greater Grandfather Mountain Conservation Area".

Brad and Cathy Watling sold one of the properties to BRC at a bargain sale, or discount. Their generosity allowed BRC to more easily raise the funds to purchase the land, ensuring its permanent protection. Fred and Alice Stanback donated the funds to BRC to purchase these properties. Their wish is to see the land remain undeveloped and open to the public. The Conservation Trust for North Carolina provided BRC a grant to help cover some of the transaction costs associated with the purchases. BRC and the Town of Seven Devils are developing a plan for a hiking trail along Peak Mountain to connect to Otter Falls Park.





Spruce Pine Greenway & Overmountain Victory Trail, Mitchell County

BRC, in partnership with the Toe River Valley Watch, accepted a 12 acre conservation easement along a portion of Grassy Creek in Spruce Pine, NC. Toe River Valley Watch received funding to restore a highly degraded stretch of this popular stocked trout stream as well as create a public greenway along the route used by the Overmountain Men during the Revolutionary War. The Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail is part of the US National Trails System and recognizes the patriot's pivotal victory at the Battle of Kings Mountain. A plan is currently being developed to add the Spruce Pine Greenway to this National Historic Trail.

The stream restoration component of the project greatly improved the water quality and habitat of Grassy Creek, a hatchery supported trout stream. The stream was moved away from the shopping center and restored it to its original meandering path. Additionally, the streambanks were sloped back and stabilized with native vegetation. A hellbender salamander was observed in the creek after the stream restoration!

The US Fish and Wildlife Service has identified the North Toe River watershed as a focus area for restoration to aid in the recovery of the federally endangered Appalachian elktoe mussel. Funding for the project came from the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund, Fish America Foundation, Blue Ridge Resource Conservation and Development, and the North Carolina Division of Water Resources.



“This greenway will follow the route of the Overmountain Victory Trail benefiting tourism and economic development for the community of Spruce Pine. This nationally recognized landmark is an important part of American history and its story will be featured along the greenway through signage and special events.”

-Starli McDowell, Toe River valley Watch
Executive Director



CONNECTING BLOWING ROCK TO BOONE, NATURALLY!

Local businesses “Round Up” for the greenway in July

The Town of Blowing Rock officially proclaimed the month of July as “Middle Fork Greenway Month,” and the activities ensued certainly lived up to its name. An unprecedented number of businesses worked together to raise money in support of constructing the next section of greenway trail that will eventually connect the towns of Blowing Rock and Boone with a pedestrian and bicycle friendly alternate route that benefits residents, visitors, and businesses of Watauga County.

The Round Up for the Middle Fork Greenway rallied support with a first-ever community-wide fundraiser by 117 businesses throughout the county. Businesses participated by asking their customers to round up their purchase to the next dollar, give to a donation jar, gave a percentage of their sales for the month, or gave a one-time donation. The collective effort totaled \$112,000.

The Round Up success was well timed with the exciting news of Watauga County receiving a grant for \$430,000 designated for Section 4 of the Middle Fork Greenway from the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.

N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund awarded over \$6.7 million in grants to fund 27 local parks and recreation projects across the state. The Fund is administered through the state Division of Parks and Recreation and was established in 1994 by the N.C. General Assembly. Watauga County was one of the largest recipients of the 2018 PARTF grant cycle receiving \$430,000.

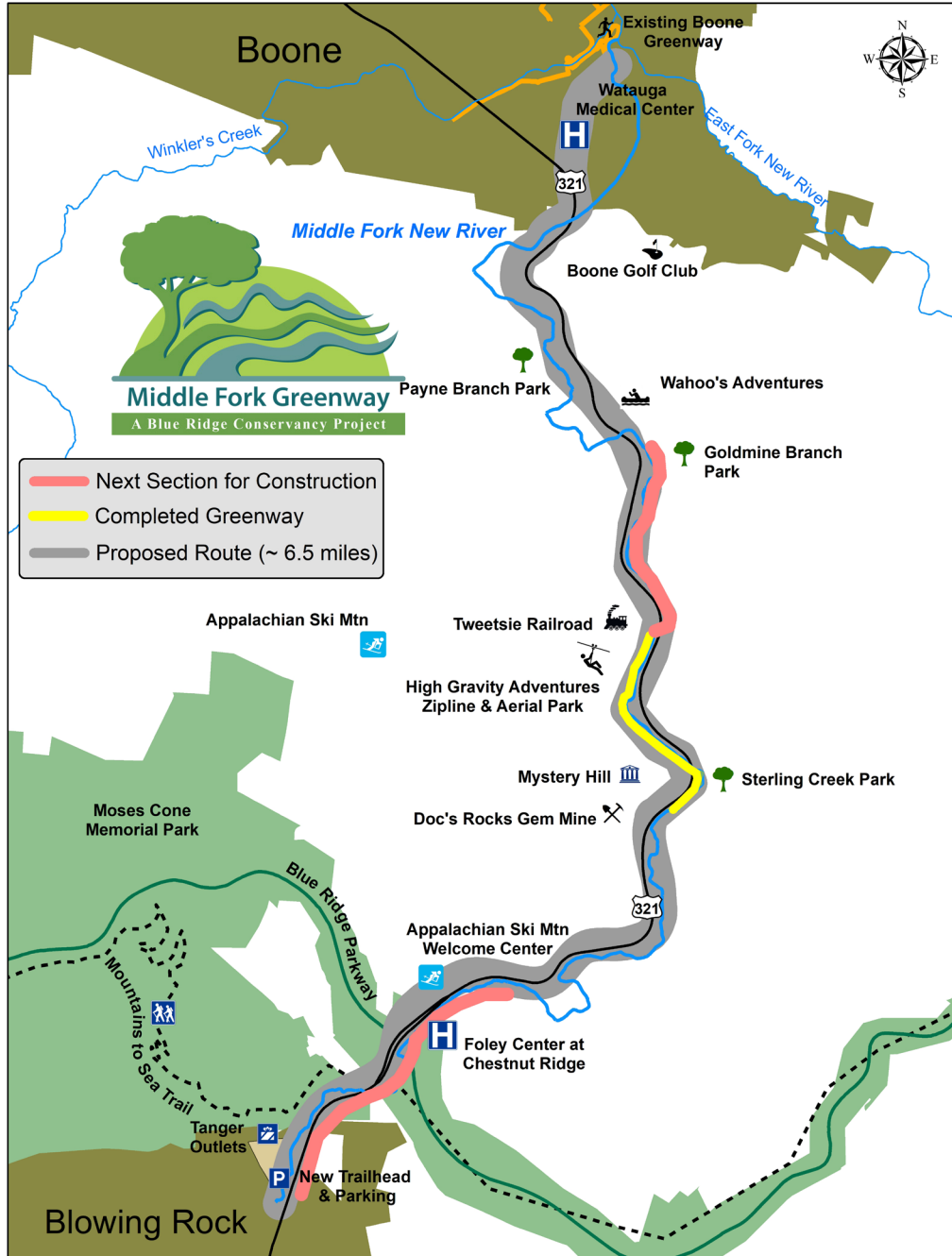
Blue Ridge Conservancy purchased a 12-acre linear tract within the Section 4 stretch in 2016. The land is two-thirds of a mile along the Middle Fork of the South Fork New River, enabling an extension of the existing Middle Fork Greenway from Tweetsie Railroad to Niley Cook Road, and the connection of two existing pocket parks. The land will provide a vegetated buffer to protect the water quality of nearby streams feeding into the Middle Fork New River, the main water supply for both Boone and Blowing Rock.



Students learn and play on the completed section of the greenway by Tweetsie Railroad.



The Middle Fork of the South Fork New River is a hatchery supported trout stream.



“There is so much momentum right now with receiving the PARTF grant. There are some significant financial gaps to fill, and that is where the ‘Round up’ comes into play. The Round up model proved highly successful, and we will continue using this strategy for leveraging state and federal grants with local financial support to complete the 6.5 mile vision of connecting Blowing Rock to Boone, naturally.”

-Wendy Patoprsty, Middle Fork Greenway Director

Economic Impact Study Results

Researchers from North Carolina State University Institute for Transportation, Research, and Education found that an investment in the Middle Fork Greenway could result in:

- 38,000 annual trips on the greenway
- \$10 million in health benefits
- 9.5% increase in the value of properties within a half mile of the greenway
- \$296,000 increase in local property tax revenue per year
- \$947,000 in business activity benefits annually
- 12 new jobs that support \$276,300 in labor income
- 12,000 annual tourist trips—estimated to generate \$6 million in the local economy

These estimates are based on analytical models that incorporate numerous greenway studies as well as special considerations of the unique economic and demographic nature of the area.

BRC IN THE COMMUNITY

Founders Gathering

In January, former High Country Conservancy president Michelle Leonard, and her husband Mike hosted a “Gathering of the Founders” party at their home in Valle Crucis to reconnect BRC with supporters of the early years of High Country Conservancy.

As a quick history lesson, High Country Conservancy began in 1995. The group was established by Appalachian State University students concerned with protecting Howard Knob. Blue Ridge Rural Land Trust was formed in 1997 out of a recognized need to protect the rapidly vanishing rural landscape and farmland in northwestern North Carolina. The two land trusts merged in 2010 to create what is today Blue Ridge Conservancy.

The evening celebrated accomplishments from the past and highlighted all of the exciting work to come in the future. We are thankful for the vision of these conservation leaders and are proud to carry on the legacy they’ve created!



Founders Jeffrey Scott and Debbie Golembeski

Appalachian Mountain Brewery CollaBREWation

Old Orchard Creek Blueberry Sour Ale was a joint effort between Appalachian Mountain Brewery (AMB) and BRC. This is the second beer in the series of “CollaBREWation” with AMB and BRC. Proceeds from this specialty beer will be donated to BRC.

The Ale’s blueberries were harvested in July of 2016 from the 4,000 blueberry bushes of Old Orchard Creek Farm located in Ashe County, one of BRC’s conserved properties.

“We are proud to support and raise awareness for BRC’s ongoing mission to protect our unique region and the places we love.”

-Nathan Kelischek, AMB Brewmaster

The Old Orchard Creek Blueberry Sour Ale is a limited release edition beer. If you were unable to attend the release party, the bottles will be on sale at Appalachian Mountain Brewery while supplies last.



AMB's Danny Wilcox, Nathan Kelischek, and Chris Zieber with BRC's Nikki Robinson and Charlie Brady



Pancakes in downtown Boone on Land Trust Day



Andi, Hank, and Rob, our Volunteers of the Year!

June community events raise over \$40,000 for BRC

Land Trust Day is a partnership between North Carolina business and our state's two dozen land trusts. On the first Saturday in June, participating businesses display information about local land trusts and agree to donate a percentage of their sales. Representatives from Kühl clothing outfitters flipped pancakes and serve Hatchet Coffee on King Street right outside Mast General Store's entrance to raise money for Land Trust Day. Mast General Store donated 20% of the day's sales from all three High Country store locations to Blue Ridge Conservancy and New River Conservancy.

Four days later, BRC hosted the 18th annual Gamekeeper Auction with record attendance of 250 people and a record fundraising achievement of \$32,000! Thank you to everyone who attended the event, sponsored, donated auction items, won auction items, volunteered, bought a raffle ticket or made a donation to BRC. Your participation had a huge impact on this monumental success.

Volunteers of the Year

Each year Blue Ridge Conservancy recognizes special supporters who go above and beyond in volunteering their time and talents to support our mission of "Saving the Places You Love." This year, BRC recognizes Andi Gelsthorpe and Rob Peters as our Volunteers of the Year!

Andi and Rob have sponsored the annual Gamekeeper Auction for the past seven years through their local businesses: Miss Match Rentals and Happy Trailers Refrigerated Rentals. Miss Match Rentals specializes in vintage dinnerware to provide an alternative to the common white dinnerware place setting. Chances are you've been to an event in the High Country featuring their unique dinnerware collections that create an unforgettably beautiful look. You've also probably been to an event and helped yourself to a beer from a Tap Trailer, or seen one parked outside of Peabody's Wine and Beer in Boone.

Thank you, Andi and Rob, for your amazing dedication and support to protect our Blue Ridge Mountains!

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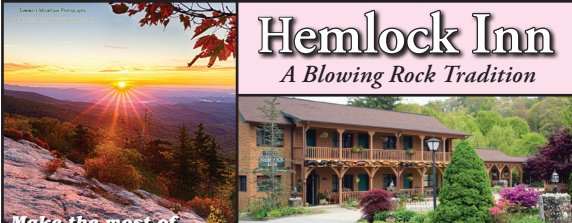
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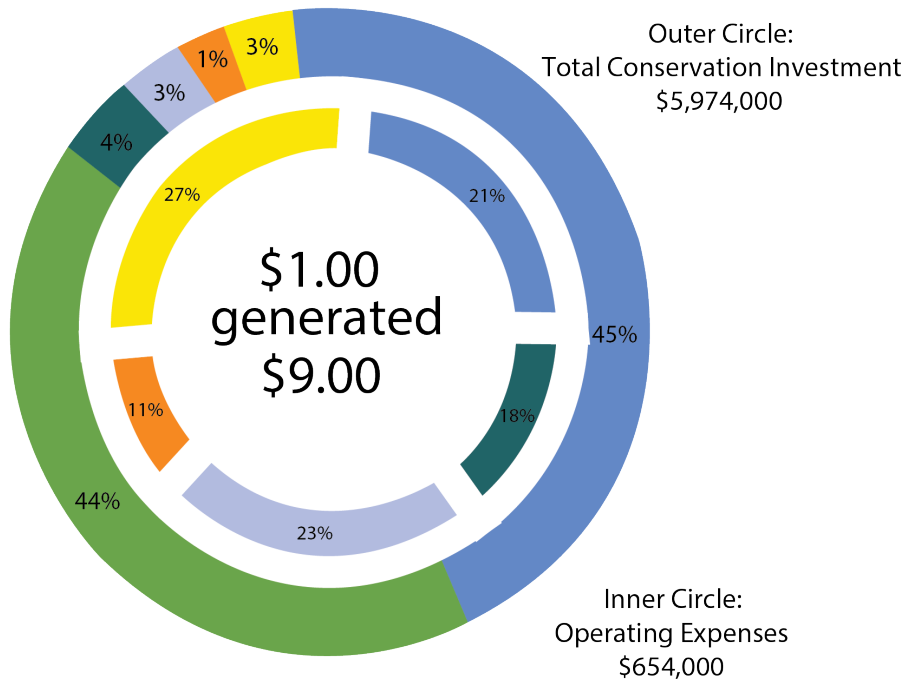
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M-Prints produces top-quality embroidered hats and screenprinted shirts. Order your BRC hat, shirt or baby/toddler shirt or onesie by visiting our website at www.blueridgeconservancy.org. The cost for any merchandise item is \$15.

2017 Financial Report

Blue Ridge Conservancy leveraged operating expenses of \$654,000 to generate \$5,974,000 for programs, including Middle Fork Greenway and land conservation projects.



- Land Conservation Projects
- Middle Fork Greenway Projects
(included grants awarded towards Greenway construction)
- Middle Fork Greenway Operations
- Fundraising
- Stewardship
- Operations

In 2017, Blue Ridge Conservancy worked with local and state governments and private donors to protect 605 acres through land acquisition and conservation easements. In addition, BRC raised \$2.9 million to further the construction of the Middle Fork Greenway. These funds are restricted to their specific purposes and are not available to support Blue Ridge Conservancy operating expenses.



WE WOULD LIKE TO RECOGNIZE AND THANK OUR 2017 DONORS:

The Evergreen Circle

These donors have made gifts to Blue Ridge Conservancy every year since 2009.

Michael and Helen Ruth Almond
Frank and Ranlet Bell
Michael and Joanie Bell
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