



Debra Murray
North Carolina Native Plant Society
PO Box 5907
Greensboro, NC 27435

May 21, 2024

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Dear Debra Murray & Fellow Grants Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina's (FCNC) restoration efforts at our Possum Rock River Access property along the Henry Fork River in Burke County, NC. We were fortunate to receive \$1,000 from the North Carolina Native Plant Society's B.W. Wells Stewardship Fund in September of 2021 to support the project.

Over the course of 2021, FCNC worked with a local Eagle Scout to plan and implement the restoration of native alluvial hardwood trees at the 1.5 acre open/agricultural field at FCNC's Possum Rock River Access to improve habitat and enhance flood/erosion protections at the site. FCNC ordered more than 200 native trees and shrubs from a private nursery in Georgia and 100 hybrid American chestnut trees were secured for donation for the project. On December 4, 2021, 16 volunteers participated in the public event and more than 300 trees were planted that day. A second public event was held February 5, 2022 to plant 400 livestakes along the Henry Fork River on the property to enhance habitat and combat streambank erosion. More than 90 volunteer hours were spent planting native trees and shrubs at the site over the two events.

Since the initial planting in December 4, 2021, FCNC has been steadfast in its stewardship of the site and working to ensure the survival of as many of the native trees and shrubs as possible. FCNC hired forest technicians from EcoForesters, based out of Asheville, to use herbicides to treat competing vegetation in September 2022. FCNC also held volunteer events that were open to the public on: Oct. 15, 2022; June 27, 2023; Nov. 4, 2023, and Dec. 17, 2023, all focused on mowing, weeding, supplemental planting, and other maintenance activities at the site. Around 20 volunteers have spent more than 60 hours helping steward the restoration site. This is in addition to the numerous hours FCNC stewardship staff have spent on maintenance activities at the site. During 2024 FCNC will be working to continue treatments of exotic, invasive plants that are in early stages of infestation, especially Kudzu.

The site is seeing frequent use by the public for passive recreation along the Henry Fork River. FCNC installed an interpretive sign at the site to educate the public about the history of the American chestnut and the restoration activities undertaken at the site. Since the initial planting date in 2021, FCNC Community Engagement staff has led five outings for various school groups, resulting in more than 70 young people, from elementary to college aged, that have visited the site and learned about the restoration project. The Possum Rock River Access parking area, adjacent to the restoration site, will soon become the trailhead for the eastern section of Wilderness Gateway State Trail that will connect a network of conservation lands from Catawba County in the east, to McDowell County in the



west. FCNC will continue to steward the site until the trees and shrubs reach maturity and canopy closure of the new forest occurs.

Thanks again to the North Carolina Native Plant Society and the B.W. Wells Stewardship fund for helping fund the project and making it a reality. FCNC stewardship and community engagement staff would welcome the opportunity to visit the site with Native Plant Society members to view the site in its third growing season. Until then, I hope you find the included photos of the site helpful. If you have any question or concerns, please reach out to me anytime by phone, 828-430-9937, or by email, rsparks@foothillsconservancy.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ryan L. Sparks". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Ryan Sparks
Stewardship Director



1. Native Trees & Shrubs lined up for volunteer planting day on Dec. 4, 2021



2. Agricultural field prepared for volunteer planting day on Dec. 4, 2021



3. Hybrid American chestnut seedlings at nursery in western NC that were donated to FCNC for the project.



4. Restoration site on Dec. 4, 2021, the day of volunteer planting event.



5. Volunteer on Dec. 4, 2021 planting day.



6. Volunteers planting trees on Dec. 4, 2021



7. FCNC Volunteers working to maintain the planting site on Oct. 15, 2022



8. FCNC volunteers met on June 27, 2023 to help maintain the site



9. View of planting site on May 14, 2024.



10. Hybrid American chestnut on site May, 14, 2024.



11. White oak and serviceberry trees on site May 14, 2024.



12. Blueberry bush on site May 14, 2024



13. Interpretive sign about project and American chestnut history installed on site in 2022.

- Link to local newspaper article about featuring Boy Scout, Aaron Grossman, and the project:
 - https://morganton.com/news/local/boy-scout-volunteers-to-plant-300-trees-in-morganton/article_3d614632-52d5-11ec-8c8e-afa82ef23de7.html
- Link to YouTube video about Aaron's Distinguished Conservation Service Award featuring many photos from the project:
 - <https://youtu.be/KwqnnGkqtsY>