



# mountaintrue vistas

## Make Sure Your Vote Counts This Fall

The fate of our environment will be heavily impacted by the General Election.

Major civic engagement is key to the issues MountainTrue works on: from cleaning up our rivers and streams, to protecting our national forests, to enacting bold solutions that move us to a clean energy economy and support healthy communities.

Time to effectively address climate change is running out, and it's especially urgent that our region is represented by elected officials who are committed to making real progress. With the right leadership, we can enforce the 100% renewable energy commitments of communities like Boone, Clyde and Waynesville; keep more carbon in the ground through smarter forest and energy policies; and upgrade our stormwater

infrastructure to better deal with heavier storms resulting from climate change.

We urge you to research the environmental positions of the candidates on your sample ballot and vote.

Whether you're a hardened advocate, sat out the last few elections or have never voted before, we urge you to research the environmental positions of the candidates on your sample ballot and vote. Simply put, it's one of the most impactful actions you can take to protect the planet and preserve our democracy.

North Carolina will be a deciding state in the direction our country takes to address the environmental issues of our time, but the pandemic and possible delays in the postal system create unique challenges for voting this year. To make sure your vote is counted we're asking you to check that your voter registration is up to date and to cast your vote as soon as possible.

### Register to Vote or Update Your Registration

While the deadline to register to vote online or by mail was October 9, you can still register in person if you vote early! During the Early Voting period from October 15-31, you can register for the first time or update your registration *and* vote all at once.

Not sure if your registration is current? Check your voter registration status by entering your name in the NC voter lookup tool. To find it, just google "NC Voter Lookup Tool" or go to [vt.ncsbe.gov/RegLkup](http://vt.ncsbe.gov/RegLkup). If you need to register or update your registration, participate in early voting and schedule enough time to update your registration while you're at your early voting location.



### Look at Your Sample Ballot and Research the Candidates

Your sample ballot for this year's election is also available when you pull up your information on the NC voter lookup tool. From there, we hope you'll research the environmental positions of the candidates on your ballot so that you're making an informed decision on every candidate you support.

### If You Vote by Mail, Vote Early

In North Carolina, absentee voting (sometimes called mail-in voting) is available to all registered voters and no excuse is required for voting by mail rather than in person. Absentee ballot requests can be completed online, by mail or in person and must be received by the Board of Elections before October 27 at 5 PM. Given the remote locations of many residents in our region and delays in the US postal system, we recommend that, if you plan to vote by absentee ballot, you complete your ballot request online or drop it off directly at your local Board of Elections office. Once you receive your ballot, follow the instructions, vote and return your completed ballot as soon as you can.

For more information on voting this year, visit [mountaintrue.org/vote2020](http://mountaintrue.org/vote2020).

# Water Quality Administrator Hannah Woodburn Identifies Major Source of Pollution into the Watauga River



*MountainTrue's High Country Water Quality Administrator Hannah Woodburn taking water samples.*

## Our Swim Guide monitoring program tracks water pollution to let our community know where it's safe to fish and swim.

This summer, spiking levels of *E. coli* – a type of bacteria found in human and animal waste – at our sampling site on Calloway Road revealed that something was seriously polluting the river there.

Our High Country Water Quality Administrator Hannah Woodburn noticed this recurring pattern in the data and became determined to track down the source of pollution. The investigation led her upstream of Calloway Road, and meant driving through the area “to the point that people thought I was casing the neighborhood,” she jokes. Hannah smelled the source before she could see it, as it was coming from behind dense vegetation. Moving through the brush, she walked along a streambank and discovered a pipe leading directly from a rundown sewage plant into the Watauga River.

Watauga Riverkeeper Andy Hill notified the Health Department and NC Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ), and sampled at the sewage plant consistently for two weeks to have enough data to show a pattern. The samples were 20-40 times over the EPA's safety limit for *E. coli* pollution, and at times were so high that they maxed out the reading capacity of their water monitoring equipment.

When DEQ followed up, “They found corroded leaking pipes, inactive overflow alarm systems and uncontrolled solids buildup,” Hannah says. “Overall, the facility showed a serious lack of regular maintenance and a significant threat to the Watauga River.”

We are optimistic that the investigation will result in proper enforcement of the plant. Thanks to Hannah and Andy for their work, and to our members for the support that allowed it to happen!

## MountainTrue Members Help Win 47 New Solar Projects



This summer, MountainTrue supporters made hundreds of public comments to get 47 new public solar projects approved in Buncombe County! The solar panels will be built over the next two years at local public schools, libraries, community centers and other county buildings by MB Haynes, a local company.

We're excited to keep advocating for more public solar projects in our region to fight climate change and support local jobs. Thanks to all our supporters for making your voices heard!

## East Flat Rock Scores a Victory Against Asphalt Plant



We want to extend a huge thank you to all the folks who helped oppose an asphalt plant proposal in East Flat Rock! Over 200 people showed up to the August Henderson County Planning Board meeting, and thousands have signed petitions and emailed county officials in opposition. Because of your advocacy, the Henderson County Planning Board voted to recommend the denial of the developer's rezoning request. The Henderson County Board of Commissioners will take up the matter on October 1 (after press time).

[Visit \[friendsofeastflatrock.org\]\(https://friendsofeastflatrock.org\) to learn more.](https://friendsofeastflatrock.org)

## High Country Staff Begins Testing to Ward Off Harmful Algal Blooms

Our High Country team has begun a nutrient and chlorophyll study on Watauga Lake to monitor algal blooms, which form due to an excess of nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus. While not all algal blooms are toxic, the harmful ones release toxins that are linked to human illnesses and have even been shown to cause death in dogs. This study will help us better understand pollution impacts on the lake and identify and respond to harmful algal blooms when they arrive in the Watauga, which is expected as a result of climate change.



# MountainTrue Launches New Web Resource on Racial Equity

Like many organizations, we have begun taking a hard look at the role MountainTrue should play in the national dialogue on race and equity.

While equity has been a focus for us for several years – mostly in terms of training and awareness for our board and staff – the killing of George Floyd and many other unarmed Black Americans and the ensuing outcry for racial justice has pushed us to ask what else we can and should do.

You might ask, why should MountainTrue do anything? We are an environmental advocacy organization, not a social or racial justice organization, right? These are understandable questions, and the short answer is that the fight for racial justice and equity is not separate from the fight for a clean and healthy environment.

MountainTrue is evaluating our current suite of programs to see where we can create more intersections on issues of environmental justice and where we can better partner with communities of color. And in order to help dismantle the existing framework of systemic racism, we will explore how we can address discrimination outside of the narrow confines of traditional environmental advocacy. We'll be documenting this

The fight for racial justice and equity is not separate from the fight for a clean and healthy environment.

work and discussing environmentalism in the context of race on our website at [mountaintrue.org/equity](https://mountaintrue.org/equity). We will also host virtual small group discussions for those who want to dive in and ask more questions.

We invite you to join us. We realize this will be a new conversation for many of you, and while it may be challenging, we hope you will remain open and engage with us on this critical topic. Please feel free to reach out to us with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Bob Wagner, Co-Director



Julie Mayfield, Co-Director

## Broad Riverkeeper David Caldwell Identifies Harmful Algal Blooms in Moss Lake



While sampling at Moss Lake this summer, Broad Riverkeeper David Caldwell noticed that the water was very green and cloudy.




Moss Lake during the algal bloom (top) compared to normal water conditions (bottom).

He conducted additional tests that showed high dissolved oxygen and pH readings, both of which are indicators of an algal bloom.

The following Monday, David received a call from a Moss Lake resident who had noticed many dead fish in the water.

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WITH EACH OTHER  
EVEN IF WE CAN'T  
HUG EACH OTHER

**Virtual Annual  
Member Gathering  
& Awards Ceremony  
October 21, 6-7pm**



mountaintrue.

Open to all current MountainTrue members  
Register: [mountaintrue.org/gathering](https://mountaintrue.org/gathering)

# Asheville Design Center Helps Businesses Face Pandemic With Design Solutions

As more and more Asheville businesses have reopened, the pandemic has required them to need more physical space.

In response, MountainTrue's Asheville Design Center (ADC) has worked with the City of Asheville to create design solutions for businesses.

The first of these solutions, temporary parklets, allows businesses to use up to three on-street public parking spots as overflow space for outdoor dining, selling merchandise and social distancing. ADC has also joined the City of Asheville's Shared Streets program, which prioritizes entire streets for pedestrian use. At Banks and Buxton Streets, for instance, ADC worked with City staff to redirect vehicles to narrower, slower lanes, and added signs to identify the space as a Pedestrian Priority

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*Asheville Design Center volunteers paint traffic barriers for Asheville's Shared Streets installation on Eagle and Market Streets, also known as "The Block."*

Zone. Other Shared Street locations include Eagle and Market Streets (also known as "The Block"), Wall Street and College Street downtown.

True to ADC's mission, staff and volunteers followed the guidance of community members. In the case of "The Block", this meant working with neighborhood business owners and

Shared Street locations include Eagle and Market Streets (also known as "The Block"), Wall Street and College Street in downtown Asheville.

residents to use culturally relevant signage and colors. "We went to the YMI Cultural Center with community historian Roy Harris to look at documents and art that represent Asheville's historically Black community," Chris says. "The community led the vision, and our graphic design intern used fonts, colors and patterns that would all say 'The Block' to the people who grew up there."

The temporary parklets and Shared Streets will be active until at least October 31. Chris hopes the effort has helped more businesses see the value of using shared space design concepts for the long term.

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David notified the NC Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), and they sent a staff member out to take water samples in and above the lake. DEQ sent reports back confirming that it was a harmful algal bloom. In follow-up conversations, David learned that the same resident who reported the dead fish had noticed similar conditions at the lake at least twice since then, and once with a very foul odor.

As algal blooms become more common due to rising temperatures and an increase of nutrients in our waters, Riverkeepers across the state believe that more study and analysis must be done. We would also like for the residents at Moss Lake to take more of a lead in identifying and reporting possible algal blooms. Residents should contact DEQ immediately if the water turns really green, because the life cycle of these blooms can be really quick – as short as a

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"I would ask the Moss Lake area residents this," David says. "What do you want your lake to look like in 10 to 20 years? What will you do to help realize that vision?"



## SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT: Earth Equity Advisors

Having been selected as a Best for the World B Corporation for four years in a row, Earth Equity Advisors continues to be a leader in sustainable, responsible and impactful investments.

Their passion for protecting the environment is evident through both their investment strategies and continued support of MountainTrue.

Earth Equity Advisors specializes in diversified, fossil-fuel-free investments and was recently selected as one of the 100 most influential financial advisors in the US by Investopedia.

Certified B Corporations integrate responsible business practices, including environmental, employee, customer, community and governance practices. For Peter Krull, CEO and Director of Investments at Earth Equity Advisors, the partnership with MountainTrue is part and parcel to the company's mission of leveraging capital for the greater good. "MountainTrue has had an incredible impact on our region," Pete says. "Their work has been instrumental to protecting our mountains, cleaning up our rivers and making our region more resilient to climate change."



*Earth Equity Advisors specializes in diversified, fossil-fuel-free investments.*

For Pete, the commitment goes even deeper: he is a past Chair of MountainTrue's Board and a frequent presence at our gatherings. "It's community service that's not just fulfilling, but really fun," he says.

Earth Equity Advisors has invested in their values by sponsoring MountainTrue for many years, and now they have options that make it easier for you to invest in your values. Their new online investing option, ALIGN DIGITAL, empowers you to invest in fossil-fuel-free, responsible portfolios with as little as \$5,000. For Pete and Earth Equity Advisors, this fulfills their vision of sustainable and responsible investments for all.

To learn more, visit [www.earthequityalign.com](https://www.earthequityalign.com).

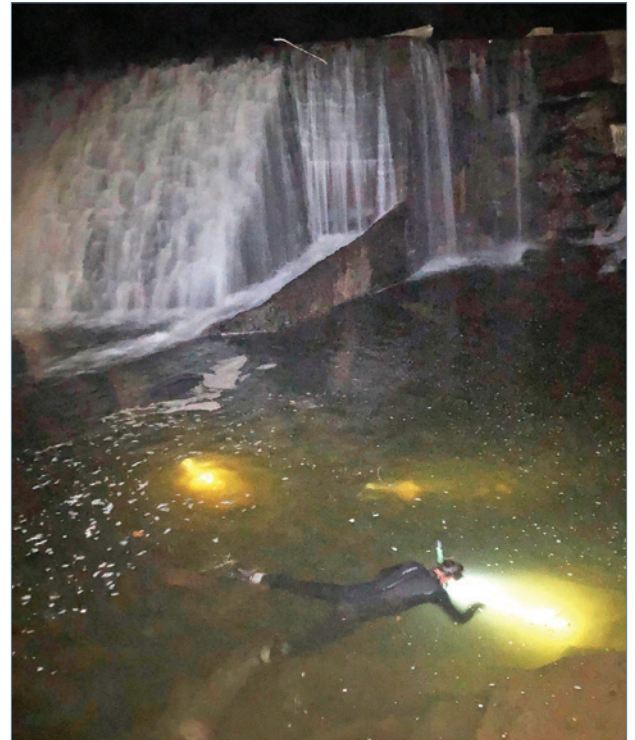
## Watauga Riverkeeper Supports Wards Mill Dam Removal With Night Scuba Expeditions

MountainTrue's Watauga Riverkeeper Andy Hill is in the third year of a project to remove the Wards Mill Dam on the Watauga River.

The effort is happening in partnership with American Rivers, Blue Ridge Resource Conservation and Development Council and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

This dam has been ranked the highest priority dam for removal by the Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership and "Tier One, Priority One" by the North Carolina Aquatic Barrier Assessment Tool. Removing it will reconnect 35 miles of aquatic habitat in the main stem of the Watauga River, and 140 miles of streams across the greater watershed. This will improve cold water aquatic habitat for native fish populations such as the brook trout, tangerine darters and threatened salamanders like the hellbender. It will also reconnect genetically distinct populations of fish and other aquatic species for the first time in 80 years.

Andy has been hard at work with partners at Appalachian State University to conduct research for the project's Environmental Impact Study – including numerous night scuba dives to document the elusive nocturnal hellbender. This project is now in the final stages of the permitting process.



*Watauga Riverkeeper Andy Hill has gone on numerous dives to identify elusive nocturnal hellbender salamanders as part of the Environmental Impact Study for the removal of the Wards Mill Dam.*



# Success Restoring Sandy Bottom Wetlands!

By Bob Gale, Ecologist & Public Lands Director for MountainTrue

**I first visited the Sandy Bottom wetland forest in 2004 with Dr. Jim Petranka, a renowned herpetologist with UNC-Asheville.**

The protected tract is an example of a rare Southern Appalachian bog ecosystem and Jim was its overseer. We were there to look at areas severely infested by several woody stemmed non-native invasive plant species that were increasingly displacing native plants. As MountainTrue's Ecologist, I offered to begin removing these plants, and for a few years was able to get small groups of volunteers to occasionally pitch in. Seeing the need for a more structured program, in 2012 I began recruiting full-time summer interns from various colleges.

Fast forward to 2020, and the jungle of non-native invasive oriental bittersweet, border privet and multiflora rose is

In invasive plant control, success is seen as a reduction of 80% or greater of such species. We've achieved an estimated 98%.



*Maxine Daniels, one of the project's first volunteers, removes a patch of Japanese Stiltgrass at the Sandy Bottom Wetlands.*

gone, as is the Japanese barberry, autumn olive and bush honeysuckle that was gaining a foothold.

In invasive plant control, success is seen as a reduction of 80% or greater of such species. We've achieved an estimated 98%. We also experimented successfully with herbicide treatment of Japanese honeysuckle in winter, when native vegetation is dormant. Currently, we are testing to see if new plantings of two native fern species can become established in the area.

Restoring Sandy Bottom's natural plant population in formerly heavily invaded areas is no small achievement, and MountainTrue is proud to have brought it about!



*Rev. Scott Hardin-Nieri, Director of the Creation Care Alliance.*

## Creation Care Alliance Hosts Eco-Grief Circles

**"Over the past six years I have had the opportunity to listen to people of faith as they grapple with the realities of our changing climate," says Rev. Scott Hardin-Nieri, Director of MountainTrue's Creation Care Alliance (CCA) program.**

"I have heard the fear of the threats made to God's good creation, felt the anger of those standing against a fossil-fueled future, seen the tears of grandparents on behalf of their grandchildren."

After hearing story after story of these and other kinds of grief, Scott gathered two counselors, a pastor and a chaplain within the Creation Care Alliance network to develop a six-week pilot project called the Eco-Grief Circle. The circle supported 16 community members, and participants expressed deep gratitude for being able to talk honestly about grief, suffering and the ecological and social challenges of our time.

"Grief, anxiety and anger are often experienced in isolation," Scott says. "Creating space for the healthy expression of these emotions – all normal reactions to injustice – is important to move us toward loving and wise solutions together."

CCA launched two more Eco-Grief Circles in mid-September. Let us know if you are interested in participating in the future by emailing [scott@creationcarealliance.org](mailto:scott@creationcarealliance.org).

"Creating space for the healthy expression of these emotions – all normal reactions to injustice – is important to move us toward loving and wise solutions together."

# MountainTrue Helps Protect Electric Co-op Customers From Utility Shutoffs

Governor Roy Cooper's moratorium on utility shutoffs for North Carolina customers came to an end on July 30, meaning that shutoffs for customers who can't afford to pay their utility debts began in September. Also on July 30, the North Carolina Utilities Commission ordered an extension of the shutoff moratorium and a requirement for a 12-month payback plan for customers with utility debt, but this only applies to the customers of regulated utilities like Duke Energy. Electric co-op customers, who disproportionately live

Electric co-op customers, who disproportionately live in rural counties with high poverty rates in our region, are left out of these protections.

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MountainTrue is an advocate for equitable and affordable access to energy. For communities to be healthy, all people must have access to electricity and water – especially when staying at home and frequent handwashing are key to safety for all of us during the pandemic.

MountainTrue stepped in to fight for electric co-op customers to have access to the same debt payment options as regulated utility customers. We have been a core member of a statewide effort to lobby the Governor, the NC General Assembly and the Utilities Commission to fix this problem. We also stepped in to report a co-op with an illegal utility shutoff policy, which had originally planned to begin shutoffs on August 4. Our outreach has successfully changed this policy and put it in line with the Governor's order.

If you are a member of an electric co-op and face the threat of your utilities being shut off, please feel free to reach out to us for the latest on this advocacy by contacting MountainTrue's Energy Organizer Eliza Stokes at [eliza@mountaintrue.org](mailto:eliza@mountaintrue.org).

## MountainTrue Partners with Beech Mountain Ski Resort on Sustainability Initiative

**Beech Mountain Ski Resort and MountainTrue are pleased to announce a partnership to increase the resort's sustainability and climate resilience efforts.**

"We're excited to be working with Beech Mountain Resort to expand their sustainability efforts," says Andy Hill, MountainTrue's Watauga Riverkeeper and High Country Regional Director. "Beech Mountain Resort's water conservation efforts are a model for the ski industry and for other businesses throughout our region."

The resort creates snow using their own replenishable water resources. "We have two holding ponds that we use to make snow, which eventually melts and drains down the mountain to refill those holding ponds. That allows us to use zero potable water in our snow making operations," explains Leighann Cogdill, who leads sustainability efforts at the resort. "Over the last several years we have heavily invested in additional snowmaking infrastructure which helps to conserve energy, and provides a more calculated approach to snowmaking. Our new system has automated features to maximize efficiency and better monitor operations."



Beech Mountain Ski Resort is expanding its commitment to the environment by partnering with the Watauga Riverkeeper on future events and generously supporting our work as a High Country sponsor.

"We are dedicated to preserving our mountains and creating a sustainable operation for our community," Leighann says. "Our partnership with MountainTrue is just one piece of our long-term plan."

This partnership is just getting started. Stay tuned for more soon!

The resort creates snow using their own replenishable resources.



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164 Depot St.  
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**Southern Regional Office**

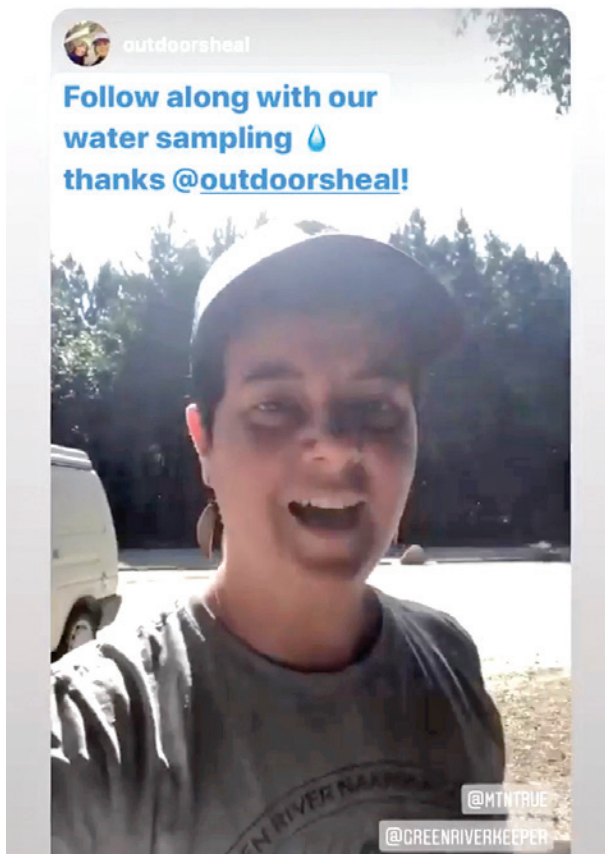
121 Third Ave. West, Ste. #1  
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**Western Regional Office**

90 Tennessee St., Ste. D  
Murphy, NC 28906  
(828) 837-5414



[mountaintrue.org](http://mountaintrue.org)



A screenshot of an Instagram video by MountainTrue member Erica Shanks, where she describes taking Swim Guide water samples on the Green River.

## Are You MountainTrue?

**MountainTrue members protect forests, water and air in the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains.**

Meet Erica Shanks. She's a MountainTrue member who takes water samples on the Green River that we test for E. coli bacteria back at our lab. Then we share the results from different sites on the Swim Guide app so people know where and when it's safe to swim.

Erica has been documenting her MountainTrue sampling process in videos on Instagram @outdoorsheal, and has also organized an annual Black Friday cleanup on the Lower Green River for the past four years.

**Be awesome like Erica and find new and creative ways to support MountainTrue at [mountaintrue.org](http://mountaintrue.org).**