



mountaintrue vistas

You Can Count On MountainTrue To Keep You Safe This River Season

Swim Guide is back, and it's about more than just having fun on the water.

The water's getting warmer, the days are getting sunnier and it's time to spend some quality time on the river. To make sure you don't come back from your river adventures with a sick feeling in your stomach or an unexpected skin rash, MountainTrue is here for you with regular E. coli monitoring for many of the most popular swimming and paddling areas in the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains.

Each week from Memorial Day to Labor Day, we collect water samples from dozens of sites throughout the Broad, French Broad, Elk, Green, Hiwassee, New, Nottely and Watauga River Basins. Our Riverkeepers and volunteers take samples on Wednesdays and drop them off at MountainTrue's regional offices. Then our staff process the data, compare it to the EPA's water recreation standard and upload the results online before the weekend so that the public knows what areas are safest to swim and paddle.

Where To Find Results

We share our results through social media, send updated media advisories to local newspapers and TV and radio stations, and upload the data to swimguide.org – a website with water quality results for 8,000 swimming areas and beaches around the world. Our data is also on the Swim Guide smartphone app, which is available for download on Google Play and the Apple App Store.

Data-Driven Advocacy

MountainTrue uses our data to help track down pollution sources and get them fixed. Our water team has used our E. coli sampling data to track down a sewer leak at Hominy Creek in Asheville, a faulty septic system at



Above: Green Riverkeeper Gray Jernigan takes a Swim Guide sample. Inset (top to bottom): French Broad Watershed Outreach Coordinator Anna Alsobrook takes a water sample from a storm drain in Asheville's Southside neighborhood; Cells of a blister pack glow under black light in MountainTrue's lab, indicating high levels of E. coli contamination; Swim Guide results indicate where it's safe to swim on a regional map.

Mud Creek in Hendersonville and a failing wastewater treatment plant on the Watauga River in Foscoe.

We also use Swim Guide data to help develop science-based policy solutions for pollution issues at the local, regional and state levels. At the NC General Assembly, we're advocating for increased funding to help farmers pay for fencing and buffers to keep cattle and runoff out of our region's rivers, as well as for increased funding to locate and fix broken septic and sewer systems. It was Swim Guide data that alerted us to ongoing stormwater and sewage infrastructure problems at Nasty Branch, which flows through Asheville's predominantly Black Southside neighborhood. We leveraged that data to successfully push Asheville City Council to form a Stormwater Task Force, which will soon issue recommendations to fix the City's stormwater and sewer infrastructure issues. We've cited similar data from all across our region to advocate for solutions that address bacteria pollution.

To make all this happen, we invest tens of thousands of dollars in supplies, equipment maintenance and staff time to collect and analyze water samples. It's a service that is powered by staff and volunteers, and only possible with the support of members like you.

To learn more and support this program, visit mountaintrue.org/swimguide.

Volunteers and Riverkeepers Planted Over 12,000 Trees This Winter

While we had to wear face masks and practice social distancing this time around, our members once again made a huge difference for the Watauga Watershed this winter through our “live staking” work days.

Together, we were able to plant over 12,000 live stakes that will grow into trees and help reduce sediment erosion in our region’s rivers.

Why Live Stakes?

Live stakes are cuttings from tree species like silky dogwood, black willow or elderberry that can be planted along riverbanks. The live stakes then grow into trees that reduce sediment erosion – one

Live staking is a cost-effective, natural way to improve water quality and aquatic habitats.

of the worst polluters of our rivers. Sediment clogs aquatic habitats, increases water temperatures (which is harmful to trout and many other species) and transports toxic substances. Of course, planting trees at this scale is also an excellent way to capture more of the carbon emissions that create climate change.

Live staking also increases the density of the riparian buffer – the vegetated area surrounding a waterway that helps provide shade and filter out substances that are carried into the river as part of runoff. And since we’ve been planting trees along the rivers for the past several years, we can now take cuttings



Photo by Moss Brennan

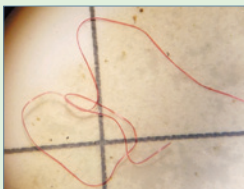
from trees that were live stakes only a few years ago. It’s a cost-effective, natural way to improve water quality and aquatic habitats.

We host these work days in winter because live stakes can only be planted while they are still dormant. When the spring comes, the stakes’ nodes sprout roots underground, helping to hold the riverbanks in place.

Thanks to all the volunteers who got on the river with us!

Assessing Microplastics in Regional Waters

MountainTrue’s volunteers and staff have begun collecting data to assess the amount of large plastics as well as microplastics – tiny pieces of plastic that are often invisible to



This tiny fiber from our microplastics sampling is smaller than .5mm.

the naked eye – in our region’s waters.

“Plastics pollution is a significant threat to waterways, wildlife and

people,” says Gray Jernigan, Green Riverkeeper at MountainTrue. “The next step is to use this data to help advocate for policy changes at every level of government, while also educating community members about what they can do as consumers.”

To learn more about our plastics advocacy, visit iloverivers.org and plasticfreepresident.org.

MountainTrue Helps Lead Bulk Solar Purchasing Effort

MountainTrue is helping to lead Solarize Asheville-Buncombe – a local bulk-purchasing initiative to increase the amount of solar energy in our community. “The model is similar to buying in bulk at the grocery store for a lower price,” says MountainTrue’s Organizer & Communications Manager Eliza Stokes, who serves on the campaign’s Steering Committee. “The more community members who participate, the cheaper the solar will be.” By reducing barriers to solar, like cost and confusion about where to start, the campaign is making solar more accessible and helping Buncombe County reach our community goal of using 100% renewable energy by 2042.



Steering Committee members.



Advocacy Wins A More Forest-, People- and Wildlife-Friendly Corridor K

Thanks to decades of advocacy, on March 25 the North Carolina Department of Transportation put forward an excellent final proposal for Corridor K!

The road expansion will avoid cutting through the acid-producing rock of the surrounding mountains, keeping much more of the surrounding area intact and protecting local streams. The final plan also includes a new land bridge overpass that will create a vital path for wildlife to cross safely and help preserve the scenic views and hiking experience on the Appalachian Trail.

Thank you to all of our members and our advocacy partner, WaysSouth, for leading the way to achieve this outcome!

Our Region Loses an Environmental Champion: Remembering Norma Ivey

By Bob Gale, Ecologist & Public Lands Director

This past winter, the MountainTrue community lost Norma Ivey, a former staff member and wonderful person.

Norma served MountainTrue first as a volunteer, and then as a dedicated staff member from 1996 to 2009. Upon retiring, she received our organization's highest honor: the Esther Cunningham Award.

Norma welcomed me warmly when I came aboard as MountainTrue's Ecologist in 1998, and it was my pleasure to work closely with her over the next decade. She filled a number of positions for the organization in that time, including Community Organizer and Staff Liaison to various chapters that were part of the structure of MountainTrue (known then as the Western North Carolina Alliance, or WNCA).

One of Norma's best attributes was her understanding of and respect for opinions and local needs in more rural counties in our region. As a staff member at our Franklin office, Norma related important information on how our members in the far western counties felt about rising environmental issues



Upon retiring, Norma received our organization's highest honor: the Esther Cunningham Award.

to our Asheville office. She was also a fabulous writer, adept at communicating technical terms in a way that was easily understood by the public.

Norma was a great help to me in my work monitoring timber sales in Nantahala National Forest, and she helped create resources and plan events at monthly meetings of our Macon, Tuckasegee and Tusquittee chapters. When she transferred to Asheville, Norma performed a similar service for the organization's "Concerned Citizens of Rutherford County" and "Good Earth Stewards of McDowell County" chapters.

Norma was WNCA's representative to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, attending numerous stakeholder meetings for the relicensing of Duke Power's dams in the Catawba-Wataeree River Basin. When the process was undermined by lack of interest from McDowell County government, Norma pivoted to successfully engaging the county in greenway planning at a time when greenways were still a new concept in our region. Unsurprisingly, Norma wrote yet another excellent article explaining the cultural and financial benefits of greenways for a wide audience.

I could list so many other issues that Norma was involved in, but most dear to her heart was the one that first attracted her to WNCA as a volunteer: protecting old-growth forests. Norma assisted with a seven-year study that located 78,000 acres of previously unknown old growth in Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. Later research increased this number to about 100,000 acres! Praise for the study appeared in newspapers as far away as the *Charlotte Observer* and *Boston Globe*.

Norma was a fierce advocate with an unassuming nature who sincerely cared for everyone she met. She will be greatly missed by MountainTrue and so many others in these mountains that got the chance to meet her. Here's to you, Norma!

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Massive Public Comment Sign-Ups Lead to Several New Hearings on Duke's Energy Plan

You signed up, and the NC Utilities Commission noticed!

So many people signed up to make virtual public comment on Duke's proposed new energy plan that the NC Utilities Commission (NCUC) canceled the original hearing to schedule several more opportunities for public comment. Final tallies show that over 200 people signed up for the original hearing date. This is a huge victory, and shows that

the NCUC is aware of how much the public opposes Duke's proposed plan.

To recap: Duke is required to submit a long-term plan to the NCUC detailing how the company plans to source energy over the next fifteen years. Duke released a proposal toward the end of 2020 that is bad news for the climate: proposing the construction of up to 13 new gas plants, overinflating the costs of renewable energy and battery storage, and proposing less renewable energy 14 years from now than what is

You can learn more and make your public comment to the NC Utilities Commission at dukesenergyplan.org.



NC resident John Harvey gives an example of public testimony for the upcoming hearings on Duke's energy plan. Watch John's full testimony at dukesenergyplan.org/resources.

already the national average.

Thank you to everyone who showed power in numbers by signing up, and we hope you'll help us build momentum for the NCUC to require big changes to Duke's plan this spring.



Rev. Scott Hardin-Nieri

New Horizons for Scott and a Growing Vision for the Creation Care Alliance

A Note from Rev. Scott Hardin-Nieri

Dear friends and supporters,

After six years of wonderful work collaborating with individuals and congregations in Western North Carolina, it is with a mix of excitement and sadness that I share the news that I am

leaving my role as Director of the Creation Care Alliance (CCA) to accept a position with the Bethany Fellowship.

Over the past six years, CCA has grown to become a vital program within the MountainTrue community. CCA and MountainTrue, working together, are unique in their ability to combine science, faith, policy, economics, spirituality, justice, technology, and theology. We took risks partnering a faith-based program with an environmental advocacy organization, and those risks are paying off.

I'm proud of what we've accomplished together. We currently work with over 70 congregations representing 12 denominations in about 20 different locations across Western North Carolina. Through the passion and dedication of the CCA Steering Team, MountainTrue staff and our network of congregations and collaborators, we have been able to offer transformative experiences like our Earth Day Vigils, Path to Paris Pilgrimages, and Creation Care Retreats; tangible results reflected in the hundreds of solar panels, LED lights, and gardens installed at congregations; and vital tools and

resources through our Creation Care Guide, Eco-Grief Circles, and Eco-Justice Camps. Together we have accompanied congregations in addressing climate change and ecological destruction, and we have deepened the capacity for compassion, right relationship, and love in the midst of crises.

I'm excited for what CCA has planned for the future as well. Even as I prepare for my new job, I've been working with the CCA Steering Team on a strategic plan for the next 10 years. We're planning now to bring the good work of Creation Care to more congregations and communities throughout our mountains, to help more faith groups achieve zero-carbon footprints, and to train more leaders to take our movement of love and compassion to the broader public. I look forward to passing the baton to the next CCA Director, and whoever steps into this work will be lucky to be walking with such a powerful collective of staff and volunteers.

It's been an honor to work with you all for justice, our communities, and a better planet. I leave this position with deep gratitude and a determination to continue this work together. See you soon!

With gratitude and hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Hardin-Nieri'.

Rev. Scott Hardin-Nieri

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Tom Gallaher



Tom Gallaher at a party for the Asheville Design Center in 2012.

Tom Gallaher is a native Texan, but as someone who's lived all over the country (and a bit in Canada), he's learned what makes places like the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains special.

During his career, Tom worked with communities seeking status as National Heritage Areas – a designation given

to areas with a combination of historic, cultural and natural resources – as an independent consultant to the National Parks Service. It's his work as a planner and the unique marriage of wild spaces and human habitats that inspired him to include MountainTrue's Asheville Design Center in his will.

"I began thinking about my will about four years ago and realized I didn't have anything prepared in that way," Tom says. "I don't have any heirs, and no close family members, so this seemed like the right thing to do." As a Founding Board Member of the Asheville Design Center, supporting the program in his will felt like a natural fit. "I was close to the Asheville Design Center and I told Chris Joyell, 'I'm going to leave you something because you work on three things that are key in meeting the needs

of a community: well-managed forests, clean water and smart land use.'"

Tom says the idea made him excited to leave a meaningful impact behind to improve the region. "It wouldn't occur to some people that MountainTrue has a program like the Asheville Design Center that takes a holistic approach to the built and natural environments. It's really only MountainTrue that is even attempting to address both environments in this way.

"You all work on three things that are key in meeting the needs of a community: well-managed forests, clean water and smart land use."

"This choice brought me closer to MountainTrue's work," Tom adds. "I'm paying more attention now than ever."

Tom, we are honored by your selfless gift to support our region's communities and environment for years to come. Thank you for your support!

To learn more about planned giving with MountainTrue, contact Development Director Adam Bowers at adam@mountaintrue.org.

Read Chris Joyell's Article "Rethinking Smart Growth" Online

A few months before the pandemic set in, Asheville Design Center Director Chris Joyell had a meeting with a community group in the Emma neighborhood in Buncombe County that challenged many of the assumptions he held regarding Smart Growth development and the role of Design Centers.

Over the past year Chris has given this issue much thought, and one result is his article "Rethinking Smart Growth," which is now up on MountainTrue's website. In this piece, Chris explores the historic role Design Centers have played in the US and examines how, despite good intentions, Smart Growth initiatives can threaten many of the communities that Design Centers were created to serve.

Read the full article at mountaintrue.org/rethinking-smart-growth.



A still from Understory, a film starring three women activists featured at this year's No Man's Land Film Festival.

MountainTrue to Host No Man's Land Film Festival

Our 4th annual screening celebrates the many opportunities we have to play outside in the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains and the need to protect the places we share for the future.

This year's film program will highlight intrepid climate activists, conservationists, problem solvers, committed grassroots organizers and environmental justice champions – all women, and all inspiring!

We will also feature an interview with MountainTrue Co-Director Julie Mayfield, who will share how her love for the outdoors inspired her to become an environmental advocate and how others can do the same.

We hope you'll watch with us on June 11 and that you'll be inspired to stand up for the places we share in our region!

For more information and to register for this year's film festival, go to mountaintrue.org/nmlff2021.



Asheville Office

29 N. Market St., Suite #610
Asheville, NC 28801
(828) 258-8737

High Country Regional Office

164 Depot St.
Boone, NC 28607
(828) 406-2429

Southern Regional Office

121 Third Ave. West, Ste. #1
Hendersonville, NC 28792
(828) 692-0385

Western Regional Office

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



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Riverkeeper-in-Training Wilder Carson during a recent paddling trip on the French Broad River.

Are You MountainTrue?

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

Members have the opportunity to hike with experts, maintain our amazing Paddle Trail along the French Broad River, volunteer to help create equitable community design projects and so much more. Have fun with us, learn more about the incredible natural treasures of our region and make a difference in our community.

mountaintrue.org