

Little Tennessee Native Fish Conservation Partnership

2016 Accomplishment Report

2016 saw the Little Tennessee Native Fish Conservation Partnership continue existing and begin new projects that give people living across the basin more opportunities to learn about, and hopefully enjoy, the Little Tennessee River and its tributary streams.

Expansion of river snorkeling opportunities

River snorkeling has long been offered in Tennessee as a way to share the incredible aquatic diversity of these rivers with anyone willing to don a wetsuit and hit the water. The partnership expanded those offerings into North Carolina. A grant from the North Carolina Chapter of the American Fisheries Society was matched with funds from the North Carolina Wildlife Federation, allowing the partnership to purchase snorkels, wetsuits, and other materials partnership members can use to offer snorkeling programs across the Little Tennessee River basin. Mainspring Conservation Trust and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians have already used the equipment for snorkeling events.

Bringing the Little Tennessee basin to screens everywhere

To bring the Little Tennessee River experience to classrooms, living rooms, and anyplace with an internet connection, the partnership is working with video production company Freshwaters Illustrated to develop a series of video shorts highlighting the Little Tennessee River basin, including:

- An overview of the Native Fish Conservation Area, and the significance of the Little Tennessee River basin.
- The importance of clean water, not only to aquatic life, but to stream users, including farmers, beer makers, outfitters, and others.
- Stream recreation such as fishing, paddling, and snorkeling, a look at the economic benefit of clean water.
- Efforts to restore stream habitat and animal populations.
- A look at some of the animals found in the basin's streams and simple steps community members can do to help conserve them.

Duke Energy grant

The partnership, working with the North Carolina Wildlife Federation, received an \$85,000 grant from the Duke Energy Water Resources Fund. The funds will go toward a pair of initiatives – expanding the offering of educational videos the partnership is currently developing, and creating an interactive web-based map to guide conservation efforts and engage citizens.

What is the Little Tennessee Native Fish Conservation Partnership?

A group of local, state, and national organizations that recognize the significance of the river basin's streams and are working with local communities to conserve stream life and develop stream-based economic opportunity.

About Little Tennessee River Basin

The Little Tennessee River Basin stretches from northeast Georgia, across North Carolina, into east Tennessee and includes the Little Tennessee River itself, as well as the Tuckasegee, Nantahala, Cheoah, Oconaluftee, and Tellico rivers, and myriad smaller tributaries.

When it comes to aquatic life, this basin is one of the most diverse in the nation with more than 100 species of native fish, 10 species of native mussels and a dozen native crayfish species. It's home to 32 fish, mussel, or crayfish species considered rare at the federal or state level, including a handful found nowhere else in the world like the Citico darter, Smoky madtom, and Little Tennessee crayfish.

The basin's streams are also important as a recreational and economic resource. Numerous native sport fishes including brook trout, rock bass, smallmouth bass, and flathead catfish bring significant angling dollars to the region. Fishing and other recreational activities such as canoeing, white-water rafting, swimming, tubing and wildlife watching are vital to the region, with the Nantahala and Cheoah rivers being nationally-known paddling destinations.



Jenny Sanders helps students identify aquatic insects on the banks of the Little Tennessee River. Credit: USFWS

Work by the partners - While the partnership has worked collaboratively on key projects, individual member organizations continue working in the basin, focused on those areas and species defined by their respective missions. Learn more about some of their work below.

American Rivers

- Hired Mandi Carringer, River Conservation Associate, based in Sylva, N.C. to work on riverside land protection and increasing recreation opportunities through the creation of the Tuckasegee River Blue Trail.
- Partnered with Western Carolina University to pursue the removal of the Cullowhee Dam to improve public safety, recreation, and river health. American Rivers was awarded a \$65,000 grant from The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina to support this work over the next two years.
- Service and other partners, and continued participation in ongoing restoration activities.
- Implemented an Environmental Protection Agency 319 Non-Point Source Pollution Program involving planning and implementing stream restoration projects to reduce sediment, organic and inorganic pollutants, and nutrient loading. Completed projects included the Oconaluftee Island Park, Raven Fork KOA Campground, McCoy Branch, and Hunting Boy Branch.

Conservation Fisheries, Inc.

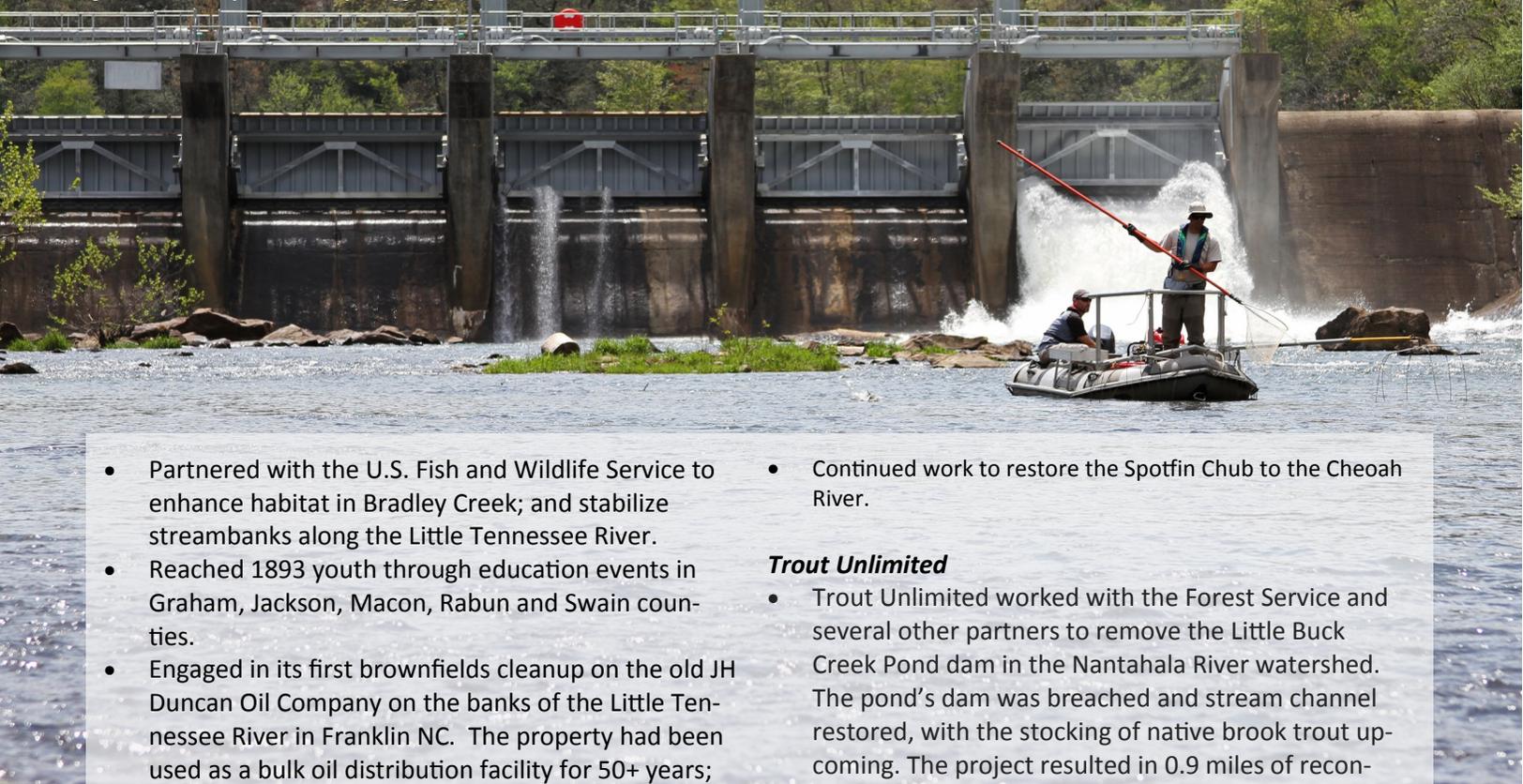
- Propagated Spotfin Chub and Olive Darter for reintroduction into the Cheoah River
- Propagated, reintroduced, and monitored Yellowfin Madtom, Smoky Madtom, Citico Darter, and Spotfin Chub in Citico and Abrams Creek, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and Tellico River, Cherokee National Forest.
- Sicklefins Redhorse propagation and reintroduction in Upper Little Tennessee River, Oconaluftee and Tuckasegee Rivers
- Monitored Spotfin Chub in the Little Tennessee in North Carolina (assisting N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission) - the last year of a 10-year project.
- Initiated multi-parameter stream monitoring station project, which will ultimately include 17 stations in EBCI streams measuring water quality, flow, and weather parameters to improve monitoring efforts and inform stream management.
- Received Treatment as a State status for water quality management under Section 106 of the Clean Water Act. Completed draft revision of water quality standards and stream classifications to meet federally-approved standards.
- Operated and maintained Jesse Owle Dugan Native Plant and Greenhouse Facility, producing 65,000 native plants for stream restoration projects

Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

- Formalized the EBCI's commitment to Sicklefins Redhorse conservation by signing a Candidate Conservation Agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Mainspring Conservation Trust

- Worked with TVA to get Shade Your Stream on-the-ground in North Carolina, resulting in seven projects, four of which involved student participation.
- Worked with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission to remove a culvert and enhance habitat in Lakey Creek, which is Spotfin Chub habitat



- Partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to enhance habitat in Bradley Creek; and stabilize streambanks along the Little Tennessee River.
- Reached 1893 youth through education events in Graham, Jackson, Macon, Rabun and Swain counties.
- Engaged in its first brownfields cleanup on the old JH Duncan Oil Company on the banks of the Little Tennessee River in Franklin NC. The property had been used as a bulk oil distribution facility for 50+ years; Mainspring used more than \$350,000 in EPA grant funding to remove 3,200 tons of petroleum-contaminated soil to prevent contamination of the waters of the Little Tennessee.
- Working on a multi-year project that will add 427 acres to National Forest System lands and connect three outlying Forest Service parcels to the larger block of public land. The land includes the numerous first order streams, including the headwaters of Rickman Creek.

N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission

- Continued Sicklefin Redhorse conservation efforts, now as signatory to the Candidate Conservation Agreement

- Continued work to restore the Spotfin Chub to the Cheoah River.

Trout Unlimited

- Trout Unlimited worked with the Forest Service and several other partners to remove the Little Buck Creek Pond dam in the Nantahala River watershed. The pond's dam was breached and stream channel restored, with the stocking of native brook trout upcoming. The project resulted in 0.9 miles of reconnected habitat.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- Worked with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Duke Energy, Tennessee Valley Authority, Georgia Department of Natural Resources to create a Candidate Conservation Agreement for the Sicklefin Redhorse, formalizing each organization's commitment to conserving the redhorse.
- Concluded the Sicklefin Redhorse does not warrant placement on the federal endangered species list.

Little Tennessee Native Fish Conservation Partnership Executive Committee

Chair – Andrea Leslie, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, andrea.leslie@ncwildlife.org

Vice-Chair – Erin McCombs, American Rivers, emccombs@americanrivers.org

Vice-Chair – Stephanie Chance, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, stephanie_chance@fws.gov

Assessment Team chair – Janet Mizzi, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, janet_mizzi@fws.gov

Communications Team chair – Gary Peeples, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, gary_peeples@fws.gov

Fundraising Team chair – Fred Harris, N.C. Wildlife Federation, fred@ncwf.org

Implementation Team chair – Shannon O'Quinn, Tennessee Valley Authority, tsoquinn@tva.gov

Outreach Team chair – Jason Meador, Mainspring Conservation Trust, jmeador@mainspringconserves.org

Partners

American Rivers • Conservation Fisheries Inc. • Duke Energy, Carolinas • Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians • Georgia Department of Natural Resources • National Park Service • Mainspring Conservation Trust • North Carolina Wildlife Federation • North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission • Sierra Club, Tennessee Chapter • Tennessee Department of Environmental Conservation • Tennessee Valley Authority • Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency • University of Tennessee • U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service • U.S. Forest Service • Watershed Association of the Tuckasegee River

Looking ahead to 2017

Everything you wanted to know about the river basin – online

- The Little Tennessee River basin has been the scene of a lot of conservation efforts, research, and data collection over the years. Thanks to funding from **Duke Energy**, the partnership will compile that information in a single, web-based location, making it readily available to anyone who wants to learn more about the river basin. An interactive map will offer biological data, conservation priorities, threats, and current and past projects, allowing the NFCA partners and others to target habitat and biological community assessment, as well as restoration and protection in the most critical places.

Telling the story of the Little Tennessee River Basin

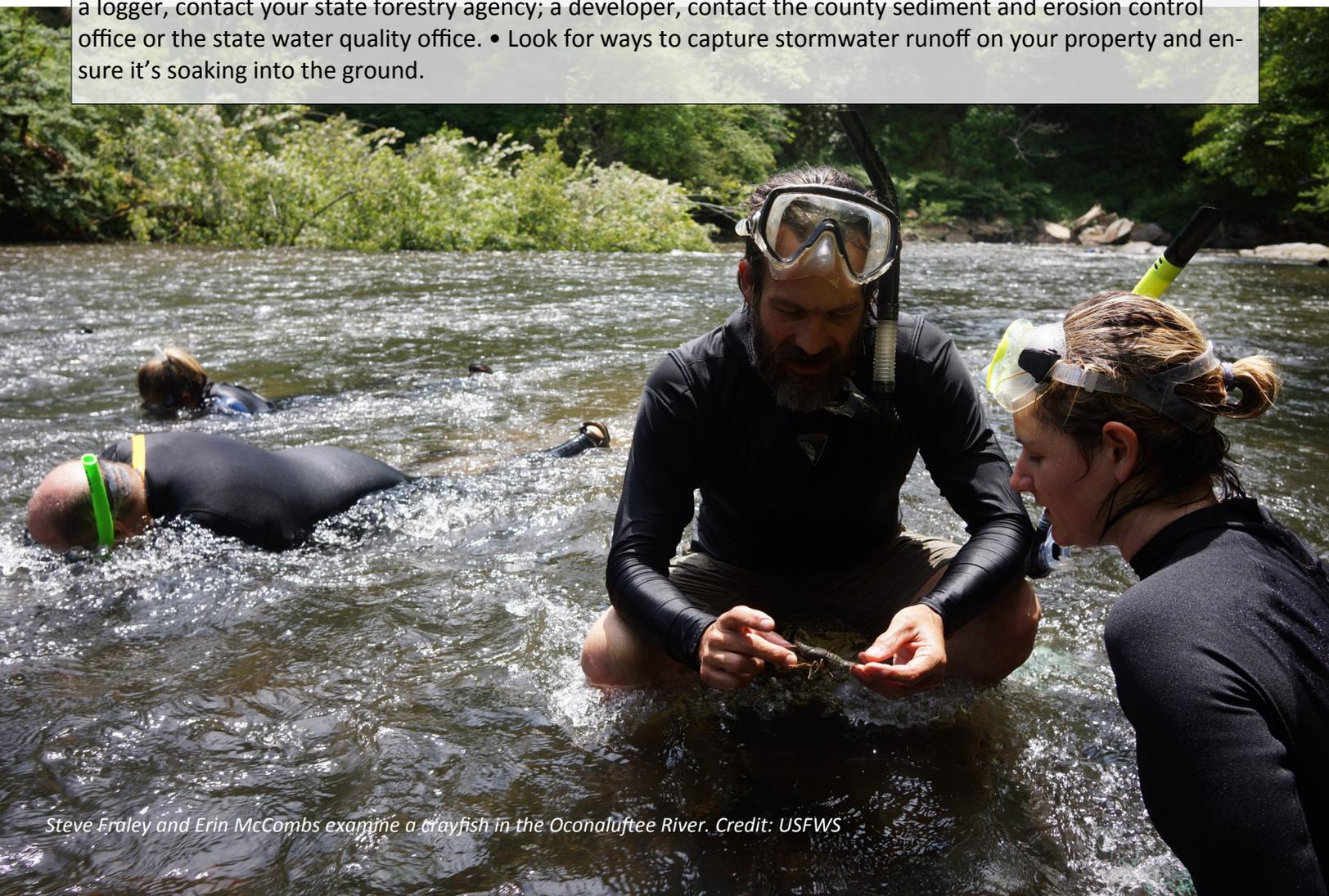
- Paired with the data-sharing map tool, a story map will merge information about the river basin - including maps, photos, and video - to tell the story of watershed conservation in the Little Tennessee in a way that's easily accessible and understandable by everyone from students working on classroom projects to community leaders who want to learn about current conservation activities in the basin and opportunities for support and participation. This project is made possible by support from **Duke Energy**.

Videos, videos, videos

- Thanks to grant support from **Duke Energy**, the partnership will work with Freshwaters Illustrated to expand video offerings.

Things you can do to support clean water and healthy streams

Clean your fishing and recreational equipment between trips to avoid carrying unwanted invasive hitchhikers between rivers. • Never leave live bait in or near a river unless you collected it there. • Follow application and disposal instructions when working with home, lawn, and automotive chemicals. • Plant native trees, shrubs, and other woody plants along streams. • Whenever you disturb soil, ensure proper measures are in place to keep dirt from eroding into streams. If you're a farmer, contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District; a logger, contact your state forestry agency; a developer, contact the county sediment and erosion control office or the state water quality office. • Look for ways to capture stormwater runoff on your property and ensure it's soaking into the ground.



Steve Fraley and Erin McCombs examine a grayfish in the Oconaluftee River. Credit: USFWS