

LANDCARE MINUTES, Wednesday, **May 1, 2024** Montreat Town Hall, 9:00 am

Call to Order 9:01 AM

Moment of Silence

Call for Quorum: A quorum was present.

| Entity | Name | Vote | Pres |
|--|--|------|------|
| MLC Chair, NWF Community Wildlife Habitat | Arrington Cox | t | X |
| Vice Chair. Montreat College | Dottie Shuman | v | X |
| MLC Secretary-Treasurer & Town Rep. | Jean Norris | v | X |
| Town Representative | Kathy Putnam | v | X |
| Town Commissioner | Kitty Fouche | v | |
| Cottagers Wilderness & Open Space | <u>Beth Fountain</u> | v | X |
| Montreat College | Josh Holbrook | v | |
| Montreat Conference Center (MCC/MRA) | Tracy Bailey | v | X |
| Montreat Conference Center (MCC/MRA) | Martha Todd Sloan | v | |
| MCC/MRA -Wilderness Committee | Jason Nanz | v | X |
| PCUSA Earth Ministry Team | Hal Demarest/ <u>George Sawyer-alt</u> | v | X |
| | TOTAL | 11 | 8 |

| Others who attend | Role | Present? | Contact/Notes |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|----------|--|
| Josh Greene | Recording mtg | | Room was setup for recording meeting |
| Brad Hestir, Chair | Tree Board Chair | | Invitation to Chestnut events in Asheville |
| Meredith Greene | Interested citizen | | |
| Jim Williamson | Interested citizen | | Artist, created card and print sale items |
| Grace Nichols | Ex officio | | Flat Creek Crossing |
| Abigail Leahy | HRI Team | | Natural Science Lab.Coord., Montreat College |
| Martha Campbell | Ex Officio | | |
| Savannah Parrish | Town Manager | | |
| Angela Murphy | Town Clerk | | |
| Betty Douglas | Chair MNPS 2024 | | Chair, Native Plant Sale |
| David Arrant | Chief of Police, Town of Montreat | | |
| Patti Pyle | Interested citizen | | Flat Creek Crossing Team leader |
| Melanie Sovine | Interested citizen | | Expecting to become year-round resident soon |
| Joe Standaert | Interested citizen | | |
| Tanner Pickett | MRA VP | | Observing |
| Ed Kramer | Tree Board member | | Report on Treasured Trees in Montreat |

Adoption of Agenda: M- Beth Fountain, S- Kathy Putnam, Carried

Adoption of Minutes: M – George Sawyer, S – Kathy Putnam, Carried

Treasurer’s Report

Montreat Landcare Committee Treasurer’s report May 1, 2024– Jean Norris, Secretary-Treasurer
Including Town of Montreat data from **Landcare Balance and Activity as of March 31, 2024**

At the end of March 2024, Town of Montreat accounts show 3 balances for Landcare.

| Account Number & Label | Beginning balance | Incoming | Outgoing | Balance |
|--|-------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| 26-80-3340-340 Contributions Landcare | 32,084.19 | \$1000.00 | | 33,084.19 |
| 26-80-6190-330 Departmental supplies | 1247.05 | | 0.00 | 1,247.05 |
| 10-80-6190-340 Remainder of Town Budget Amt | 1,846.22 | | 13.99 | 1,818.24 |

About \$6,600 belongs to Montreat Landcare Committee and the remainder was raised for Flat Creek Crossing. There was a temporary error in recording donations to Landcare, registering them as Town General Fund instead. Because they were made by personal friends of one of the Flat Creek Crossing team, we knew about them. Town staff spent hours finding them and we expect they will appear in the April accounting report. Also in the April accounting report, we expect to see \$34,065 received for the Pigeon River Fund grant for Flat Creek Crossing.

-----Public Comments-----None-----

Entity Reports

Town of Montreat- Kathy Putnam reporting on highlights of Town Council meeting:

- April 22 designated Montreat Earth Day
- May 4 designated Montreat Arbor Day (Native Plant sale date)
- Flat Creek Crossing Survey Monkey survey has been fielded. Jean Norris added:
 - To date, 65 responses, good and stable response rate for Town and MRA
 - 84%+ aware of Flat Creek Crossing, 78%+ think it is very or extremely important
 - Long delayed, but overwhelmingly positive results

MRA - Martha Sloan. Not present, no report

-Tracy Bailey. Native Plant Sale Saturday

-Jason Nanz. Summer staff arrive this week

Tanner Pickett will be at a table at the Native Plant Sale with information about the process of dredging Lake Susan

Montreat College- Dottie Shuman. No report, except this is the last week of classes, with finals next week, and looking forward to the native plant sale.

Earth Ministry Team, Montreat Presbyterian Church - George Sawyer, Earthcare and Landcare committee co-sponsored a very good meeting on Bearwise at the Town Hall. It was very well attended by Montreat and Black Mountain residents – a really good program.

Community Wildlife Habitat- Bill Seaman. Montreat is on track for recertification as a Community Wildlife Habitat in 2024 (with 20 of the 30 necessary points accrued already), and that one new property has been certified as a wildlife backyard this year. And Bill has

Team Reports

Native Plant Sale and Arbor Day Celebration – Betty Douglas. Not present, no report at this time.

Firewise. No report.

Hemlock Restoration – Abby Leahy. Not present, no report.

Flat Creek Crossing- Jean Norris.

We did receive the Pigeon River Fund Grant. Unofficially, we have another grant application almost ready to submit. The program is under NC Parks and Rec Dept. It requires a 1:5 match, very favorable. If we received this grant, we could be completing the entire physical construction beginning this fall. Our match, nearly complete, from several sources, is about \$85,000, which would also allow building our the educational and online resources.

Bearwise- Arrington Cox. No report.

Children and Outdoors, Kids in Parks, and Eco-Explore – Patti Pyle. Not present, no report.

Unfinished Business

Report by Bill Seaman.

In February 2024, Bill made a presentation to a statewide scientific meeting in Silva entitled “Watershed Stewardship in a Small Mountain Community: Stakeholder Involvement is Key to Education, Planning and Resource Restoration and Management” by William Seaman and Jacob Rash. It was delivered in a 5-minute lightning round. He reported on 6 success stories in preserving Flat Creek, the kind of stream many communities wish they had, or had back. Besides its role in ecosystem services, Flat Creek serves the needs of anglers for brook trout; K-12, college and informal educators; people seeking solitude and meditation; amateur and professional naturalists; children and adults playing in the creek; persons living with disabilities anticipating access to the creek; and advocates. These include the upcoming Stormwater Management Plan and the recently adopted Montreat Tomorrow Ten-year Plan for the Town. The 2-page report is attached to these minutes.

Problems found with Flat Creek sediment associated with heavy rainfall and erosion along roadways. Raingardens can catch runoff from private homes, which can be encouraged voluntarily. The rain garden brochure was produced under Landcare auspices, and will be refilled when needed, at Landcare expense.

Report on Cottagers Wilderness and Open Spaces - Beth Fountain

Individuals from Montreat purchased Rocky Knob in a private sale, and gave it Cottagers, which had to reconstitute itself to own land. The land is currently protected by Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy Conservancy. This report is intended to education Landcare Committee Members about the issues and process to prevent misunderstanding in the community. Whether the Cottagers are willing to offer the land to MRA for a vote by their board. Whether the land remains with Cottagers or the deed moved to MRA, the land will remain in conservancy. It will be necessary to be present to vote, and some system will be in place to limit voting to dues current members. The report on which this presentation is based, previously for the Cottagers annual meeting, is attached. Since that time, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy has been ruled out because they cannot both own and oversee conserved lands, and it makes sense for SAHC to continue in the oversight role.

New Business – None.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, Jun 5, 2024

Adjourned: 9:50 AM

ZOOM LINK for live meeting is on the town website.

Montreat Landcare meeting recording LINK:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_htZelu47Q&t=25s

Recording of business meeting begins about minute 16:50. Sound speeded up about minute 37:37.

Meeting recording ends about minute 49:32.

Respectfully submitted: May 27, 2024



Jean C Norris, Secretary-Treasurer

Montreat Landcare Committee

2 attachments:

1. Report by Beth Fountain continuous with these minutes
2. Report by Bill Seaman following these minutes

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Read to Cottagers at July 2023 Annual meeting by Beth Fountain:

If you have been at this annual meeting for the past few years, you may remember that as part of my report on the Wilderness and Open Spaces Committee of this Cottagers' organization, I have provided updates on the Rocky Knob Property. The ~200 acre Rocky Knob property situated between Greybeard Mountain and the Blue Ridge Parkway was acquired by the Montreat Cottagers over 30 years ago for the purpose of ensuring its preservation in perpetuity. After its purchase, the property was placed in a permanent conservation easement which is still administered by the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC). This prevents development of any kind on this pristine land.

Over the past year, the Cottagers' Wilderness Committee has conducted an extensive review of the Rocky Knob property for the purposes of updating our understanding of its history and ensuring its future. One question we asked ourselves was whether the Cottagers remain the best, most logical ownership vehicle for the property going forward. We have done our best to include insight from all angles including listening to Jane Holt who had a deep understanding of this history and passion for the care of this property. Throughout this year we have actively engaged Cottagers leadership, including Coleman Legerton in our meetings and discussions to date and will continue to do so. This information has been presented to the Cottagers' Board throughout this year as we have met.

We considered and have carefully evaluated 3 options:

- 1) Continued ownership by the Cottagers
- 2) Transfer of ownership to the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy
- 3) Transfer of ownership to Montreat Conference Center

Continued ownership by the Cottagers remains a viable option. Yet, while there are historical reasons why this came to pass in 1991, including a determined group of Cottagers on a mission to protect the property from possible development, this mission was fulfilled with its purchase 32 years ago when it was placed in the conservation easement which continues to be administered by SAHC. So to be clear, the Cottagers own the property but the Southern

Appalachian Conservation Easement monitors the property to ensure that it stays undeveloped. Today the ongoing role of the Cottagers is simply maintenance of a small liability insurance policy on the property and an annual joint inspection with SAHC, which was just completed last week by Perrin Wright, Joe Standaert and myself. We continue to be in good standing.

Option 2, transfer of ownership to the SACH was similarly actively researched but mutually ruled out after extensive discussions. Their key mission for their efforts has already been met with the original placement of the property in a conservation easement. Additionally, they are precluded from both owning and administering or monitoring this conservation easement on the same property. They would need to find and assign the monitoring of this easement to another registered conservation organization (land trust or municipality). They would also incur unnecessary expenses in the process of these transactions.

With the elimination of SAHC as an interested owner, we more thoroughly evaluated Option 3, which is assumption of ownership by Montreat Conference Center. As the Committee discussed this alternative, we found considerable logic in this approach, including:

- The ~2,500 acres of Montreat Wilderness, which is owned by the conference center, is in a conservation easement very similar to the Rocky Knob easement. This conservation easement which is in our cove is also administered by the SAHC. A transfer of the Rocky Knob deed to the conference center would consolidate all Montreat wilderness properties under one owner with the SAHC monitoring all of the properties, creating efficiencies;
- This approach would also maintain ownership of the Montreat Wilderness exclusively in Montreat hands, providing an ongoing alignment of interests. There would be NO change for you and others in terms of access and use. It would only be who holds the deed, who meets with SAHC for the annual assessment and who pays the small annual liability insurance.
- Ownership of the Montreat Wilderness properties also seems more in concert with the mission of the conference center, providing for recreation and spiritual renewal, than that of the Cottagers group;
- Rocky Knob, while not contiguous with Montreat property, is connected by hiking routes to the MRA properties and the MRA hiking programs already traverse the Rocky Knob property;
- MRA has staff to provide minimal trail maintenance and, in fact, is informally already doing this;
- MRA and the Cottagers maintain separate liability insurance policies and these could be consolidated, potentially at a reduced cost;
- Our attorney indicates that the expenses related to a transfer to MRA are minimal and could potentially be mitigated by some of the funds in the Wilderness and Open Spaces committee of the Cottagers' account.

Based on these considerations, the Wilderness Committee approached the conference center and reviewed our thoughts and findings in a meeting with Richard DuBose and Tanner Pickett on June 29th and Bill Tucker and I met with Richard and Tanner again July, 7th. Richard understood our logic and indicated he was amenable to more broadly exploring a possible ownership transfer with the Montreat Conference Center leadership. Richard has checked in with the team and are appropriately raising questions about tax exempt status and liability insurance. At this point, we are working to get more information to MRA about these topics. We present this to inform you of what we have been doing on your behalf. Our goal is to do what is in the best interest of the cottagers'. At this time no decisions have been made except

to eliminate SAHCs as an owner. The Wilderness and Open Spaces Committee will continue to keep the Cottagers' board included in the progress that we make in our discussions with Montreat Conference Center. If there is a change, it will come as a recommendation from this committee to the board.

If you have questions, I will take a few now with the help of Bill Tucker who is vice-chair of this committee and Richard and Tanner. Or please feel free to see us after the meeting.

Thank you!

Watershed Stewardship in a Small Mountain Community: Stakeholder Involvement is Key to Education, Planning and Resource Restoration and Management*

William Seaman¹ and Jacob Rash²

¹Professor Emeritus, University of Florida, Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences, Montreat, North Carolina

²Coldwater Research Coordinator, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, Black Mountain

The mountain headwaters stream Flat Creek, Buncombe County, North Carolina rises and flows only a short distance, about half of its total 5.4-mile length, through the small town of Montreat, yet it exerts an inordinately large influence on the social dynamics and lifestyle of residents and more numerous seasonal visitors of all ages. The cultural ecosystem services of the creek and its small impoundment (ca. three acres) are valued, for example, by anglers seeking Eastern Brook Trout, K-12, college and non-formal educators teaching on-site, persons seeking solitude and meditation, amateur and professional naturalists in awe of its ecology, with some seeking to reestablish hellbender salamanders, children and adults at play on and in its waters, disabled persons anticipating new access to it, and advocates of both the latest stormwater management plan and also the new comprehensive town plan. Valued environmental services include its moderating effect on local climate, diverse wildlife habitat, and provision of clean water to the Swannanoa River Valley downstream. In return, a diversity of stakeholders have emphasized Flat Creek in conservation, restoration, research, education and management, as presented here for six tangible and successful efforts, with five in just the last five years. (Another project is scheduled for late 2024.)



First, Flat Creek waters have been found to be of sufficient quality to harbor hellbenders and native and introduced trout, thanks to first-ever field and laboratory studies that quantified baseline physical-chemical attributes in 2020. Funding came from the North Carolina Chapter of the American Fisheries Society for a citizen science project, in partnership with the Environmental Quality Institute. Secondly, prior to that, citizens organized a bio-control treatment program for invasive woolly adelgid insects damaging and killing hemlock trees, with one success being preservation of hemlocks along the creek to continue shading and its cooling effect on water temperatures. This work was in partnership with the Hemlock Restoration Initiative, with funding from the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners. Third, an educational TRACK Trail of the national Kids-in-Parks program has been designated for a nearly mile-long stretch adjacent to Flat Creek. Extramural funding was again secured, this time with the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation. These three efforts were under the auspices of the Montreat Landcare Committee, an umbrella organization representing key entities in the community.



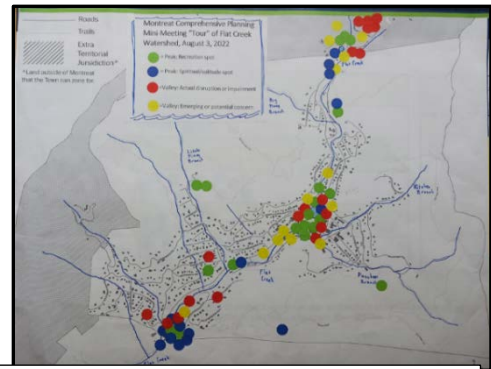
**Adapted a from presentation to the annual conference of the North Carolina Chapter of the American Fisheries Society, Sylva, February 28, 2024, as information for the Montreat community and beyond*

Fourth, more recently, the Town of Montreat completed a Stormwater Inventory and Management Plan so as to be in compliance with a mandated Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System, or MS4, permit requirement. Town officials were assisted by staff from the Land of Sky Regional Council, having secured a Clean Water Act Section 205(j) grant. The Council in turn partnered with consultants from Blue Earth and a faculty member from Montreat College to inventory and map stormwater system infrastructure and some biological attributes. Work focused on steep slopes and reducing erosion and sedimentation.



Erosion of soil from upstream properties creates “plume” of brown sediment in Lake Susan after heavy rain.

Fifth, as a gauge of progress in community recognition of the importance of Flat Creek, it is noteworthy that the 2023 town comprehensive plan mentions stormwater 23 times, while incorporating the general subject of creek management into 20% of its total “objectives,” alongside subjects such as transportation and revenue, etc. Citizens again played an important part in driving significant attention to Flat Creek in the plan. In concert with the plan consultants, members of the Landcare Committee organized a “mini-meeting” attended by a dozen Montreat residents who listed and mapped so-called “peaks and valleys” related to positive negative issues and concerns such as runoff, erosion, and aesthetics for Flat Creek. Local ecosystem knowledge provided a foundation for the consultants.



Stakeholders mapped concerns (red, yellow dots) and valued places (blue, green) along creek; Lake Susan in middle.

Sixth, a work in progress that has drawn broad community hands-on support is the new Flat Creek Crossing All-Access Trail being developed as a Landcare project. This all-persons trail will create a universally accessible one-tenth-of-a-mile path to the water. Extramural funding is being developed.



Finally, an upcoming project will see the dredging of sediments from the bottom of Lake Susan, under the auspices of the Montreat Conference Center, with State funding having been secured for much of the work.

To sum up, then, we have described seven different projects concerning Flat Creek, a cultural and environmental jewel in Montreat, Western North Carolina, each of which has engaged stakeholders including permanent and seasonal residents, scientific entities and funding sources both in the community and outside. For a town with a population of about 800, we feel that this approach and array of effort offers a possible model of stakeholder-driven engagement with watershed science, education, community-building and resource management.