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Summer 2023 • nature.org/virginia



View overlooking Big Wilson from Bear Loop © Daniel White/TNC

The Afterburn Effect

When the smoke clears, restoration is just beginning

Last spring at The Nature Conservancy's Warm Springs Mountain Preserve, TNC fire teams joined with our state and federal agency partners to complete the largest-ever controlled burn across TNC and national forest lands in Virginia. Our partnership—Heart of the Appalachians Fire Learning Network—applied fire to 7,300 acres across the aptly named Big Wilson and Porter's Mill burn units. The record-setting burn was both a milestone for a years-long investment in forest restoration and a new beginning.

After the smoke clears and the fire teams head for home, our forests get to work on regeneration. Within days, new life will appear. The forest's response, in turn, sets in motion new seasonal cycles of scientific inquiry into the effects of fire and how restoration is progressing toward desired healthy conditions.

“What's best for biodiversity is a forest with a mosaic of habitats and structures, from sunny to shady,” says Conservation Scientist Jean Lorber. “Burning allows us to recreate the missing parts of that mosaic.” Along with assessing forest



Bird survey © Sandy Hausman/WVTF

patterns via satellite imagery, Lorber and his Allegheny Highlands teammates return periodically to burned areas to inventory songbirds and monitor plant growth. Learn more at nature.org/alleghenyfireva.



Photo Courtesy of Bettina Ring

TNC Welcomes New Virginia State Director Bettina Ring

The Nature Conservancy has named Bettina Ring as its next Virginia State Director. Ring is a former Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry and former Virginia State Forester. Learn more about Ring's leadership experience in conservation and sustainability, as well as her passion for TNC's mission, by reading her profile at nature.org/vastaff.



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Milky Way over Roaring Springs Preserve © Brennan Gilmore

From the Sky to the Rivers

Black America's complicated relationship with nature

Basia Scott was The Nature Conservancy's Virginia Lands and Lives Intern, researching Indigenous communities in places where we work and exploring African Americans' traditional connections to nature. The excerpt below is from her capstone essay.

Though our culture is vast and diverse, the roots of the African American story start and continue with nature. Despite mixed feelings across the community around water, animals and nature as a whole—coming from our collective memories of trauma—it is hard to deny that the environment shaped the past and still shapes contemporary lived experiences of African Americans.

Rivers were highways to freedom; forests, our churches; and the sky, our map.

Basia Scott, Lands and Lives Intern

The hard truths of the African American relationship with the environment are many. The landscape was a medium for enslavement, lynching and inequality. This is a fact that cannot be ignored.

But we also cannot deny the fact that rivers were highways to freedom; forests, our churches; and the sky, our map. If we keep running from nature and conservation efforts because of painful truths, we will lose a part of ourselves—the medium of our history—to climate change and a lack of biodiversity.

Read Scott's full essay at nature.org/skytoriver/va.

Explore Your Public Lands and TNC Preserves

As the summer sun beams down on our sparkling waters and lush green forests once again drape our majestic mountains, there's no better time to get outside and enjoy our great Virginia outdoors. For your summertime fun, consider exploring places protected by The Nature Conservancy and our conservation partners where you can relax and recharge.



Blue Ridge view © Daniel White

Sample nature's "peak" season with a visit to our Warm Springs Mountain Preserve in Bath County. From scenic mountain vistas to a close-up look at a globally rare pine barren, each of the preserve's three public hiking trails offers a distinctive experience. Then beat the heat with a dip in cool waters in the adjacent national forest or Doughnut State Park. If the coast is more to your liking, soak up the sun's warmth along the Eastern Shore of Virginia, home to TNC's Volgenau Virginia Coast Reserve. Stroll our bird and wildlife trail at Brownsville Preserve or follow the shoreline of Oyster along our Horse Island Trail. Extend your visit by exploring nearby national wildlife refuges, or relax on the Chesapeake Bay beach at Kiptopeke State Park. Learn more about these and other escapes today at nature.org/VAgetaways.