

# Piney Creek



SNAP SHOTS  
NEWSLETTER



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A few things that make a good hike... like the sound of a roaring river, two minutes from town, easy walking trail, and lots of shade to keep you cool in the summer. These are just a few of the attributes at our newest preserve along Piney Creek Gorge in Raleigh County. Thanks to a gift of land from Appalachian Headwaters, WVLT now has 325 acres of land in the Piney Creek Gorge for the public to enjoy.

At first glance on the map this property looks like a steep river gorge that might be treacherous to visit. By repurposing old strip mine benches already on the property, in the future, a visitor will be able to have a relatively easy day of hiking into an otherwise remote and scenic place. Interestingly, this property is only minutes from Beckley city limits and the old mine benches are now well shaded 30 to 40-year-old trees. The surrounding forest is much older and so the character of the site is pleasant. In several places, small tributary streams cross these mine bench trails and are beginning to take on a natural character. These streams, in turn, feed into Piney Creek that eventually reaches the New River. By protecting these headwater streams, we ultimately make a positive impact on water quality downstream.

Over time, WVLT will seek local partners for ideas about new hiking and biking trails and to seek additional restoration funds to repair the streams and damaged landscape. With the site's proximity to Beckley, WVLT hopes that we can build a partnership with locals to construct new trails and promote new recreational opportunities. But for now, these old trails and mine benches make for a pretty pleasant walk, as is, with a few rock hops and diversions around a downed tree or two.

If you are just looking for a two-hour getaway or a place to walk the dog, this tract is a perfect fit. If you are a nature lover, this is your easy ticket to good birding without a long drive to other parks. One trail already in place borders Cranberry Creek and presents a pleasant two mile hike out a level bench (and two miles back), providing a healthy weekend workout.

Stay tuned for more details about our efforts to promote this site for recreational access, build new trails, and work to improve water quality with future restoration projects.



## A Letter from Our Executive Director

**Brent Bailey, Ph.D.**

“You don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone.” Joni Mitchell’s “Big Yellow Taxi” lyrics, appearing on her 1970 *Ladies of the Canyon* album, spoke to the era’s budding environmental awareness (the federal Environmental Protection Agency would be established in December of that year), but the refrain continues to echo with people who contact us, asking for help to conserve a piece of property.

West Virginia is filled with private properties that are used by non-owners as if they were public: “I don’t know whose land it is, I’ve just always walked there,” or “We’ve built trails through those woods, but now it looks like it’s going to be sold...”, or “My family’s hunted there for years,” or “I think somebody from out of state owns it, they never come here...”. Often, large-scale industrial landowners have allowed recreational uses (hunting, hiking, foraging, biking, river access) as long as they didn’t interfere with the economic activities of the property (generally coal or timber extraction).

But, when something shifts, alarms are raised... often too late. New housing spurs the division of a wooded tract into lots. A decline in markets prompts an industrial landowner to sell. An absentee landowner dies, and the heirs to the estate have no connections to local communities that would favor continued local use.

So, look at what you’ve got, and move to protect it now! That happened in Tucker County this past year, when residents contacted WVLT for help securing a popular recreation destination to which access had been taken for granted... until it was being sold. A combination of grant funds and \$100,000 in private donations – 228 individuals from 19 states– brought together \$800,000 to protect what is now the 860-acre Yellow Creek Preserve.

Less repeated, but just as relevant, is another line from the song: “Put away the DDT now/Give me spots on my apples/But give me the birds and the bees, please...”. WVLT keeps the power lines across our preserves from being sprayed with herbicides, we restore sites with native plants to improve habitat, and we prioritize species that are in decline. The birds and the bees are indeed still suffering, now due to climate change, and lyrics written for the song today would probably also put out a plea for bats. (Rachel Carson’s landmark book about the insecticide DDT was published in 1962, and the chemical was banned in the US in 1972; the federal Endangered Species Act was signed into law in 1973.)

I’m going back to review Mitchell’s prescient albums and see what else we should take to heart. Thanks to all of you who have helped us this past year to make sure that special places all over the Mountain State are protected, before they’re gone!

## Book Recommendations

### **Kingbird Highway: The Biggest Year in the Life of an Extreme Birder**

*Kenn Kaufman • 2006*

Bird nerd? Miss those days of being a seasonal biological technician and crisscrossing the country chasing birds? Yearn for those days of living out of your backpack and a fresh pair of socks being your greatest concern? I know you’re out there and this cult classic coming-of-age tale about how birding guidebook extraordinaire, Kenn Kaufman, got his start in the birding world, might just be enough to keep you from selling your home and applying for a roving job counting terns along the Pacific Coast (if you do, that’s on you!). At 16-years old, student body president, Ken Kaufman, dropped out of high school and hitchhiked his way across early 1970s North America intent on setting a “Big Year” record for the most North American bird species seen in a year. Sounds boring? I don’t think so. There’s no way that covering nearly 80,000 miles by thumb crisscrossing from Atlantic to Pacific repeatedly and discovering that cat food makes for a great low budget meal can simply be... boring. While there’s a bunch about birds, life lessons about looking and not seeing, and connections with nature, a colorful cast of characters and stories about life on the road keep you wanting to turn the pages. As Kaufman writes, “People always called us ‘birdwatchers.’ But if we had been, there would be no story to tell.”

#### **SUGGESTED BY**

Adam Webster, WVLT Conservation & Communication Coordinator

### **Where the Crawdads Sing**

*Delia Owens • 2018*

A bright sun causes us to squint as we putter in the little boat through coastal Virginia creeks—marsh grasses brush our arms until we reach a beach where the gulls circle and shells are abundant. If late fall’s darkening days leave you with more time than you might like inside, seek out this story to engage your imagination in joining a young life growing up in coastal wildlands. That is how well this story is written—I still feel I personally knew Kya, the young person whose life the story follows, and clearly understand how family and community relations made nature her first choice for companionship and learning. This is much more than a naturalist’s ‘journal’ account though: the novel includes a murder mystery, love lost, and examples of how even those who have a deep connection with nature still need a human community.

#### **SUGGESTED BY**

Amy Cimarolli, WVLT Land Protection Specialist





## You Bought the Moon!

WVLT, thanks to its growing circle of supporters, is now the proud owner of the Yellow Creek Preserve - which includes Moon Rocks! With the support of four major grant funders, several local businesses, and 228 individuals from 19 states, we raised \$800,000 for the purchase and management of 860 acres in Tucker County! This property will be permanently protected by the West Virginia Land Trust and open for public outdoor recreation use for future generations to enjoy.

Named after a tributary of the Blackwater River that flows through the property, the Yellow Creek Preserve connects to other public lands and includes Moon Rocks, a rock formation that is a popular destination for hikers and mountain bikers. With 3+ miles of established trails, this property attracts people from all over the country.

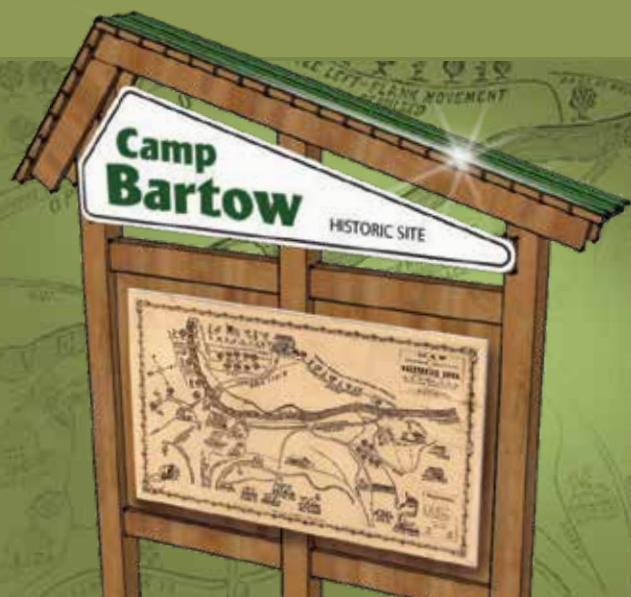
While we now own the property, we still need funds for management, expanding the trail system, & ecological restoration. Visit [www.BuyTheMoonWV.org](http://www.BuyTheMoonWV.org) to make a donation and we'll send you one of these cool stickers!

## Camp Bartow **NOW OPEN!**

Saturday, October 5, 2019 was a great day in WVLT history, as we opened Camp Bartow Historic Site with 75 of our friends and supporters! Guests joined for a light picnic, enjoyed a guided hike, and had the opportunity to witness the firing of a "six-pounder" Civil War cannon.

Camp Bartow was an encampment during the Battle of the Greenbrier River, which was instrumental in West Virginia becoming a state. With 14 acres of historic land, a beautiful scenic view, and hand-dug trenches still intact, this is a must see for all history buffs! Visit our website for more information and directions to visit the site.

Special thanks to West Virginia Humanities Council for grant support to make this project possible, and interpretive design by Lens Creek Studios. Historian Hunter Lesser, the Pocahontas County Community Cooperative, and Pocahontas County Drama Fairs and Festivals group also supported this project.







## AmeriCorps NCCC

This fall, volunteers from the National Civilian Community Corps, a program known as AmeriCorps NCCC, assisted WVLT in making significant progress building trails at the Toms Run Preserve in Monongalia County.

The 7-person crew of 20-something volunteers helped turn an old logging road into a hiking trail that leads to a scenic cascade on Toms Run, a creek that intersects the preserve. The AmeriCorps team did some heavy lifting during their 3-week stay with our organization. While constructing what will now be known as the “Cascade Trail”, the crew split large locust logs to make steps and fortify the trail, as well as hauled more than 10 tons of gravel bucket-by-bucket to create a lasting surface along the path. Their hard work helped us create a scenic, sturdy trail that will be enjoyed by the community for decades to come.

During their stay, the AmeriCorps team, dubbed “Delta 2”, also completed service work at WVLT’s Camp Bartow Historic Site (Pocahontas County), Morgantown Early Learning Facility, and Camp Muffly Park (Monongalia County), the latter of which provided lodging for the crew. WVLT also provided learning opportunities while the team was in town—they met with West Virginia House of

Delegates member, Evan Hansen (Monongalia, District 51) to talk about protecting the state’s rivers and streams and renewable energy initiatives. Dr. Nektaria Adaktilou led a discussion about the “urban heat island effect” and the crew also toured the WVU Campus and GIS lab, and attended a meeting of the Morgantown Board of Parks and Recreation (BOPARC). Additionally, the crew seemed pretty good at impromptu dance parties and selfie moments along the trail.

AmeriCorps NCCC is a federal program with a competitive application process. Host organizations submit projects for review, and projects are selected that provide team members opportunities to strengthen communities and develop leadership skills through direct, team-based service. Teams of young adults, age 18-24, travel across the country to complete projects that meet crucial community needs – usually spending between two and eight weeks on each project. WVLT is grateful for the labor and dedication the “Delta 2 AmeriCorps” NCCC Team provided during their stay, as well as their efforts in other communities— they do inspiring work and are collecting stories to tell for a lifetime!

The Toms Run Preserve is a 320-acre property located in Monongalia County, several miles south of Morgantown, which will be opened to the public in 2020 for hiking, nature study, and educational and volunteer opportunities. Two miles of trails have already been constructed and many more are planned. The preserve includes stands of mature hardwood forest, wildflowers, scenic views, and a cascading stream, called Toms Run, which flows into the Monongalia River. The property borders the Mon River Rail-Trail near Little Falls and is also an important piece of forested land within a drinking water protection area for the City of Morgantown.





Many thanks to our friends and family who helped us celebrate our birthday at the annual Special Places Celebration on Friday, November 8, 2019 in Charleston, WV at the Clay Center for the Arts & Sciences of West Virginia. This annual event raises valuable funds to support our mission to protect special places, while honoring those conservation heroes who help make it all happen!.

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