



Keeping Bears Wild

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The American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*) is an iconic symbol of Shenandoah National Park. Visitors watch vigilantly for a glimpse of one along Skyline Drive, and rangers give daily Bear Safety programs at Byrd Visitor Center, displaying punctured coolers and photos of blue-eyed newborn cubs.

Throughout that program, rangers stress an important message: **keep bears wild.**

Just one generation ago, it was common to see visitors feeding and interacting with bears for a sensationalized national park experience. It wasn't until the late 1960s, after several food-motivated bear encounters in western national parks ended in fatalities, that the National Park Service began enforcing strict rules for trash disposal and food storage.

Once a bear discovers a food source, they return to it. If that food source comes from humans – at campsites, in picnic areas, on trails, or out of vehicles or trash cans – a bear will continue to approach humans in pursuit of a meal, often with increasing aggression.


Food aggression is nearly impossible for a bear to unlearn, leaving the park only a few options, ranging from aversive conditioning (loud noises, sandbags, or even paintballs) to relocation and, in severe cases, euthanasia.

Keeping bears wild starts with keeping them away from human food sources. The most effective way to do that is through bear-proof storage lockers, or “bear boxes.” Right now, only 63% of the park’s campsites have a bear box at the site. **The Trust has committed to making that 100% by funding the purchase and installation of these boxes at every single campsite in Shenandoah National Park.**

The Trust was awarded a National Park Foundation grant

that will cover the purchase and installation of 55 bear boxes, leaving just over 80 campsites without safe food storage.

Each box comes with a \$2,000 price tag, and the Trust has set a goal of raising \$170,000 to purchase and install the remaining boxes, ensuring that visitors stay safe, and bears stay wild.


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NPS

Help us keep bears wild!

Want to donate directly to the Bear Box project? Scan this QR code or visit the link below to join us in keeping bears wild!



NPS



Dear friends,

Shenandoah National Park is one of those places that feels like a deep breath – like there's time to slow down, space to spread your arms, and quiet that can smooth away the rough edges of worry and distraction. It's a place that holds memories for both individuals and our nation alike.

It's also a place that inspires and empowers change. The natural world is constantly changing, from the slow growth of a seedling into a towering tree to the sudden storms that reroute entire streams and change the tree canopy overnight.

Finding the balance between this agelessness and growth can be challenging. How do we preserve the experience that makes Shenandoah a place people return to for generations while also helping our park adapt to new visitor needs? How do we save the old growth hemlocks while nurturing a climate-resilient forest for the future? What is our role as a partner to this incredible place?

As we approach 20 years as a philanthropic partner to Shenandoah National Park, we've seen these questions answered in innovative and inspiring ways by both the creativity of our NPS colleagues and your generosity. Every year, you make it possible for us to help the park tackle big problems head on, from climate change and invasives to equitable access and education and beyond. You help us balance the past and the future, preserving that deep-breath feeling Shenandoah gives us for years to come.

We're thankful for your support through these challenges and your deep love for this cherished place. As you read through this newsletter, we hope you see how your support is bridging gaps in funding and helping to make Shenandoah a true treasure of both our region and the National Park Service. We couldn't make this impact without you.

Thank you for believing in our mission – see you on the trails!



Jessica Cocciolone
Executive Director | Shenandoah National Park Trust

ACCESS TO ADVENTURE

For some, a hike through Shenandoah's wilderness can seem like a journey to another planet. Stripped of the familiar sounds of vehicles, conversations, electronics, and other urban noise, the trail can feel overwhelmingly isolated for teens who have never been without the comfort of nearby civilization.

While that kind of quiet can feel foreign, Tyrhee Moore, the Founder & Executive Director of **SoulTrak Outdoors**, believes it's necessary for true internal growth.

"I think noise, for many reasons, is associated with chaos – the constant sensation of being in the ongoing pace of things beyond you," he said. "And I think that silence gives you the opportunity to slow down, to be present and listen to the things inside of you. You can hear your thoughts; you can hear your heartbeat – sometimes those things get pushed back when there's so many other noises taking priority in your day to day."

Last summer, Moore led a group of teens from New York City on a 50-mile backpacking trip in Shenandoah through the Trust's *Access to the Outdoors Fund*. The trip was a pilot for the partnership – an introduction to the park that would lay the groundwork for future programming for more local SoulTrak groups in Washington, DC.

"This partnership has been really valuable for us," he said. "I think that there's a lot to consider in terms of access, but to be able to drive an hour and a half and be fully immersed in a space that is very remote, surrounded in nature in that way – there's the comfort and safety of knowing that home is not too far, but in Shenandoah you can still find ways to fully disconnect and remove yourself from that very urban, fast-paced lifestyle."

Moore shared that at the beginning of the trip, the teens seemed helpless, lacking the agency to take on basic tasks. But when bad weather rolled in towards the end of the trip and Moore worried about keeping the group comfortable, he looked around and realized "they were all sitting under this tarp that had completely collapsed, and they were just laughing and giggling, playing cards. They found ways to empower themselves and each other."

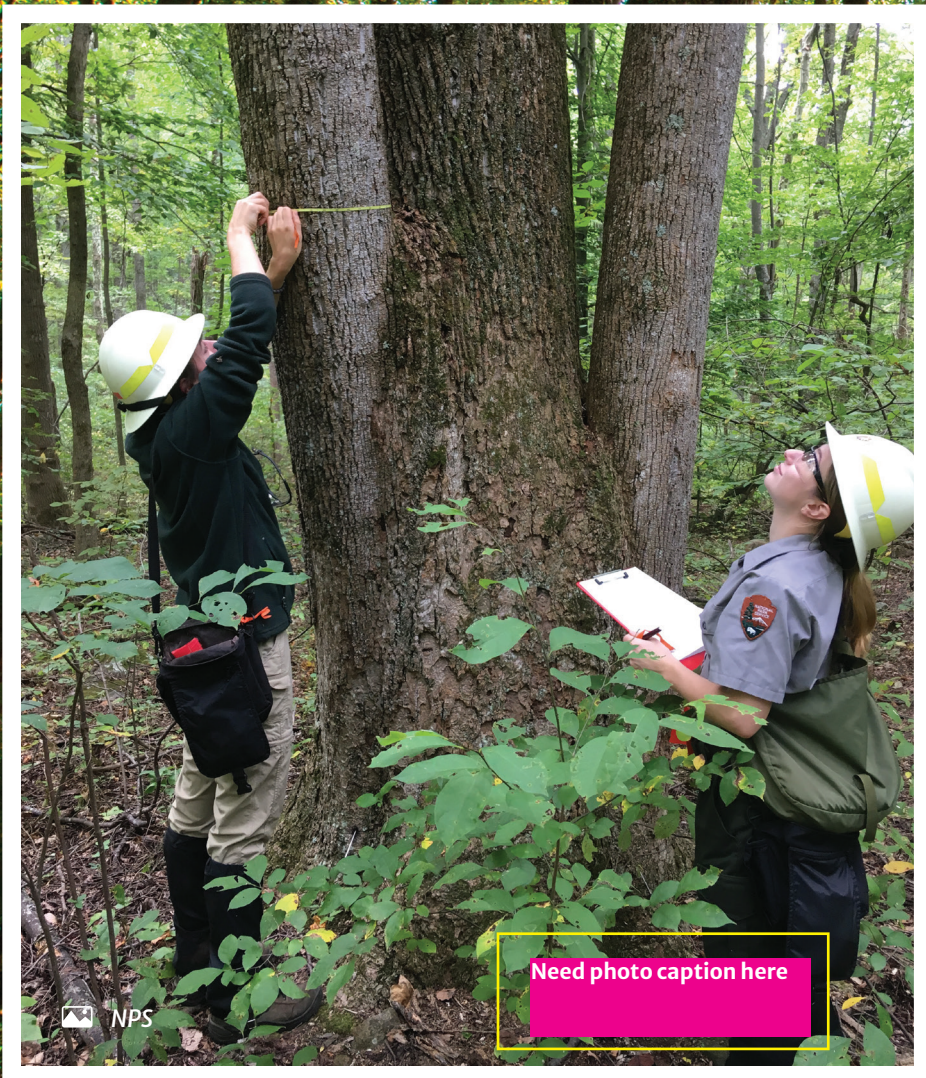
Moore is looking forward to growing SoulTrak's partnership with the Trust. He is returning this summer with a group of middle schoolers from Washington, DC for another immersive outdoor experience in Shenandoah that he hopes will empower them to find joy amid discomfort within the safety of a nearby national park.

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The Access to the Outdoors Fund is championed by the Christopher Johnson McCandless Memorial Foundation, in memory of Christopher's generosity and passion for the outdoors. Learn more at www.snptrust.org/access-to-the-outdoors

The Forest for the Trees: Navigating the Matrix



Need photo caption here



Botanist Wendy Cass has been keeping an eye – and a team of scientists – on Shenandoah National Park’s forests for nearly three decades. “Forests are the matrix,” she said. “They’re what most everything else in this park exists within.”

Cass and her team have been collecting detailed data on the forest matrix for the last 22 years, tracking trends and the growth of individual trees in 160 plots of land across the park. They’ve long known that Shenandoah’s forests are under pressure from severe weather, invasive pests, and blights that harm the tree canopy, as well as pressure from deer browsing and invasive plants that may make it difficult for new seedlings to grow.

The work of Cass’s team advises strategies for improved forest resilience across divisions, including where prescribed burns are needed, how trail usage and maintenance might impact the forest, and which trees to grow in the park’s native plant nursery. While these steps help protect today’s trees, Cass worries that it’s not enough to ensure a healthy future for the forest.

“Protection is no longer good enough,” she summarized. “We can’t just draw a line around it and say it’s protected. We need to think about the larger picture and what we can do to help things along.”

But with the hours it takes to visit each plot, train seasonal staff, record data, enter that data into a digital system, identify and fix errors, and manage day-to-day program activities and park support needs there’s little time left to make sense of that larger picture.

“We need to release the information held within the data we have,” Cass said. “We can’t make a request for large-scale management without the strong foundation of a comprehensive

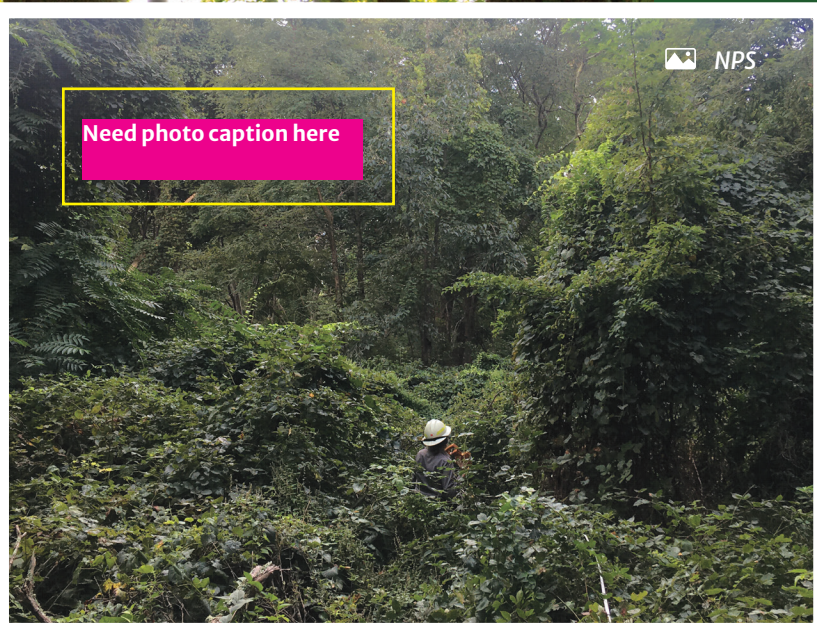
report. Over the years we have contracted with a few outside groups to look at our data, but the results haven’t been of the scale needed to inform management decisions. It just hasn’t been possible for us to generate what we need with our own staff because of limited capacity.

Stephen Paull, the park’s Lead Biological Science Technician, said, “You can’t do this work with just hours here and there; you need blocks – days and days and days with the data.” Paull is a former software engineer with significant programming experience, something Cass saw as a perfect fit for an advanced data analysis project. All she needed was the time for Paull to put his skills to work.

“I saw this window of opportunity with the Trust,” Cass explained. She applied for a grant from the Trust that will allow Paull to have dedicated time to work with the data and write a comprehensive report that will become the foundation for Shenandoah’s future forest management plans,

including large-scale efforts that will help to build a resilient forest in the park.

“We are drawn to the Park Service because we care,” Cass shared. “Our greatest goal is to do something meaningful with the data we collect, and the Trust is allowing us to do that.”





MEET YOUR PARK



CORRINA WENDELL | VOLUNTEER AND YOUTH PROGRAM MANAGER

“Volunteering allows us to find community, learning, adventure, connection, and accomplishment. After college, I spent three years in Zambia as a Peace Corps Volunteer. I learned so much in that time, and I want to help others have similar experiences.

I now manage several impactful projects funded by the Shenandoah National Park Trust: the Artist-in-Residence Program, the Shenandoah Youth Crew, and the Volunteer and Youth Project Lead. These projects encourage people, especially young people, to develop personal connections to Shenandoah National Park through art, learning, recreation, and service.”



EVAN CHILDRESS | CHIEF OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

“Shenandoah is an inspiring place to work. I love snorkeling in the larger rivers in the park, especially when chubs are building nests. The park has some beautiful fish, and it’s a whole different world under the water. I grew up near the park, and it’s what inspired me to become an ecologist. It’s amazing to be able to come back home and contribute to its management.

One Trust project I manage uses volunteers and artificial intelligence to monitor streamflow to manage our fishery and determine the effects of climate change in a cost-efficient way across such a large park.”



MARGO ROSEUM | EDUCATION PROGRAM MANAGER

“I love the A-HA moments that occur when a visitor, particularly a youth, connects to the park in a personal way. Whether they feel confident enough to hold a bug they did not at first, learn to understand the importance of the park in their life, or use their senses fully and reflect on nature in a new way, these connections are my favorite moments.

Play, Learn, Serve focuses on engaging youth, often from under-resourced communities, through school-based concepts, social-emotional learning, hands-on engagement, and fun and reflection in nature!”

**MARK YOUR
CALENDARS!**



2024 Artists-in-Residence



**Join us for the second annual
Art in the Park:
Scenes from Shenandoah,
on September 27-29!**

Local artists will teach free workshops
all weekend, along with free
performances, a plein air paint off,
and a ticketed gala in Sperryville!

This year, the Trust has partnered with Art 180 to pilot a new initiative: the Launching Emerging Artists Program (LEAP). Through LEAP, one young artist will spend two weeks in Shenandoah as a youth Artist-in-Residence, developing their work and engaging with nature as inspiration.

The LEAP artist will be in the park from July 8-22 and will return to lead a workshop during Art in the Park in September.

JO CLARK POET

August 5-26

“I grew up in the shadow of the Blue Ridge and have always felt a deep connection to Shenandoah National Park. I can’t wait to fill up my notebook with new poems inspired by sights, sounds, and memories the park conjures. It’ll be such a treat to get back in touch with the restorative and refreshing Virginian landscape.”

LIA PIKUS CELLIST

May 1-22

“I grew up partially in and around the Blue Ridge Mountains and felt a magnetic pull back homewards to begin conceptualizing my first album. I seek to create meditative sonic experiences that awaken the audience’s awareness to the landscapes, natural processes, flora, and fauna with which I am conversing in my works.”

SUSAN PATRICE PHOTOGRAPHER/ INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTIST

September 9-30

“During my residency, I will experiment with ways that photography can bear witness to the massive scales of time and space in which the Appalachian region has evolved while also attending to the ever-changing landscape and what it can tell us about transformation and resiliency.”

MEGAN EVANS PAINTER/PRINTMAKER

July 8-29

“I am looking forward to the dedicated time to think and work on the thing that feeds my soul the most. For the public programming, I will focus on natural textures and developing observational drawings, including how to use the technique of sighting to get accurate proportions and angles within drawing.”

AIMEE BOBRUK SINGER/SONGWRITER

October 3-24

“I will go down some rabbit holes when it comes to researching plants and animals in the park. These will be used as metaphors in songs, as well as some first-hand stories from visitors. I will present new songs at a concert at the park and strive to have the music reflect the surroundings.”





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WHY WE GIVE: #CelebrateJacksonHike

 NPS | Dave Kiel

“He loved being outdoors, he loved being active. He loved the mountains of Virginia, both in Shenandoah and lower in the Blue Ridge,” Michelle and Craig Greene said of their son Jackson. “We were really trying to figure out ways to honor him and give back in his name, so we started thinking about what was meaningful to him and also meaningful to us, and we found the Trust.”

The Greens have always loved the outdoors, but when Jackson was killed in a car accident in 2019, getting outside became a way to honor his memory and keep him close. They found the Trust’s mission in line with Jackson’s passion for making sure everyone had the chance to experience nature, and they made their first memorial gift in 2020.

“It’s with pride that we talk about what we do for the Trust,” they shared. “Just being able to say that we do something in his name in a place that he loved and that we hope other people get to love.”

They began attending Rapidan Society events the following year, getting more involved with the park their son loved,

joining a community of donors committed to Shenandoah’s future. “The more that we’ve become involved in meeting other people, the more meaningful it is,” said Michelle. “And when we hike on a trail we know he’s been on, we always feel a little bit closer to him.”

In addition to giving, Jackson’s friends and family make time to hike on his birthday every February – no matter where they are – and share photos of their adventures with the hashtag #CelebrateJacksonHike.

“It’s all about the good memories,” Craig added. “It’s not about remembering what happened; it’s about remembering him and who he was and what he loved. And Shenandoah National Park was one of the things he loved.”

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QCDs

A qualified charitable distribution (QCD) allows individuals who are 70½ years old or older to donate up to \$100,000 total to one or more charities directly from a taxable IRA instead of taking their required minimum distributions. As a 501(c)3, the Trust qualifies as a recipient of your QCDs!

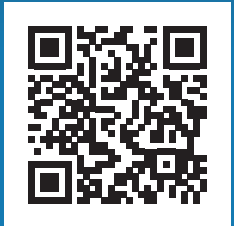
Monthly Giving



CLUB 105
SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK TRUST

Club 105 members make their annual contribution to the Trust in monthly installments to ensure that Shenandoah has a dependable, ongoing source of funding for key projects.

Scan this QR code to learn more!



Mailing note: To ensure your gift arrives in a timely manner, please consider donating online via the QR code or putting a stamp on the envelope provided.