

# New River News

August 2024

New River Chapter, VNPS

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## Programs for Fall Semester (Brenda Graff)

Ellen Bosman and Brenda Graff worked together to complete the planning of our monthly presentations for this fall. Dates for our programs are: **September 10, October 8, November 12, and December 10**. Meetings start at **7 pm**. All meetings will be run with a Zoom component. The meeting location for the first three programs will be at the **Health & Human Services Bldg** located at **210 Pepper Street SE, Room 108/109** in Christiansburg. Our December program will be at another location (to be determined).

### **September 10. Sarah Windes. How to Use the Flora of Virginia App on Your Cell Phone.**

Sarah Windes is a member of the New River Valley Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists. The Flora of Virginia app can be acquired for either Android or iOS for \$19.99 here at <https://floraofvirginia.org/flora-app/> before the meeting if you do not have it already. It is a scientific key for your phone for helping accurately identify 3,164 species of native and non-native plants in the Virginia flora. A field trip is planned at a later date to a local park to actually use the app.

### **October 8. Ian Caton. Texture: Ferns and Grasses.**

Ian Caton is the owner of Woodthrush Native Plant Nursery in Floyd County. Ferns and grasses make up the bulk of many native plant communities, serving as the workhorse structures and stabilizers. This backdrop has often been neglected by gardeners who traditionally (at least in the west) have been more focused on flowers than on things with primarily textural qualities. However these plants are important to include and help with the suppression of weeds, the survival of many plants that do poorly in their absence, and by providing a clear and cohesive canvas against which flowering plants can show at their best. This lecture is intended as an introduction both to planting techniques and to a selection of plants that are valuable to the home gardener and landscaper.

## **November 12. Bruce Grimes. Flower Flies in Virginia: A Sampling**

Bruce is a Master Naturalist and currently serves as Treasurer for our Chapter. Everyone knows that bees are the most important pollinators, but flies are also very important pollinators, and flower flies are usually the most important of the flies in pollination. A bonus is that many of them are also colorful and attractive. We will look at representatives of many of the types that are in Virginia, especially those you might be likely to encounter, and examine some of the important services beyond pollination that flower flies provide to us and the environment.

## **December 10. Member Share Meeting, at a location to be determined.**

For our last program of the year members share their interest in native plants through photos and stories. Consider passing on your experiences from books you have read, nurseries you have visited, trips you have taken, a project you have worked on, or a website that you found, or anything else plant related. Details will be sent later on how to send in your photos, slides, etc. Bring finger foods if you would like to share them with your fellow native plant enthusiasts.

### **Meet the Board for New River Chapter** (Mary Rhoades)

We have many new members who may not know the officers and board members who run our Chapter, so they are listed here. Our annual election is held in October at our program meeting, which this year will be October 8. If you are a member of our Chapter, and would like to be on the board, or run for an office, contact Rosemarie Sawdon ([sawdon@msn.com](mailto:sawdon@msn.com)). She is composing the ballot this year.

President	Bob Boehringer
Vice President	Lauren Kerwien
Secretary	Lauren Kerwien
Treasurer	Bruce Grimes

#### Members at Large:

Ellen Bosman, Brenda Graff, Jennifer Lovern,  
Rosemarie Sawdon, Beth Umberger

## **Student Travel Grants Available to Attend VNPS Annual Meeting this September** (Lauren Kerwien)

Our Chapter would like to award two undergraduate students from Virginia Tech, Radford University, or New River Community College travel grants to attend the annual VNPS state meeting in Harrisonburg, VA. Grants will include the registration fee (\$50) and hotel accommodations. The meeting will be held Friday, Sept. 20 through Sunday, Sept. 22, and feature presentations by Dr. Andrea Weeks, professor of biology at George Mason University, and Dr. Iara Lacher, Research Associate at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute in addition to a selection of field trips in the area. More details can be found at <https://vnps.org/events/2024-annual-meeting-and-program/>.

**If you are an undergraduate student at Virginia Tech, Radford University, or New River Community College and are interested in attending the VNPS state meeting, please apply for a VNPS-NR travel grant by Friday, August 30th.** To apply, submit a short write up detailing your interest in native plants and native habitats and why you would like to attend the annual meeting. Submit your application to [nrchaptervnps@gmail.com](mailto:nrchaptervnps@gmail.com) via email. Please include your full name, college, major of study, and contact information.

## **Project Grant Deadline is Friday, October 11** (Lauren Kerwien)

The VNPS-NR chapter grant program works to support community and educational projects focusing on native plants in the New River Valley. Projects funded by this award can range from installation of native plant gardens or removal of invasive species in neighborhood common spaces, schools, or on conserved land to projects led by undergraduates at Virginia Tech and Radford University to better understand or preserve Virginia native flora. Applicants are not limited to only these three types of projects; we encourage applicants with any creative project ideas to apply as well. More information can be found at <https://vnps.org/newriver/projects/grants/>.

Email [nrchaptervnps@gmail.com](mailto:nrchaptervnps@gmail.com) with any questions.

## **Membership Report** (Rosemarie Sawdon)

As of the end of July, we have 47 new members who have joined the New River Chapter. In total we presently have 142 members that list the New River Chapter as their main chapter. Our membership extends to Bland, Giles, Wythe, Floyd, Pulaski, and Carroll counties, as well as the City of Radford, with the majority of members living in Montgomery County. We welcome all new members, and, of course, everyone who renews their membership. Please contact me (sawdon@msn.com) if you have any questions about your membership.

## **Field Trips and Outreach for 2024** (Brenda Graff)

We had a wonderful variety of field trips this year. Our ten field trips ranged from local wildflower walks to reviewing grant recipient projects located at the Ivanhoe bird trail, the Pulaski High School sensory trail, and the Bland County public educational pollinator garden. We also had tours of a local old growth grassland in Christiansburg and an American chestnut tree breeding orchard in Catawba. If you have ideas for field trips later this year or next year, contact Brenda Graff at [graff\\_brenda@hotmail.com](mailto:graff_brenda@hotmail.com).

We had eight outreach events this year where we had a table at an event and talked to the public about wildflowers, pollinator gardens, and invasives. We also displayed posters and gave out handouts. If you would like to help at an outreach event such as Heritage Day in Christiansburg on August 24, or the Hokie Bugfest on October 12, contact Brenda Graff at [graff\\_brenda@hotmail.com](mailto:graff_brenda@hotmail.com).

This year at our outreach events we passed out free copies of the book titled "A Guide to Gardening with Southwest Virginia Native Plants" which was published by the [Plant Southwest Virginia natives campaign](#) which our chapter is a partner with. We started with 250 copies and have only 50 copies left. People were very happy to find suggestions on how to plant natives in their yards and help the wildlife at the same time. If you need a copy you can either contact our chapter at [nrchaptervnps@gmail.com](mailto:nrchaptervnps@gmail.com) or look at [an online copy](#).

Details of both our field trips and outreach events are published in our monthly list of events sent to our list serve members. Brenda will be glad to add you to the list serve if you are not already on it.

## Tour of Chestnut Trees at Catawba (Lauren Kerwien)

In July, VNPS NR members toured a chestnut orchard maintained by the VA chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation. The orchard is located right behind the Catawba Sustainability Center near McAfee Knob. The tour was led by Cassie Stark, regional science coordinator, John Scrivani, VA TACF chapter president, and Vinny, TACF's Absher intern. On the tour we saw American, Chinese, and hybrid chestnut trees and what chestnut blight looks like on each tree. Below are pictures from the tour!



## Report from the Massey Herbarium (Jordan Metzgar)

The federally endangered Peters Mountain Mallow (*Iliamna corei*) is one of our rarest native plants. This wildflower is known from only one site in Virginia--or in the world! I was fortunate to join an outing to see the mallow at a Nature Conservancy preserve in Giles County.

I saw about 10 plants of *Iliamna corei*, all a little droopy from the heat but still impressive with their pale pink blossoms. The stellate (star-shaped) hairs on the leaves were easy to see on the wilted leaves. This species is fire-adapted so more plants will sprout after the site burns again. Sometimes these fires are intentional managed burns and sometimes the fire is started by lightning.

This site is on a very dry and sunny mountaintop so this plant clearly likes it hot. But even it was wilting from the heat wave earlier this summer!

The herbarium was involved in some of the early recovery efforts for this species so I have heard a lot about this plant over the years. I've seen our specimens prepared from greenhouse-raised plants and read the studies published by our former staff that used DNA to show the species is distinct from other *Iliamna* species. I was thrilled to finally observe this plant in the wild!

A big thank you to The Nature Conservancy for protecting this plant and for organizing this outing!



## **Buffalo Mountain Natural Area Preserve Updates** (Ryan Klopff)

Buffalo Mountain Natural Area Preserve (NAP) currently protects eighteen rare species and nine natural communities within 1,146 acres of forests, wetlands, and grasslands in Floyd County. This preserve is managed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR) Natural Heritage Program. Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources Travis Voyles has expressed the administration's support to expand DCR's ownership and management of lands surrounding Buffalo Mountain NAP. In November 2023, the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation awarded a \$3.6 million grant to expand the preserve by 1,000 acres. Then in May 2024 the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Legacy Program provided \$9.5 million in funding to support additional land protection near Buffalo Mountain. DCR will make an announcement when any transactions that would affect the size and management of Buffalo Mountain NAP have been completed.

In the meantime, Natural Heritage stewardship staff continue to manage Buffalo Mountain NAP so this special place is sustained in a healthy condition. Specific actions underway include herbicide application to patches of invasive species (e.g., Japanese stilt grass, Japanese spirea), maintenance of hiking trail features (e.g., stonework, rolling grade dips) to minimize soil erosion, entrance road maintenance including grading and pothole repair, management of visitors to avoid overcrowding, and vegetation monitoring to measure the recovery of summit communities following the installation of the Barrens Loop Trail in 2020. This trail concentrated impacts from visitors to the summit, protecting the fragile plant habitats found there from trampling. Ongoing photo monitoring is demonstrating the efficacy of this approach to sustainable public access atop Buffalo Mountain. Specifically, each year multiple photographs are taken from permanently marked points so that changes in vegetation can be measured over time (Figures 1a and 1b). All in all, the stewardship team responsible for Buffalo Mountain NAP continues to work diligently to protect biodiversity and manage the preserve as a leading example of natural areas stewardship in Virginia and beyond.



**Figure 1a.** Photopoint 5E in May 2020 showing exposed mineral soil created by trampling.



**Figure 1b.** Photopoint 5E in May 2023, showing recovery of previously trampled barrens community.