OUR MISSION

Our mission is to work in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service to conserve this outstanding natural resource while improving the quality and experience of recreational opportunities in Panthertown Valley.

Save These Dates

Thursday August 13
Patrick McMillan Webinar Presentation
(Tickets: Details on page 7)

Saturday August 15
Trail Work Day & Hike
RSVP/Sign-Up or More Info: panthertown.org/volunteer

Saturday September 19
Trail Work Day & Hike

Saturday September 26
National Public Lands Day in Panthertown

Saturday October 17
Trail Work Day & Hike

Saturday November 17
Trail Work Day & Hike

Saturday December 19
Trail Work Day & Hike

Saturday January 16
Trail Work Day & Hike

Mountain bikers enjoying the view from the Salt Rock Gap overlook. Photograph by Krista Robb, Panthertown Trail Stewardship Coordinator

Panthertown Provides Backcountry Recharge

The thriving natural world in Panthertown remains teeming with life. There is remarkable diversity here that we all cherish, from the silent microbes deep within our rich soils, and the thriving small wonders crawling amongst our leaves, to the dens filled with American black bears, and even the humans and animals exploring our trails. Life here is magnificent, mysterious, abundant, and precious. Conservation of our public lands has been challenging in 2020 with the historic Covid-19 pandemic. In these uncertain times we remain committed to protecting this special place. We treasure Panthertown, and we greatly appreciate the generosity of our members, community, and partners now more than ever. Panthertown stayed open while other public trail systems and campgrounds throughout Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests remained closed for months. More people are choosing to stay closer to home, and visitation in our National Forests is at an all-time high, and for good reasons. Panthertown provides for a refresh, a recharge, and replenishing of our health, spirit, and well-being. Thank you for your continued support and patience as we navigate through new and uncharted norms together. Your care and concern are essential to our success.
News & Happenings

We are excited to introduce Krista Robb, our new Trail Stewardship Coordinator, Kara McMullen, our environmental science intern from Western Carolina University, and Peter Pavarini, a member of Friends of Panthertown, recently elected to serve on our Board of Trustees.

We have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, and we remain dedicated and resilient despite the challenges we face ahead. With social distancing to avoid contracting the virus being the new normal, Panthertown has proven to provide an ideal natural setting to enjoy outdoor recreation while maintaining social distance. This has resulted in an exponential, record-setting increase in visitation to our Forests. Panthertown was one of the few trail systems that stayed open during the pandemic, despite North Carolina stay at home orders, U.S. Forest Service volunteer restrictions, and significant trail and campground shutdowns, including on Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Blue Ridge Parkway, DuPont State Forest, Gorges State Park, and Whiteside Mountain.

With more than 30 miles of trails, and 6,311 acres of quality backcountry to explore, Panthertown remains one of Jackson County’s most prized natural resources. Thank you for helping us protect this special place. Our dedicated volunteers have put in many hours this summer, removing fallen trees and storm debris, keeping the trail system maintained, and the valley protected. We appreciate their hard work and thank them for being such amazing stewards.

New Nantahala Ranger Hired

We welcome Troy Waskey as the new ranger for the Nantahala Ranger District. Since 2013, Waskey has served in West Virginia as the district ranger for the Monongahela National Forest. Waskey took over from Mike Wilkins, who announced last summer that he would retire after 29 years in the post. Waskey is a graduate of Virginia Tech, holding a degree in natural resources recreation and forestry, as well as a master’s in outdoor recreation management from Arizona State University. He grew up in Richmond and has worked at USFS properties in NH, ME, AZ, NM, and WV. “Western North Carolina is a special place for me,” said Waskey. “It’s where I cut my teeth as an outdoor recreation enthusiast, trained as a wilderness first responder, and worked with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.” We look forward to continuing our partnership and working together with Ranger Waskey and his staff on conservation and stewardship projects throughout Panthertown.
Meet Our Trail Stewardship Coordinator: Krista Robb

Krista Robb is an outdoor enthusiast and 2017 Western Carolina University Parks and Recreation Management graduate. She recently joined the staff of Friends of Panthertown serving as part-time Trail Stewardship Coordinator. She’s on the trails in Panthertown, managing our trail crew volunteers, and leading our Leave No Trace outreach and education program. She previously served as an interpretive educator with the U.S. Forest Service Cradle of Forestry.

Krisita Robb is the new Trail Stewardship Coordinator for Friends of Panthertown. She’ll be “connecting people with the Forest through memorable experiences”. Krista knows the value of opening the great out “doors” to others, as those “doors” were opened for her in her early 20’s. With welcoming friends, and the western Montana trails of the Bob Marshall Wilderness, Flathead National Forest, and Glacier National Park right at her doorstep, the birth of a deep land connection was established. Once in her blood, the calling brought her to back to her ancestral homeland where she studied at Western Carolina University in Parks and Recreation Management. Some of her favorite projects were working with local naturalist George Ellison, helping build North Carolina’s first downhill bike trails and race series at Beech Mountain, plus establishing a student partnership with Friends of Panthertown during her studies. Most recently, her passion for understanding Appalachian heritage and the natural world led her to establish a variety of educational programs for the Brasstown Bald Visitor Center in the Chattahoochee National Forest of North Georgia. Interacting with and interpreting for guests from all over the world enriched her love for the Blue Ridge Mountains. You may spot her taking macro pictures of nature’s wonders in Panthertown, hoeing a row in her popcorn field, or kicking up dirt on her mountain bike. Krista says she is “truly honored to be our newest steward of Panthertown”, and we are honored to have her on our team. Thanks to our members, donors, and grantors for making this position possible!

Meet Our Intern: Kara McMullen, WCU

We welcome our summer undergraduate intern, Kara McMullen, a rising junior who is studying environmental science at Western Carolina University. Kara has been taking water quality samples while monitoring the waterfalls and creeks in Panthertown, and downstream along the Tuckasegee River watershed. She will be contributing her hydrology data to the North Carolina water quality database, in partnership with Friends of Panthertown, Western Carolina, and the Watershed Association of the Tuckasegee River.
Big Thanks To Our Currently Supporting Members of Friends of Panthertown


WILDERNESS FALLS 500: Stephen Boone, Dave and Lynda Borden, R. Grant and Michele Campbell, Margaret and Bob Carton, Michael Comer, Ken Gardner, Mike and Margo Purdy, Charles Shufeldt, Lee and Dorthy Thomas, Christina West, Anonymous.


GRANNY BURRELL FALLS 100: David Adams, Wendy and Ed Ansbrough, Lauren Baer, Bill and Lindsey Barclift, Abbey and Mike Bearer, Linda Benge, Patricia Booker, Dan and Marty Boone, Julia Bryant, Chris and Anne Bulleit, John Cantey, Lane and Barb Carlin, Nicole Carr, Tony Cobb, Lindsay and Bill Dorris, Tom and Lin Duncan, Pat and John Dunlevy, Denise and Jim Dunn, Ken and Jody Dunn, Kathy Edwards, Helen and Frank Ellerbe, Martha Fishbane, Gabrielle Gillies, Dan Goldberg, An Goldgar, Ocie and Jo Ella Harris, Pat Hawkins, William Horton, Evans Hubbard, Howard and Marilyn Kaston, Bernie Kearns, Kurt Kronauge, Greg Lambert, Robert Markland, Annette and Steven McBrayer, Tony McDade, Susan and Dan McLeaod, Melissa Miles, Patricia Morse, Kathryn Nash, George and Ellen Nemhauser, Roy Osborn, Thomas and Jeanne Parker, J. Dan Pittillo, Thomas and Laura Prior, Oscar and Ruthann Range, Ingo and Bridgette Regier, Carl Riden, Robert Ross Jr., Kelly and David Ryan, Jesse Salerno, Aileen Steinberg, Carroll and Toby Summerour, Dr. David R. Thomas III, Beth Townsend, Ellen and Mike Tucker, William A. Van Ormer Jr., Rosemary Watts, Susanne Wren, William Webb, Jim and Dawn York, George and Laura Younams.


MAC’S GAP FALLS 25: Anne Bonestroo, Jack Borneman, Rainier Finley, Kristina Javar.
Boy Scout Eagle Project Leads To Bear Box Installation in Panthertown Valley

by Krista Robb, Trail Stewardship Coordinator

Hiking and camping in Panthertown from an early age, Liam McNeely chose his Eagle Scout service project with Boy Scouts Troop 701 as one aiming to help protect campers and black bears alike. As a long-time trail user, Liam’s project reflects his love for Panthertown Valley, which being part of a designated American black bear sanctuary is protected year-round from bear hunting, and provides a safe space for these omnivores to roam freely.

Most day hikers rarely see the shy and elusive creatures, but as recreation numbers increase, overnight campers have been experiencing more frequent bear encounters around food. If a bear successfully gets snacks or dinner from a hiker’s pack, the bear will learn this as a food source, which leads to more undesirable interactions, potentially being harmful or deadly to both.

Liam’s Eagle Scout project is an important step in helping remedy this issue with the long awaited and carefully planned installation of two metal bear boxes in proximity of two popular camping areas. The boxes will allow overnighters to safely store any odor producing items out of a bear’s reach, as they are strategically bolted to the ground, and the tops of the boxes are latched with two simple chain linked carabiners.

To reduce the amount of human and bear interactions, the U.S. Forest Service still recommends campers use a bear-proof canister when camping in Panthertown Valley.

Liam says, “Panthertown can and should remain available to the public for many years to come if visitors will properly store and dispose of food and trash.”

The next time you are in Panthertown you may see one of the brown boxes. They are there to minimize our impact on the ecosystem as a whole. Low impact principles such as “Plan ahead & Prepare, Dispose of Waste Properly, and Respect Wildlife” are a part of understanding the sustainability of our forests and creating active solutions to local environmental issues.

This successful project was the result of a collaboration between the U.S. Forest Service, Friends of Panthertown, Boy Scouts of America Troop 701, and McNeely’s Store & Rental. Congratulations to all on this important collaboration for conservation. Your actions matter! Thank you for supporting the work that we do.
Our Trail Work Volunteers Are The Best! We Have Fun Working On The Trails!

Above Left: Boy Scouts have been a great help this summer. Right: Volunteers repair a bridge on Mac's Gap Trail. Below: Mike English, Trail Boss, cuts out fallen trees while volunteers remove storm debris, prune, and maintain water diversions.

Schoolhouse Falls in Panthertown was featured as one of North Carolina's Best Waterfalls in the July 2020 issue of Our State magazine.

PUBLIC HEALTH NOTICE DUE TO COVID-19 VIRUS PANDEMIC

Panthertown Trail System Access

- Please practice responsible social distancing by observing CDC guidelines, and follow all local, state, and federal orders.
- Maintain a minimum distance of at least 6 feet between you and others. Keep groups limited to 10 persons or less at all times.

- Do not use trails if you are sick or exhibiting symptoms.
- Please use proper trail etiquette, be courteous on the trails, and warn other trail users of your presence as you pass.
- Please keep your children and dogs under your control.
- Practice Leave No Trace and pack your trash out with you. Bury human waste 6-8" deep & 200' away from trails & water.
- Avoid risks. Stay within your skill level to reduce accidents.
- Enjoy the trails and remember: we're all in this together.

This notice was posted on March 30, 2020. Check nc.gov/coronavirus or coronavirus.gov for the latest COVID-19 updates.
Learn About The Rare Southern Appalachian Bog in Panthertown Valley

Emmy® Award-winning PBS television host to talk about Panthertown’s rare wetlands

Join us live on Thursday, August 13 at 7:30 P.M. for an exciting online webinar presentation by Emmy® Award-winning PBS television host, educator, and naturalist Dr. Patrick McMillan.

Dr. McMillan is the Hilliard professor of environmental sustainability at Clemson University, and is the director of the South Carolina Botanical Garden. His popular PBS television show is a public service program of Clemson University Cooperative Extension, produced in partnership with South Carolina Educational Television.

Special thanks to Marcia and Steve Shawler for sponsoring this event.

Friends of Panthertown is a proud member and partner of these local and national organizations.

We are thankful for our 2020 community partnerships with these supporting local businesses and organizations:
Thank you for your generous support. To renew your membership, join Friends, or make a tax-deductible gift in honor of someone special, send a text from your smartphone with the short code PANTHERTOWN to 44321.

Or, you can scan this QR code with your phone’s camera. You’ll be sent a link to make a secure donation.

Or, visit our website: panthertown.org/renew
panthertown.org/join

Friends of Panthertown
PO Box 51
Cashiers, NC 28717

Visit our website to read our comments about the U.S. Forest Service revised Land and Resource Management Plan.

Rhododendron blooms, and a Panthertown salamander, an Eastern red-spotted newt (Notophthalmus viridescens) Photos by Krista Robb