

**KENTUCKY
HEARTWOOD**

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



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Staff in front of the White Fringeless Orchid Mural in Berea, Kentucky.

Left to Right: Jim Scheff, Ecologist. Whitney Hamblin, Membership Director. Lauren Kallmeyer, Executive Director.



Original drawings by Laurie Schimmoeller



LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



2023 was the year of “getting the ground under our feet” so to speak - with the huge lift of filing the South Redbird lawsuit and responding to the first round of the Jellico logging proposal out of the way, we were afforded some breathing room to focus on our organizational and operational effectiveness.

Magically, our intent to focus on this work coincided with a special grant opportunity from Patagonia, who gave us \$20,000 to hire a consultant! Because we participate in the SPARK nonprofit support program sponsored by Mountain Association, it was easy to find an experienced consultant. All

these puzzle pieces fit perfectly into place thanks to the relationships we have built over the years with these organizations! As a result, we updated our bylaws, and developed a new board member handbook, new policies and procedures, and a strategic plan!

One of the main focuses of our strategic plan is staffing and our biggest challenge is how to expand our bandwidth with our small budget. We secured a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to help increase our marketing capacity. One component of this was hiring an intern to digitize our 30 years of paper archives, news clippings, and pictures. We brought on Mahala King, a local resident and recent graduate of the University of Louisville’s History department, who not only organized our paper archives, but won a grant from the Kentucky Oral History Commission to build our oral history archives. Mahala will be conducting oral history interviews throughout 2024, and we have already started using the digital archives in our communications and outreach.

Thanks to our most successful fall fundraising campaign ever, we have decided to hire a staff attorney! This position will focus on writing our organizational comments and administrative objections for various Forest Service projects, submitting Freedom of Information Act requests (and litigating if needed), and staying informed on national and regional activities that could impact forest management in Kentucky. By hiring an attorney, Jim can spend more time on ecology, fieldwork, and scientific research, which will help us expand our public education programs.



I am particularly proud of the human connections that we made this year. Between attending two regional activist gatherings in the spring and attending Patagonia’s national “Tools for Grassroots Activists” conference this fall, I had the opportunity to network and connect with determined activists from across the country. It is more important than ever that we stay connected, share our wins, and learn from our failures. Our participation in the Climate Forests Coalition continues to be crucial, as this group has been successful at giving a unified voice to the movement and pushing the Biden Administration to protect mature and old-growth forests.

We must continue to use “**endless pressure, endlessly applied**” (a useful quote from Brock Evans that was drilled into us at the Patagonia conference) until the Forest Service prioritizes ecology and preservation over the interests of the timber industry.

When we advocate for the forest, we aren’t just advocating for the trees. We advocate for the air we breathe, Kentucky’s 1,100 miles of navigable waterways (only Alaska has more), the over 700 rare, threatened, endangered, species of concern, and the thousands of other species that can continue to thrive if we dampen our human urge for destruction. We are blessed to live in one of the most biodiverse regions of the world.

The forest connects us all, and we will never give up.

LAUREN KALLMEYER

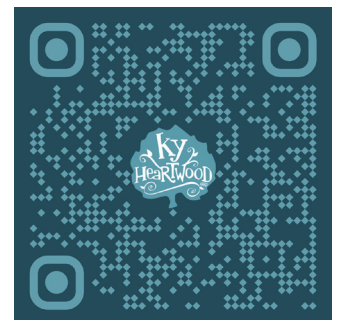
ENGAGING COMMUNITY

with creative partnerships

We continue to increase our community engagement efforts both within our KY community as well as within the broader environmental activist community. Hikes, events, and presentations to community and activist groups helped us to engage people of all ages in helping to protect the forest we love.

The highlight of our year was our trek to the Champion Red Hickory tree with musician Senora May Childers to film a creative project that sheds light on the threats facing our public land. Together with Senora and her film crew, we led the team on the Redbird Crest Trail into Little Flat Creek, using the Champion Red Hickory as the focal point.

Senora sang her original song “Family Tree” to the Red Hickory and the crew captured the serenade. This project highlights the commercial logging threats to the Daniel Boone National Forest and presents the viewer with what feels like a first-hand experience in the forest. We are so grateful to Senora and the Hickman Holler Appalachian Relief Fund for hearing our idea and leading the charge in capturing such a special story. If you are interested in watching the full creative project, head over to YouTube and search for Kentucky Heartwood.



Scan the above QR code with smartphone to watch the creative project with Senora May!

Kentucky Heartwood Staff + Senora May Childers at the Champion Red Hickory site.

2023 MUSIC FESTIVAL

KENTUCKY HEARTWOOD 17TH ANNUAL MUSIC FESTIVAL JULY 29TH, 2023 MILLVILLE COMMUNITY CENTER - FRANKFORT KY

With the help of Kentucky Heartwood founder and Council member Chris Schimmoeller, we held our 17th annual Music Festival in Frankfort with funk band the Baja Yeti's, creative songwriting from Jasmine Fouts, and many talented youth participants in the music competition. We look forward to seeing you on **July 27th, 2024** for our 18th Annual Music Festival at the Millville Community Center in Frankfort, KY!



Chris Schimmoeller with kids!



ENGAGING COMMUNITY



We increased our community engagement with outreach to a wide variety of audiences including the Kentucky Environmental Education Conference, the Red Oaks Forest School, and the Sierra Club! Our most unique event of the year was the Feral Folk Holiday Market at West 6th Brewery in Lexington.

We co-hosted this event with our friends at Kentucky Herbalism Alliance. This market featured handcrafted goods from land-based and nature-inspired makers of Eastern Kentucky!

We had the incredible opportunity to elevate our work and mission to nature oriented folks in Lexington, while supporting local vendors with ethics rooted in land stewardship. This event was successful for both vendors and Kentucky Heartwood, with many artists reporting back their highest, single-day business sales to date! We look forward to continuing to co-host this event and are pleased to share with you a spring Feral Folk Market will be held at West 6th Brewery on **Sunday May 12th, 2024** from noon to 4:00. See you there!



130 NEW MEMBERS IN 2023!

We are expanding our coalition of people who love Kentucky's public lands and know that our forests are **WORTH MORE STANDING!**

FOREST WATCH

Defending the Daniel Boone National Forest



Original drawings by Laurie Schimmoeller



We spent over **500 hours** ground truthing existing projects and scoping out new areas that are proposed for logging. The time we spend in the Daniel Boone is the most significant contribution we make to the defense of the forest, and it influences the entirety of our thirty-two year mission.

CONTINUE TO GROUND TRUTH AND DEFEND SOUTH RED BIRD PROJECT AREA FROM LOGGING



Despite our ongoing litigation, the Forest Service has moved forward with several sales in South Red Bird. Logging in the Bear Creek sale is nearly completed, with timber from the Caney Knob and Panther Branch sales bid out to loggers. It appears that the Ruffed Grouse Society is holding off on logging Little Flat Creek while litigation is pending, though its fate is uncertain. The on-the-ground impacts of the Bear Creek sale are an upsetting mess. Huge skid roads have been bulldozed throughout, with large numbers of remaining trees heavily damaged. During field visits of Caney Knob and Panther Creek we found big, old trees included in the sales and areas with significant slope stability concerns. We also identified more high quality old-growth forest that was misidentified and

approved for logging in the Elisha Creek watershed, part of the upcoming Laurel Fork sale.

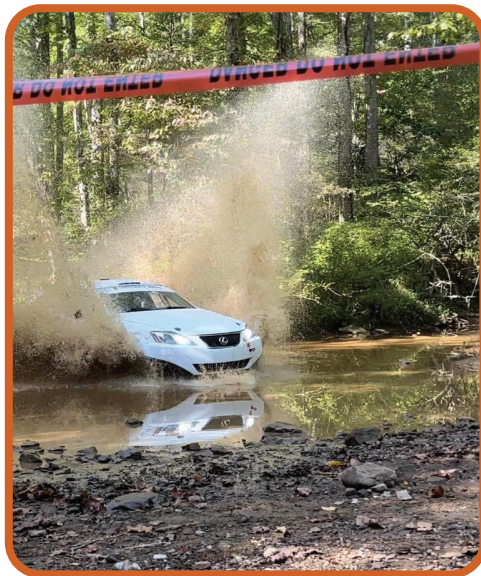
ACTIVITIES IN THE HORSE LICK CREEK WATERSHED

Kentucky Heartwood becomes a landowner. We were contacted out of the blue by some generous folks who had a family property on Dry Fork School Road in the Horse Lick Creek area of Jackson County. After considering what property "ownership" would entail for our organization, we decided that we had the bandwidth to manage the 2-acre parcel. It is wooded and steep, and easily accessed from the road, so we do not anticipate the need to manage it unless invasive species appear. The property is surrounded by National Forest, so it affords us landowner status in a high-priority conservation area. In the 90s, the Horse Lick Creek watershed was deemed a Bioreserve and one of the world's "last great places" by the Nature Conservancy.



RALLY CAR RACE THROUGH HORSE LICK CREEK

Horse Lick Creek is critical habitat for several species of endangered mussels and also contains habitat for endangered bats and "at-risk" species of birds and plants. It is by all accounts a special and magical place. Unfortunately, it has become horribly overrun with OHVs and appears to have been deprioritized by the larger conservation community.



In fact, in September, the Forest Service allowed a Rally Car race to take place through the critical habitat portion of the creek and throughout the watershed, without going through all the requirements to gain permits in the environmentally sensitive area. We submitted comments expressing our concern and outlining the violations of the Endangered Species Act and the Forest Plan, but the Forest Service never responded to us. We plan to follow up on this situation once we have hired our staff attorney. We are continuing to monitor and photograph the OHV impacts in the area that are causing severe erosion into Horse Lick Creek.

SOUTH RED BIRD LAWSUIT UPDATE



Our lawsuit has become increasingly complex, with a prolonged and ongoing fight over what documents can be considered part of the full administrative record - and therefore part of the lawsuit. Kentucky Heartwood volunteer Tina Marie Camp Scheff uncovered a trove of vital documents that were accidentally released by the Forest Service, which shed light on (and contradict) important aspects of the project and the public record. The Forest Service is fighting to keep these records barred from consideration.

NEPA VIOLATIONS

The Daniel Boone NF continues to try to sneak projects in without going through the steps required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). We continue to comment on these projects and look forward to having more staff dedicated to fighting these legal issues:

● **Cumberland district – Ruffed Grouse Habitat Enhancement project:**

We submitted comments raising our concerns about the DBNF's use of a "Categorical Exclusion" (CE) to sidestep NEPA requirements and provide a fast track for this logging project that is disguised as "habitat improvement." The project would also impact the viewshed of the Sheltopee Trace. We haven't heard any updates from the Forest Service since submitting our comments in August.

● **Cumberland district – Stonecoal Stream Restoration:**

The Forest Service also illegally used a CE to implement this project. They have informally acknowledged issues with the permitting (or lack thereof) that was required for this massive stream restoration project, and they also acknowledged that their use of a CE was inappropriate for a project this size. We have learned a lot from this project that we can use as future "restoration" projects are proposed.

● **Stearns – Greenwood Project Road Construction:**

The Forest Service approved NFSR 5104, a new road construction project of a 1-mile system road to haul timber from a section of the Greenwood project - despite the project being predicated on not building new roads. The new project analysis ignored all cost issues, including the District's own travel analysis report which found they have an annual road maintenance cost of nearly \$160,000. The Forest Service argued there would be no environmental impacts because the road and new stream crossing would be properly maintained, despite not having the resources to do so.



Fly over of Bear Creek project. October 2023.



Yellow Lady Slipper south of Cave Run Lake.



Bear Creek Area, before logging. September 2022.



Field Trip to visit the Champion Red Hickory.



Approximately same location as above.
Bear Creek Area, after logging. October 2023.

ANNUAL HONORS

STUART BUTLER MEMORIAL DINNER AND AWARD CEREMONY

In November, we honored long-time Red River Gorge volunteer **Becky Brewer** as the recipient of our 2023 Stu Butler award. There is an indescribable energy that bounces around the room when environmentalists from all walks of life gather together. The common thread connecting us all is a pure, deep love for nature and all that she provides. The room was buzzing with old friends reconnecting, new friendships forming, and a deep remembering of our friend, Stu Butler, for all that he contributed to the world during his life. This event was created to honor Stu, as those that knew him closely did not realize the breadth and depth of this work until after he was gone. The Stu Butler award aims to celebrate local environmental hero's while they are still alive. What an honor it was to celebrate with friends and family of Becky!



Debbie Monbeck, Daughter of the late Stu Butler with 2023 winner, Becky Brewer.



PARTNERSHIP IN SERVICE AWARD



Kentucky Heartwood was awarded the "Partnership in Service Award" by the Sheltoewe Trace Association (STA) at its annual 2023 gathering. We appreciate everything that the STA does to promote our state's only long-distance hiking trail. The more folks we get out into the forest, the more people will feel compelled to protect it!

Special Thanks *&* COUNCIL MEMBERS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

- Xyara Asplen**
Vice President
 wrote our beautiful annual appeal letter.
- Julian Campbell**
 continues to advocate for clear conservation goals, sound science, and stronger connections with the environmental community in KY.
- Gretchen Collins**
 ran our KY Heartwood merch table at the Feral Folk market.
- Dave Cooper**
President
 stepped up in a leadership role as Council president and kept everyone headed in the right direction!
- Steve Dorsett**
Treasurer
 helped put us on solid financial ground. We are grateful for his service as Treasurer the last two years.
- Patty Draus**
Secretary
 provided invaluable support processing donations during our successful (and thus busy) fundraising campaign after Thanksgiving.
- Chris Schimmoeller**
KYH Founder
 provided a wide network of community support that was vital in pulling off a successful music festival despite the very hot July day!
- Ted Withrow**
 provided support for a number of behind the scenes HR functions that were critical for staff success.

CORE VOLUNTEERS

- Tina Marie Camp Scheff**
 for her steadfast love and passion for the forest and her ongoing, invaluable role in our South Red Bird lawsuit.
- Laurie Schimmoeller**
 for creating beautiful artwork for our communication pieces that are as special as the forest we work to protect.

Grant & Foundation Partners



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on our new website!

Thank you!



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