

Critical Habitats Workshop in Galax, Virginia

By David Richert, Area Forester Bland, Buchanan, Tazewell Counties

Recently, a workshop to encourage landowner interest in biologically significant habitats was conducted in the New River Watershed near Galax, Virginia. Thirty five landowners, teachers, and natural resource managers learned about these critical habitats and witnessed management techniques necessary for stewardship of these unique areas. Besides providing habitat for rare flora and fauna, these habitats can instill pride in stewardship, add to the aesthetic value, and even increase the marketability of the land.

The field component of the workshop included a trip to a state-owned Natural Area Preserve. The DCR-Division of Natural Heritage's Claiborne Woodall showed participants the management efforts underway at Big Spring Bog Natural Area Preserve. To date, DCR has mechanically and chemically removed encroaching woody vegetation, and has installed a series of deer exclosures (see illustration) to monitor the effects of deer herbivory in the natural area preserve. Woodall also discussed DCR's plans to use prescribed fire to remove dead materials and promote germination of native herbs and forbs.

Participants also toured the Dixon Lumber tract—a privately owned tract of timberland that includes a state-recognized critical habitat. Retired DOF Associate Regional Forester Jim Baxley and Grayson / Carroll County Forester Donnie Garman explained how the landowners have incorporated the stewardship of at least 3 state-rare plants including the large leaved grass of Parnassus (see illustration) into the management of their timberland. The Virginia Department of Forestry has provided cost-share assistance to the landowners, and has burned the 6-acre site twice in the last 2 years.

For the finale, the participants enjoyed a lecture by retired Virginia Highlands Community College Professor, Doug Ogle, a native of Hillsville, VA. The lecture explained how topography, geology, biology, history, and meteorology have inter-related to make the New River Plateau of Grayson and Carroll Counties a biologically unique place.

Footer: The event was organized by the forestry committee of the New River Watershed Roundtable, and sponsored by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's Division of Natural Heritage, Virginia Tech Cooperative Extension, the Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program, the Virginia Tech Forestry Department, the New River Soil and Water Conservation District, the New River Watershed Roundtable, the New River Highlands RC & D, and the Virginia Department of Forestry. The forestry committee of the New River Watershed Roundtable has been organizing forestry related activities and events in the New River Valley for the past 4 years.



State-rare large-leaved grass of Parnassus found on the Dixon Lumber Tract April 20th (above). In August and September these same plants will be loaded with showy white flowers (below).





DOF Grayson County Forest Technician Chad Austin examines a sprig of state-rare cranberry found at the Dixon Lumber Tract on April 20th.



Retired DOF Associate Regional Forester Jim Baxley inspects a deer exclosure at Big Spring Bog Natural Area Preserve.



Retired DOF forester Jim Baxley, and DOF Area forester Donnie Garman discuss the benefits of forest stewardship management.