

# *Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains*



## **Annual Report 2014-2015**

### **MISSION**

To preserve, enhance, and celebrate the Blue Ridge Mountains as a valuable resource and treasured space for present and future generations

### **VISION**

The Blue Ridge Mountains stand secure as a national treasure for all time – ancient and sacred space that is maintained as a model of natural and cultural preservation – a free and accessible destination for recreation, discovery, and renewal that inspires others to join us and sustain our effort.

## Letter from the President



In the early days of our organization, when we articulated a vision for our work, we set a clear intention to achieve successes on an annual basis. By any measure I believe we can celebrate a number of significant successes over the past year.

Let's start with our core activities: we hosted two volunteer days (now designated Stewardship Volunteer Days to emphasize the importance of stewardship as a part of how we execute our mission) to continue our work of restoring and maintaining the Blue Ridge Regional Park; we also hosted a very successful annual meeting at Twin Oaks Winery, an opportunity to highlight a low-impact agricultural enterprise on the Blue Ridge; we added two new committees to our Board – the Education Committee and the Stewardship Committee; we presented our fifth *Friend of the Mountain* award and expanded our *Jane Pratt Blue Ridge Education Award* program into Jefferson County, one of the counties in our focus area; we brought two new members onto our Board, who are serving, respectively, as the point person for land use issues and as the primary researcher and proposal writer for a campaign to build additional funding for the Jane Pratt award; we hired a part-time administrative assistant to add capacity; we maintained our presence at Earth Day and the Bluemont Fair; we continued our partnership with the Native Plant Society and the Northern Virginia Park Authority, began to explore a partnership with Leadership Loudoun and the Land Trust of Virginia, and grew our membership by 20%.

Beyond our core functions, our signature accomplishments over the past year have been the convening of a mini-summit for regional conservation groups (a follow-up to the summit hosted with the National Wildlife Federation in 2013) and the formal launch of the Blue Ridge Coalition, a structure that brings together representatives from regional conservation organizations on a regular basis to explore issues and identify opportunities for collective action. We also secured a significant pledge and made a good start in raising matching funds for expansion of the Jane Pratt award and made presentations on mountain ecosystems at Loudoun Valley High School.

The growth and momentum that we have experienced over the past year promises more good things in the coming year as we seek to build on our successes by expanding our offerings and our outreach. Our hope is to partner with the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center to offer a family education program on raptors on the Blue Ridge, lay the groundwork for extending our youth award to a third county, and expand representation on our Board of Directors.

We appreciate your support and invite your participation in our continuing efforts to preserve, protect, and celebrate our treasured Blue Ridge Mountains.

All best,

Carole Napolitano  
President, *Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains*

## 2014-15 Accomplishments

We are proud to highlight major accomplishments by *Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains* over the last year.

### PROTECTING AND ENHANCING OUR MOUNTAINS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

- In August, 2014 and May, 2015 we hosted Stewardship Volunteer Days at Blue Ridge Regional Park. We partnered again with the Virginia Native Plant Society, and continued clearing invasive plant species from this little gem of a park, including a large patch of invasive bamboo. Another Stewardship Day is planned for November 7, 2015.



*Friends volunteers clear invasive plants at Blue Ridge Regional Park; photos by Debbie Snyder*

- The 2nd annual presentation of the Jane Pratt Blue Ridge Education Award was expanded to include scholarship awards to a graduating senior at both Loudoun Valley High School in Loudoun County, Virginia, and Jefferson High School in Jefferson County, West Virginia. Each student was presented with a certificate and a \$1,000 college scholarship.



Photo at left: Board members Peter Weeks, Carole Napolitano and Jed Shilling with Loudoun Valley High School environmental studies teacher Liam McGranaghan (center) presenting the 2015 Jane Pratt Blue Ridge Education Award to senior Samantha Lliiff; *photo by Joyce Gates*  
At right: Board member Jed Shilling and Marie Uehling present the award to Jefferson High School senior Michael Long; *photo by Peter Weeks*



- The Land Use Committee obtained a model ordinance with criteria for evaluating development capacity of a site based on steep slopes and erodible soils
- A Board member attended a meeting sponsored by the Land Trust of Virginia for owners of larger tracts of land on and along the Blue Ridge to explain how they could benefit from Conservation Easements on their property, and followed up with a visit with a prospective participant.
- Representatives from *Friends'* Board attended the June 10, 2015 Board of Supervisors public hearing addressing the proposed Steep Slope Zoning Amendment prepared by ZOAG (Zoning Ordinance Action Group). Board member James Remuzzi testified in opposition to the proposed amendments to the zoning limitations associated with steep slopes. In his testimony, James noted that steep slopes perform valuable ecological functions that, if altered, would start costing the county in erosion control and stormwater practices. Chairman York and Supervisor Clarke spoke very favorably about their support for protecting the mountains and steep slopes, and expressed their desire to retain the rural character of Western Loudoun. The ordinance was referred back to the Transportation and Land Use Committee for further refinement following which the ordinance will be brought back to the Board of Supervisors for review. *Friends* will continue to monitor this situation.



- With the goal of building on the past efforts of a dedicated group of Board members and volunteers to restore the Blue Ridge Regional Park, a new Stewardship Committee was formed. The Committee will organize events and activities that provide an opportunity for members to actively participate and that demonstrate the value of stewardship practices in protecting and enhancing the character of the Blue Ridge.
- The Blue Ridge Coalition, an outgrowth of the Conservation Corridor concept first introduced by *Friends* charter member Jane Pratt in 2009, was formally launched in the fall of 2014 following a mini-summit at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute in Front Royal. This event served to reconvene regional conservation organizations who had come together at the original summit a year earlier to consider prospects for leveraging their impact. The mini-summit featured Ron Tipton, Executive Director of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, as the keynote speaker.

Groundwork for this event and the launch of the Coalition had been laid by a steering committee over the course of the previous year including the development of both a preliminary framework for the Coalition and its governance as well as a website (compliments of The Downstream Project) to serve as a clearinghouse for Coalition member newsfeeds.

The first official meeting of the Blue Ridge Coalition (BRC) was held in late November, 2014, followed by several meetings over the next several months at which considerations related to organizational

structure. Leadership roles, membership eligibility and requirements, have been explored in addition to a consideration of what the priorities of the Coalition should be. A goal of the BRC is to identify issues that warrant a response from the Coalition. A current example of such an issue involves pending changes to steep slopes ordinances, currently under review in Loudoun County. A second goal of the Coalition is to allow for the development of partnerships among members on a de facto basis to support initiatives of mutual interest. The BRC will also serve as resource for increasing the visibility of each other's projects and events and for adding heft to advocacy opportunities.



The Blue Ridge Coalition is launched! *photo by Carolyn Millard*

## CELEBRATING OUR MOUNTAINS

- Our well-attended 2014 Annual Meeting was held on November 9<sup>th</sup> at Twin Oaks Tavern Winery in Bluemont, VA. Attendees were treated to a winery tour by owner and winemaker Donna Evers before partaking in our traditional home-cooked chili dinner prepared by FBRM members. Peter Weeks was elected Treasurer by acclamation and outgoing Board members Katie Conaway and John Maxey were honored. The annual "Friend of the Mountain" award was presented to Al Van Huyck. Traditional mountain music was provided throughout the evening by the Just Left Band.



Carole Napolitano and Marie Uehling present the 2014 *Friend of the Mountain* award to Al Van Huyck; *photo by Debbie Snyder*

- In April, *Friends* made our second appearance at the 7th annual EarthDay@Loudoun where we had the opportunity to speak with hundreds of people, provide children's activities, and network with other conservation organizations.



*Friends* volunteer JC Quirin and two canine companions host our table at the Earth Day Loudoun event; photo by Megan Miraglia  
Children enjoy nature craft activities with Board member Rebekka Prinz; photo by Carole Napolitano

- For the fourth consecutive year *Friends* hosted an exhibit at the Bluemont Fair in September in front of our office in the heart of the village. Many fair visitors stopped by to learn more about our work on behalf of the mountains. Bluemont is located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge in western Loudoun County.

## BUILDING OUR ORGANIZATION AND OUR PRESENCE

- The Membership and Development Committee achieved a 20% growth in membership which now stands at 117 with a 90% renewal rate in 2015. Development activities focused on identifying prospective donors - foundations and individuals – as the first stage of a campaign to secure funding for our Jane Pratt scholarships
- Shannon Schwartz, a certified paralegal, joined *Friends* as a part-time administrative assistant and bookkeeper.
- *Friends* continues to develop its presence via local media outlets and online through Facebook and our website. The goal is to increase visibility, highlight our work, extend our reach, and develop ongoing support.



## PLANS FOR 2016

- The Celebrations, Communications, and Outreach Committee is committed to exploring outreach opportunities on behalf of *Friends* and the Blue Ridge Coalition, and exploring opportunities to increase our presence and activity in focus counties other than Loudoun (e.g. sponsoring/co-hosting an educational event in another county with a partner organization based in that county). In addition to annual events associated with Earth Day, the Bluemont Fair, and our Annual Meeting, the Committee is looking to partner with the Blue Ridge Wildlife Coalition in presenting a family-oriented, educational program on raptors on the Blue Ridge.
- The Membership and Development Committee will continue to work to grow our membership in a variety of ways including a targeted appeal to mountain landowners. To support and expand our successful Jane Pratt Blue Ridge Education Award program, Development is working towards establishing a permanent scholarship fund.
- The Education Committee plans to identify and administer at least two more area county high schools as recipients of scholarship awards for college-bound seniors. In addition, the Committee will recruit guest speakers familiar with mountain ecosystems for class presentations in these schools.
- The Land Use Committee will attend land use policy meetings and continue to oppose changes that would open the door to unacceptable development on the Blue Ridge; they will also coordinate with the Blue Ridge Coalition representatives in our 5-county region promote the adoption of a unified set of steep slope development regulations and criteria across jurisdictions. The Committee will continue to encourage Conservation Easements by assisting in sponsoring meetings and educating property owners in the region.
- The Stewardship Committee will plan and implement Spring and Fall Stewardship Volunteer Days, recruit new Committee members, and work to develop a Stewardship fund dedicated to helping eligible members plan and implement stewardship practices on the ground. Along with the Land Use Committee, Stewardship will provide representation and testimony as needed at the Loudoun Board of Supervisors and other relevant county meetings.
- *Friends* will identify an accounting firm to conduct an audit of financial records, a best practice to ensure transparency and sound financial management for a growing non-profit.



Photo by Tom Edmonds

## Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains Annual Income Statement and Financial Position

	12 months ending 8/31/2015
<b>REVENUE</b>	
Jane Pratt Memorial Fund	\$1,330.00
Membership Fees: Annual - Family	\$1,435.00
Membership Fees: Annual - Individual	\$280.00
Membership Fees: Annual - Sustainer	\$900.00
<b>SUBTOTAL Membership Fees</b>	<b>\$2,615.00</b>
<b>TOTAL Revenue</b>	<b>\$3,945.00</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>	
Administrative Assistance	\$941.40
Credit Card Fees	\$8.54
Insurance	\$401.00
<b>SUBTOTAL Administrative Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,350.94</b>
FBRM Brochures & Ads	\$1,773.91
Postage	\$27.20
Website	\$25.00
<b>SUBTOTAL Outreach, Fundraising &amp; Marketing Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,826.11</b>
Volunteer Stewardship Day Expenses	\$200.00
Jane Pratt Education Scholarship Awards	\$2,000.00
Miscellaneous Award costs	\$298.00
Educational Events	\$573.08
<b>SUBTOTAL Program Services</b>	<b>\$3,071.08</b>
<b>TOTAL Expenses</b>	<b>\$6,248.13</b>
<b>TOTAL FY 2013-14 Carry Forward</b>	<b>\$16,322.34</b>
<b>TOTAL NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$13,887.63</b>



## DONOR RECOGNITION

*Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains* is grateful for the financial contributions of all members. We wish to offer special recognition to the following individuals, businesses, and organizations for their generous support above membership level between September 1, 2014 and August 31, 2015.

Jill Beach  
Lucinda B. Emmett  
*End of the Road* Reading Group  
Goose Creek Friends Meeting  
Carole & Stephen Napolitano  
Just Left Band  
Maria Nicklin and Furyworks Productions LLC  
Schuyler Richardson  
John D. Shilling  
Twin Oaks Tavern Winery  
Marie Uehling & Will Hetzel  
Al & Betty Van Huyck

## Board of Director Members as of August 31, 2015

Carole Napolitano, President  
Marie Uehling, Vice President  
Deborah Snyder, Secretary  
Peter Weeks, Treasurer  
Chair of the Membership and Development Committee, Co-Chair of the Education Committee  
Megan Miraglia  
Norman Myers, Chair, Land Use Committee  
Rebekka Skinner-Prinz, Chair, Celebrations, Communications and Outreach Committee  
James Remuzzi, Chair, Stewardship Committee  
John "Jed" Shilling, Co-Chair, Education Committee



From front left: Carole Napolitano, Deborah Snyder, Marie Uehling, Rebekka Skinner-Prinz, James Remuzzi, Jed Shilling, Megan Miraglia, Peter Weeks, Norman Myers  
*Photo by Maria Nicklin*

To learn more about *Friends* and to join or donate, visit  
[www.friendsofblueridge.org](http://www.friendsofblueridge.org)

*Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains* is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

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