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NEWS RELEASE

Conservationists Complete Massive Cleanup at Tucker Creek

BREVARD, N.C., January 19, 2022:

Start with a pristine mountain creek and waterfall in the Pisgah Ranger District. Put in a gravel road high above the stream on a steep bank. Then add decades of illegal dumping of every kind of household and commercial garbage imaginable down the bank. You have the makings of a local environmental tragedy. The illegal dump site at Tucker Creek in Transylvania County stretched for 1.5 miles and was littered with appliances, construction materials, tires, and household trash.

This is the site that local conservationists, led by The Pisgah Conservancy (“TPC”) and the U.S. Forest Service, attacked last week with volunteers, contractors, climbing gear, block & tackle rigs, and heavy equipment. For three days TPC, the Forest Service, Headwaters Outfitters, Waterfall Keepers of North Carolina, Pisgah Climbing School, and Cauble & Sons Grading collected the garbage, bagged it, pulled it up the steep hill by hand, cable, and heavy machinery, then hauled it to the local landfill. Volunteers, Forest Service employees, and contractors provided over 500 hours of labor. Ken Webb and Dwayne Smith of Transylvania County Solid Waste provided dumpsters and trucking and allowed the group to deposit over 22 tons of trash at the landfill. As a result of this effort, for the first time in decades this massive dump is now virtually free of trash.

David Whitmire of Headwaters Outfitters, who was instrumental in conceiving and implementing the project said: “This is a site where people have been dumping for years right next to a beautiful creek that leads into the French Broad River. We’re excited to get it cleaned up and look forward to keeping it that way.”

Whitmire and others, including TPC, had wanted to clean up this site for years, but the challenges presented by the steepest sections of the dump site required more than just willing volunteers. It required heavy equipment and funding – which is where the banjo came in.

In 2021 a banjo was donated to the Cindy Platt Boys & Girls Club, which in turn donated it to Trails Carolina, a longtime supporter of the Mountain Song Festival (which supports the Boys & Girls Club). Woody Platt, lead singer and guitarist of the Steep Canyon Rangers, arranged to get the banjo signed by the band members and Steve Martin, who frequently plays banjo with the band. The Pisgah Conservancy raffled the banjo at the Mountain Song Festival and created a fund for cleaning up trash sites in Pisgah.

“This is something we had wanted to do for years,” said John Cottingham, Executive Director of TPC, “to establish a fund we could use for rapid responses to trash dumping that we see from time to time in Pisgah. Thanks to the signatures of this popular band and their famous comedian/banjo player on the banjo, we were able to raise \$25,000 with the raffle. Then, we were able to keep costs low with the County waiving dump fees, with our contractor, Cauble & Sons Grading, providing an in-kind donation of equipment, and with lots of sweat equity by volunteers. As a result, we were able to clean up Tucker Creek and retain a substantial amount of this fund to use on additional projects. It’s a big win for Pisgah.”

Jeff Maitz, Trail Specialist of TPC, headed up the project, designing methodologies for removing the trash, organizing volunteers, hiring contractors, and coordinating with the Forest Service. Said Maitz: “We’ve had a great response from the community, supporting this project financially and with their volunteer efforts. It’s great to have a chance to remove this eyesore from Pisgah.”

Chris Worley, longtime resident of the area and Forestry Technician of the Forest Service, set up and operated a block and tackle system for removing trash from the steep sections, and worked tirelessly on the project each day. “It’s a great day for Pisgah that we are able to get this longstanding, harmful trash dump removed,” said Worley. “Now, we have to make sure it stays clear so everyone can enjoy unencumbered views of this beautiful creek.”

To help keep this site clean TPC and members of the local community are taking a multi-pronged approach. They installed new signage prohibiting dumping immediately after the cleanup. They have worked with the County Sheriff’s office to increase monitoring of the site. And the conservation groups, contractors, and volunteers involved in this project plan to keep an eye on the site and respond if additional dumping occurs. “We need to take advantage of the clean slate we have created with this project and make sure this beautiful mountain stream remains just that, for generations to come,” said Cottingham.

About the Pisgah Ranger District

The Pisgah Ranger District is one of three ranger districts representing Pisgah National Forest, which is administered by the United States Forest Service. Pisgah National Forest was established in 1916, one of the first national forests in the eastern United States.

About The Pisgah Conservancy

The Pisgah Conservancy’s mission is to provide funding to preserve the natural resources and scenic beauty of the Pisgah Ranger District and to enhance the recreational experience of its visitors. TPC was formed in October 2015 by a diverse group of stakeholders, including a camper, fly fisherman, District Ranger, hiker, mountain biker, backcountry horseman, hunter, fisheries biologist, and more. For more information, please go to www.pisgahconservancy.org.

About Headwaters Outfitters

For more than 25 years, the Whitmire family and their business, Headwaters Outfitters, have been involved in conservation and protection of local rivers. Located near Rosman, N.C. at the

junction of N.C. Highway 215 and U.S. Highway 64, Headwaters offers fly fishing trips, paddling and tubing trips, outdoor gear, and a taproom. For more information go to <https://www.headwatersoutfitters.com>.

About Transylvania County

With thousands of acres of forest and 250 waterfalls, Transylvania County has long been a destination for travelers seeking adventure and natural beauty. Find out more at <https://www.transylvaniacounty.org>.

About Waterfall Keepers of North Carolina

Established in 2020, Waterfall Keepers of North Carolina takes care of waterfalls and waterfall visitors, removing trash and graffiti, educating the public about waterfall safety, promoting ethical behavior, and improving trails leading to waterfalls. For more information go to <https://www.waterfallkeepersofnc.org>.

About Pisgah Climbing School

Located in Pisgah Forest, NC, Pisgah Climbing School prides itself on being a leader in rock climbing education. They offer a variety of courses, AMGA certification programs and professional rescue training. They also assist on conservation projects in the area. Find out more at <https://www.pisgahclimbingschool.com>.

About Trails Carolina

Trails Carolina is a wilderness therapy program founded with a singular goal – to help families reconnect, heal, and thrive. Rooted in tradition, the Trails Carolina team cultivates personalized experiences for youth and families through a modern transitional wilderness model that teaches adaptability and resilience. For more information go to <https://www.trails-carolina.com>.