



# THE 500-YEAR FOREST FOUNDATION

# Newsletter

Volume 12 ■ Number 2 ■ Summer/Fall 2009

Your contribution to the 500-Year Forest Foundation is an investment guaranteed to grow. Celebrate aging-natural forests and donate.

## A New 500-Year Forest in the Making

We are very pleased to announce a new 500-Year Forest owned by Rick Helms and Carolyn Phillips. For two years in the late 1990's, Rick and Carolyn traveled the back roads in Albemarle County looking for their special place. In 1999 they found a lovely and unusual site of 197 acres south of Batesville in the upper end of "Big Spring Valley". Their valley is defined by Castle Rock Mountain on the west and Long Arm Mountain on the east.

In 2005 a consulting forester, producing a forestry management plan, said this is an absolutely beautiful property nestled in the foot hills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. He thought it very unusual to see so much mature hardwood forest on one site.

The largest area of forest lies on the north-eastern flank of Castle Rock Mountain. It covers about 90 acres and is composed of hardwoods, aged between 65 and 85 years. There are three coves with streams flowing into Whiteside Branch. Another section of about 35 acres lies on the western slope of Long Arm Mountain.

This forest stand is 90 to 120 years old with some trees measuring 40 inches in diameter at breast height. The three most prevalent species in both stands are chestnut oak, yellow poplar, and northern red oak.

A third section, 60 to 70 acres, of this property was an apple orchard and is now a young forest. This young forest is being removed from the 500-Year Forest. In addition 10 or so acres of cutover land on the eastern flank of Long Arm Mountain will be excluded, though as these stands age all or parts may be added to the 500-Year Forest.

Rick Helms and Carolyn Phillips placed their property under a conservation easement in December, 2005 with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. This easement will be modified with language about the 500-Year Forest Foundation. Rick and Carolyn will give up the right to harvest any timber in the 500-Year Forest, and to further sub-divide the property in any way. We all hope to be able to consummate this transaction by the summer of 2010.

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Rick Helms and Carolyn Phillips

## About Carolyn Phillips and Rick Helms

**Carolyn L. Phillips** grew up enthralled by poetry and mathematics. She graduated Purdue University and then worked for her alma mater as a science editor. Her many leisure-time activities centered on poetry, theatre, African-American culture and literacy.

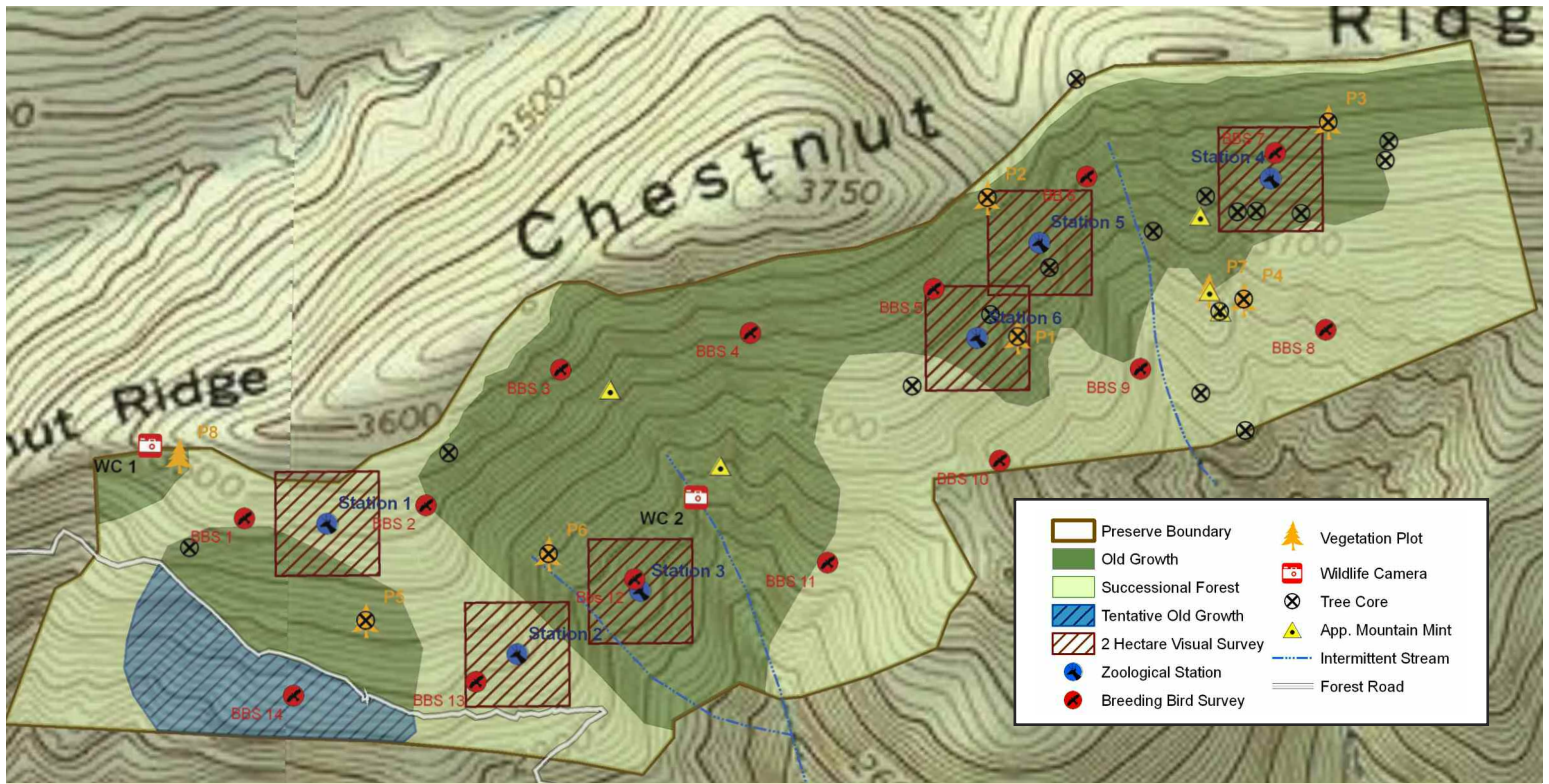
In 1982, Carolyn joined *The Wall Street Journal* as a reporter in its Chicago bureau. For twenty years, she worked for the *Journal* in several capacities including Houston bureau chief and assistant managing editor in New York. Since 2003, Carolyn has served as a media industry consultant, advising on news staffing, training, transition and diversity issues. She is incubating a writers' retreat program and developing a column for non-gardeners called "The Gardener's Wife."

She has taught journalism at Hampton University and the University of Houston and been a visiting professional and speaker at dozens of campuses and conferences. Currently, she is an editor for *Standard & Poor's* in Charlottesville, VA.

**Richard M. Helms** graduated Ohio University in 1978 then spent most of three decades in the hospitality business, first in Athens, Ohio, then Houston and finally in New York, where he helped launch one of the city's top ten restaurants in the ultra-competitive 1990s.

Along the way, Rick always indulged his gardening hobby. In Houston, he worked raised beds on a blistering parking lot, as well as a shady backyard under towering live oaks. Five stories above the streets of Manhattan, his roof decks were an oasis of thriving trees, vines and plants.

Since 2003, Rick has focused on the stewardship of 200 acres of hardwood forest outside Batesville, Virginia. He designed the family home that fits in almost organically there. He has studied and done volunteer work with tree stewards, master gardeners and stone masons. His other passions include reading, cooking, music and progressive politics, particularly human rights and environmental issues.



Map of work being performed

## Inventory Update for the Chestnut Ridge Natural Area Preserve, the Gilvary 500-Year Forest

You might remember from our last newsletter that the 500-Year Forest Foundation contracted with Curtis Environmental of Pittsboro, NC to perform a biological inventory of the Gilvary 500-Year Forest, also one of Virginia's 58 Natural Area Preserves. This is being done in collaboration with the State of Virginia through the Virginia Natural Heritage Program. The Natural Heritage staff will develop the management plan when the inventory process is completed in the spring of 2010.

In three-day sampling and observation periods this past June and again in September, Kevin Caldwell, botanist, identified 186 species of trees, shrubs, vines,

herbs, grasses, and sedges. Shay Garriock, zoologist, identified 62 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians, and 38 species of butterflies and moths. These numbers will likely grow significantly when moth identification is completed over the winter and the third and final inventory is taken in April or May of next year.

Results from trees corings, still to be analyzed, will more firmly establish the extent of both the original forest and successional forest. Community designations, e.g. Basic Oak-Hickory Forest, will be defined after the spring inventory.

Only a few rare plants have been uncovered. Appalachian mountain

mint, rare and considered imperiled in Virginia, was observed in five locations. Two other Watch List identified plants include Mountain Pimpernel and Butter-nut. Only five invasive species were identified. The worst is confined to one small previously disturbed part of the forest. Control should not present a problem.

As usual, the best plans for identifying species can be foiled. Two wildlife cameras had been pulled off their mounting trees by black bears that didn't seem to want their picture taken. But, before that, a bear (see photo on page 3), a bobcat and an opossum posed for a photo.



Appalachian mountain mint, a rare plant

## Report from Brooks/Kenny 500-Year Forest by Maxine Kenny

Japanese stilt grass is flourishing on our land. We can literally see pathways of stilt grass leading up the mountain from our lower acreage to the 500-Year Forest. We assume the stilt grass seed is being transported into the Forest along our footpaths by both wildlife and hikers. In the spring we'll experiment with a flame weeder to knock back stilt grass along the roadways and paths leading into the Forest. At the same time we plan to contract with a local landscaping service to hand pull stilt grass during June and August in specified areas in our Forest.



This black bear photo was taken in Gilvary 500-Year Forest on July 3, 2009 by a wild-life camera (see map on previous page for camera location).

## A Curious Bear

*from a work in progress by Jean Kolb*

After spending two hours pulling stilt grass, Peter Mehring and I sat on the top of a big rock on a high ridgeline to eat our lunches. The rock, like a massive loaf of Italian bread rising halfway out of the ground, is eight feet tall and offers a view of the treetops below and the Blue Ridge Mountains to the northwest.

We'd finished eating and decided it was time to get back to work, when we heard a rustling in the dry leaves down below us, a rustling coming uphill toward us; but the maker was hidden by trees and spicebush. "A deer," I whispered. We didn't move, hoping for a closer look. The rustling approached and became a black bear, who stepped over a log about forty feet away and sat down. His back was toward us while he bent around to do some grooming on his belly. Then he sat up, scratched his head on one side, and gave it a good shake like a dog shaking off water, ears audibly flapping. The other side got the same treatment with more ear flapping. He sat for a few minutes, just resting, I suppose, from his long climb, and seemed to be a young adult, but rather skinny.

He stood up and resumed his trek toward the ridgeline, roughly in our direc-

tion, until, to avoid some shrubs, he veered toward our rock and glanced up at us sitting on its top. We didn't move. With no change in his pace, he continued toward our rock and, as if trying to figure out what we were, kept looking right at us with his small black eyes. His wide black nose struck me as the most prominent feature in his face. He casually approached, peering up at us, and his manner suggested simple curiosity. We still didn't move. Then I remembered that I'd just eaten a peanut butter sandwich and stashed its plastic bag in the pack beside me. Could this bear detect its scent? When he was about fifteen feet from the base of the rock, I turned my head to see what Peter was thinking, and the bear, seeing my movement, instantly turned around, retraced his route back to the log, and disappeared beyond it. He didn't run, but he didn't wait around. Clearly, he now wanted nothing to do with us. We could hear him, hidden by trees and spicebush, rustling along in the dry leaves below us as he paralleled the ridgeline and continued on his way up the mountain.

© Jean B. Kolb 2008



Mile-a-minute, a sprawling, suffocating vine

# Mile-a-minute

## Another invasive plant

We add to our previously featured invasive plants (which are Garlic mustard, Japanese stilt grass, Ailanthus, Oriental bittersweet) another noxious weed. Mile-a-minute "*Persicaria perfoliata*" is so named because it can grow up to 6 inches daily during the growing season. Using barbs on its stem and triangular-shaped leaves, it pulls itself over other vegetation. The over-grown native plants struggle under the weight of the vines and are killed when the sunlight is blocked. As is the case with other invasive plants, plant diversity in natural areas is reduced and wildlife habitat is degraded.

In the late 1930's, mile-a-minute, a hitchhiker with holly seeds from Asia, arrived at

a nursery in York, Pennsylvania. The interested nursery owner let it grow. Today, it ranges from New York to Virginia and westward to Ohio.

Mile-a-minute colonizes open and disturbed areas, wood edges, wetlands, riparian areas, and fence lines. A self pollinator, it produces seeds, each encased in a pea-sized blue fruit along vines that can reach 20 feet in length, in Virginia from June to October. Birds and streams disperse the seeds. The fruit is buoyant up to nine days, thereby creating great dispersion distances. Seeds are viable up to seven years.

"*Rhannoncomimus latipes*", a weevil, is a natural predator. Between 2004 and 2007,

64,000 weevils were released in 37 infested New Jersey sites, significantly reducing the mile-a-minute population. Studies of weevil ecological effects are ongoing.

Infestation is controlled by hand pulling newly or lightly-infested areas by August before seeds set. Mowing or repeated cutting of infested areas during the growing season will keep mile-a-minute from developing flowers and seeds. Looking after cut or pulled areas is necessary for a few growing seasons due to seed viability.

Above left photo by winged photography (flickr.com/photos/angelslens); above right photo by Leslie J. Mehroff (IPANE).



Jean Kolb explaining the control of Japanese stilt grass to directors Kay Van Allen, Ted Harris, and Steve Nash

## The Foundation Board visits the Kolb 500-Year Forest

In late October, four 500-Year Forest Foundation directors visited the Kolb Forest where they saw some large tulip trees and heard Jean Kolb talk about removing non-native invasive Japanese stilt grass, "*Microstegium vimineum*." Stilt grass, she explained, can grow three feet tall and fall sideways, which puts its top-growing seeds several feet beyond the mother plant, and advances its spread. She and Peter Mehring have found that if, for three consecutive years, every plant in a given patch is pulled before it drops any seed, that patch can be eliminated. If seeds have not formed, they pull the grass and hang it in bunches above ground; if seeds have formed inside the stem tip, they bag the plants and pile them in Jean's fenced garden to be monitored. "It's amazing to me," Jean says, "that we can actually win this battle."

# Donors ~ Thank You

What we do is only possible with the support of people you see on this list.  
The following gifts were received from May 1, 2009 to October 30, 2009.

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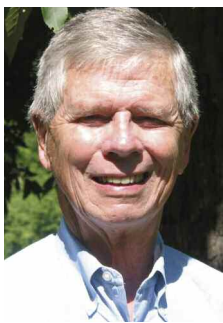
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**500-YEAR FOREST**  
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## President's Letter



Ted Harris

It's been a while since we have announced a new 500-Year Forest. This is an exciting event for us and Carolyn Phillips and Rick Helms. We still have work to do to finalize everything. Hopefully it will all be accomplished by the summer of 2010. Also for the first time we were invited to visit a prospective 500-Year Forest outside of Virginia in North Carolina.

I hope you enjoy Jean Kolb's delightful bear encounter story. Bears have moved into our area, a suburban location including northwestern Lynchburg and northeastern Bedford County, Virginia. They enjoy the seed in our bird feeders and like to open our garbage cans to see what we have left them.

Home, of course, is where we humans live. On land home for wild plants and animals in most cases is the forest. If analyzed in human terms, one might think of the Gilvary forest with its 286 species of plants and animals as a 286 condo unit with more units to be added in the spring.

We greatly appreciate those of you who think of us with your ideas, your suggestions, and your donations. This is our withdrawal from which our future ancient forests will thrive.

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