



**SHENANDOAH**  
NATIONAL PARK TRUST

# FIELD NOTES

Newsletter | August 2021

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## ACC Crews Transform Shenandoah — and Themselves



**At night, after a long day of working in the woods, Appalachian Conservation Corps (ACC) volunteers gather around their campfire. They rest. They talk. They watch the stars.**

That's Leah Cawthorn's favorite moment — one she's experienced many times as a crew member, and now as Volunteer and Youth Project Lead for the ACC.

The nonprofit ACC connects young people to critical conservation service projects across the Appalachian region and neighboring communities. Cawthorn's position is funded by the Trust, thanks to our generous donors. She has helped hire the crewmembers working in Shenandoah National Park, in addition to coordinating projects with National Park staff.

In Shenandoah, you'll see ACC crews restoring and improving trails, removing invasive vegetation, cleaning waysides, and working on amphitheaters and campgrounds. They also assist with wildlife projects, such as counting butterflies and dragonfly larvae.

But the work is more than physical, Cawthorn explains; it's personal development, too. In the all-women's chainsaw crew she led, the members worked to remove invasive trees, build habitat, and clear viewsheds. At the same time, they empowered each other to succeed in a mostly male-dominated field.

In ACC's leadership development crew, each participant serves as the group's leader for the day. Becoming a strong leader isn't just about delegating tasks and solving problems. It also requires compassion and understanding, Cawthorn says — “really recognizing that there's a wide range of people coming on these crews.” Some participants grew up in outdoorsy families, learning wilderness skills as soon as they were old enough to walk. Some have never slept in a tent.

For Cawthorn, the greatest reward of her work is watching ACC participants develop an intimate relationship with the land they're working on. As they spend weeks or months in Shenandoah National Park, they “develop their own perspective and love and passion” for the natural world, she says — a passion that will be lifelong.





**Dear friends,**

Stress can make us grow stronger. You see it all over Shenandoah National Park, where the wind has taught the trees to cling tenaciously to cliffsides and ridgetops.

The same is true for the park itself, and for the Trust. COVID-19 dramatically increased the number of visitors, straining park resources and forcing difficult programming decisions. The Trust — and our wonderful donors — rose to the occasion. In this newsletter, you'll read about the many initiatives we've funded, from trail conservation to bear education to the 2021 Artist-in-Residence.

The Trust has approved a record amount of funding to the park for the fall season. And our work is only just beginning. We're embarking on a re-envisioning of our partnership, which we've begun by engaging the community in conversations about their perceptions and expectations of the Trust and Shenandoah National Park. I thank everyone who has participated in these sessions, and I look forward to sharing more details.

We're thinking hard and dreaming big about how the Trust will grow in the years to come. I hope you'll be a part of it! Tell a friend about our work. Come to one of our upcoming events. And from the bottom of my heart, thank you for being a loyal friend of the Trust and of Shenandoah. We need your support now, more than ever.

**Jessica Cocciolone**  
*Executive Director*



# Inside Shenandoah

Shenandoah National Park Superintendent  
Patrick M. Kenney



**In 2020, national parks became Americans' refuge from the pandemic. Shenandoah National Park was no exception. The park saw a 15% increase in visitation — an increase our staff were not anticipating.**

From a park management perspective, it's great to see that parks matter in these difficult times for the country. We're excited that parks are connecting with visitors who have never had a national park experience! However, new visitors aren't always prepared for a visit to a wild area with challenging terrain and limited amenities. The increased visitor numbers have definitely put a strain on our staff.

At times, we had to prioritize the basics, such as emergency services and clean restrooms. With a budget that has remained flat since 2010, Shenandoah would have had to abandon some of its educational and enrichment programming — if it weren't for the Trust. Philanthropic gifts are important ways to help address some of the shortfalls and take on projects that we would not be able to continue without support. These include:

## Safeguarding Shenandoah's black bears:

New park visitors don't always know about the importance of managing trash and securing food to keep it away from bears. And when bears become habituated to humans, bears suffer. Shenandoah National Park Trust funds staff that help us manage human behavior better, so that bears can stay wild and stay around in Shenandoah for the visitors to see.



## Offering virtual field trips:

COVID-related travel restrictions meant Virginia schoolchildren lost their chance to visit the park during the past year. The Trust supported virtual field trips as a substitute. Hopefully, they'll get here someday to visit the park in person.



## Rehabilitating Boulder Cabin:

The Trust is funding the restoration of this historic cabin in Skyland, which will serve as the home of the Artist-in-Residence program. People will be able to visit the cabin and learn about the connection between art and national parks, all through the generosity of the Trust and its donors.





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## Faith in the Future: The Gift of an Endowment

When Patti McGill Peterson was a child, the Appalachian foothills of southwest Pennsylvania were her playground. She'd explore the forest, perch on cliffs' edges and find the best trees under which to shelter. "Lots of bruised knees. No broken bones," she says with a laugh.

She carried that deep love of nature into her career as a higher education leader. As president of St. Lawrence University in upstate New York, she supported the development of an environmental studies program that used the surrounding mountains as a classroom and living laboratory.

Many years later, Peterson returned to the landscape she loved. She moved to

Sperryville, a gateway to Shenandoah National Park in Rappahannock County. From her study window, Peterson can watch the rising sun illuminate the eastern side of Mary's Rock. "It's one of the most beautiful sights that you can see," she says.

But Peterson wasn't content to simply enjoy the view. She wanted to help preserve and sustain the park, which she affectionately calls "our neighbor." David Aldrich, then chairman of the Trust's board of directors, encouraged her to join. "For me," Peterson says, "joining the Trust board was a way to put my conservation values to work."

After two years of involvement with the Trust, Peterson looked toward a far-

ther horizon. As a former president of two colleges founded in the 1800s, she knew that endowments could ensure the long-term survival of institutions and bolster faith in their work. "Endowments are a form of planned giving," she explains. "They're a way of providing a legacy that will hopefully outlast you, and serve as a commitment to perpetually support the things you believe in."

Peterson took a deliberate approach to founding the endowment. She met with the Trust's Executive Director to discuss logistics and set up a plan to fund the endowment over time. And she's still weighing how she'd like to direct the funds to be used in the future.

The central question that guided her: **"If you really believe in something, and you think that it is important, how do you make it last longer than you?"** The Trust is profoundly grateful to Patti McGill Peterson for her generosity and vision, which will allow us to continue protecting and defending the park for decades to come.



*Would you like to know more about funding an endowment to benefit the Shenandoah National Park Trust? Please contact Jessica*

*Cocciolone at [jcocciolone@snptrust.org](mailto:jcocciolone@snptrust.org) or 434-293-2728.*



## RMDs Are Back

Did you skip your required minimum distribution (RMD) for 2020 because of the CARES Act waiver? RMDs are once again required for people aged 72 and up. There's a good chance that your 2021 RMD will be higher than it was in 2019, because the account may be larger and you're now two years older.

Making a qualified charitable distribution to the Shenandoah National Park Trust can satisfy your RMD and result in tax savings! Your gift will help us continue to support essential conservation and education programs in the park. We're happy to help. Call (434) 293-2728, or talk to your financial advisor.