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The Blue Ridge Conservancy further develops the Middle Fork Greenway

By Harley Nefe

The Blue Ridge Conservancy is partnering with the town of Blowing Rock, the town of Boone and Watauga County to work on a project that aims to help protect the environment and strengthen local economies.

The project, known as the Middle Fork Greenway, is a developing trail that will be 6.5 miles long to connect Blowing Rock to Boone naturally.

An approximately 1-mile-long section is already completed.

To further progress the production of the Middle Fork Greenway, fundraising events are taking place.

There was a 5K event Sept. 22. All proceeds raised from the run went to the Blue Ridge Conservancy, Julia Adams, who is the president of Appalachian State University's Blue Ridge Conservancy Chapter, said in an email message.

Adams' club takes part in annual creek cleanups at the Middle Fork Greenway, raises awareness about what the Blue Ridge Conservancy does and tells others of its importance.

The Blue Ridge Conservancy focuses on protecting land, said Tristan Thomas, who works part-time with the Blue Ridge Conservancy.

"We are creating this greenspace for people to be able to go out and explore nature, but we are also helping the environment and improving it," Thomas said.

In addition to the greenway, the Blue Ridge Conservancy is also doing river restoration on the Middle Fork New River.

“There are parts of that river that are super eroded and not in great shape, which is really bad, not only for us, but for the animals that live around it,” Thomas said.

One of Thomas’ main responsibilities is graphic design work and raising awareness to the association through social media.

“Working for the conservancy was a perfect fit,” Thomas said.

Thomas is a senior at Appalachian State University double majoring in biology and graphic arts.

“It’s basically what I would describe as my dream job,” Thomas said. “What I really wanted to do when I decided to double major is I wanted to design things to save the environment.”

The Blue Ridge Conservancy is planning to build the trail-head, or where the Middle Fork Greenway starts, in Blowing Rock this fall.

“We are all kind of excited about it because once it is there, it’s like this is a real thing,” Thomas said.

There is not a set date for when the Middle Fork Greenway will be completed; progression partly depends on funding.

The Blue Ridge Conservancy also held a fundraiser called the Round Up, where 118 businesses throughout the county asked their customers to round up their purchases to the next dollar, donating to the project, Thomas said. “That’s like the whole community saying, ‘we support the idea.’”

One way to help the Blue Ridge Conservancy with the Middle Fork Greenway is to donate. Other options to get involved include volunteering at events and raising awareness to the project and how it will affect the community.

“It’s such a great project that we are going to have around for such a long time,” Thomas said. “It’s going to make Boone even more amazing.”