

MountainTrue, Paris promote environmental awareness at Meeks

By Jarrett Whitener
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Conservation organization MountainTrue set up a tent at Meeks Park earlier this month to share information with the community about the local environment and water quality.

The community informational opportunity reflected a recent proclamation by Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris designating Oct. 1, 2020, as Environmental Awareness Day.

Many will be familiar with MountainTrue Western Regional Director Callie Moore, who spearheaded the event. After all, she's the same Callie Moore who headed up the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition for years prior to the 2019 merger with MountainTrue.

"We are raising awareness about the environment in Union County," Moore said on Oct. 1. "I have information about the area for people to come and learn about. We are talking about the Butternut Creek Watershed, which heads into the Nottely River."

Unfortunately, Butternut Creek has experienced longstanding problems over the years with consistently high levels of E. coli, a disease-causing pathogen.

"Butternut Creek has challenges," Moore said. "It is on the (Environmental Protection Agency's) 303(d) list of impaired waters, which is basically a list of waters (in the state) that have some kind of water pollution or challenges."

"The main problems with Butternut Creek are associated with stormwater runoff from communities that may have leaking or failing septic systems, maybe they are older communities; agricultural lands where livestock may have access to the water; and just urban runoff."

"Butternut Creek flows right through the middle of Downtown Blairsville, and all of those parking lots and roads and all that stuff has no treatment for the stormwater."

During the Environmental Awareness Day event, Moore and MountainTrue aimed to reinforce the needs of the creek by comparing it to how other bodies of water in the county have been faring in terms of E. coli bacteria.

"The other thing we are working to highlight today is that we found zero E. coli in all five Lake Nottely sites that we have sampled," Moore said.



MountainTrue Western Regional Director Callie Moore and Western Region Program Coordinator Tony Ward hosted an Environmental Awareness Day at the beginning of the month at Meeks Park.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

"Lake Nottely is completely safe for swimming, and it always has been for the 20 years that I have been here. I have never found any E. coli in any of the sites since I have been testing."

"People really shouldn't be swimming (in Butternut Creek at Meeks Park), unfortunately. I gave a presentation at the commissioner's meeting in August to start informing the public. The commissioner was here this morning, and we were talking about what to do."

"We are going to be hiring a consultant and apply for state funding to put in practices and help prevent and reduce the E. coli in the creek."

For his part, Paris said he was happy with MountainTrue and will continue to work with the nonprofit on the challenges in the creek.

"I want to thank the MountainTrue organization and Callie Moore for bringing Environmental Awareness Day to Meeks Park on Oct. 1," Paris said. "Furthermore, I would like

to thank Mrs. Marlene Hadden for urging me to consider the proclamation."

"Anyone who has known me for a very long time knows that the environment of Union County has always been of utmost importance to me."

"It was personally a sad day for me when a few folks decided on their own that I was not interested in the environment or the health of Lake Nottely and Union County."

"I hoped that this proclamation would help dispel that misconception. For those that misunderstood my position, I hope that we can now all work together to protect the environment of the entire county."

Hadden attended Paris' September meeting to speak on the importance of maintaining local water quality, especially considering the yearlong treatment of leachate by the Blairsville Wastewater Treatment Plant. Importantly, the city ceased all leachate treatment in August.

Also at the Environmental Awareness Day event, MountainTrue Western Regional Program Coordinator Tony Ward gave a tour of the park to inform kids and families about the various trees and aspects of the environment. For more information, visit MountainTrue.org.



Tony Ward of MountainTrue gave an ecological tour of Meeks Park to participants of the 2020 Environmental Awareness Day event.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Farmers Market...from Page 1A



The Farmers Market has enjoyed tremendous success this year, despite COVID-19 putting a damper on pretty much everything.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

everybody knows that we appreciate their cooperation," Cummings said. "It has been a different year and has put some stress on things, but the way people have come out and supported us, I really appreciate it, and our farmers and vendors appreciate it as well."

"(This Saturday) is the last day until our annual Kris Kringle Market, which is Dec. 5, and we are looking forward to that. We are going to have a good final day and end to the season."

On top of COVID-19, farmers this year had to face challenges with the weather bringing too much rain, making

it difficult to grow crops. Farmer Jimmy Spivia experienced this, having lower crop yields in 2020 while trying to make the best of the season.

"I've been coming here since it has opened," Spivia said of the market. "I have been here and been coming ever since then. It hasn't been the best year for me because my wife had been sick, and with all the rain and stuff, I couldn't get the fields ready to plant."

"I had a little bit of (produce) early and a little bit late, but nothing in between those. I plan on being here for the last week, and I will have

my beans and squash."

Normally, the market brings in hundreds of people from out of town and around the area with its fun customer events. Unfortunately, these events were canceled for COVID, but Paul Love of Florida said he still finds the market a must-see during visits to the area.

"My family and I are up here for the weekend, just looking at the mountains," Love said. "We have stopped in here one time before, and we just love this place. This is the best market we have been to. Last time we came they had some stuff going on, but I guess they couldn't do all that this year."

"It is awesome that something like this exists in this area, and farmers can come and sell what they have been working hard on. We don't have this close to where I live, so this is something special. It definitely beats going to the store all the time."

For more information, visit UCFarmersMarket.com.