



Southern Appalachians
Six-Month
Accomplishments Report

————— 2021 —————



Southern Appalachians Six-Month Accomplishments Report

Over the past six months, the Ruffed Grouse Society and American Woodcock Society (RGS & AWS) Southern Appalachian Forest Conservation Director has worked to build a conservation network in the region, which has included partnering with several universities, establishing relationships with program leadership in 12 state wildlife and forestry agencies, building partnerships with 14 forest industry and economic development entities, and collaborating with over 84 conservation organizations (see Figure 1).

The Southern Appalachian Forest Conservation Director has solidified participation in two landscape conservation initiatives, the Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture's Technical Committee and the North Carolina Fish and Wildlife Conservation Council; and established formal seats on three public lands stakeholder committees, the Cherokee National Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative, the Stakeholder's Forum for the Nantahala and Pisgah Plan Revision, and the Forest Recreation Outdoor Group for the George Washington-Jefferson National Forest.

RGS & AWS has robustly engaged all 8 National Forests in the region and is currently drafting several agreements with the USFS to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration and wildlife habitat improvement. This includes five draft Stewardship Agreements that will enable RGS & AWS to help the USFS sell timber and implement grouse habitat enhancement across 2,100 acres of National Forest land (see Figure 2); a draft Master Challenge Cost-Share Agreement (CCSA) and a draft Master Participating Agreement with Region 8 of the USFS to partner across the region on project planning, design, and implementation. RGS & AWS is also drafting novel agreements with forest industry partners to pursue financial incentives for public lands management in the region. We expect most of these agreements to be executed spring 2021.

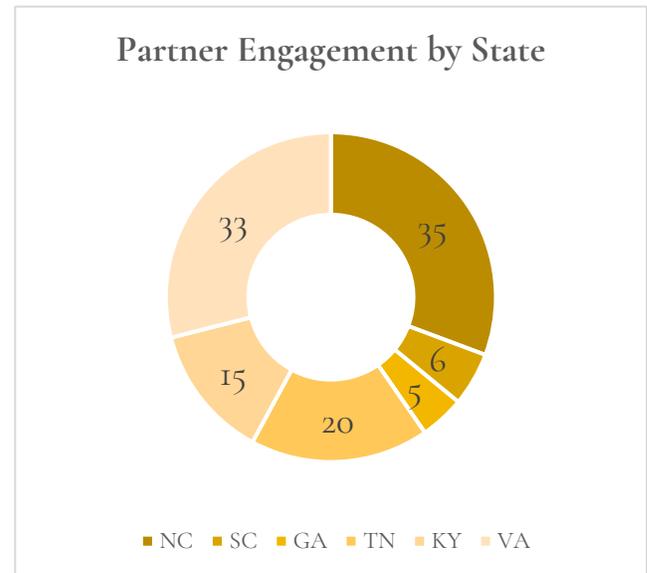


Figure 1: RGS & AWS has developed new partnerships in the Southern Appalachians with over 114 different entities, including public and private sector collaborators.

RGS & AWS has completed a draft conservation business plan for the Southern Appalachians that outlines our conservational strategy and financial plan for promoting healthy forests and abundant wildlife across the region over the next 5 years.

RGS & AWS has worked hard to communicate the importance of forest management for wildlife by identifying and initiating relationships with local media across all six states in the region, identifying communications gaps and opportunities, and preparing three outward communication pieces.

RGS & AWS has engaged all six chapters in the region during meet-and-greet updates calls, individual calls with chapter leadership, and field visits with members and supporters. The Southern Appalachian Forest Conservation Director has worked closely with the Director of Regional Development for the Southeast to connect with membership in the region and strategically leverage chapter funds for meaningful conservation projects.

RGS & AWS has pursued funding opportunities to support the network by leading and submitting three landscape-scale, multi-partner grant applications and contributing towards two Joint Chiefs funding proposals as a subgrant recipient. If awarded, these grants will bring in over \$2.9 million to RGS & AWS and our collaborators and leverage over \$5 million when combined with partner in-kind resources (see Figure 3). In addition, RGS & AWS has developed a list of potential foundations, funding programs, corporate partners, and major donors to cultivate in the region. We were already awarded a \$75,000 subgrant and have hired a North Carolina Private Lands Wildlife Forester to engage private landowners in Western North Carolina and connect them to cost-share funding from NRCS' Working Lands for Wildlife program.

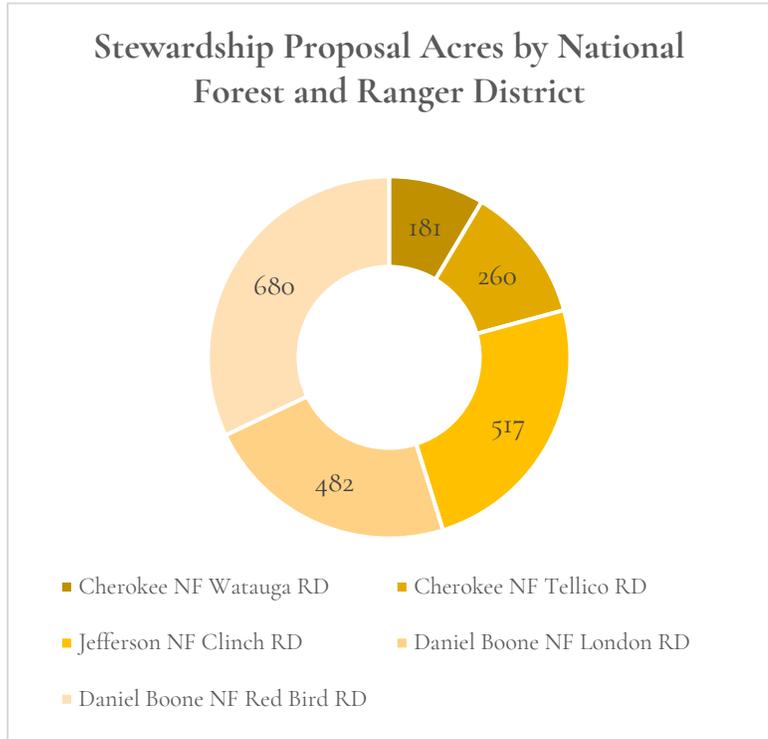


Figure 2: Stewardship Projects are currently being developed for five different Ranger Districts in the region and several more are in earlier stages of development on other Districts. Combined, these projects will enhance over 2100 acres.



Our Southern Appalachian Forest Conservation Director has played an active role in national RGS & AWS conservation programming by contributing towards developing a wildlife-focused carbon program and improving our program tracking and reporting operating procedures.

Lastly, RGS & AWS is partnering with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency on an active habitat management project at the North Cumberland Wildlife Management Area. We are providing \$5,000 in local chapter funds from the Appalachian Highlands RGS Chapter to support the project and the state is matching that with \$15,000 to enhance conditions for grouse and woodcock across 500 acres. This project demonstrates the effectiveness of our new Model of Working Forests on-the-ground and lays the groundwork for many more projects to come!

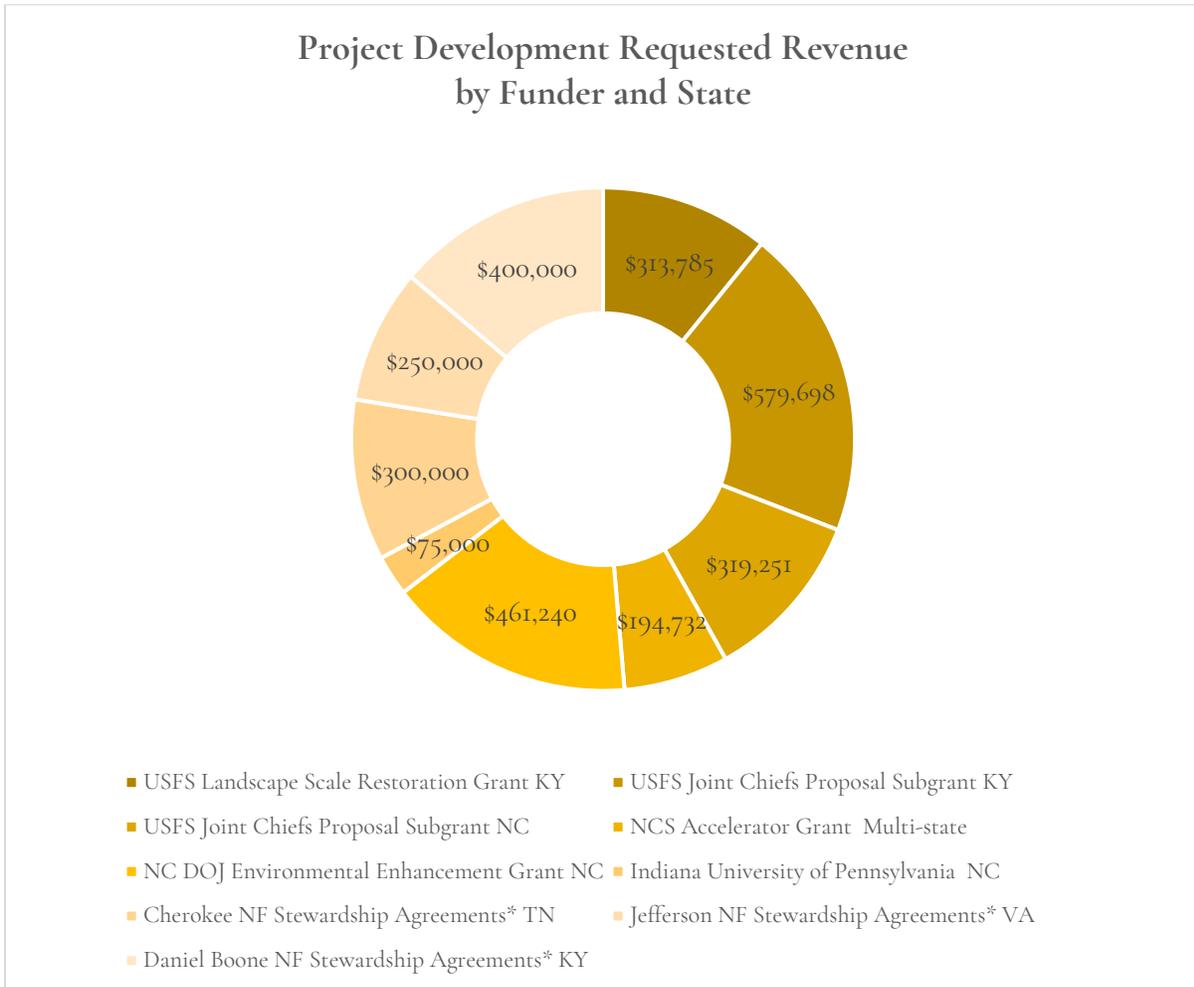


Figure 3: Grant proposals have been submitted and Stewardship Agreements are currently being drafted to bring in revenue to support RGS & AWS' conservation delivery network in the Southern Appalachians. (*Timber appraisals have not yet been completed, so Stewardship values are a best estimate and might change).



Led by the region's Forest Conservation Director, RGS & AWS' Southern Appalachian program has accomplished the following state-specific achievements.

North Carolina

- In spring 2020, RGS & AWS submitted detailed guidance, and we worked to mobilize members and partners to provide substantial input to the U.S. Forest Service on their proposed forest plan for the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forests. This included the submission of our organization's 20-page comments document and significant contributions towards the Stakeholders Forum for the Nantahala and Pisgah Plan Revisions recommendations. The plan will establish a vision for how more than 1 million acres of public land on the forests will be managed for the next 10 to 15 years.
- In fall 2020, RGS & AWS hired a new North Carolina Private Lands Wildlife Forester. The position is funded through a partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service Working Lands for Wildlife program, the American Bird Conservancy, and Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and will support forest management to benefit ruffed grouse, American woodcock, golden-winged warblers, and other forest wildlife. The position has started work and is based in Spruce Pine, NC and will serve the Appalachian region of Western North Carolina.
- RGS & AWS is actively pursuing a Supplemental Challenge Cost-Share Agreement with the National Forests of North Carolina to assist with project planning, design, and implementation on the Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests. Once signed, the Agreement will enable RGS & AWS to collaborate with the National Forests of North Carolina on activities to help shepherd projects through the NEPA-process to implementation, including completing common stand exams, writing management prescriptions, performing GIS mapping, identifying grouse focal areas, and building collaborative support for projects. The Agreement will also enable RGS & AWS to assist with implementation of habitat projects and perform monitoring and evaluation (e.g. grouse surveys) on the National Forests.
- We are actively pursuing every opportunity for Stewardship Projects with the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests and working to identify opportunities to increase the pace and scale of active management. There are several locations that are currently being scoped for potential Stewardship Agreements in 2021.
- RGS & AWS is pursuing an agreement with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission to assist with state lands conservation delivery, grouse surveys and monitoring, and collaborative project design and planning on the National Forests.



North Carolina (continued)

- RGS & AWS was included in a US Forest Service Joint Chiefs Proposal for the Uwharrie National Forest to receive a subgrant to fund a Private Lands Wildlife Forester position in the greater Uwharrie landscape of the North Carolina Piedmont. If funded, the position will focus on forest restoration and wildlife habitat improvement on private lands surrounding the National Forest, with a focus on woodcock habitat. The position would be funded for 3-years. This project includes participation from 17 different partner entities.
 - RGS & AWS has established relationships with the North Carolina Forestry Association and major timber purchasers in Western North Carolina.
 - RGS & AWS has established relationships with over 35 different partner entities in North Carolina.
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Tennessee

- RGS & AWS is partnering with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) on an active habitat management project on the North Cumberland Wildlife Management Area. We are providing \$5,000 in local chapter funds from the Appalachian Highlands RGS Chapter to support the project and the state is matching that with \$15,000 to enhance conditions for grouse and woodcock across 500 acres. The timber harvest has already begun! To further build out this relationship, we are preparing an agreement with TWRA to facilitate broad collaboration in the state.
- RGS/AWS is currently drafting two Stewardship Agreements with the Cherokee National Forest to assist the USFS to implement commercial timber harvest projects and complete forest restoration and wildlife habitat activities across over 441 acres. The Stewardship Agreements are currently being drafted for projects on both the North Zone and the South Zone and the work is expected to begin in spring 2021.
- RGS & AWS has established a formal seat on the Cherokee National Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative, a stakeholder collaborative group providing project recommendations to the North Zone of the Cherokee National Forest.

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Tennessee (continued)

- RGS & AWS is actively pursuing a Supplemental Challenge Cost-Share Agreement with the Cherokee National Forest to implement activities collaboratively outside the scope of Stewardship Authority, including grouse-focused project planning, design, and implementation.
- RGS & AWS staff are building relationships with NRCS-Tennessee to pursue opportunities for private lands conservation delivery in East Tennessee and the North Cumberland region of Tennessee.
- RGS & AWS has established relationships with the Tennessee Forestry Association and major timber purchasers in East Tennessee and the North Cumberland regions.
- RGS & AWS has established relationships with over 20 different partner entities in Tennessee.





Kentucky

- RGS & AWS is currently drafting two Stewardship Agreements with the Daniel Boone National Forest to assist the USFS to implement commercial timber harvest projects and complete forest restoration and wildlife habitat activities across over 1,162 acres. The Stewardship Agreements are currently being drafted for both projects and the work is expected to begin in spring 2021.
 - RGS & AWS is actively pursuing a Supplemental Challenge Cost-Share Agreement with the Daniel Boone National Forest to implement activities collaboratively outside the scope of Stewardship Authority, including grouse-focused project planning, design, and implementation.
 - RGS & AWS led a \$807,358 U.S. Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration grant proposal for Eastern Kentucky. The proposal was approved by the state and submitted for consideration to the Forest Service Southern Region. If funded, the project will support an RGS & AWS Private Lands Wildlife Forester position, achieve *wildlife forestry* demonstration areas on state lands, and perform education and outreach to landowners and the public. In the proposal, we are collaborating with several entities, including the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, the Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture, The Nature Conservancy, the Kentucky Division of Forestry, the Kentucky Office of Nature Preserves, the Kentucky Waterways Alliance, the White Oak Initiative, and the University of Kentucky Forestry Extension. The project would provide 3-years of funding to RGS & AWS and our partners.
 - RGS & AWS partnered with the Daniel Boone National Forest on a Joint Chiefs Proposal. If awarded, RGS & AWS will receive a \$579,698 subgrant to support a Supplemental Challenge Cost-Share Agreement for collaboration on project planning, design, and implementation on the National Forest and to hire an Eastern Kentucky Private Lands Wildlife Forester position. The proposal would fund activities for a 3-year performance period. This project includes participation from 7 different partner entities.
 - RGS & AWS is actively pursuing funding from NRCS-Kentucky and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resource to support a *second* Private Lands Wildlife Forester in Eastern Kentucky to engage private landowners and connect them to cost-share funding from NRCS. The position would support forest management to benefit ruffed grouse, American woodcock, golden-winged warblers, and other forest wildlife.
 - RGS & AWS has established relationships with the Kentucky Forest Industries Association and major timber purchasers in Eastern Kentucky.
 - RGS & AWS has established relationships with over 15 different partner entities in Kentucky.
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Virginia

- RGS & AWS is currently drafting a Stewardship Agreement on the Clinch Ranger District of the Jefferson National Forest to assist the USFS to implement commercial timber harvest projects and complete forest restoration and wildlife habitat activities within a grouse focal area across over 517 acres. The Stewardship Agreement is currently being drafted and the work is expected to begin in early 2021.
- RGS & AWS has established relationships with the George Washington-Jefferson (GW-JEFF) National Forests Supervisor's Office and the Clinch Ranger District, the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, and the Eastern Divide Ranger District.
- RGS & AWS is actively pursuing a Supplemental Challenge Cost-Share Agreement with the GW-JEFF to implement activities collaboratively outside the scope of Stewardship Authority, including grouse-focused project planning, design, and implementation.
- RGS & AWS has established a formal seat on the Forest Recreation Outdoor Group, a stakeholder collaborative group engaging the Clinch Ranger District of the George Washington-Jefferson National Forest. By engaging in this group, RGS & AWS can advocate for high quality hunter access, experience, and satisfaction for our members and the public on the Clinch Ranger District.
- RGS & AWS has established relationships with over 33 different partner entities in Virginia. We have established relationships with the Virginia Forestry Association and major timber purchasers in Southwest Virginia.





South Carolina

- RGS & AWS has established relationships with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, the South Carolina Forestry Commission, Audubon South Carolina, and the Forestry Association of South Carolina to increase capacity for forest restoration and wildlife habitat improvement on state and private lands in mountains of South Carolina.
 - RGS & AWS has established relationships with the Andrew Pickens Ranger District of the Sumter National Forest and is actively pursuing Stewardship Agreements and a Supplemental Challenge Cost-Share Agreement to work together to benefit healthy forests and abundant wildlife on the National Forest.
 - RGS & AWS is actively pursuing opportunities for land acquisition to curtail the development trends in the mountains of South Carolina.
 - RGS & AWS has established relationships with major timber purchasers in the mountains of South Carolina.
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Georgia

- RGS & AWS has established relationships with the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests and is actively pursuing Stewardship Agreements and a Supplemental Challenge Cost-Share Agreement with the Chattahoochee National Forest to work together to benefit healthy forests and abundant wildlife on the National Forest.
 - RGS & AWS has established relationships with the Georgia Forestry Commission and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Division. Our staff are exploring opportunities to partner on public and private lands management with these agencies.
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