

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Bog Turtles and Working Lands

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Western North Carolina is dotted with farm fields, and while most don't even draw notice from those driving by, contrary to conventional wisdom some of these farm fields play a key role in conserving one of our rarest turtles – the bog turtle.

Bog turtles are North America's smallest turtle, and protected by the Endangered Species Act. These are two populations – a northern and southern, with the southern population centered on western North Carolina.

Bog turtles like plenty of sunshine, and in fact opening up the forest canopy to allow sunlight through is often a priority when natural lands are managed for these turtles. On farmlands, grazing or hay harvests keep vegetation low, providing the turtles with plenty of sunlight.

Given that one of the great threats faced by bog turtles is habitat loss and degradation, keeping these lands as working farms is in the interest of both the farmers and wildlife biologists. On the ground, there has been immense cooperation between farmers and the biologists who track bog turtles. In fact, the community of bog turtle conservationists has actively supported keeping many of these lands as working farms, sometimes offering farmers payments to supplement what they make from the land.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.