

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Former farmland being restored to one of Appalachia's rarest habitats

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

At first glance it appears to be merely a patch of woods and farm field beside an established Flat Rock neighborhood. However, to biologists it's Ochlawaha bog, a degraded remnant of one of the rarest natural communities in North America, and it's in the beginning stages of a resurgence.

Biologists estimate around 500 acres of Southern Appalachian bogs remain, and their importance is heightened by the fact they're often home to greatly imperiled species. An endangered plant, bunched arrowhead, was recently known from Ochlawaha bog, and biologists expect the work here will enable the plant to thrive at this site in the future.

Today, what's left of the bog is sheltered in a small grove of trees separated from the farm field by drainage ditch that flows into Mud Creek. Infrared imagery shows that a stream once meandered across the farm field, which is now framed by the ditch on one side and a straightened Mud Creek on the other. In 2009, the Carolina Mountain Lands Conservancy purchased the north end of the adjacent farm field, setting in motion the project to restore the bog.

Ochlawaha bog sits in a broad, flat swath of Henderson County centered on Mud Creek. Biologists believe this area once contained the greatest expanse of wetlands in the Southern Appalachians.

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