

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Farmers and bog turtles

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Though the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service currently proposes creating a National Wildlife Refuge to protect rare Southern Appalachian Mountain Bogs, efforts to conserve these areas have been going on for decades, with farmers playing a key role.

The bog turtle is North America's smallest turtle, and this federally-protected species has suffered from both habitat loss and poaching to fuel an illegal pet trade. In the Southern Appalachians, bog turtles tend to prefer bogs that don't have a lot of shade – nice, open sunny, but wet spots on the landscape. One place they're most frequently found are meadow bogs. Meadow bogs are wetlands that have been altered for agriculture and are often used for pasture or hay production. Though they may appear to be no more than wet spots in farm fields, they're incredibly important habitat for bog turtles and other bog plants and animals. They're most commonly found in the northwest corner of North Carolina, and when managed well these areas can provide excellent habitat for bog plants and animals while allowing farmers to work their land.

Over the years, people in the bog turtle conservation community have worked closely with farmers to protect these areas. This effort has culminated in a program that actually pays farmers a small amount to help ensure the farmers continue using and managing the land in a way that benefits the turtle and allows them to work the land.

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