

Conservation District members gather to talk goals, objectives



Micah Williams with the Georgia Association of Conservation Districts discussed two reports in last week's Blue Ridge Mountain Soil & Water Conservation District meeting.

**By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer**

BLAIRSVILLE – Members of the Blue Ridge Mountain Soil & Water Conservation District held their first in-person meeting since the start of the pandemic on Friday, June 19, choosing to gather in Meeks Park due to the spacing and open-air seating.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts were created in 1937 by the Georgia General Assembly with the purpose of protecting the state's soil and water resources following the Dust Bowl of the 1930s.

"Districts provide a way for citizens to set local resource priorities for state and federal assistance programs," per <https://gaswcc.georgia.gov>. "Today, Georgia has 40 SWCDs encompassing all 159 counties.

"Throughout the state, 370 volunteer district supervisors meet and work to conserve, improve and protect Georgia's natural resources. Each county is represented by at least two district supervisors, one appointed (by the State Commission) and one elected (locally).

"District supervisors are unpaid state officials who work hand-in-hand with the Georgia Soil & Water Conservation Commission and the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service."

One of these supervisors is John Kay of Towns County, who chairs the local Blue Ridge Mountain SWCD. Joining him and others in the meeting was District Program Assistant Micah Williams with the Georgia Association of Conservation Districts.

Williams also discussed the district's 2020 Annual Report and 2021 Plan of Work.

The Annual Report touched on the district's accomplishments over the past year, such as the completion of 319 Water Quality Projects, local distribution of educational material, and spearheading of initiatives like hoop house installations and hosting of conservation tours.

Moving on to the 2021 Plan of Work, Williams spoke about the group's major objectives for the coming year, which include:

1. Natural Resources Conservation – Promote the conservation of soil, water, forestry, wildlife and other natural resources.
2. Conservation Education – Promote conservation education through youth and adult education programs.
3. Public Relations & Information – To create public awareness of District conservation programs and objectives.
4. Erosion and Sedimentation Program – Provide technical assistance related to erosion control and sedimentation prevention to citizens and local units of government.
5. Watershed Flood Control Program – Uphold the duties as sponsor of watershed flood control structures in the District and assist other watershed control structure sponsors with technical assistance.

He then brought up the idea of starting a Facebook Page for the Blue Ridge Mountain Soil & Water Conservation District as a way to get more people connected with local projects and showcase how the district is interacting with the community.

"This would be to better put out to the public what we are accomplishing, what our goals are, what we are doing here, especially in this time of social distancing," Williams said.

District members voted to approve the Annual Report,

Plan of Work and creation of a Facebook page that Friday.

The Blue Ridge Mountain SWCD serves Union, Towns, Rabun and Fannin counties.

Palmer of Towns, Damon Dav-enport and Ann Stanley of Fannin, and Dick Godfrey and Les Neely of Rabun.

For more information, visit <https://www.gacd.us/blueridgemountain/>.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

"It is great to be back together again, scattered as we are, but that is better than not being together at all," Kay said. "I just hope everybody is doing well during this period. I know the work is continuing to go on for NRCS and state visits. I appreciate what Micah has been doing for us."

The group discussed the Olin Hughes Memorial Scholarship, which will be awarded to a high school student in the area. Hughes was a local farmer renowned for his sorghum syrup. He passed away at 93 in 2017. The Hughes Sorghum Syrup Mill is still operational in Young Harris.

"We are sending out emails right now to local high schools; we are looking for juniors (and seniors involved in agriculture and other sciences) to sponsor for that (scholarship)," Williams said.



John Kay is the chairman of the Blue Ridge Mountain Soil & Water Conservation District.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Firewise...from Page 1A

Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council, and he spoke about the North Georgia Prescribed Fire Council Meeting held via Zoom on June 4.

"The Georgia Prescribed Fire Council, a statewide coalition of land managers, landowners, forestry consultants, conservation organizations, universities,

and state and federal agencies promotes the safe use of prescribed fire as an essential natural resource management tool to ensure ecosystem health and reduce wildfire risk," according to event literature.

"We had 432 that came online, and at any one time, there was around 270 on – some of them came and went," Riley said.

Many communities have requested the use of a chipper to get rid of natural debris collected from around homes, and Riley assured the group that they will make the chipper available soon and move down the list to loan it to the communities that have made the requests.

A goal of Firewise is to spread awareness of the

program's fire safety best practices to surrounding communities, which is accomplished in part by attending area events to inform people of ways to protect their homes from wildfire.

Having debris and other fire hazards close to the home makes all the difference between losing a house to a forest fire and staying safe. That's why coalition members travel to events with brochures and information to help people evaluate their own home situation and make a plan to be Firewise.

Coming up, the coalition will attend the Union County Farmers Market in October and the Home & Garden Show in August, and it will participate in the Georgia Mountain Fair Parade, also in August.

The group is looking into ideas for the parade that will recognize the inclusion of the municipalities of Hiawassee and Young Harris for having recently become Firewise Communities.

"It is a big deal and really neat that both Young Harris and Hiawassee are now involved with Firewise, and I think it would be great for us to make that the theme for the parade," Courey said.

For more information, visit [NFPA.org/Firewise](https://www.nfpa.org/firewise).

VFW resumes Friday Fish Fry

VFW Post 7807 on Hwy. 288 in Hiawassee will be holding all you can eat Fish Fry for \$10 per person on the second and fourth Friday of each month 4:30 to 7 PM.

Come see us and get the best fish in town.

Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Pageant

This year's pageant for the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds will be held on August 17th at 8 p.m.

Any young ladies that would like to participate and have the opportunity to become Miss Georgia Mountain Fair, please go to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds website and under events and pageant, please find the application.

All applications must be filled out completely and received by the pageant coordinator, Sonya McClain, no later than Sunday, August 9th, 2020.

All rules and regulations can be found on the fairgrounds website along with the awards for each title.

If you have any further questions please contact Sonya at 770-480-4777.

Iota Iota a Chapter of Beta Sigma Phi June meeting



Iota Iota members

Iota Iota a chapter of Beta Sigma Phi held their monthly meeting at the Civic Center on June 18th. Due to the Corona virus their usual service project helping with BINGO has been put on hold. That did not stop the chapter members from finding another way to help individuals that are at high-risk and living alone. Each member brought cards that will be delivered through Meals on Wheels.