



**MUDDY SNEAKERS®**

# PATHWAYS



## Mountainfilm Asheville moves to new location



This fall, Muddy Sneakers will host Asheville's only screening of Mountainfilm on Tour for a third year, debuting at a new downtown location. The 2019 edition of Mountainfilm will take place Saturday, Nov. 23 at The Orange Peel in Asheville, offering a chance for the community to come together to celebrate connection to the natural world and support our regional outdoor science education program.

We've sold out the past two years, so get your tickets now at [bit.ly/mountainfilmtickets!](http://bit.ly/mountainfilmtickets!) More info at [muddysneakers.org/mountainfilm](http://muddysneakers.org/mountainfilm).

**TOP PHOTO:** In this photo from the spring of 2017, students in Stanly County take part in one of the first Muddy Sneakers expeditions in the Piedmont. This year, more students across the state will have the opportunity to learn science outside as we expand to Eastern North Carolina.

## Muddy Sneakers plans expansion to Eastern NC

Students in Eastern North Carolina will soon have the opportunity to experience the benefits of outdoor science education as Muddy Sneakers opens a third field office in the region.

**T**his new development marks a continuation of expansion efforts we began three years ago with the opening of our Piedmont field office in Salisbury. Muddy Sneakers is committed to realizing a vision of becoming statewide, providing experiential education to students from the mountains to the sea.

That dream will become a reality later this school year as we begin programming in 15 schools in seven eastern counties, serving

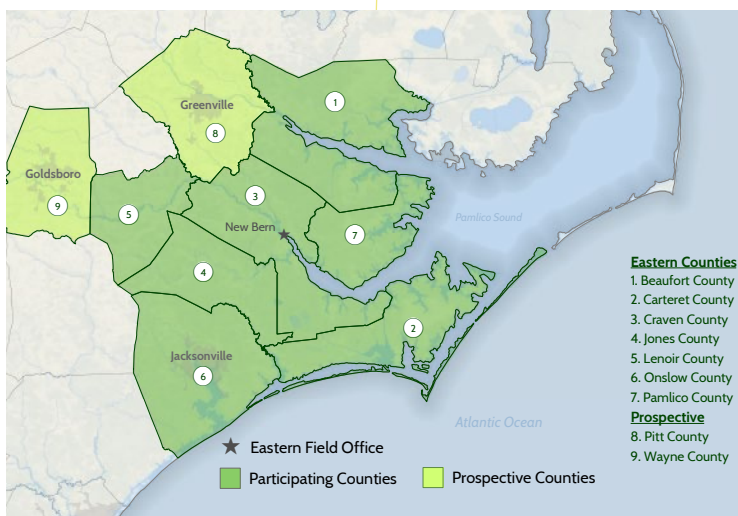
more than 1,000 students. Schools in the following counties have already signed up for their fifth-graders to take part in our outdoor learning program: Beaufort, Carteret, Craven, Jones, Lenoir, Onslow, and Pamlico.

We have our sights set on New Bern as the new field office location, a resilient and growing community that will allow us to reach the diverse ecosystems of the near-coastal region. The area features an abundance of protected lands

where students can explore pine forests, estuarine environments, bottomland hardwood swamps, and river systems.

This fall, we are looking regionally to hire our Eastern NC staff, including a field office director, program director, and multiple field instructors. We look forward to working with local land partners such as the NC Coastal Land Trust, U.S. Forest Service (Croatan NF), NC State Parks (Goose Creek SP), municipal Departments of Parks and Recreation, and Weyerhaeuser.

Currently, Muddy Sneakers is included in the North Carolina state budget for the fourth year in a row, and should the budget pass as proposed, our eastern expansion plans will continue as scheduled. We are thrilled to deepen our connections with the dynamic and evolving communities of Eastern North Carolina and introduce more students to the special environments in their backyard.



# Campers embark on new adventures



Camp Muddy Sneakers received rave reviews in its first summer at a new location: the REEB Ranch outside DuPont State Recreational Forest in Western North Carolina.

This year, the nature-immersive day camp introduced a record number of campers to the joy of being outside as it expanded its age groups to serve children age 4-14. Older campers got to experience river snorkeling, fly-fishing, rock climbing, and hiking to swimming holes, while the younger campers enjoyed storytelling, creek exploring, music, crafts, wildlife watching, and guided free play.

Here are just a few examples of parent feedback from summer 2019:

“Our daughter loved meeting a new friend. Our son loved seeing salamanders and crawdads in the stream.”

“He loved the games, creek walking, discovering cow bones, and creek wildlife.”

“My daughter has been enthusiastically pointing out different types of plants and things she learned at Muddy Sneakers.”

“Camp was a very positive experience for my kid and I am thrilled!!!”

“This has been an ideal way to keep my child busy and entertained during the summer. He loved it.”

“Such a terrific program to get young ones comfortable in the woods/outdoors!”

“He really enjoyed it and came home tired. :)”

Exciting plans are already taking shape for next summer! Look for camp registration to open in January 2020.



Camp Muddy Sneakers widened its age groups this year to serve children age 4-14, and the younger campers loved exploring the natural landscapes of Western North Carolina.

## Site Spotlight

### Bailey Mountain

When Muddy Sneakers took its first groups of students to Bailey Mountain in Madison County last spring, we knew it was a special property.

Overlooking Mars Hill, Bailey Mountain has a long history of being a destination for families looking to experience what nature has to offer from the community's highest point, according to Town Manager Nathan Bennett.

In December 2018, the Town of Mars Hill completed the purchase of an 87-acre property on Bailey Mountain, the result of a grassroots cooperative effort to preserve the iconic mountain from private development.

Muddy Sneakers was among the first organizations to utilize the natural space, leading school-day expeditions there for Mars Hill and Hot Springs Elementary students during the spring 2019 semester, with more learning adventures on the calendar for the current academic year.

“Muddy Sneakers’ emphasis on self-propelled wonder and discovery is a perfect match for the preserved but still unkempt natural space of Bailey Mountain Park,” said Ryan Bell, a Mars Hill University professor and liaison to the Bailey Mountain Project.



# Advisory Council sprouts in Piedmont

In summer 2019, Muddy Sneakers strengthened its community ties in the Piedmont of North Carolina as we launched our first Regional Advisory Council. Consisting of eight members drawn from diverse backgrounds, the new Piedmont Advisory Council promises to bolster our drive to be a multilocal organization.

"I look forward to collaborating with and seeking guidance from our new Piedmont Advisory Council as we work together to build enhanced community awareness and regional support," said Piedmont Field Officer Director Elise Tellez.

The council will amplify the groundwork that Muddy Sneakers has accomplished since we first opened our Piedmont

field office in Salisbury in December 2016. We have grown to serve 1,500 students in 18 schools across eight Piedmont counties — with additional school interest exceeding current program capacity.

The inaugural members of the Piedmont Advisory Council include: Jay Bolin (Rowan County), Chris Cagle (Montgomery/Randolph counties), Michelle Leonard (Forsyth County), Dr. Christopher Magryta (Rowan/Mecklenburg counties), Don Martin (Forsyth County), Marjorie 'Missy' Rankin (Randolph County), Mary Wallace (Stanly County), and Jason Walser (Rowan County).

At the council's first meeting in August, the new members shared stories of how they first developed a connection with

nature and why they are excited to join in Muddy Sneakers' outdoor science education efforts in the region.

Bolin, a professor at Catawba College, said he has two daughters who go to Overton Elementary in Rowan County. "My kids, even though they're not in fifth grade, they know about Muddy Sneakers and they can't wait to be in fifth grade to take part in the program," he said.

Cagle, owner of Eldorado Outpost in Montgomery County, said when his daughter was born, fellow council member Walser brought her a little T-shirt that said, "Save a little land for me." "It truly was a lightbulb moment, and I realized I really had to become even more engaged, not just for my daughter but for her peers," he said.

Wallace, a teacher for 35 years in Stanly and Anson counties, looks forward to sharing her perspective as an educator with Muddy Sneakers. "It's always good to have somebody to share the teachers' views of how it is," she said.

The Piedmont Advisory Council will meet quarterly with the mission of supporting the efforts of the regional field office, including helping to build a local network of support.



The new Piedmont Advisory Council met for the first time in August in Salisbury. Left to right: Program Director Cynthia Peedin, Jay Bolin, Field Office Director Elise Tellez, Chris Cagle, Missy Rankin, Michelle Leonard, Mary Wallace and Jason Walser. Not pictured: Don Martin and Chris Magryta.

## Z. Smith Reynolds supports Muddy Sneakers' growth

Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation awarded Muddy Sneakers \$30,000 from its Community Progress Fund to assist the organization's eastern expansion this school year. As a part of the foundation's Community-Based Strategy, launched after a statewide learning and listening tour, ZSR granted 34 organizations and five communities a total of \$2.5 million.

This generous grant provides critical seed funding for our growth into this new region, helping support the cost of hiring and training a team of high-quality field instructors from the local area. Muddy Sneakers is eager to introduce more than 1,000 students to the rich ecosystems of eastern NC. Thank you, Z. Smith Reynolds, for helping make this possible!

## Instructor Spotlight



Piedmont Assistant  
Program Director

**Em Hitzfelder**

**How did you come to feel a connection with nature?**

As a child, I spent the majority of my time outside. I remember building forts in the woods and pretending I was a fairy princess or hanging out with friends in my treehouse. Being outside keeps my inner child alive and adds vibrance to my life.

**What is the best thing a student has ever said to you?**

Two boys were having a conversation about our expeditions and comparing them to other trips they had taken with their school. It went something like this: "Muddy Sneakers days are better than other field trips because we actually get to go in a field!" That student's appreciation that we were outside in a real field, seeing real-life trees, and playing in actual bubbling creeks was cool to hear.

**What do you do outside of instructing?**

Cooking, reading, listening to country music (gotta represent my home state of Texas!), running, hiking, swimming.



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## New school gives thanks in Henderson County

We are significantly increasing our partnership with Henderson County schools this year. After their first expedition, students at Hendersonville Elementary School wrote thank-you letters to their instructors. Here are a few of our favorites:

**Dear Ms. Megan:** Thank you for being a wonderful leader. If I had to rate you on a scale of 1-10, I'd give you 100.

**Dear Mr. Than:** I thought it was awesome when you picked up that snake and let us try eating sassafras. Thank you for letting me be the navigator.

**Dear Mr. Carlton:** I learned so many new things with you, and that spider you picked up was so scary! The leaf we ate was amazing! Thank you for the BEST experience!



**Dear Ms. Kiersten:** Thank you for teaching me what to do when you see a swarm of bees or when we see a snake, and what different types of leaves and mushrooms look like. I loved that you made schoolwork so much more fun.

**Dear Ms. Nancy:** Thank you for telling me about all the bugs. At the beginning of the trip I was scared of most bugs but I'm not as scared now.



### Did you know?

Trees and other plants can communicate with each other using underground fungi threads known as mycelium. Researchers have found that through this mycorrhizal network, plants can share nutrients and information and even warn each other of dangers.