



TRANSYLVANIA  
Natural Resources Council

**Meeting Minutes for Transylvania County Natural Resource Council**

**Regular Meeting**

**May 8, 2020**

**Welcome**

The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:00 A.M. by Bart Renner.

**Members present:**

Lee McMinn  
Dave Casey  
Jeff Parker  
David Whitmire  
Kent Wilcox  
Elizabeth Reshower  
Jason Guidry  
Dan Hodges  
Jennifer Kafsky  
David Casey  
Woody Nolan

**Staff:**

Addison Bradley  
Samantha Trueman  
Bart Renner  
Kate Hayes

In addition, approximately 1 member of the public was present.

**Approval of Agenda:** Moved and seconded, motion passed unanimously.

**Approval of minutes from March 2020:** Moved and seconded, motion passed unanimously.

**New Business:**

- **U.S.N.F. Plan Revision:** David Whitmire discussed the decline of wildlife in the national forest and the stance of N.C. Wildlife Commission regarding the U.S.N.F. Plan Revision, which was followed by discussion. Lee McMinn and David Whitmire voiced support for option B or D, but not A or C. Kent Wilcox also stated his support for B or D. Kent Wilcox requested that the information from Mountain True would also be submitted to the Board of Commissioners. R.K. Young stated she supported option B or D. David Whitmire said that he would withdraw the two documents that were originally attached to the recommendation sent to the B.o.C. but did suggest that recommendation from N.C. Wildlife Resource Commission be included. There is an extension on public comment to June 9, 2020. Kent Wilcox suggested the entire proposal be rewritten. Motion made by Dan Hodges and seconded to approve the agenda memo as written, motion failed.

- Dan Hodges made a motion: “For staff and council to rewrite the agenda memo based on minutes to this meeting to include a combination of alternatives B and D that contain provisions for Natural Heritage Areas, stream bank restoration, support of management staff at the highest level, maximize protections for old growth forests, and support recreation.” Discussion followed. Dan Hodges called the question. Motion passed unanimously.
- The memo will be completed by Monday the 11th, distributed via email to members, to review, and then voted via a Zoom meeting scheduled for Tuesday May 12th at 3:00PM.

**Old Business:**

- None

**Updates from subcommittees:**

- None

**Updates from public land managers and other staff members:**

- None

Motion was made to adjourn, approved unanimously.

**Meeting was adjourned at 10:39**

Respectfully submitted by Addison Bradley

# Kudzu: Volunteers Fight ‘the vine that ate the South’

Patrick Sullivan/Times-News

By Gina Malone / Times-News Correspondent

Sunday

Posted Mar 10, 2013 at 4:00 AM

In the 1930s, a kudzu farm existed in the Green Creek area of Polk County. Extension Director John Vining has the brochure to prove it. The farm cultivated the vine, offering it to the public and providing advice on how to fertilize and grow it.

It was kudzu’s heyday. Brought from Japan in 1876, it was thought until about 1950 to be the answer to preventing erosion of steep hillsides. Some people fed it to their livestock. Some thought it pretty enough to plant as an ornamental around porches. It was considered a “miracle vine“

Today it is more likely to be called “the vine that ate the South.” We now know that conditions in the southeastern U.S. are too good for kudzu, allowing it to grow up to 60 feet a year, engulfing and crowding out native plants. It is estimated that kudzu now covers more than 7 million acres of the Southern landscape.

The past few years have seen a show of man versus nature in Polk County with groups of stalwart volunteers gathering to fight invasive plant species, most of them Asian in origin.

Besides the well-known kudzu, there are many other nonnative plants that property owners need to watch for and take steps to control. To that end, several groups have been formed to try to halt these threats to native plant species and biodiversity.

The Pacolet Area Conservancy’s group calls itself the Kudzu Warriors. For the past two years, they have worked primarily in the Norman Wilder Forest, a 185-acre nature preserve with hiking trails on the slopes of Little Warrior Mountain. Volunteers, under the direction of Pam Torlina, land protection specialist with PAC, meet once a week to dig out kudzu plant crowns. These crowns are like the hearts of the plant. Removing a crown kills all of the vines sprouting from it, but this method of eradication is labor-intensive, since kudzu-infested areas have many crowns.

The group, which also targets other nonnative plants, has been rewarded by the reappearance in cleared areas of native species such as Sweet Betsy trillium and Solomon’s seal.

Most of the groups battling kudzu and landowners with lots of vine coverage choose to combine this manual method of removal with spraying. There are, Torlina said, “good herbicides” that target the kudzu and do not hurt other plants. Spraying, she added, “gives us a little breathing room.” Workers are careful, she said, not to spray on windy days.

Saluda ‘Swat Team’

The Saluda Community Land Trust also has a regular schedule of kudzu eradication. In 2012 its Kudzu Swat Team was awarded a Polk County Beautification Award for clearing kudzu from numerous sites in Saluda, including the area at the corner of Ozone Drive and Thompson Road.

Like PAC, the group’s volunteers rely mainly on physical labor to remove crowns.

Nancy Barnett, a volunteer with the group, said that a lot of people are against spraying.

“It’s not the first thing,” she said, “but when you’ve got an acre of it, there’s no other way to get rid of it.“

The group initially partnered with the Spartanburg (S.C.) Kudzu Coalition in 2009. While doing a study of the

Pacolet River, SCLT volunteers noticed the prevalence of the persistent vine.

“Once you start paying attention to it,” said volunteer Nora Parks Anderson, “it shows up everywhere.” She and other interested members of SCLT contacted Spartanburg’s group to learn about their eradication efforts. When they showed Newt Hardie, founder of Spartanburg’s group, the area they were most concerned with, Anderson said with a laugh, his response was, “Ladies, you need to start with a smaller site.’ ”

Four years later, the group proudly points to Ozone Drive and to a house near Saluda Elementary School that, before volunteers tackled it, was almost entirely engulfed by vines.

### **Other threats**

While kudzu is most noticeable because of its ability to grow up to 60 feet a year, there are other invasive plants that worry him more, Vining said. His most hated plant, he said, is Tree of Heaven, which he describes as a tree version of kudzu, each with the potential to produce thousands of seeds.

And, perhaps the biggest threat at this time in Polk County, he said, is neither kudzu nor Tree of Heaven, but Oriental bittersweet. Whereas kudzu begins at the edges of wooded areas because it needs the sunlight, Oriental bittersweet has the ability to grow from the inside out, completely covering areas of trees. Driving up Interstate 26 from around the Saluda area to the Blue Ridge Parkway, he said, you will see trees covered with this “really invasive” vine.

Vining and the other kudzu killers agree that the first step is cutting vines from the trees. Kudzu vines grow up about three feet before they attach to trees, Anderson said, so there is time to cut it away. “It does not grow into the woods,” she added. “It goes over the woods.”

Signs put up at work areas in Saluda advise landowners to “Save a Tree. Cut the Kudzu.”

Once the vines are off the tree and on the ground, Vining said, the plant may not be able to get the sunlight it needs or may be grazed by animals. Mowing is another method of control for most invasive plants, he said, but it requires diligence and it might take years to see results.

In the past, goats were used in a downtown Tryon location. However, because the town funded only one year’s lease of the goats from Wells Farm in Horseshoe, kudzu and other invasive plants were not eradicated.

With help from the Polk County Community Foundation, which recently set up a grant category for the eradication of invasive plants, the goats are scheduled to come back this summer and again in the fall, Torlina said. They will graze a two-acre site on Highway 176 near the IGA.

Goats have to graze an area for three years before it is cleared. Their consumption of the leaves starves the plant and kills the vines.

Volunteers from PAC and another kudzu-killing group, Tryon’s Gillette Woods Association “Irregulars,” have prepped the area for the goats’ arrival this summer. They recently cut back Chinese privet shrubs in the area that had grown so large the goats would not have been able to reach far enough up the plant to do any damage. They also removed debris that had accumulated on the site.

Another living creature that enjoys eating kudzu leaves is the kudzu bug. Noticeable in the past two or three years locally, these small flying insects, according to Vining, made a “significant reduction in the biomass of kudzu last year,” cutting its growth in half, he guesses. The bugs, however, will not kill kudzu; they can only reduce its spread. “The downside,” Vining said, “is that they get on other legumes.” There is concern already across the South about soybean crops. And, too, many people find the bugs annoying.

At least one member of the Kudzu Warriors is adversely affected, Torlina said, by the bugs, which have a noxious odor and contain a substance that, when they are crushed on the skin, causes irritation for some.

## Helping hands

All of the groups battling invasive plants in Polk County keep a welcome mat out for volunteers with information available on their websites. Many people, both Torlina and Anderson said, come out to help with the added purpose of gaining knowledge about fighting kudzu and other plants on their own property.

“You can call it eradication,” Anderson said, “but you’re really just controlling it.”

Torlina is of the same opinion. Looking out from recently cleared areas of Wilder Forest across the road to where kudzu is visible on other properties, she said, “We’ll have to keep at this forever”.

Vining speaks appreciatively of the volunteers who work tirelessly to combat these invasive plants. He recommends a website with information on Polk County’s worst invasive species, including pictures to help property owners identify them. That website is [www.ces.ncsu.edu/weedwatch/](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/weedwatch/). As Torlina said, “We’re trying to encourage the public to get excited about this. Anything you do to combat kudzu is better than doing nothing at all.”