Highlands Biological Station
Botanical Gardens & Grounds Planning and Advisory Committee
Update for HBS Board of Directors
June 11, 2023

Ken Conover, Chair

The Botanical Gardens & Grounds Planning and Advisory Committee continues to meet monthly and assist the HBS with implementing Gardens and Grounds Roadmap priorities.

Current Committee members are Bryding Adams, Lynda Anderson, Ken Conover, Jim Costa, Laura Gamble, Jason Love, Paul Manos, Kathy Mathews, Charlotte Muir, Liz Sargent, Dollie Swanson, and Glenda Zahner. Helen Regnery, an inaugural Committee member, decided in April to retire from this this Committee. Helen will continue to volunteer and help us achieve the vision for the Gardens that she helped to create.

The Committee welcomed Laura Gamble, the recently hired HBS Horticultural Specialist, at our June 8 meeting. Laura has a degree in Geology from Western Carolina University (WCU) and two certificates in horticultural science from North Carolina State University. In her prior position with a landscape design company, she maintained gardens for clients. Committee members look forward to working with Laura.

The HBS hired two Garden Assistants for the summer. Aster Ayer, an undergraduate student at WCU, and Zoe Morris, a recent graduate of Warren Wilson College. They have been busy maintaining the gardens, eradicating invasive plants, and enhancing some of the rare plant populations.

Roadmap Implementation
During the past six months, the HBS and Committee continue to make significant progress on several priorities.

1. Native Plant Symposium

The Native Plant Symposium (NPS) subcommittee decided to postpone the next Native Plant Symposium until 2024. Our NPS leader, Bryding Adams, has booked the venue for September 13 & 14, 2024. Speakers who committed to 2023 will be asked to speak in 2024 and additional speakers will be booked.

In lieu of a 2023 Symposium, we will be hosting a presentation by Jim Costa and Bobbi Angell on their forthcoming book “Darwin and the Art of Botany: Observations on the Curious World of Plants” on the evening of September 16, 2023. This special event will be free and open to the public. It will include an auction of native plants and art with proceeds to support the Botanical Gardens. The Highlands Biological Foundation will host the reception.

2. Wayfinding and interpretation signage

A comprehensive wayfinding plan for the gardens and grounds has been completed. Equinox is now developing a bid package that WCU Facilities Management will use to solicit bids for implementing the plan.

Jim Costa successfully procured a grant from the North Carolina Science Museums Grant Program that we hope will be sufficient to fund this wayfinding project and the design of a new south gateway entrance garden.

Jason Love is soliciting quotes from vendors to design a new garden brochure. The brochure will include an updated map and information about the Station and Botanical Gardens such as plants with connections to William and John Bartram and significant trees. Lynda Anderson has updated the list of plants and locations for a revised Bartram Walk and Ken Conover and Paul Manos have identified significant trees for a new self-guided Tree Walk.

3. HBS Bridges, boardwalks, benches, trail repairs

Repairs were completed on the Creekside Trail where a section of the steep, narrow trail had eroded. The stone steps in the Plants of the Cherokee Garden have been replaced. These repairs were made possible by end-of-year funding that Jim Costa obtained from WCU.

4. Summer Programming

Garden tours are scheduled every Wednesday at noon for the public from May 31 to August 2. Bryding Adams spearheaded developing topics for each tour and identifying tour leaders. The garden tours will be led by HBS staff and Committee members.

Jim Costa led an excursion in March to see Oconee Bells, *Shortia galacifolia*, in their natural habitat surrounding Lake Jocassee. Bryding Adams led the development of several additional workshops with botanical themes. These are fee-based and support the Botanical Gardens. Jim Costa and Kathy Mathews led an excursion to the Buck Creek Serpentine Barrens in May. Paul Manos will be highlighting the heath family with a hike up Sunset Rock followed by an optional afternoon lab on June 23.

5. Living Collections Policy Implementation

The Station purchased the BRAHAMS Management of natural history collections database in 2022 to document and manage the living collection. Ken Conover and Kathy Mathews are in the process of learning the system in order to build a living collections database including accession records and plant records.

6. Management and Maintenance Guidelines

Management and maintenance guidelines for campus zones and individual gardens were completed in May. Ken Conover and Lynda Anderson developed the document with input from the Committee. The guidelines are informed by the policies and priorities of the HBS including the Living Collections Policy, HBS Campus Appropriate Use Policy, HBS Gardens

and Grounds Roadmap, and Invasive Plant Management Plan. The new Horticultural Specialist is finding this helpful in her onboarding.

7. Renovation of East Island Bed at Nature Center

Work is underway to renovate the East Island planting area between the Nature Center and Horse Cove Road. Lynda Anderson developed the new design and plant list with input from the Committee. The Station obtained funding from the Laurel Garden Club to cover the purchase of the plants and soil amendment. Volunteers have been working to prepare the area for installation that will begin this month.

8. Old-Growth Forest Network

The Coker Forest was accepted into the Old-Growth Forest Network in May. A dedication ceremony is planned for July 13 from 4-6 pm just prior to the Zahner Conservation lecture by Buzz Williams, Emeritus Executive Director of the Chattooga Conservancy, on old-growth forest management. The Executive Director of the Old-Growth Forest Network will participate in the dedication. Local conservation groups, civic organizations, and neighbors of the Coker Forest will be invited. Jason Love spearheaded the application for inclusion into the Old-Growth Forest Network to raise awareness of the special worth of the Coker Forest especially with adjacent landowners, some of whom have been cutting trees and altering the landscape.

9. Friends of the Garden Volunteers

Garden Volunteers continue to assist in maintaining the Botanical Gardens. New volunteers have been recruited from the 2022 Native Plant Symposium and from HBS workshops. Lynda Anderson continues to coordinate the Wednesday workdays targeted to maintaining the demonstration gardens.

Two special event days were devoted to eradicating non-native invasive plants with the assistance of volunteers from the Coalition of Non-native Invasive Plant Management (CNIPM) and the two local Rotary clubs.