

Tygarts Valley Student Planting Day, 20 May 2015



Chad Arbogast of Greenbrier Ranger District invited students from the Tygarts Valley Middle School and High School to plant native species and see the collaborative ecological restoration taking place on Cheat Mountain. The Mower Tract is the largest scale partnership and restoration effort on the Monongahela National Forest. A large portion of the approximately 40,000 acre Mower tract was heavily disturbed as a result of large scale timber harvesting and coal mining by the Mower Lumber Company in the 1970's and 80's prior to being purchased by the Forest Service. Coal mine reclamation by law required the company to return the site to approximate original contour and control erosion. Erosion was controlled by compacting the soil and planting of non-native trees and grasses. Compacted soils and a non-native grass mat have prevented native species recolonization over the last 30 years. This condition is known as "arrested succession" and can only be remedied with restorative intervention. After the Forest Service purchased this land in the early 1980's, very little activity occurred until recently. Beginning about five years ago, the Forest Service engaged several partners to address the arrested succession on the coal mine

benches. Although located on National Forest System lands, the partners are too numerous to mention but range from the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources to Green Forests Work (GFW), the non-profit organization of the Appalachian Reforestation and Restoration Initiative.



The student volunteers planted Red Spruce and two pollinator species (Basswood and Milkweed) in a section of the ripped restoration area on Lambert North. Plants were grown from local plant material and provided thanks to our partnership with the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and the NRCS's Appalachian Plant Material Center. Both species are used by Monarch butterflies, bees and other pollinators. GFW provided lunch for the 35 students. WVDNR's Cheat Mountain Wildlife Area Manager Rob Tallman demonstrated bobcat hair snare traps. After a morning of planting the students toured the restoration area on Lambert North and identified the amphibians using the wetlands at their different life stages. Not only was it a fun day for local kids, it was an outreach opportunity to explain our unconventional restoration efforts underway in such a unique environment!

