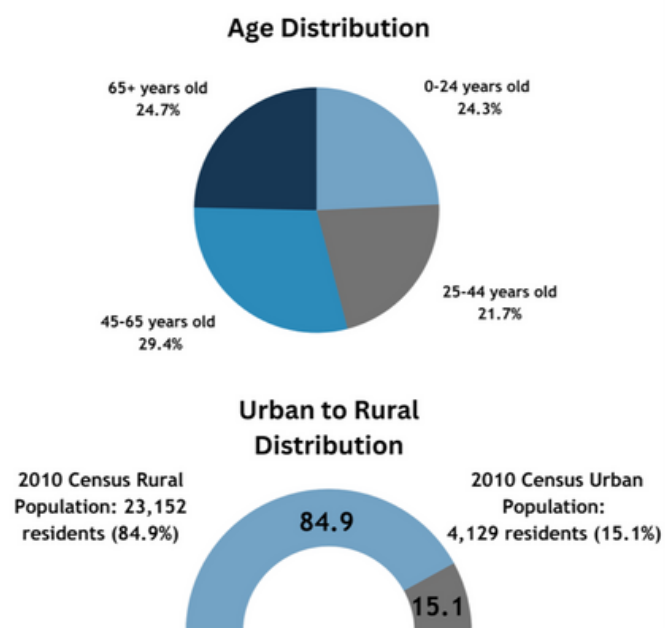


Background

Shortly after The Nature Conservancy's North Carolina Chapter office opened in 1977, staff began working with the Wyn Edwards and Mac Edwards families of West Jefferson, Bluff Mountain's owners, to explore a way to protect the fragile area (part of the ancient Amphibolite range) for conservation. TNC purchased 701 acres of Bluff from the Edwards family in 1978 (The Nature Conservancy, 2022).

Demographic Data



Research Question:

How can community outreach be used as a mechanism for strategically increasing environmental conservation efforts in Western N.C., specifically, The Nature Conservancy's Bluff Mountain Preserve?

Methods

Over the course of 180 hours of research, I compiled analysis from an array of sources to better understand initial opinions on the reserve, changes the community/staff would like to have implemented, and suggested next steps for TNC.

Below is a list of methods that drove the results that were halted from the research:

- ❖ Conducted proper Institutional Review Board requirements and reviewed historical data from the preserve.
- ❖ Planned a field site excursion to collect data and document flora and fauna at Bluff Mountain. During the field site excursion, my TNC staff mentor, Sydney Bezanson, and I visited the Ashe County Commissioner's Office.
- ❖ Fielded interviews with TNC staff, local community members and volunteers at the preserve.



Bluff Mountain Preserve, Ashe County
Source: Caroline Kelly



Eastern Bog Turtle (*Glyptemys mühlenbergii*)
Source: © Sydney Bezanson/TNC

Findings

Through qualitative data I collected, as well as journalistic-style interviews, I found three central areas of key insights. From these insights, I designed and presented organization-specific recommendations to TNC stakeholders.

- ❖ **Facilitating Conversation from East to West Coast offices:**
 - ❖ Sample town hall-style meetings to ensure inclusivity of older demographics who frequent social media platforms less frequently
 - ❖ Comparing foot traffic durability of preserves to gauge marketing for tourism and whether or not to open more of the preserve to the public
- ❖ **Balancing Volunteerism:**
 - ❖ Sending out interest surveys to those seeking volunteer opportunities on the Bluff, Phoenix and Bat Cave preserves
 - ❖ Reviewing volunteer training and placing emphasis on protocol for trespassing
- ❖ **Managing External Relations:**
 - ❖ Maintaining good relations with external organizations despite different goals and objectives
 - ❖ Surveying local government effectively in the future for their perception on the preserve's progress

Key Quotes

TNC Interviewee 4: *"I do have an interest or reach out for some of the work we've done on Phoenix Mountain which is nearby to promote some of the sustainable forestry practices and some of the other projects we have going on up there... And sort of to expand that out from our volunteer monitor base."*

TNC Interviewee 5: *"In terms of the mountains, I think that the need for community discussion would look more, maybe more town hall style, simply because I think people in the mountains are a bit more amenable to our land acquisition projects than they would be, say, in eastern North Carolina and the sand hills."*

References

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