

Azalea City Application

Section A

Legal Municipality Name: Town of Robbinsville
North Carolina

County/Parish: County of Graham

Mailing Address: 12 North Main Street
Robbinsville, NC 28771

Application Maker: Town of Robbinsville
Revonda Williams
Vice Chair
Graham County Travel & Tourism

Azalea City Application

Section B

Robbinsville and Graham County will be a unique Azalea City by having the ability to promote our Native Azaleas. We have already helped with preservation of a special stand of Native Azaleas that are also easily accessible by the public. This accessibility allows visitors to view some of the best Rhododendron Calendulaceum found in the mountains. The Hooper Bald Project has attracted national notice and has received two awards from the U.S. Forest Service.

Robbinsville and Graham County Volunteers, the local Chapter of Boy Scouts along with the Azalea Society members aided in the Great Azalea Planting of 2011 when Huckleberry and Oak Knob were planted with local Native Azaleas.

Robbinsville and Graham County are also planning a Native Azalea Festival for 2018. This Festival will be specifically to highlight the rare species we have growing on Hooper Bald and Oak Knob. In conjunction with the Graham County Travel & Tourism, a few members of the Azalea Society planted almost 20 Native Azaleas throughout town in October, so the beautiful blooms would be visible as visitors traveled into and around Robbinsville.

The main thrust of this Azalea City will be on the use of our Native Azaleas in the landscape and in the Project of preservation of the Native Azaleas stands in Graham County. This Project also addresses the Federally

Endangered habitat of the Northern Flying Red Squirrel and landscape restoration for the threatened and endangered species. There are 20-40 acres of early successional habitat that has proven to also improve the conditions for pollinators and recreational users. The trees invading the Bald were seen as a negative resource for the azaleas, but a positive monologue among all the agencies involved. The Project was able to find a compromise action, primarily improve the conditions for the Native Azaleas and protect nesting habitat for the flying squirrel. The Hooper Bald Project united five agencies into a single project that had been addressed unilaterally by the U.S. Forest Service. In terms of volunteers and work hours, this was the largest restoration project attempted in the Nantahala National Forest in the last twenty years. The Project has gained national recognition for its success from the American Rhododendron Society.

The following narrative
was contributed by a local newspaper writer and
Azalea enthusiast.

Section C

See attachment #1

Protecting Hooper B

By Kim Hainge
The Graham Star

Revonda Williams of Robbinsville didn't realize how special the native azaleas are on Hooper Bald until she received an extremely interesting phone call from Jim Brant of the Middle Atlantic Chapter (MAC) of the American Rhododendron Society.

Brant called after learning that Williams' family had a long and colorful history in Graham County and had once owned Hooper Bald before and during the time of the Civil War.

Brant called because of his interest in an azalea growing on Hooper Bald known as "Hooper's Copper", a unique azalea with extremely large blossoms that can reach 3.5 inches in diameter. The flowers open a bright gold and then quickly change to a deep coppery orange.

Unfortunately, at the time of the plant's discovery, other native azaleas were competing with this uniquely colored plant and help was needed.

That's what concerned Brant, who has been involved with a restoration project for two balds in the Southern Appalachians, Gregory Bald in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park and Hooper Bald off the Cherohala Skyway near Robbinsville.

Williams shares Brant's concern for the azaleas of Hooper Bald, which has long been one



The magnificent Hooper's Copper of Hooper Bald blooms

of her favorite places. She's spent years clearing Hooper Bald of invading plants and preserving the genetic diversity of the six species of native azalea.

"There have been challenges," Williams explained. "Over 1,000 native azalea seeds were planted on the Bald. There were two to three seedlings, each which looked a little like a fly's wing, planted together. It turns out the seedlings competed with each other and not many survived."

Two years after the first planting, larger native azaleas, each about a foot tall, were planted individually. Their survival rate was definitely better. A biodegradable disc was placed around the base of each plant to discourage

grass and weed growth.

"Each year we go up and check on the new plantings," Williams said. "Volunteer groups do some weed eating and try to keep vegetation clear for around a three foot diameter from the trunk of the native azaleas. In 2016, we found seven of the plants doing well and we suspect there are quite a few more."

Balds are open mountaintops that historically have been covered with dense native grasses and shrubs. They are often areas where rare native azaleas grow.

Most of the mountaintops in the southern Appalachians are covered with heavy forest growth and there has been a tremendous amount of

ald's amazing azaleas



Kim Hainge/The Graham Star
bright orange.

into why some mountain summits are "bald".

The current popular theory is to blame it on the vicious winds that blew at the high elevations of the balds during the last ice age.

Some researchers also believe Native Americans may have kept the balds

clear by fire, too, perhaps maintaining them in order to make easier hunting of the beasts that feasted there.

Due to a variety of factors, many balds are filling in with trees, wild blackberries, hawthorne and various other types of vegetation, choking the native azaleas. So in 2004, MAC member Brant organized a formal "Hooper Bald Project". He and another member, George Mclellan, met with the then chief botanist for the Nantahala National Forest, Dr. Duke Rankin and asked if the Forest Service would allow them to find ways to preserve the rare plants on the balds, including fighting off the encroaching vegetation that threatened to fill in the balds quickly. After many meetings and a great deal of paperwork, an agreement was reached.

The American Rhododendron Society collected and shared the seeds from the unique native azaleas with many groups, hoping to plant the best seedlings

back into the wild of Hooper Bald. Their hope is that local groups will adopt Hooper Bald and the surrounding balds for continued preservation efforts. Each time one of the native azaleas is nurtured and cared for it grows larger and blooms more profusely.

Hooper Bald is relatively easy to reach so it is an excellent place for people to go and appreciate the native azaleas that grow there. Revonda, a member of the Graham County Travel and Tourism Board, hopes that in the near future Robbinsville can host an annual native azalea festival during the bloom of Rhododendron calendulaceum. Native azalea and rhododendron growers from all over could set up stands and sell their plants.

"We have a treasure trove, six species of native azaleas that don't grow anywhere else in the world," Williams said. "Let them grow and propagate, and in a few years everybody will be coming to see them."

Justice District Court
FILE NO.: 14-CVS-179 (268853)

CARMINE ORR; COLLEN MULLINAX; SHERRY VAARUM; OLIN ORR; CYNTHIA CHRISTOPHER; CARLA SMITH,
Plaintiffs,

v.

EVA D. DOMI; VICKI BRITT; WANDA G. SHEW; REGINA BUNTING; GARY MILLSAPS; MICHAEL MILLSAPS; ALVIN EUGENE MESSER; H.L. MESSER; SUE TAY-

Public Notices

"Haren Construction Company, Inc. is seeking qualified Minority/Women Business Enterprises (MWBE) for construction of the Robbinsville, NC WTP Sludge Dewatering and Lime Stabilization Improvements Project bidding

most of the roads in the county being small. There is no one image of the county that is continuously being reinforced in the traveler's mind. As a result, Graham County must create that image by developing and building upon a true destination image. This image should serve as a point for all tourism stakeholders and act as a guide for future messaging and tourism products and services.

National group eyes local mountains for planting

By James Budd

editor@grahamstar.com

A group of horticulturists plan to spend several days next month planting hundreds of native flame azaleas on Hooper Bald and Huckleberry Knob.

Both mountains, located off the Cherohala Skyway, rise more than 5,500 feet in elevation and are considered to have some of the showiest native flame azaleas in North America.

Jim Brant, who is with the Middle Atlantic Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society, said the size of the blooms on Hooper Bald often reach 3 1/2 inches



The flame azalea blooms on Hooper Bald are the biggest found in North America. Above, the orange-red variety.

compared to most normal azalea blooms, which are about 2 inches.

The large blooms of the *rhododendron calendulaceums* found on the high

mountains can't be matched by any native azalea in other locations, he said.

■ See Plants, page 5



Photos/contributed

Jim Brant and George McLellan with the Middle Atlantic Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society claim Hooper Bald has some of the most magnificent species of native azaleas in North America. Above, they are posed with a 'Hooper's Copper' variety. A group plans a trip to the area early next month.

Plants

■ Continued from page 1

"They are unique for their size," Brant said.

The horticulturists, many of whom are traveling from eastern Virginia, will start work Oct. 6 and finish Oct. 10. They have the full cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service and private property owners, including Revonda McGuire Williams.

The group plans to plant about 700 azaleas on Huckleberry Knob and about 100 on Hooper Bald. Recent mowing operations have helped the existing azaleas bloom with more vibrancy, Brant said.

The plants aren't a new species, but are unusually large and vibrant. Some of the showier plants have been given names like "Hooper Pumpkin" and "Hooper Glow."

The group has vowed to help the forest service with equipment and support to retain the bald spots on the ridges with mowing equipment.

Many of the southern balds are becoming reforested with the decline of grazing on the mountain tops.

Bears

■ Continued from page 1

"Most of the acorns are at lower elevations this year," Carraway said.

The best crops seem to be around 2,000-feet in elevation, bringing the most food down where most of the human population lives, Carraway said.

"There have been problems all over," Carraway said. "A lot in Asheville this



Staff photo/Zelerie Rose

GREAT Executive Director Rick Davis looks on as Alcoa Community Relations Manager Christy Newman presents a check to Graham County Schools Superintendent Chip Carringer. The money will be used to promote science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) to students in grades sixth through ninth.

GREAT

■ Continued from page 1

It is the second time Alcoa has funded the program.

"We are very happy to be able to fund this program again for the school," Newman said. "There were approximately 350 kids exposed to this program, which is phenomenal. We hope some of them will eventually come back and work for Alcoa."

The STEM program was started in 2010 and focuses on ways to develop interest in the mathematics and science fields.

One of the guest speakers at the GREAT meeting was Robert Taylor, who is with the Division of Environmental Assistance Outreach. He spoke to committee members about the benefits of recycling, and the different ways of implementing a program.

Taylor said recycling

initiative, said he hopes to have some kind of plan available for review by the next GREAT meeting in November.

Smithson Mills, consultant for N.C. Rural Center also spoke to GREAT about the progress that has been made towards improving downtown Robbinsville.

For the last several months a committee has been working on ways to improve the downtown area, and slowly but surely progress is being made. The county's assets and challenges have been identified, and goals have been set.

Now the committee must prioritize their projects and submit a plan of action to the N.C. Rural Center for approval. Once it clears there, the proposals will be submitted to the town aldermen for their approval, and work can commence.

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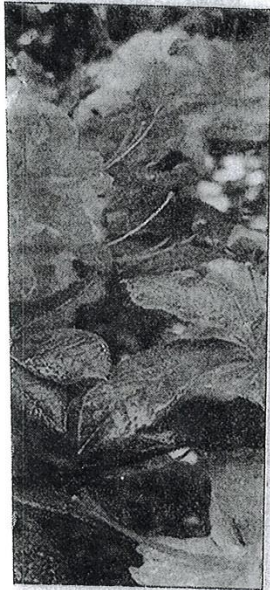
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Our azaleas rival Roan Mountain

10-20

THE GRAHAM S

There is a huge secret in Graham County that needs to be shared. The national group, the Middle Atlantic Chapter (MAC) of the American Rhododendron Society, has been visiting our county to nurture and propagate the unique flame rhododendrons that grow throughout our mountains. Volunteers from all



KIM
HAINGE
MOUNTAIN
VIEWS

over the world have been coming here for the past 20 years to admire the unique azaleas that grow along the Cherohala Skyway at elevations above 4,500 feet.

Flame azaleas (*rhododendron calendulaceum*),

are gorgeous wherever they grow, but along the Cherohala Skyway, hidden amongst hawthorns and Mountain Ash trees, are flame azaleas that are beyond compare. Most azalea blooms are about 2 inches across. The ones that grow along the Cherohala are often 3½ inches wide. The colors are unique also, ranging from a golden yellow, to

a pumpkin orange, all the way to a scarlet red.

Three times a year, volunteers arrive to care for the huge azalea bushes up on Hooper Bald, Oak Knob and Huckleberry Knob. In October, they collect seed capsules from the bushes and label them carefully according to their color. These

Hainge See page 5

Hainge is a gre

Continued from page 1
capsules are distributed to members interested nationwide who nur replant them. brought back and carefully their "mother" that the azalea increasing ev

Members re March to prur and weed eat. known azalea will thrive with titution for the nutrients from plants. Finally people come to see the splendor in bloom.

Thomasville known as the Roan Mountain see is world famous. Catawba Rhododendron. They have a number of these lavender plants throughout the hillside. a Rhododendron festival there each thousands of people to refresh themselves appreciate the

We have the same thing flame azaleas. like Don Hyatt

to refresh themselves and appreciate the plants.

We have the potential for the same thing with our flame azaleas. Volunteers like Don Hyatt, Jim Brant and George McLellan of MAC have been coming here for 20 years, adding plants and nurturing the originals. Revonda Williams of Robbinsville has been their local contact. William's family owned Hooper Bald before the Civil War and she is deeply attached to this area. The azaleas cover a good deal of land. Volunteer manpower could transform that area into one similar to the rhododendron gardens on Roan Mountain.

Individuals can commit to nurturing just a single plant. Church groups and maybe the boy scouts could help protect and educate people about the azaleas. Local plant nurseries like Taylor's and Satterfield's could propagate the seeds and all of us could plant flame azaleas in our own yards. Every person in Graham County could be given a free plant. Can you imagine the beauty when they bloom?

Williams has envisioned a Native Azalea Festival, occurring in June, which would bring in vendors of azaleas from all over the country to sell their plants and where azalea hikes could be offered throughout the county.

I think the idea has great merit. What a wonderful thing it would be to increase the beauty in the world as well as bring in people who would stay here for a few days, eat, play and tell their friends about the natural beauty in Graham County.

AZALEA LOVERS' PRESERVATION BLOSSOMS WITH POSSIBILITIES

By Rebecca Burcher Jones
Correspondent

GLoucester

keeping it growing
For some 15 years, friends Jim Brant and George McLellan have shared a passion for azaleas, particularly native ones that grow in the higher elevations of the southeastern United States.

They've hiked mountains in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee—occasionally dodging hungry bears and poisonous snakes—in pursuit of breathtaking vistas of the colorful, fragrant native azaleas that thrive there.

The Gloucester residents are active members of the Middle Atlantic Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. Both are dedicated naturalists who want to see native azaleas preserved. In that vein, Brant, whose home is surrounded by a woodland garden that McLellan designed, is working

with curators from Norfolk Botanical Garden. They're taking cuttings from Brant's 35 native azaleas so that their offspring can be enjoyed in Norfolk.

Two years ago, the two friends initiated a preservation project on Hoop-

er Bald, a North Carolina mountaintop meadow in Nantahala National Forest. With permission from the U.S. Forest Service, which owns the property, Brant and McLellan are working with like-minded volunteers to clear away



JIM BRANT, left, and George McLellan stand alongside the native azalea "Hooper's Copper." The two are working to preserve azaleas growing in North Carolina. COURTESY OF WWW.DONALDHYATT.COM

scrubby trees and shrubs that threaten to overtake the bald and its azaleas, which cease to bloom when there's too much competitive vegetation.

What makes Hooper Bald an ideal preservation site is that it's relatively easy to reach.

Most balds require long and strenuous hikes to get to them. However, Hooper Bald sits just a quarter-mile off the Cherokee Skyway.

"We're doing this work with loppers and hand trimmers and a whole lot of sweat," Brant said. "We're trying to preserve the native azaleas for generations to come."

Without intervention, Brant said, Hooper Bald would eventually evolve into a hardwood forestland. At particular risk is a bright, coppery-orange native azalea nicknamed "Hooper's Copper." It produces blooms exceeding 3 1/2 inches in diameter.

Last fall, McLellan and others collected seeds from azaleas on Hooper Bald and gave them to Southern Highlands Reserve, a research center dedicated to the preservation of plants native to the Southern Appalachian Highlands.

From these seeds, Brant and McLellan hope volunteers can eventually plant as many as 500 new native azaleas.

Rebecca Burcher Jones, vbjgarden@cox.net

6-20-10

as D.D. to MAC friends) had been a MAC member for some years previously. John had been a member since before 1967.

John graduated from Roanoke College and was a World War II Air Force Veteran with the 339th Fighter Squadron. Among his accomplished citations, Captain Withers received the Distinguished Flying Cross Air Medal with seven oak leaf clusters. John was a nurseryman and owned and operated Hi-Meadows Gardens in Mount Solon for many years. He enjoyed raising horses, cattle and tending to his azaleas and rhododendrons.

His wife LuDean Withers survives as does his daughter Dell Taylor (also a MAC member) and two sons, Dean Withers and John Withers, brother Douglas Withers and six grandchildren.

John was MAC's first P4M (Plants for Members) propagator back when Austin Kennell instigated our program before the Sheuchenkos then David Lay took it over. John took cuttings from some of his own plants and probably others also. John had been active in the chapter until the last few years.

ARS MEETING IN EVERETT, WA

Details about the up-coming ARS convention April 29th - May3rd are on the Web at: www.ars-2009-convention.org

HOOPER BALD PROJECT SPRING 2009

The Species Study Group of the Middle Atlantic Chapter ARS has undertaken a new project to help restore Hooper Bald. This North Carolina mountaintop wilderness area is south of the Great Smoky Mountains near the Tennessee border in the Nantahala National Forest, just off the scenic Cherohala Skyway.

Like many of the open balds in the Southern Appalachians, Hooper Bald is getting overgrown. Rather than staying an open meadow, the area is filling up with successional trees and shrubs which crowd out the native meadow wildflower, azalea and rhododendron populations. Without intervention the top of the mountain will no longer be an open meadow bald, but will become pine and hardwood forestland. This invasive regression is threatening native wildflowers, and especially the exceptional forms of the flame azalea (*R. calendulaceum*) which have been identified on Hooper Bald. One of those exceptional plants has been informally named "Hooper's Copper" and is a bright coppery orange flame azalea that has

some of the largest flowers we have seen on this species with blossoms of more than 3" across.

In November 2008, the Species Study Group began discussions about this project with the Forest Service Officials in the region. Working in coordination with the National Forest administration, a restoration clean-up of the Bald has been scheduled for the weekend of April 3 - 5, 2009. We are looking for volunteers to participate in this preservation of the important plant communities of Hooper Bald. This restoration is similar to the ones currently in progress in the Roan Highlands and on Gregory Bald. The National Forest Service has approved the plan and will be assisting us in cutting of invasive trees and shrubs, and bush hogging to open up the Bald. Many volunteers from the Middle Atlantic Chapter and others interested in the project are needed to help with the chipping of the cut trees, cleaning up around the identified azaleas and pruning other vegetation.

A real advantage to this project on Hooper Bald is the relatively easy access. Using any of the several motels in Robbinsville, NC as our base, only a short drive is needed to get to the scenic Cherohala Skyway. From the Skyway entrance to the parking area at Hooper Bald is not far, a little less than 12 miles. After parking, we have just a short walk of about a quarter mile along a gravel path to get from the parking area to the Bald. (There are even restroom facilities - not typical conditions for most wilderness areas.)



R. calendulaceum on Hooper Bald. Photo by Don Hyatt

For more information or to sign up for the project, please contact Jim Brant, MAC President, by phone: 804 693-7556 or by e-mail: jandpbrant@verison.net

Hooper Bald Planting Trip 2011 by Carolyn Beck

On October 7th and 8th, a diverse and robust group converged on a section of the Nantahala Forest, about 100 miles west of Asheville, NC, and very close to the Tennessee border. Some of the workers lived locally. Others came from Georgia, DC, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Alabama, Maryland, Virginia, and other parts of North Carolina. Represented were members of the ARS, ASA, Boy Scouts, and even a descendent of the Hoopers for whom Hooper Bald was named. All were there with a common goal: to plant 800 native azalea seedlings back into the wild.

Travelers arrived at the planting areas via the scenic Cherokee Skyway, an undulating course across the crest of the pristine Unicoi Mountains. With its many twists and turns, it is a route much favored by motorcyclists. As we approached the higher elevations, we were greeted with panoramic views and breathtaking displays of fall color.

The first of the planting spots was located a short climb from the highway on top of Oak Knob. This large, grassy knoll is a sub-peak of Huckleberry Knob, the highest elevation in the range at 5,560 feet. On Friday morning, the crew set to work. Some were diggers, others planters; a real team machine. They followed the green spots sprayed on the grass, which meant "This is the place to plant one." The process was thus: remove a small section of turf, loosen the wonderfully loamy soil, and nestle in one of the *Rhododendron calendulaceum* seedlings. By Saturday midmorning, 700 plants were in the ground. And then it was on to the nearby Hooper Bald for the last 100. All had been grown by The Southern Highland Reserve from seed collected on Hooper Bald.

We could not have asked for more perfect weather. The mornings were cool, the skies marbled with interesting cloud formations, and there was but a whisper of a breeze. By midday we were glad for some peripheral shade in which to lunch, relax, and chat. It was here that we heard how individuals had spent their time on the way from home. Some had included stretches of the Blue Ridge Parkway in their route. Some had stopped at J Jackson's nursery in Mountain City, Tennessee, called Appalachian Native Plants; a great place to purchase native azaleas. A few had visited Roan Mountain.

After our break, we were treated to a tour by George McLellan. As we walked down the ridge, he

pointed out the local flora, including some of the many *R. calendulaceum* specimens that have been documented, named, and tagged. Also present were *Kalmia* (Mountain Laurel), conifers, Ground Cedar, mosses, and natural *R. calendulaceum* seedlings. At the end of the trail, we were introduced to "Hooper Copper", discovered by George and named for its coppery foliage and star-shaped flowers of yellow, orange, and coppery-gold. This had been one of the first plants to be freed from encroaching trees and shrubs. And it responded with vigor, putting on new growth and flowering abundantly, possibly giving rise to the idea of expanding the restoration effort.

We saw evidence of the hard work that had gone into this venture over the years in the form of huge piles of brush. And we heard stories of the history behind the Hooper Bald Project.

Blunt summits, known as balds, had historically been grazed by livestock. These open expanses of native grasses were a great home for *R. calendulaceum* and they had flourished. In spring, their flowers paraded a sea of oranges, reds, yellows, and golds. In fall, the foliage presented another burst of color, which could be seen from miles away. But when the Forest Service started buying land in the 1930s and ended the grazing practices, trees and shrubs seized the opportunity, quickly crowding out the less aggressive understory plants. So the native azaleas were at serious risk of losing their place in the sun.

Starting in the 1990s, a few members of the Species Study Group from the Middle Atlantic Chapter of the ARS would explore numerous sites each year, searching for native azaleas. It was during one of these trips that a treasure trove of *R. calendulaceum* was noted on Hooper Bald. These azaleas had exceptionally large flowers for the type, many attaining diameters of 2-3", and the group discussed the importance of preserving the gene pool.

Jim Brant took on the task of organizing the effort. He contacted Dr Duke Rankin, a botanist with the Nantahala National Forest. Duke was able to open the doors that lead to approval for the ARS and ASA to proceed with what became known as the Hooper Bald Project. The objective was to reclaim the balds for the native azaleas.

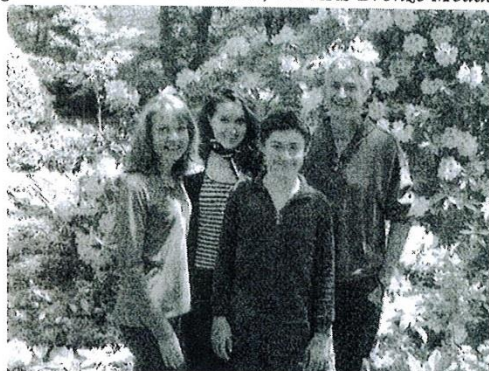
George McLellan, Bob and Audrey Stelloh, Don Hyatt, and John Brown, along with Jim, became the core of this project. With the help of others, like the Sierra Club, areas around the azaleas were cleared so



Wallenmeyers Receive the Bronze Medal

In the picture above, Ginny Mohr looks on as President Richard Mohr presents the ARS Bronze Medal to Jon Wallenmeyer and family at the Fall Banquet. Congratulations! The official citation reads:

The Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society is pleased to award the Bronze Medal to the Wallenmeyer family: Jon, Phyllis, Jackie, and James. For many years, the Wallenmeyers have promoted the goals and activities of our organization. Jon served as Vice President and then President of the chapter, providing key leadership throughout the 2006 ARS Convention and beyond. He has served as banquet coordinator and has assisted with flower shows, plant sales, and auctions. Phyllis helped with many convention details, and has helped publicize the Potomac Valley Chapter, always encouraging her own family's support of the ARS. Jackie and James have faithfully attended our meetings since they were very young. They have joined us on many trips to see rhododendrons, acted as young ARS ambassadors at local and national meetings, and actively bid on auction plants to help raise chapter funds. The Wallenmeyers helped recruit new members and are always there to assist when needed. For these and many other reasons, the Potomac Valley Chapter wishes to honor the entire Wallenmeyer team with the highest award we can bestow, the ARS Bronze Medal.



Phyllis, Jackie, James, and Jon Wallenmeyer

The Great Azalea Planting: Success!

For several years, Jim Brant has been coordinating activities related to the "Great Azalea Planting". This was a cooperative venture between the ARS, the ASA, the National Forest Service, the Southern Highlands Reserve, and several other participating organizations. The goal was to replant seedlings of the the very large flowered forms of the flame azalea, *R. calendulaceum*, back into the wild on Hooper and other nearby balds.

Everything came together on the Columbus Day weekend. We had 800 native azaleas to plant, helpers from seven states and the District of Columbia. There was even a troop of Boy Scouts from nearby Robbinsville. We also had perfect weather.



Pictured in the photo above are Carolyn Beck and Barbara Bullock at one of the planting sites on Oak Knob. The first shift worked so quickly that by the time many of us got there on Saturday most of the azaleas were already in the ground. We finished planting about 100 of the seedlings on Hooper Bald and then had nothing much to do but enjoy the sunny weather and glorious fall foliage. It was perfection!

In a few years, these plants will have reached blooming size and we will all be able to appreciate the beauty. Congratulations to Jim and all who helped.

2012 Seed from Paul James

The rest of this newsletter is devoted to our local seed exchange, but we want to emphasize some seed from Paul James. He sent a mix from his best three-leaf Japanese deciduous azaleas including *hyuganense*, *mariesii*, *tashiroi*, *wadanum*, and *wadanum album*. These are spectacular!

He sent open pollinated seed of his most fragrant rhodo, an *R. fortunei* selection. Two other favorite plants with great potential are his beautiful (*soulei* x *Idealist*) and a stunning Kehr cross, (*catawbiense-wardii* x *vernicosum*).

This is our first offering of *R. calendulaceum* and natural hybrids he collected in the wild on nearby Cahas Mountain. Expect large flowers in red, yellow, peach, and multicolor blends. Most will have a blotch and some are almost white!

MIDDLE ATLANTIC CHAPTER
OF THE
AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

ANNOUNCES

HOOPER BALD PROJECT
SPRING 2009

The Species Study Group of the Middle Atlantic Chapter ARS has undertaken a new project to help restore the ecologically diverse and important Hooper Bald. This North Carolina mountaintop wilderness area is south of the Great Smoky Mountains area near the Tennessee border in the Nantahala National Forest, just off the scenic Cherohala Skyway.

Like many of the open balds in the Southern Appalachians, Hooper Bald is getting overgrown. Rather than staying an open meadow, the area is filling up with successional trees and shrubs which crowd out the native meadow wildflower, azalea and rhododendron populations. Without intervention the top of the mountain will no longer be an open meadow bald, but will become pine and hardwood forestland. This invasive regression is threatening many native wildflowers, and especially the exceptional forms of the Flame Azalea (*R. calendulaceum*) on which have been identified on Hooper Bald. One of those exceptional plants has been informally named "Hooper's Copper" and is a bright coppery orange Flame Azalea that has some of the largest flowers we have seen on this species with blossoms of more than 3" across.

In November 2008, the Species Study Group began discussions about this project with the Forest Service Officials in the region. Working in coordination with the National Forest administration, a restoration clean-up of the Bald has been scheduled for the weekend of April 3 - 5, 2009. We are looking for volunteers to participate in this preservation of the important plant communities of Hooper Bald. This restoration is similar to the ones currently in progress in the Roan Highlands and on Gregory Bald. The National Forest Service has approved the plan and will be assisting us in cutting of invasive trees and shrubs, and bush hogging to open up the Bald. Many volunteers from the Middle Atlantic Chapter and others interested in the project are needed to help with the chipping of the cut trees, cleaning up around the identified azaleas and pruning other vegetation.



A real advantage to this project on Hooper Bald is the relatively easy access. Using any of the several motels in Robbinsville, NC as our base, only a short drive is needed to get to the scenic Cherohala Skyway. From the Skyway entrance to the parking area at Hooper Bald is not far, a little less than 12 miles. After parking, we have just a short walk of about a quarter mile along a gravel path to get from the parking area to the Bald. (There are even restroom facilities - not typical conditions for most wilderness areas.)

If any of your group members would like to join with members of the Middle Atlantic chapter ARS for this fun and productive weekend of restoring a natural area containing many interesting plants, we would love to have you join with us in this project. For more information or to sign up for the project, please contact Jim Brant, MAC President, by phone: 804 693-7556 or by e-mail: jandpbrant@verison.net.

Thanks,
Jim Brant, President
Middle Atlantic Chapter
American Rhododendron Society

Conclusion: We are fortunate that the *R calendulaceum* on Hooper Bald are protected by the Forest Service for all to enjoy. And we are grateful for all the volunteers who have spent so much time preserving their habitat for future generations.

Note: Jim Brant reported that, on the Tuesday after the planting, a gentle rain fell in the area, thus helping to ensure the success of the newly planted specimens.

For more information and photographs of *R calendulaceum* on Hooper Bald, visit Don Hyatt's website, <http://www.donaldhyatt.com/natives>. There is also a MAC Chapter PDF of a PowerPoint show which you can view at <http://www.macars.org/HooperBald.pdf>.

If you would like to participate in the ongoing efforts in this, or other, native azalea projects, contact Jim Brant at jandpbrant@verizon.net

Carolyn Beck, ASA Northern Virginia Chapter

and to Friends of the National Arboretum (FONA) for the preservation of the Glenn Dale azaleas. There was a caveat included with the donation of \$5000 that assurance of donated funds would be returned to the ARS if the arboretum elects to destroy the azaleas.

There is continued movement to consider an electronic edition of the ARS Journal. The costs associated with the publication/ mailing of the Journal in its present format are a significant portion of the annual budget. Further considerations for changes and/or distribution will be followed up by a committee, including Sandra McDonald from MAC. There is no move afoot to remove the delivery of the JARS away from its present form and that will be available to those who want it. There will be a chapter newsletter contest in an attempt to enhance local publications. There will be a judging committee. Chapter calendars, speakers' names, educational material, etc. are often included in newsletters, which are currently being delivered to members either by US Mail service or electronically. Dee Daneri was asked to write an article for the Journal relating to the process for nominating honor recipients, and Bill Mangels will write an article describing the procedure for writing grant requests.

The proposed budget was accepted. Salary increases will be awarded to Glen Jamieson, Sonia Nelson and Laura Grant in the amount of 3% beginning September 1st.

The Annual Meeting was held in two sessions – on Thursday and Saturday nights. The annual roll call of districts with members standing to acknowledge their attendance took place on the first evening. The following meeting included awarding of two Gold Medals: one to Kathy VanVeen and the other to June Sinclair. There were no Silver Medals given. The Pioneer Award was given to Edward John Penworthy Magor. Don Hyatt and Dr. Hartwig Schepker were the two meeting speakers.

A large number of people attended the convention, which overflowed into several nearby hotels. The quality of tours and educational sessions were well handled, and cost related activities were kept to an affordable level. There was not a roster of attendees, but District 9 had a good representation present from all three chapters. If there are any questions or comments about this meeting, or if you have something you'd like to see discussed, please let me know.

- Ann Mangels, Director, District 9

Color Insert – Photo Contest Winners

The color insert with this newsletter has the top vote getters in our 2011 Photo Contest. Congratulations!



Hooper Bald Project

The MAC Species Study Group under the initiative of Jim Brant has been involved with restoration projects for two balds in the Southern Appalachians. These balds are open mountain tops where rare native azalea populations grow, but trees and other vegetation were beginning to take over, threatening the azaleas.

One of those sites is Gregory Bald in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. The other is Hooper Bald, south of the Smokies near Robbinsville, NC. Hooper Bald has some of the largest flowered forms of the flame azalea, *R. calendulaceum*, we have seen in the wild. Some of the flowers exceed 3 inches across.

After getting approval from the U.S. Forest Service, Jim has organized volunteer groups to clear small trees and brush around the existing azaleas on Hooper Bald. That bald is very easy to access, about 1/4 mile from a parking lot on a gravel path.

We also collected seed off of some of the better forms of those plants. The Southern Highlands Reserve has been raising seedlings for us to replant on Hooper and another nearby bald, Oak Knob. It is important to have a backup for that rare germplasm.

About 800 seedlings will be ready to plant out this fall, and we have selected the Columbus Day weekend in October as the time to plant. We really need people to help, so we chose that weekend because it is usually peak fall color at the upper elevations in that area. We decided to combine a planting trip with a fall foliage tour of the mountains in North Carolina and Tennessee.

A tentative schedule is listed below but details are still a bit sketchy. Some of us will probably go down early to get ready, but if you want to be kept informed, please let Don Hyatt know: (Don@donaldhyatt.com)

October 7: Head to Elizabethton, TN, for Roan Mt.

October 8: Travel the Parkway to Asheville, NC

October 9-10: Drive to Robbinsville, NC. Plant azaleas and admire the fall foliage as time permits

October 11: Tour Parkway. Stay in Mt. City, TN

October 12: Visit nurseries and head for home.

the fact that Gregory Bald is a complex hybrid swarm, and almost anything is possible. All are lovely!



"Don's Yellow #1"

photo by Jim Willhite

Jim also made several hand pollinated rhododendron crosses using Swartmore Dexter hybrids of John Wister. SW 12505-5 is a hybrid involving *decorum*, *fortunei*, and *griersonianum*, and blooms fairly late with coral pink flowers and a cherry red blotch. Wister used that plant to develop other hybrids with dark blotches. As for the plant called 'John Wister,' most people believe that is likely the same clone that David Leach introduced as 'Janet Blair.' Leach had been testing plants of others and people think he mistakenly believed that Dexter to be one of his own seedlings.

Carol Segree sent us open pollinated seed of two special rhododendrons in her garden. 'Hardy Loderi' is an Augie Kehr introduction that has huge, fragrant creamy white flowers and is much hardier than the Loderi hybrids developed at Exbury. We also have open pollinated seeds of (Odee Wright x *wardii*) op, which could produce some yellows.



'Hardy Loderi'

Unfortunately, we don't have any evergreen azalea seeds this year, but maybe we can encourage some of you to make crosses for us in 2009. Maybe there will be some exciting new pollen sources at the Joint Flower Show we host with the ASA this coming May.

Hooper Bald Project

The species Study Group of the Middle Atlantic Chapter ARS has started on a new project to help restore Hooper Bald. This North Carolina mountaintop is south of the Smokies near the Tennessee border, just off of the scenic Cherohala Skyway.

Like many of the open balds in the Southern Appalachians, Hooper Bald is getting overgrown. Rather than staying an open meadow, the area is filling up with rather ordinary trees and shrubs. Soon, the top of the mountain will no longer be a meadow but forestland. The regression is threatening many native wildflowers and especially the exceptional forms of the Flame Azalea (*R. calendulacem*) on Hooper. One of those plants we call "Hooper's Copper", a bright coppery orange Flame Azalea that has some of the largest flowers we have seen on this species, blossoms in excess of 3" across!

In November 2008, Jim Brant, the President of the Middle Atlantic Chapter, discussed the project with officials in the region and seems to have made great progress. In the coming years, we should be able to begin a restoration project similar to what is being done in the Roan Highlands and on Gregory Bald.

Obviously, Hooper Bald is quite far away for people who live in our area, but the plan is to get environmentalists from many areas excited about the possibilities and we need to provide that motivation.

The project is on a much smaller scale than the Roan Highlands or Gregory Bald, too. The first phase will probably be cutting down small saplings and pruning back unwanted shrubs that are encroaching on the azaleas. Eventually we will expand to larger areas and eventually the whole bald, but those details have not yet been established.

One real advantage to Hooper Bald is its easy access. Using one of several possible motels in Robbinsville, NC, as our base, we only have to drive a short distance to get to the scenic Cherohala Skyway. From there to the parking area at Hooper Bald is not far, probably less than 20 miles. It is just a short walk of about ¼ mile along a gravel path to get from the parking area to the bald. They even restroom facilities! That is not typical for most wilderness areas.

Jim is trying to organize a clean up session in early spring this year so if you think you might like to join him then or at a later date, let him know:

Jim Brant, 7304 Hunters Pointe Drive,
Gloucester, VA 23061
jandpbrant@verizon.net

Sandwich Club 2009

The Sandwich club meeting on Cape Cod is scheduled for May 30 this year. Most of us arrange our schedules to have a few days on either side so we can see other things. Mark your calendars!

grooming and selecting specimen trusses for show. Ray Smith (MD) had remarked that the Fellers had done such a nice program for Mason Dixon several years ago, and because of the difficulty tracking down judges during the first couple of weeks in May, additional judges are needed to help with our shows. The Fellers will not get into judging ethics and practices – just preparation for showing. Laura Grant reported that Walter Przypek (MAC) has volunteered to replace Wing Fong to lead the Program Library. Don Hyatt (PV) has agreed to make DVD's, while other suitable programs are also being developed for chapter use.

The Endowment Fund recommended that grants be awarded to Planting Fields Arboretum State Historic Park, Oyster Bay, New York; Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society (B.C.) Memorial Park; and Humboldt Botanical Garden Foundation, Eureka, CA; and to Friends of the National Arboretum (FONA) for the preservation of the Glenn Dale azaleas. There was a caveat included with the donation of \$5000 that assurance of donated funds would be returned to the ARS in the event the arboretum elects to destroy the azaleas.

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HOOVER BALD PROJECT : THE GREAT AZALEA PLANTING! by Jim Brant

I hope you all can join us on Columbus Day weekend in the Nantahala Forest on Hoover Bald and Huckleberry Ridge. These are both on the scenic Cherokee Skyway one mile apart. The fall foliage should be in full color for your enjoyment while planting azaleas!

Mark your calendar -- we will be planting 700 azaleas in 4-6 inch pots on Huckleberry Ridge and 100 azaleas on Hoover Bald. These plants have been grown for us by the Southern Highlands Reserve from seed that was taken from the plants on Hoover Bald. This may be the largest amount of native azaleas to ever be planted in a native setting during one event.

****Our schedule will be as follows:**

Oct. 6	Thursday	Bush hogging and laying out the planting area
Oct. 7	Friday	Placement of azaleas
Oct. 8	Saturday	Planting on Huckleberry
Oct. 9	Sunday	Continued planting on Huckleberry and Hoover
Oct. 10	Monday	Finish planting and clean-up

As you can see we have a lot of planting to do so come early or late and enjoy the company and gorgeous scenery. We will have locals, boy scouts, college students, and plant enthusiasts there volunteering their time.

****These are some things you need to bring:**

- Water



reluctant parents. Crosses often produce seed, but the viability is typically poor and germination quite low. However, all we need are one or two good plants!

The *Falconera* Subsection (*Falconeri* Series) has 10 species, and their leaves are not quite as large but are still ever attractive. *R. falconeri* is a very tender species from the Himalayan foothills, hardy in Zone 9. Its large leaves can be up to a foot long, indumented, and the flowers are usually pale pink to cream.



Foliage of *R. rex* ssp. *rex*

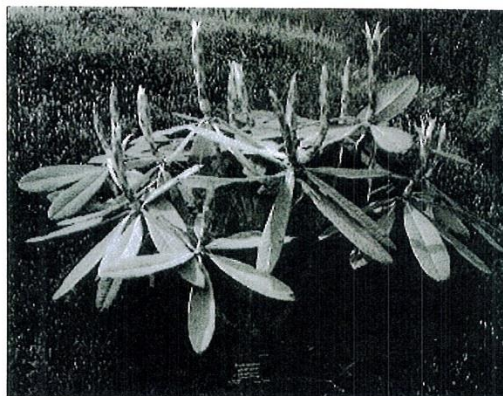
One of the species in the group, *R. rex* and its subspecies variants like *R. rex* ssp. *fictolacteum*, are much hardier. Native to western China, these forms are reportedly hardy to Zone 7. My garden is supposed to be Zone 7, but there is a slight difference. In the blistering heat this summer, I recorded the highest temperature ever on that Friday in July when so many records in the East were shattered. In the shade at the back of my house, my thermometer hit 110.3° F! It was probably cooler elsewhere in the garden since that area gets reflected heat from the house, but it was hot!



Flowers of *R. rex* ssp. *fictolacteum*

R. rex has great foliage with heavy indumentum, and the blossoms are white to pale pink with a prominent blotch. It has proven valuable as a parent producing some stunning hybrids like 'Hardy Giant' when crossed with *R. fortunei*, or the hybrid produced by Jens Birck of Denmark that he calls 'Great Dane', a cross of *R. rex* with *R. yakushimanum*.

There are a few rhododendrons with large leaves that we can grow. Many of us have admired 'Hardy Giant' in the Beaudry's garden, but there are others with fairly large leaves. The species *R. calophyllum* is a member of the subsection *Fortunea*. Its leaves can be up to a foot in length and it is hardy to Zone 6. Wil Smith, one of our Associate members from Pennsylvania, apparently has a large *R. calophyllum* that has been grown well for him for many years.



R. calophyllum

Since flowers only last a week or two, I prefer rhododendrons with distinctive foliage that I can admire all year long. I want a hardy *R. sinogrande*!

Hooper Bald Project

2011

Local interest from North Carolina and Tennessee seems to be increasing for the Hooper Bald Project. Over the Columbus Day weekend, we will be planting 800 *R. calendulaceum* seedlings back into the wild. Jim Brant has set the main planting day for Saturday, October 8. With a "cast of thousands" including local boy scouts and many others who may not be familiar with plants, he may need additional people who know how to plant an azalea to help supervise workers. Don Hyatt will discuss details at our next meeting.

Potomac Valley Chapter Newsletter
Donald W. Hyatt, Editor
1948 Lorraine Avenue, McLean, VA 22101
(703)-241-5421 Don@donaldhyatt.com

Section D

Robbinsville and Graham County are very fortunate to have several existing public gardens exhibiting the Native Azaleas. Those are listed below:

Hooper Bald- Cherohala Skyway, Robbinsville, NC, Graham County- This area provides some of the best viewing areas in the county. The Azalea Society has gone to great lengths thru the years to preserve and encourage the growth of species of Azaleas that only grow on the Hooper Bald.

Oak Knob – Cherohala Skyway, Robbinsville, NC, Graham County- Oak Knob is the site of some of the largest planting projects we've undertaken in efforts to preserve the Native Azaleas. This area provides the perfect habitat for the Azaleas and is very accessible for our many visitors to enjoy.

Huckleberry Knob - Cherohala Skyway, Robbinsville, NC, Graham County- Huckleberry Knob is another favorable habitat for the Azaleas as the soil, sunlight and undergrowth are all conducive to the conditions needed by the Azaleas. This also has been a site of the many plantings we have done.

Stecoah Valley Center – Robbinsville, NC, Graham County- Stecoah Valley Center is a cultural center in Graham County. It is a great tourist destination and an excellent example of restoration efforts as it is housed in an old high school auditorium. At the Center there is a Memorial Garden dedicated to a patron from the area. This Garden is made up of Native Azaleas and is a beautiful display of the brilliant orange flowers that bloom each May.

Section E

Azalea Society local members:

Kim Hainge

Revonda Williams

Karen Wilson

