



# Special Edition Red Bird Report

## Message from the LTCA Board President

### *Season's Greetings!*

As LTCA Board President, and as a volunteer docent and red spruce transplanter at the Southern Highlands Reserve atop Toxaway Mountain, I thought this news was worthy of a special Red Bird Report this month!

Big news is burgeoning on top of Toxaway Mountain. The staff of Southern Highlands Reserve just returned from celebrating the Capitol Christmas Tree lighting in Washington, D.C., as well as a new partnership with the U.S. Forest Service to lead the largest red spruce restoration effort to date.

Southern Highlands Reserve (SHR) has grown red spruce from seed for more than a decade. More than 6,000 of those trees are planted on public lands in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia, and the 20-year-old Lake Toxaway nonprofit has set a new goal to grow 50,000 more. On Monday last week, the Washington Post featured SHR's efforts in [an article by Pulitzer Prize-winning climate reporter Brady Dennis](#).

In D.C., SHR staff members attended the Congressional Reception at the United States Botanic Garden following the tree lighting. They also met with

North Carolina Senator Thom Tillis to discuss the importance of high-elevation spruce—fir forests — where red spruce grow — the second most endangered ecosystem of the United States. This year's Capitol Christmas Tree is a red spruce harvested from Pisgah National Forest near the intersection of Route 215 and the Blue Ridge Parkway, just a few miles from Lake Toxaway.



***Message continued***

Nicknamed “Ruby” — short for *Picea rubens*, the scientific name for red spruce — she now stands on the west lawn of the Capitol building for the holiday season. Her journey from North Carolina to Washington on a 100-foot truck, with stops in several North Carolina and Virginia communities, raised national awareness for red spruce restoration. Several of SHR’s baby red spruce were on tour with her as well.

The U.S. Forest Service and the National Forest Foundation are contributing a lead gift of \$300,000 toward construction of a state-of-the-art greenhouse at Southern Highlands Reserve, where tens of thousands more trees will grow for restoration in the Southern Appalachians. The success rate of SHR’s plantings is an unprecedented 90 percent, rebuilding forests decimated by unsustainable logging and subsequent wildfires at the turn of the 20th century. Several endangered and threatened animal and plant species live only in these forests, and more will migrate there as temperatures rise.

SHR is a founding member of the Southern Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative (SASRI), which includes partners such as the U.S. Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. What began as a grassroots group in 2013 is now a formal organization committed to building a new conservation model that works across sectors and state lines to combine resources and efforts.

Our neighbors at the top of the mountain are thrilled and grateful for the recognition and support of partners and donors. The heart of red spruce restoration lives in our neighborhood! The high-elevation forests all along the Blue Ridge Parkway are the backbone of ecotourism in our region and an essential part of the magic of Western North Carolina. Please consider supporting red spruce restoration through donations, volunteering or simply spreading the word about the great work SHR is doing. For more information, visit [www.southernhighlandsreserve.org](http://www.southernhighlandsreserve.org) or email SHR Executive Director Kelly Holdbrooks at [kholdbrooks@southernhighlandsreserve.org](mailto:kholdbrooks@southernhighlandsreserve.org)

***Robb Turner***

**The LTCA Office will be closed the following days for the Holidays**

**Monday December 26th, Friday December 30th, and Monday January 2nd**

**We hope you and your family enjoy your Holiday Season and have a Happy New Year!**

Warmest Wishes,

**Debby Nussel**

*General Manager*

**Jody Duggins**

*ARB Manager*

**Julie Klever**

*Administrator*

