

Help restore the Cherokees' rivercane

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Volunteers are needed to help transplant rivercane from near Western Carolina University to a site near Cherokee as part of a rivercane restoration project.

Rivercane is a mainstay of Cherokee culture, and traditionally has been used in making baskets, blowguns and mats. It once was plentiful along stream banks and floodplains in Western North Carolina, but the species has been heavily impacted by development. WCU and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians are working together to restore the native bamboo. Not much rivercane still grows in Cherokee, so WCU students and faculty members started working with Cherokee tribal members last fall to move plants from Cullowhee Valley to the site near the Cherokee school.

“Over the course of four days in October, volunteers dug up rivercane behind the baseball stadium on campus, wrapped the roots in plastic, loaded them onto a truck and replanted them in Cherokee,” said Adam Griffith, a staff member in WCU’s Program for the study of developed shorelines. “The dense network of tough underground stems and roots made the digging difficult, but the result was the planting of more than 50 feet of underground stems and 30 above-ground stems.”

A much larger rivercane transplantation effort is planned for March and April to a site at the new Cherokee Central School.

“The long-term goal of the project is to establish a patch of rivercane on Cherokee tribal land that can be used for educational purposes and even harvesting by Cherokee artisans,” Griffith said.

The transplanting work is scheduled for March 11 and 19, and April 1, 2, 8 and 9.

Visit rivercane.wcu.edu or email agriffith@wcu.edu. Area landowners who have rivercane on their properties they’d like to donate are asked to contact Griffith.