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## Biologists discover patches of endangered plant on riverbank

*staff reports*

Biologists canoeing the Little Tennessee River in late May discovered two new patches of the federally-protected Virginia spiraea plant growing on the river's banks.

The search was part of an effort by U.S. Fish and Wildlife and conservation organizations to catalog where the plant is found along the river.

"Knowing where these plants are means we know where to focus our time and energy in conserving the species," said Dennis Desmond, search organizer and land stewardship coordinator for the Land Trust for the Little Tennessee in a statement. "Of course, the ultimate goal is to recover them so they no longer need protection, and this was a tiny step toward that goal."

Virginia spiraea was listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in 1990, and today it's found in seven states across Appalachia from West Virginia to Georgia, including seven counties in North Carolina.

The plant is typically found along stream banks where it's able to take advantage of the stream-bank scouring that comes with periodic flooding and makes these areas inhospitable to many other plants. The plant's decline can be linked to the widespread building of dams across its range, which temper the rise and fall of river floodwaters, allowing other plants species to become established; and the increasing preponderance of invasive exotic plant species, like Japanese knotweed, Japanese honeysuckle, and kudzu, that take over sites where Virginia spiraea is found.

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