



SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS RESERVE

Southern Highlands Reserve (SHR) is a nationally recognized native plant arboretum and research center located in Lake Toxaway, NC. The organization, established in 2002, is a 501(c)(3), nonprofit corporation with deep experience in high-elevation native plant management, propagation, and restoration. Set among 120 acres along the Blue Ridge escarpment of the eastern continental divide at an elevation of 4,500 feet, the site includes a 22-acre display garden and a new state-of-the-art greenhouse.

The Reserve is comprised of staff and volunteers collectively working to create an awareness of and education about the ecosystems of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Among other projects, SHR has been at the forefront of red spruce restoration in the Southern Appalachian Mountains and is a charter member of Southern Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative (SASRI). Staff at SHR collaborate with other organizations such as the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission to establish a framework for mapping, planning, and completing red spruce restoration projects. To date, SHR has grown more than 10,000 mature red spruce seedlings and planted more than 7,000 red spruce trees on public land with SASRI partners and volunteers.

Since inception in 2002, integrity, stewardship, and excellence have been hallmarks of the organization. These principles are carried forward from our founders, Betty and Robert Balentine. SHR is actively seeking to grow partnerships and recruit like-minded professionals to assist in its expansion.

POSITION: CONSERVATION HORTICULTURIST

— Executive Summary —

SHR is currently seeking a full-time conservation horticulturist. This position plays a central role in the cultivation, documentation, and long-term stewardship of the Reserve's living collections. This position blends hands-on horticulture with conservation science, supporting initiatives such as rare plant propagation, ecological restoration, and collaborative research projects. The ideal candidate is equally comfortable working in the field, in the greenhouse, and alongside partners in the conservation community. This position requires regular outdoor work in a mountainous environment, including exposure to heat, cold, precipitation, uneven terrain, and wildlife. The role involves lifting, bending, carrying materials, and operating equipment as part of routine duties.

— Outcomes —

SHR is a nationally recognized native plant arboretum and research center dedicated to sustaining the natural ecosystems of the Blue Ridge Mountains. We accomplish this mission through the preservation, cultivation, and display of plants native to the region, and by advocating for their value through education, restoration, and research. Our staff functions as a single team, dedicated to outstanding guest and partner service and excellence in conservation. To adhere to our culture of excellence, we have defined the following outcomes for this position. Demonstrate and understand internal and external requirements in regard to all tasks by:

- Following established operating procedures and policies
- Taking direction while showing initiative and thriving in a work environment where all staff wear many hats
- Communicating effectively with colleagues and showing enthusiasm for working in a team environment
- Creating new solutions to tasks and problems
- Maintaining gardens with pride and ownership, achieving a high standard of aesthetic display

— Job Description —

Horticultural Operations



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- Perform daily horticultural tasks including planting, watering, pruning, weeding, mulching, and soil management.
- Propagate native plant species using seed, and other appropriate methods to support conservation and restoration objectives.
- Monitor plant health and diagnose issues related to pests, diseases, and environmental stress; implement integrated pest management strategies.
- Maintain nursery, greenhouse, and propagation facilities to ensure optimal growing conditions and compliance with safety and sanitation standards.

Conservation and Research

- Direct rare and threatened species propagation, seed collection, research, and ex-situ conservation activities.
- Participate in field-based conservation work, including vegetation surveys, habitat assessments, and restoration plantings.
- Maintain accurate and timely records of plant accessions, propagation data, and conservation activities in accordance with organizational protocols.

Landscape and Site Stewardship

- Implement ecological land management practices, including invasive species control and habitat enhancement.
- Support maintenance of trails, structures, and public areas to ensure a safe and high-quality visitor experience.
- Operate and maintain horticultural tools, equipment, and machinery in accordance with safety guidelines.

Education and Public Engagement

- Provide support for guided tours, volunteer programs, workshops, and public events as assigned.
- Contribute to the development of educational materials and interpretive content related to native plants and conservation.

– **Qualifications** –

- Bachelor's degree in horticulture, botany, plant science, ecology, or a related field; or equivalent combination of education and experience.
- Minimum of four years of experience in horticulture, native plant cultivation, or ecological restoration.
- Experience with rare plant propagation, seed banking, ex-situ conservation, and nursery management
- Experience with plant records databases or GIS-based documentation tools.
- Familiarity with Southern Appalachian ecosystems and high-elevation plant communities.
- Ability to perform physically demanding work outdoors in varying weather conditions.
- Strong organizational, communication, and recordkeeping skills.
- Prior experience working with volunteers or public audiences.

– **Personal Attributes** –

- Passion for native plants and ecological conservation.
- Curiosity, initiative, and a collaborative spirit.
- Commitment to high standards of horticultural excellence.
- Dedication to conservation and ecological stewardship
- Adaptability and a willingness to learn new techniques.
- Attention to detail and accuracy in documentation



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- Problem-solving and adaptability in dynamic field conditions

– Compensation –

This role offers the opportunity to work in one of the most biodiverse temperate ecosystems in the world, contributing directly to conservation of rare species and the advancement of conservation horticulture. You'll join a small, dedicated team making a meaningful impact on the future of the Southern Appalachian landscape. A competitive compensation package will be offered, including an attractive base salary and benefits. If interested, please email a cover letter and resume to info@southernhighlandsreserve.org. Please use the subject: Conservation Horticulturist - YOUR NAME.