

This spring, Foothills Conservancy lost a remarkable friend with a soul for conservation and servitude: Janet Hostetter Wilson.

Former Foothills Conservancy Executive Director Susie Hamrick Jones grew quiet and thoughtful as she chronicled their friendship, calling Janet “classy, humble, and a role model for all people.”

“She was an advocate for women and always guided by rock-solid principles, whether it be education or conservation,” Susie said.

Due to her passionate work protecting the area’s natural spaces, many often assume that Wilson Creek, a National Wild and Scenic River, is attributed to Janet’s family name. While the river was not named for Janet or her family, she did spend many years diligently protecting its waters. Living in Lenoir for most of her life, Wilson Creek was one of Janet’s favorite places in Western North Carolina. She spearheaded the conservation of a 650-acre parcel of land, the Lutz Tract, in Caldwell County that contains more than four miles of river frontage along the creek. In 2007, the tract was under immediate threat of development until Janet stepped in.

Ron Beane, Janet’s friend and former Caldwell County Commissioner, North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund trustee and Foothills Conservancy board chair, explained that Janet stalled the Lutz property deal to “Save Wilson Creek.”

“Janet and her family helped fund worthwhile projects that helped other people, and Janet was the driving force in funding these projects — mostly through anonymous gifts,” Ron explained. “The family never wanted to be recognized for giving; they just wanted to help their community. And Wilson Creek wouldn’t look the way it does today without Janet quietly stepping in.”

After the conservation success at Wilson Creek, Susie recruited Janet to serve on Foothills Conservancy’s Board of Directors in 2008. Janet brought energy, enthusiasm, and grace during her two consecutive terms of service.

Susan Powers, a conservancy board member, lived in the same community as Janet for almost 40 years, and, although their friendship developed later in life through a shared interest in the environment, Susan credits Janet with giving her one of the best gifts she could have asked for: an introduction to Foothills Conservancy.

“She was a gracious, loving, giving person that cared so much about environmental issues,” said Susan, reflecting on the years they spent testing water quality in Wilson Creek and driving the gravel roads through Mortimer and Edgemont. “I valued her friendship dearly.”

Foothills Conservancy’s Executive Director Andrew Kota fondly remembers Janet as “a kind soul and a friend.”

“I was working on a Wilson Creek conservation plan for Foothills when I first met Janet, and I had the opportunity to accompany her at community and public meetings,” he said. “I watched how she treated everyone with respect and kindness and was astounded by her determination to protect the environment. Even though I was relatively ‘green’ to the land trust world, being associated with her instilled confidence in me. We developed a friendship during that time and

through her service on the conservancy's board (and after). It is obvious to me that I am in my position today because of her support, trust, and confidence.”

Susie added: “Janet was a professional who brought a keen understanding of the business of the conservancy to her volunteer service. She wanted Foothills to last and to be on firm-footing so that our conservation work will go on.”

Foothills Conservancy is fortunate to have had the opportunity to experience Janet's passion for the environment, philanthropic spirit, and warm nature. Our hearts are with Janet's three children, six grandchildren, and her countless friends. Her conservation spirit, volunteerism, and humble leadership are missed today and will continue to be missed forever.