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# ***THE CANE PATCH***

Issue #1

Summer 2025

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Birmingham, AL  
August 2025

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Rivercane Restoration Alliance

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER

As one of the founding members of the Rivercane Restoration Alliance (RRA), I am proud to present our inaugural Newsletter. Like all things in Nature, relationships are vital between communities for sustainability and resilience. Envisioning a future ecology for native rivercane is no exception, and our community of practice continues to grow. I wondered how best to kick off this Newsletter, and it occurred to me a little history on how the Rivercane Restoration Alliance was born might be appropriate for our members (both old and new).

On 13-15 October, 2021, the USACE Tribal Nations Technical Center of Expertise (TNTCX), in planning and collaboration with Tribal, State, Federal, Industry, and Academic partners, hosted the Indigenous Approaches to Rivercane Restoration Workshop. The workshop was funded by the USACE Sustainable Rivers Program with a grant written by myself and Mr. Brian Zettle. Nearly 200 people participated in the 3-day virtual workshop designed to promote Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) and outline how to integrate Indigenous perspectives into rivercane restoration science and conservation. Participants included Tribal partners, US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Geological Survey, other federal and state agencies, rivercane artists, community leaders, and students. Participants shared stories about their relationships with rivercane, prepared conceptual models through facilitated small group exercises, and discussed how to collaborate on rivercane recovery projects while also expanding education on the importance of rivercane restoration. The workshop outcomes identified a need for better communication and a community of practice among rivercane restoration specialists and land managers.

Rivercane Restoration Alliance

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER

Continued.

From this need the Rivercane Restoration Alliance (RRA) was born in 2022. Although from humble Federal beginnings, the RRA has moved from a dozen members to well over 100! Rivercane enthusiasts, conservationists, academics, and large land managers have joined our ranks accepting rivercane into their hearts. We are currently hosted by the Alabama Water Institute CONSERVE research program at the University of Alabama with the goal of “growing our restoration influence” across the greater Southeastern United States. To accomplish this goal, we are working to conduct large scale restoration projects and provide expertise when needed to support rivercane ecosystem work. Our group has sponsored several online resources on how to propagate rivercane and also have a new podcast out on this important plant! Most importantly, we were created to give voice to the rivercane ecosystem activities and support our RRA members and partners toward a future ecology of cane.

My hope is that this Newsletter will foster new relationships, sustain old ones, and grow more opportunities to revitalize important native rivercane ecosystems across the United States. It will also be a venue to share both successes and challenges in rivercane restoration and conservation across the RRA. Please reach out to contribute to this effort and thank you all for taking a stand for Rivercane!



In Service,

*MP Fedoroff*

Michael Fedoroff, PhD.  
RRA Founding Member

# A PAST AND FUTURE FOR RIVERCANE

— a tribal perspective —

Mr. Roger Cain

United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians



ABOVE: Photos of UKB's trailer showing the different stages of river cane growth as well as traditional basketry.

## TELL US ABOUT YOUR TRUCK!

We purchased the truck and trailer through our grant with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to haul our crew and tools to remote canebrake sites that are often located hours away. The imagery on the truck and trailer consists of culms, rhizomes, leaves, flowers and cane basketry showing the various aspects of river cane providing a visual opportunity to teach the public about river cane while we work in remote areas.

# A PAST AND FUTURE FOR RIVERCANE

Mr. Roger Cain | United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians | Continued

## COULD YOU TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE HISTORY OF RIVERCANE?

River cane used to be abundant and dominate on the landscape of the southeastern United States with canebrake ecosystems stretching further out on the landscape than it is currently with an estimated only two percent of cane remaining in the country. It has served as an important ecological and cultural keystone species for the Woodland people both prehistorically and historically. For many tribes such as my own, river cane and the technology associated with it provided an essential way of life as it was utilized for our home construction both inside and out, lifeways such as canoes, baskets, bows, arrows, and cosmology. Much of our tribal knowledge and applications associated with this wonderful plant has been lost with the removal of our people from our homelands and subsequent loss/destruction of river cane on the landscape. Today, cane basketry, ceremonies, and blowguns are the predominant uses for river cane by tribal members.

River cane ecosystems provided hunting grounds and shelter for our people by creating barriers adjacent to our villages. Sources such as the Bartram accounts tell us that these barriers helped prevent raids on the villages as they were normally placed near canebreaks. The large ecosystems created the same for many creatures who continue to utilize the canebreaks for the same reason: for shelter, cover, and a calm/cool place to rest.

RIGHT: Photo of UKB's Rivercane Conservation truck showing the river cane plant as well as traditional river cane basketry, out in the field with the UKB Crew harvesting river cane for the annual Keetoowah Celebration.



# A PAST AND FUTURE FOR RIVERCANE

Mr. Roger Cain | United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians | Continued

## **WHY DOES RIVERCANE MATTER?**

River cane was what made the agriculture and ranching in the southeast so great! In the early parts of the 1800s and late 1700s, colonials realized that our Cherokee ancestors in our homelands had begun leasing out their canebrakes for livestock with great success. As the 1800s progressed, universities started touting the many benefits of livestock grazing on river cane and farmers realized the soil under canebrakes was best for agricultural uses. This was a fact that our ancestors already knew because this is where we often grew our corn and other crops. From then on, realty people touted how many acres of cane was on land for it to be considered a prime area for agriculture.

Little did the farmers and ranchers know that the river cane soil was also capable of trapping sediments and holding the banks together during flooding events. Rivercane is also a great filter for trapping phosphorous and nitrogen from surface and ground runoff. Academics studying this remarkable indigenous plant are also beginning to learn of rivercane's uses as a carbon sink.


## **WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE OF RIVERCANE? WHAT MESSAGE WOULD YOU WANT THOSE READING THIS TO COME AWAY WITH?**

My hopes for the future are that more people will know of river cane and its many positive contributions to the environment, as well as bring light to how Indigenous people are able to continue their traditional practices with canebreak ecosystems and technology.

Similarly, my message about river cane is that it is a cool indigenous bamboo that once created giant biomes all over the southeast and covered several thousands of acres. While this environment no longer exists, we need to do our best to protect the remaining cane on the landscape.

## TUCKABUM CREEK

Alabama's Largest Modern Rivercane  
Restoration Project

An aerial photograph showing a winding, dark brown creek cutting through a landscape of green vegetation and sandy banks. The creek meanders from the top right towards the bottom left of the frame.

On July 7, 2025, the CONSERVE team conducted a site visit at Tuckabum Creek near York, Alabama to assess the health of the largest rivercane restoration in Alabama state history. In February 2024, the CONSERVE team with help from our partners at the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Westervelt Ecological Services, and Rivercane Solutions LLC went out to Tuckabum Creek and transplanted several hundred native rivercane to the creek banks. Southeastern rivercane is one of the cornerstones of Alabama's ecosystem and serves many ecosystem services, including being a source of food for several species as well as helping control bank erosion. To learn more, catch our video on the restoration on our YouTube channel and at this [link](#)!



# Rivercane Activities in Western North Carolina (WNC)

Dr. Adam Griffith

Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians  
North Carolina Cooperative Extension

Since hurricane Helene ravaged streams in WNC, interest in rivercane has soared. Landowners, federal, state, local, and non-profit agencies have contacted our office ([EBCI Cooperative Extension](#)) seeking advice, partnership, or most commonly, access to plants. But the lack of nursery supply and high prices (7 gallon pots of cane approaching \$100 each) have encouraged property owners, non-profits, schools, HOAs, and more groups to take matters into their own hands. Through various partnerships with non-profits, we collectively have attempted to put rivercane back on the landscape using the [cane train method](#) developed and popularized by Laura Young ([VA Department of Conservation and Recreation](#)) through her work with the group Friends of the Cedars.



ABOVE: New cane shoots emerge from a single, 4" rhizome cutting using the Cane Train method.

## Yancey County Cane Train

Yancey County, NC was devastated by extreme flooding during hurricane Helene in the Fall of 2024. Many creeks, rivers, and streams were denuded of vegetation making them candidates for planting rivercane. Volunteer coordinators Jess Schaner and Jared Dubin emerged and facilitated partnerships with County officials, [Blue Ridge Resource Conservation and Development](#), [Beacon Network](#), and many others to plant rivercane seedlings. Volunteers from [RiverLink](#) and [Asheville Botanical Garden](#) stepped up to harvest rivercane rhizomes and grow out the tiny plants while Eric Bradford at [Asheville GreenWorks](#) assisted with access to sites. The cane train methodology is low-cost, simple, and easy to replicate making it perfect for crowdsourcing the planting of rivercane. Correctly [identifying rivercane](#) is critical to ensure the spread of a native species and it helps if the source of the plant material is close to the destination, ideally within the same watershed.

In total, about 1,000 culms of cane were planted along the banks of Yancey County streams with high hopes for the 2026 planting season. Volunteer smiles were plentiful and the project showed that many hands make light work.

RIGHT: Jared Durbin of the Beacon Network loads his truck with young cane shoots bound for the streambanks of Yancey County, NC.



RIGHT: Rivercane dug from Warren Wilson College awaits a new home at Lake Logan Camp and Conference Center in September, 2021.



### The Future of Cane

The EBCI Cooperative Extension stream restoration work we help facilitate is well situated in the broader NCSU Department of [Biological and Agricultural Engineering](#) (BAE): we have introduced rivercane to broader audiences through the [BAE low cost stream bank repair workshops](#) and provided plant material where appropriate. Western NC has always been a center of knowledge surrounding rivercane due to the presence of Cherokee people. In 2004, the [Revitalization of Traditional Cherokee Artisan Resources](#) project was launched and now is housed at the [Center for Native Health](#). The project has many priorities, but one is improving access to rivercane sites for harvesting purposes. The NCDOT and local energy providers such as Duke Energy and Progress Energy may prove to be important partners as local resource access continues to be an issue. These stakeholders are massive landholders in the WNC region and many others in the southeast. It is certainly an exciting time to be a fan of cane, and we are cautiously optimistic that in a few years, rivercane will be available at local nurseries for purchase. See you in the canebrakes!

### Warren Wilson College Partnership

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) Cooperative Extension office relies on many partnerships and has had a great relationship with [Warren Wilson College](#) (WWC) since approximately 2020. Mark Brenner (Professor of Biology - Emeritus) made the initial contact and since then, WWC students in Environmental Biology learn about the environmental benefits of cane. In lab, students dig cane rhizomes at locations where the cane is expanding into adjacent agricultural fields. The cane is then transplanted to areas where the cane is allowed to expand. In recent years, students transplanted cane in the Cherokee, NC area and saw traditional arts and crafts made by EBCI artisans at [Qualla Arts and Crafts](#) and attended the [Kanesegi Art and Fashion Show](#). This year is no different and the event date is November 8th, so plan to stop by if you're in the Cherokee, NC area.



LEFT: Warren Wilson College students dig rivercane at the college in 2021.

## RESTORING RIVERCANE: REVIVING A CULTURAL AND ECOLOGICAL KEYSTONE

by Austin Young | Tennessee River Gorge Trust | July 4, 2025

“As I admire the newly transplanted rivercane at the Tennessee River Gorge Trust’s Mike Linger Butterfly Meadow, I’m struck by the resilience of this native bamboo” says Austin Young of the Tennessee River Gorge Trust, echoing a sentiment that the Rivercane Restoration Alliance has heard from countless individuals across the country.

Read the full article [here!](#)



## COLLABORATION FOR RIVER CANE RESTORATION

by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service | July 9, 2025

“Sharing cultural crafts more broadly through education and outreach programming inspires others to continue preserving and caring for the natural world.” This article from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is a great piece that makes the case for rivercane restoration, large-scale cooperation, and increased awareness of rivercane through various means.

Read the full article [here!](#)



## WHAT IS RIVERCANE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

by Adam Griffith | EBCI NC Cooperative Extension | March 17, 2025

Dr. Adam Griffith has put together a myriad of resources for rivercane including articles detailing ecosystem benefits and a guide on how to identify native rivercane. However, for those who want a quick read that will give you a basic understanding of this amazing species, this article quickly but thoroughly highlights what exactly rivercane is and why its survival is of great importance to the southeast.

Read the full article [here!](#)





The official podcast of the Rivercane Restoration Alliance is now live! The *Reimagining Rivercane* podcast is hosted by Dr. Adam Griffith of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and North Carolina State University Cooperative Extension and sponsored by the CONSERVE research group. Episode 1 features Mr. Ryan Spring of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and Dr. Kathy Mathews of Western Carolina University discussing rivercane and its ecological significance. The full first episode can be found by clicking on the thumbnail above!

## Rivercane Podcast

## Rivercane Blog

The Rivercane Reflections blog features several articles reflecting on rivercane and its role in Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). The research blog can be found on the CONSERVE website and at this [link!](#)



# Rivercane Propagation

## HOW TO FIND AND PLANT NATIVE RIVERCANE SEEDS

This video provides step-by-step instructions on how to find and plant native rivercane seeds. This short tutorial is designed to support both the experienced and novice rivercane grower. Click on the thumbnail to the right to begin watching!

## HOW TO FIND AND PLANT NATIVE RIVERCANE SEEDS

A CULTURAL KEYSTONE SPECIES TUTORIAL  
# 3

SPONSORED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA CONSERVE RESEARCH GROUP AND THE RIVERCANE RESTORATION ALLIANCE

## HOW TO GROW NATIVE RIVERCANE FROM OLDER RHIZOME CUTTINGS

This video provides step-by-step instructions on how to grow native rivercane from older rhizome cuttings. This short tutorial is designed to support both the experienced and novice rivercane grower. Click on the thumbnail to the right to begin watching!



## HOW TO GROW NATIVE RIVERCANE FROM RHIZOMES

This video provides step-by-step instructions on how to grow native rivercane from rhizome stock. This short tutorial is designed to support both the experienced and novice rivercane grower. Click on the thumbnail to the right to begin watching!

## HOW TO GROW NATIVE RIVERCANE FROM RHIZOMES

A CULTURAL KEYSTONE SPECIES TUTORIAL

SPONSORED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA CONSERVE RESEARCH GROUP AND THE RIVERCANE RESTORATION ALLIANCE

Contact Us

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