



Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy

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Press Release

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\$95,000 grant helps SAHC preserve migratory bird habitat; Waterfalls, AT views protected in the Highlands of Roan

Avery County, NC- The Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC) has purchased two conservation priority tracts in the Roaring Creek Valley of the Highlands of Roan, preserving Golden-winged Warbler habitat, scenic views from the Appalachian Trail and pristine waterfalls.

A \$95,000 grant awarded under the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA), along with bridge loans from the Conservation Trust for North Carolina, the Will Henry Stevens Loan Fund and a substantial private donation, enabled SAHC to purchase these two tracts within three miles of each other for over half a million dollars.

Funds from the NMBCA grant assisted SAHC in the purchase of 62.5 acres of land in the nationally significant Roan Mountain Natural Heritage Area including 50 acres of rare neotropical migratory bird habitat. Recognizing the importance of conserving migratory birds, the Congress of the United States passed the NMBCA in 2000. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), with assistance from an international advisory group, manages a grants program to implement the terms of this legislation.

SAHC was chosen as one of 37 organizations throughout the Western Hemisphere to receive project funding for its efforts to restore and maintain Golden-winged Warbler habitat. More than \$4.9 million in NMBCA grants have been awarded in 2010 by the USFWS to support projects that promote the long-term conservation of neotropical migratory birds and their habitats in the United States, Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean.

“Until the property can be placed under the permanent stewardship of the U.S. Forest Service, SAHC will own and manage the tract as part of its Highlands of Roan focus area with the goal of maintaining the Golden-winged Warbler habitat and conducting research and monitoring onsite,” according to Jay Leutze, a Trustee for SAHC familiar with the property. “As a result of the proximity of this tract to Forest Service land and prominence in the viewshed of the Appalachian Trail, the USFS has long desired to work with SAHC to secure the tract to add it to Pisgah National Forest.”

The tract shares a mile long boundary with Pisgah National Forest, hosts nearly 7,000 feet of productive trout water and tributaries flowing off of U.S. Forest Service lands, and is part of a network of high-elevation protected lands in the Roan totaling 24,000 acres. Additionally, the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail crosses the eastern section of the property. “It’s rare that you have a tract that is so prominent in the viewshed of one national treasure, the Appalachian Trail, and has another

National Park Service unit, the Overmountain Victory Trail, passing through it,” said Leutze.

“This grant establishes an exciting new partnership between SAHC and the US Fish and Wildlife Service,” said Michelle Pugliese, SAHC Land Protection Director. “It only takes one visit to this property, surrounded on all sides by globally significant conservation lands, to see the critical connection between this property and the greater Roan landscape. We could not have come this far without the help of our partners. We are inviting the community to join SAHC on this property during our annual meeting in June, when I will be leading a hike through this beautiful landscape.”

Well-known for its grassy balds and rich spruce/fir forests, the high-elevation ecosystem of the Roan Massif is a biological and recreational treasure of the region. The landscape’s steep slopes are largely undeveloped and surrounded by large parcels of protected land, providing essentially a contiguous unbroken landscape.

Named the most scenic valley in America by *Backpacker Magazine* in 2007, “The Roaring Creek valley of the Highlands of Roan has an embarrassment of natural riches,” said Leutze. “From waterfalls that very few people have ever seen, to an extraordinary inventory of plant and animal life, and the nation’s most popular footpath, this is a key part of one of the premier conservation landscapes in the country. Some of the area is still at risk of poorly planned development but these two acquisitions represent critical pieces of a really special puzzle. Today we mark great progress toward our goal of preserving a very large and complex ecological unit.”

Both properties were on the real estate market and at risk of being sold for development. The 5-acre waterfall tract, further up the Roaring Creek Valley, was purchased out of foreclosure from Capital Bank and will be conveyed to the state of North Carolina as part of the new Yellow Mountain State Natural Area.

“We feel very fortunate that we were able to work out a good deal with the bank on this small but important parcel,” said Carl Silverstein, SAHC Executive Director. “In the case of Buggle Branch Falls, we owned most of the cascade from a prior acquisition but the top of the falls was at high risk of trophy-home development. That could have degraded the springs feeding the falls and would have spoiled a beautiful part of the new State Natural Area.”

About 9,000 acres, including some of the most ecologically important tracts of land remain at risk in the Highlands of Roan. Several high-priority sites near the Appalachian Trail are currently on the real estate market with more expected in the near future.

For a chance to visit these protected areas and to join the effort to protect the Southern Appalachians, come to SAHC’s annual membership event this June. SAHC will be hosting its annual June Jamboree the weekend of June 19 and 20 in Crossnore, NC. The event is open to the public. 600 acres of natural Catawba rhododendron gardens will be in bloom. There will be a native plant auction and an array of guided hikes to choose from, including hikes to visit these newly protected properties in the Highlands of Roan. For more information and to make reservations, visit www.appalachian.org.