

CONSERVATION PARTNERS ADD 2,600 ACRES TO BRIDGESTONE FIRESTONE CENTENNIAL WILDERNESS

Newly protected land located in high-priority conservation region & connects numerous public recreation areas

Sparta, TN, June 30, 2016 — The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) and The Land Trust for Tennessee are excited to announce the permanent protection of 2,600 acres within the historical Scott's Gulf — located in White and Van Buren Counties. The newly conserved property connects tens of thousands of acres of public recreation land in the area — including Bridgestone-Firestone Centennial Wilderness Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Virgin Falls State Natural Area, Fall Creek Falls State Park, Lost Creek State Natural Area and Bledsoe State Forest. The property also provides habitat for several rare and endangered species — including three federally listed species of bats as well as fish, mussels and plants. The long-reaching effects of this conservation project mark a major accomplishment for land and resource conservation in Tennessee.

“We are pleased to add this new acreage to the Bridgestone-Firestone Centennial Wilderness WMA,” says TWRA Director Ed Carter. “The land will provide needed conservation to several federally listed species and provide new recreational opportunity for outdoor enthusiasts.”

The Scott's Gulf region of the Cumberland Plateau is a rugged, scenic area of the state. The State of Tennessee has worked diligently with landowners and non-governmental organizations over the past decade to purchase land in the area to conserve its biological resources and beauty. Much of Scott's Gulf is located within the 10,000 acre Bridgestone Firestone Centennial Wilderness — a TWRA wildlife management area with waterfalls, 26 miles of hiking trails, overlooks of the Caney Fork River Gorge, public hunting access and primitive campgrounds.

The State of Tennessee purchased the property from landowners Bobby and Joy Cunningham, and The Land Trust for Tennessee was essential in finding additional funding and facilitating the deal. The Land Trust has been working with the Cunninghams and other family members since 2012 — starting with three conservation easements on 9,500 acres in Van Buren, White and Putnam Counties. The priority for the Cunninghams is that the land is available for public use for generations to come.

“This sale is made in honor of my father, the late Charles Robert [Bob] Cunningham,” explains Bobby Cunningham, who inherited the land from Bob. “He would be happy that so many visitors will now be able to use and enjoy this very special property.”

“The Land Trust for Tennessee is honored to work with the Cunninghams and TWRA on this crucial conservation purchase,” says Liz McLaurin, the president and CEO of The Land Trust. “It is incredible to see this private land go into public use for the Tennesseans of today and tomorrow to enjoy.”

In addition to state funds, this purchase was made possible with funding from a Recovery Land Acquisition Grant through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; a grant from the Open Space Institute's Southern Cumberland Land Protection Fund; and a gift from an anonymous donor. These grants were awarded to the project to protect habitat for the rare and endangered species found on the property.

“By connecting and linking some 60,000 acres of protected land, including the beloved Fall Creek Falls State Park, this project helps to ensure the integrity of large, intact forests and safeguards the many benefits for wildlife and people they provide,” explains Peter Howell, executive vice president of the Open Space Institute. “We salute The Land Trust for Tennessee, the State of Tennessee and their partners for their commitment to protecting this extraordinary region — a true jewel in the southeast.”

OSI’s funding for the project came from its Southern Cumberland Land Protection Fund, which provided a \$475,000 grant to the project. The mission of the Fund is to protect wildlife habitat and biodiversity by protecting large forest tracts in landscapes critical to facilitating wildlife adaptation to changes in temperature and precipitation.

ABOUT THE LAND TRUST FOR TENNESSEE

The Land Trust for Tennessee is an accredited, statewide non-governmental nonprofit organization founded in 1999 with offices in Nashville, Chattanooga and at Glen Leven Farm. The Land Trust has protected over 100,000 acres of treasured farmland, historic sites, open spaces, recreational areas and wildlife habitats across Tennessee. Visit www.LandTrustTN.org to learn more.