Service Looks to Expand Bog Conservation

Mountain purple pitcher plant, photo: Gary Peeples

Bog turtle

National Wildlife Refuges are lands managed by or in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the benefit of fish, wildlife, and plants.

Mountain Bogs National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was created on April 20, 2015 to support conservation of Southern Appalachian Mountain bogs, a rare habitat that is home to several imperiled plants and animals.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) focuses bog conservation efforts, including development of Mountain Bogs National Wildlife Refuge, on 30 sites, or Conservation Partnership Areas (CPAs) across the Southern Appalachians. In addition to acquiring land from willing landowners for inclusion in the refuge, the Service provides technical and financial support for private land stewardship. Landowner participation is completely voluntary. These Conservation Partnership Areas encompass 42,390 acres, of which the Service is authorized to acquire up to 23,478 acres for Mountain Bogs National Wildlife Refuge.

Proposed Mountain Bogs NWR Expansion

The Service proposes expanding five of the existing CPAs and creating two new ones, while increasing the acreage authorized for inclusion in Mountain Bogs NWR. The extent of the proposed expansion is yet to be determined. The Service considers the occurrence and distribution of rare species populations, conservation efforts by other organizations, and landowner interest during the expansion planning process.

Sites proposed for CPA creation or expansion

- Establish Box Creek CPA in McDowell and Rutherford Counties, which would include habitat for federally-protected bog turtles and several rare amphibian, bird, and plant species
- Establish the Black Rock CPA, in Macon County, to help conserve a population of the at-risk Southern Appalachian purple pitcher plant
- Expand the Bluff CPA in Ashe County to include newly discovered bog acreage adjacent to the original partnership area boundary
- Expand Sparta CPA in Alleghany County to include additional bog turtle habitat
- Expand Pinnacle CPA in Watauga County to include a recently-discovered maternity site for North Carolina's only endangered Virginia big-eared bat population
- Expand Three Peaks CPA in Watauga County to include the state-listed (threatened) Gray's lily habitat
- Expand Butt CPA in Henderson County to include include an endangered bunched arrowhead colony

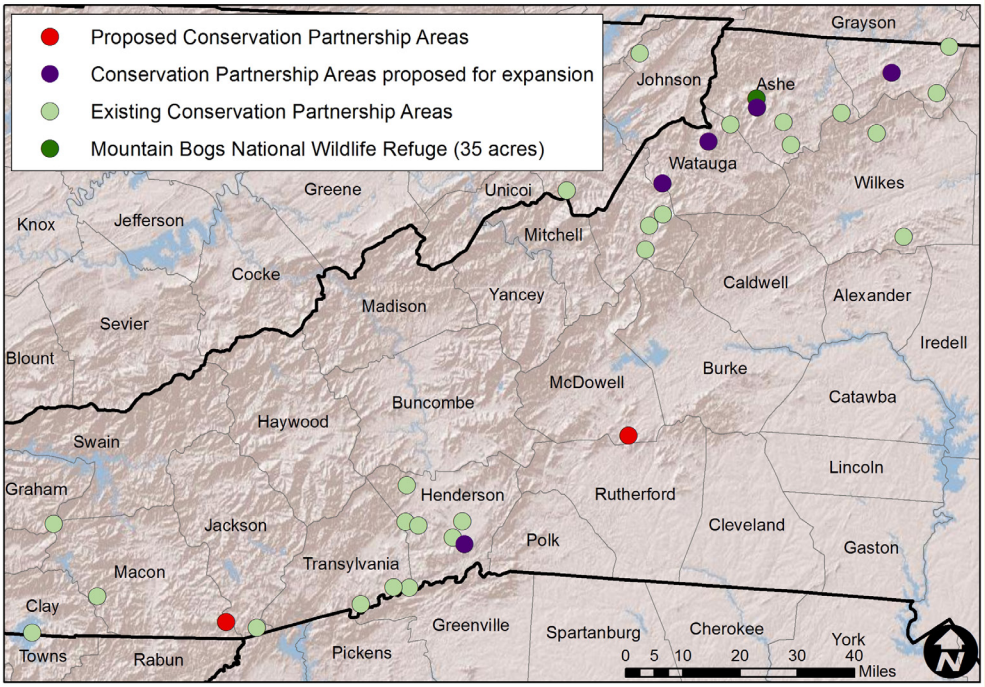
Why expand this effort?

Since Mountain Bogs NWR was established in 2015, we have heard from private landowners who have an intense interest in supporting the development of the refuge, including donating conservation easements. This expansion would allow us to take advantage of these and other opportunities to expand conservation of some of our nation's rarest plants and animals.

What does this mean for plants and wildlife?

- Including these areas in Conservation Partnership Areas would expand our ability to help conserve numerous rare plants and animals:
  - Four federally threatened or endangered species – bunched arrowhead, bog turtle, northern long-eared bat and Virginia big-eared bat.

Potential Mountain Bogs Conservation Partnership Area Expansion Sites



Bunched arrowhead, photo: Gary Peeples

- Five species under consideration for the federal endangered species list – Southern Appalachian purple pitcher plant, eastern hellbender, little brown bat, South Mountains gray-cheeked salamander, and tri-colored bat.
- Fifteen additional rare plants and animals of federal conservation concern.

■ This expansion would help us conserve the area between the South Mountains, which includes South Mountains State Park and South Mountains State Gamelands, and Pisgah National Forest.

What does this mean for landowners?
For landowners interested in working with the Service, this opens opportunities, ranging from partnering to support private land stewardship to selling or donating land to the Fish and Wildlife Service for Mountain Bogs National Wildlife Refuge. The Service's ability to purchase land largely depends on two factors: 1) whether we have funding to purchase land, and 2) whether there is a landowner willing to sell land. Although we may eventually purchase some of this land, funding is extremely limited. Any partnership with the Service is completely voluntary.

What does this mean for outdoor recreation?
CPAs are simply places where we focus bog conservation efforts. If we acquire land by purchase or donation, it would become part of Mountain Bogs National Wildlife Refuge. However, in the near term, we expect a majority of the lands within CPAs to remain in private ownership, with the landowner controlling use and access.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Mountain Bogs National Wildlife Refuge

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