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Grant awarded to conservancy groups

From Staff Reports

Hendersonville-based Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy and four other land preservation groups in Western North Carolina have been awarded \$1.7 million in grants to help protect 901 acres of farmland in the region.

The North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund allocated the funds June 23.

"In Western North Carolina, we are rapidly losing our farmland to development," said Phyllis Stiles, campaign director for the Blue Ridge Forever Coalition. "North Carolina is lucky to have the Farmland Preservation Trust Fund. These grants are an important tool in preserving working farms."

North Carolina leads the nation in farm loss, having lost more than 6,000 farms and 300,000 acres of farmland since 2002. Western North Carolina land trusts have protected 124 working farms comprising 15,150 acres. About 12,000 working farms remain in Western North Carolina.

The Farmland Trust Fund grants bring the land trusts one step closer to permanently protecting these 901 additional acres of farmland, according to Stiles. To receive the funds, the land trust must raise matching funds.

Blue Ridge Rural Land Trust, Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina, High Country Conservancy and Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy were also awarded grant funds.

"We're very pleased to be able to help communities in their efforts to preserve farmland and forest land," North Carolina Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler said. "Our main focus is to maintain working farms and create new opportunities in agriculture."

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