

## Campaign Focus Area 21

# The Little Tennessee River Valley

Acre for acre the Little Tennessee River Valley has a richer combined natural and cultural history than any other area of its size in the nation. Draining the highest rainfall area in the East, the waters flowing from the Nantahala and Cowee Mountains form a magnificent river meandering across broad alluvial plains that have been farmed for thousands of years. Historically the center of the mountain Cherokee, the Little Tennessee represents one of modern America's greatest conservation opportunities.



Photo: Ralph Preston

## A Threatened Cultural Landscape with Exceptional Natural Heritage

The Little Tennessee River is one of the state's most pristine waterways, containing a multitude of rare ecological communities. The mountains surrounding the valley are cloaked by the most diverse temperate hardwood forests on earth. This "Noah's Ark" of Blue Ridge rivers is threatened as historic farmlands and headwater forests are converted to residential subdivisions. Over the past 25 years urban areas more than doubled in the area and farmland has declined by over 28%.

### Biological Diversity

This Little Tennessee River valley is globally significant because, outside of the tropics, it is where the most species-rich river system (the Tennessee) intertwines with the richest deciduous forests on earth. The 25-mile reach of free-flowing river below Franklin is the aquatic biodiversity "hotspot" of the southern Blue Ridge and is home to over half the freshwater fish and mussel species in the State. Also more than half of Western North Carolina's rare plants are found in the valley which is home to a rare assemblage of federally listed aquatic, amphibian, reptile, mammal, and plant species.



Spotfin Chub



### Cultural Heritage

The Little Tennessee retains the most intact archeological landscape of the Cherokee. Ancient Cowee was the main commercial & diplomatic center of the southern Blue Ridge in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when first British and then Colonial ambitions clashed with the native people for control of this region. Today the Cowee/West's Mill Historic District includes a 1400-year span of historic structures unequalled in North Carolina. Mountain farmsteads still dot the valley, the home of the Foxfire movement.

### Economic Significance

A traditional rural economy based upon forest & farm production is transitioning to an economy dependent upon quality of life measures such as access to clean water, stunning views, open space and a rural lifestyle. Recreation, tourism & service industries are growing as is the construction industry for retirees, seasonal residents, and others tied to economic activities emanating from growing metropolitan areas within 120 miles of the valley.



Photo: Ralph Preston

# Little Tennessee River Valley

Since 1999 the Land Trust for the Little Tennessee has led in the protection of 5,300 acres and 35 miles of river frontage on the Little Tennessee, in collaboration with two national partners -The Nature Conservancy and The Conservation Fund. During that time with \$2.5 million of private funds, LTLT has leveraged \$19.4 million of public funds, \$880,000 of Cherokee Tribal funds, and over \$5.61 million of donated interests in land to total over \$27.5 million of land value conserved along the Little Tennessee River. In other words, this extraordinary river corridor conservation effort has leveraged \$11 in conservation land value for every \$1 of private funds available. In addition LTLT has conserved another 650 acres of land on tributary streams and headwater forests in the valley. Another 1,300 acres of this landscape, valued at \$7.8 million, is at immediate risk and targeted for protection by 2010.

Fifty-four aquatic and terrestrial natural areas are located in the Little Tennessee River Valley, twenty of which have national significance. These habitats are priorities in the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), a comprehensive plan developed by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and many partners to help conserve the state's wildlife and their habitats.



The Needmore tract is shown here as state property after having been conveyed to the State by LTLT & TNC.

## Leave Your Legacy

There are few ways that you can leave a greater legacy than through land conservation. Please consider a tax-deductible gift to preserve the magnificent landscape of the Little Tennessee valley. Each donation brings us one step closer to conserving this veritable Noah's Ark for our great-grandchildren and beyond.

*Financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the State Solicitation Licensing Branch at 888-830-4989. The license is not an endorsement by the state.*

### Proposed Funding Plan for Protecting an Additional 1,300 Acres

NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund	\$2,000,000
NC Natural Heritage Trust Fund	\$1,000,000
Donated Land Interests	\$1,800,000
Private Donations	\$3,000,000
<b>FUNDING GOAL</b>	<b>\$7,800,000</b>



**LTLT**  
*Land Trust for the Little Tennessee*

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The Land Trust for the Little Tennessee (LTLT) conserves the waters, forests, farms and heritage of the upper Little Tennessee and Hiwassee River valleys. Since its inception in 1997, LTLT has led in the conservation of over 10,000 acres including: 35 miles of river frontage on the free-flowing Little Tennessee; 50 miles of river, stream, and reservoir frontage surrounding the confluence of the Little Tennessee and Cheoah Rivers; three municipal watersheds; and 12 other parcels of land buffering national parks and national forest lands. LTLT's cultural heritage work to date includes the conservation of four historic farms, the nomination of the Cowee/Wests Mill Historic District to the National Register, the purchase of the T.M. Rickman General Store in Wests Mill, and the conservation of the Cowee Mound - returning it to historic Cherokee control. LTLT serves Macon, Swain, Jackson, Graham, Clay, and Cherokee Counties in North Carolina and northern Rabun County in Georgia.

**Blue Ridge Forever**  
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*A Campaign Spearheaded by 13 Conservation Organizations to Protect 50,000 Acres of the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains by 2010*