



## Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy

34 Wall Street, Suite 502, Asheville, NC 28801-2710 Telephone: 828.253.0095 Website: [appalachian.org](http://appalachian.org)

### Press Release

---

For Immediate Release  
24 September 2009

Contact: Kristina Tarasan  
828-253-0095 x 205  
[Kristina@appalachian.org](mailto:Kristina@appalachian.org)

---

#### **SAHC Protects 500-Acre Farm in Western North Carolina**

**Buncombe County, NC-** The Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy recently permanently protected the historic Bee Branch farm through a conservation easement. The 500-acre working farm adds to over 6,000 acres that SAHC has previously protected in the Sandy Mush Township of Buncombe County.

“I believe this conservation easement serves to protect not only the scenic viewshed, but also the historic and natural habitat values of this property; and, most importantly, a viable farm when we are losing farm land in North Carolina, and specifically Buncombe County, at an alarming rate,” said Terri Wells, one of the family members.

The Bee Branch farm is located within the southern Blue Ridge Mountain Physiographic Province, and more specifically, within the Newfound Mountains. Elevations on the farm range from approximately 2,280 feet along Willow Creek to approximately 4,200 feet at Sheep Pen Knob.

“It’s a peaceful feeling to know this farm will be protected forever and remain in its natural state for present and future generations,” said Keith Wells, one of the landowners. “I’d hate to see the mountains destroyed and the scenic views hurt. I feel good about it; I would encourage other landowners to do the same.”

The farm is within the French Broad River Watershed and includes about 40,700 linear feet of Bee Branch, Willow Creek and their unnamed tributaries. Bee Branch is a tributary of Willow Creek, which flows into Sandy Mush Creek, which is a direct tributary of the French Broad River.

The Bee Branch is a multigenerational farm. It has been in the family for nine generations. This farmstead is an integral piece of Buncombe County's history. Historically, the Wells family has grown tobacco and hay and grazed cattle. This tract is enrolled in the Voluntary Agricultural District program, and the Well's family will maintain the property as a working landscape for agricultural enterprises.

"Parts of this land have been farmed by our family for over 200 years, some of it dating back to 1807," said Wells. "A portion of the farm was received by State Grant in 1815, and one cabin on the property is pre-civil war era."

This 500-acre farm contains a prominent ridgeline, visible from Sandy Mush valley and the surrounding area. Protecting this ridgeline is an important part of preserving the beloved mountain skyline of Buncombe County.

"It is real good to know the Bee Branch will stay a farm forever," said Pearl Wells, one of the landowners. "I was raised on this farm and have lived here most of my years. This farm is something my Mother and Daddy worked hard for, and I want to keep it that way for my family and future generations."

North Carolina lost 1,000 farms in 2005—tying Florida and Tennessee for the most farms lost in the nation according to the United States Department of Agriculture. Less than 50,000 farms now exist in North Carolina compared to 300,000 in 1950. Developed land in the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains has increased by more than 77 percent in the last two decades and is expected to increase as the region's population continues to rise.

"SAHC has been a professional and knowledgeable organization and a pleasure to work with on this important project," said Wells. "I hope others will appreciate the long-term value of these easements and consider protecting their farmland as my family did."

When landowners donate voluntary conservation easements, they enter a perpetual written agreement (conservation easement) between a qualified conservation organization or public agency and the landowner. This enables landowners to protect their land, maintain ownership of it, and many times realize significant tax savings. The agreement runs with the land—which means the land can be sold, but will be bound to the conservation easement and therefore permanently protected.

The Bee Branch is part of a network of thousands of acres of conservation easements and land held by SAHC, including the nearby 256-acre Pardue family conservation easement, 873-acre Canton watershed conservation easement, 600-acre Sandy Mush Bald conservation easement, 138-acre Bill Duckett conservation easement, 400-acre Jayne conservation easement, and 500-acre Hearne family easement, just to name a few.