



## Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy

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### Press Release

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#### Local Land Trust Acquires Two Priority Tracts in the Highlands of Roan

**Avery County, NC**—The end of 2008 proved to be a success in land conservation in the Highlands of Roan. Two priority tracts that adjoin the Pisgah National Forest and are within the Appalachian Trail (AT) corridor were permanently protected for clean water, wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities. The protection of this 163 acres, adds to a decades-long legacy of land conservation in the Highlands of Roan — the landmark landscape and conservation priority of the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy since the organization began in 1974.

The 113-acre Elk Hollow Branch Tract, located in the Roaring Creek Valley of Avery County, contains two meadows that provide habitat for the Golden-winged Warbler, which is listed as “Significantly Rare” on the N.C. Natural Heritage Program List of Rare Animals. With only five Golden-winged Warbler populations identified in the region, preserving the species’ habitat is crucial to its survival. Biologists with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission see the purchase of this tract as a significant advancement toward achieving the goals set forth in the State Wildlife Action Plan.

“Working with SAHC was absolutely phenomenal,” said Lisa Beck, one of the landowners. “I have never come across anyone who has done everything so professional in a family like matter. This beautiful mountain property was handed down from my great-grandmother to my mother to my brothers and me—so we felt like we were handing our property down to another generation of family to take care of it.”

The property includes a portion of Roaring Creek and Elk Hollow Branch, a tributary of Roaring Creek that runs through more than 6,000 feet on the tract and are designated by N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission as Wild Trout Waters and contain a rich diversity of salamanders.

“The protection of our family land is invaluable,” said Beck. “We know we can always go and see the property and that it will look the same in 20 years as it does now.”

The Elk Hollow Branch Tract is historically significant because the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail (OVNHT) runs adjacent to it. The OVNHT is a 330-mile trail that traverses four states from Virginia to South Carolina, retracing the path of the patriot militia to their victorious battle at King's Mountain.

The 49-acre Rumpf Tract, located in the Cranberry Township of Avery County, contains headwater streams that flow into the Elk River, which is classified as Wild Trout Water by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. It is also located in the globally significant Roan Mountain Massif Natural Heritage Area, the Audubon Society's Important Bird Area, and connectivity to Roan Mountain. This ecological corridor contains one of the most significant clusters of rare species and natural communities in the Southern Appalachians.

"All you see is wildlife and streams that run through the property," said Kenneth Rumpf, one of the landowners. "You forget about all the town life, you're just in another world. It's God's country. It's wonderful; there is no building on it. Thanks to SAHC, the property will remain pristine and private forever. It will be the same now as it will be in a 100 years."

The property containing a rare high mountain community of northern hardwood forests, rises to 4,500 feet elevation on Hump Mountain and contains the headwaters of White Oak Creek, which flows into Cranberry Creek and the Elk River. It's located one mile from the Cranberry Iron Mine bat habitat, a state significant Natural Heritage Area that contains the endangered Virginia Big-Eared Bats, and one half mile from Belview Mountain Slopes, a county significant Natural Heritage Area.

"These two recent success stories in our Highlands of Roan focus area are a testament to the dedication of our conservation partners in the region," said Michelle Pugliese, SAHC's Land Protection Director. "SAHC's ability to act quickly and work with the families that own these special tracts of land enabled us to permanently preserve and protect these two critical pieces and add to our conservation puzzle in the Roan."

Both tracts are located within the nationally significant Roan Mountain Massif Natural Heritage Area, which includes the Appalachian Trail, the Pisgah National Forest, and the Big Yellow Mountain Preserve. SAHC's new acquisitions in the Roan establish continuity of protected land in its highest priority focus area, the Highlands of Roan.

"These projects are good examples of how the State Wildlife Action Plan is being put to use by our conservation partners to achieve conservation on the ground," said Chris McGrath, Wildlife Diversity Coordinator with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. "The plan is not just another government document on a shelf in Raleigh; it provides meaningful guidance to partners and leverages resources to accomplish important conservation actions. Further, it facilitates closer cooperation among conservation organizations and agencies to achieve more than any of us could achieve on our own."

The purposes of the State Wildlife Action Plan, completed by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission in 2005, include conserving and enhancing habitats and communities supporting North Carolina's species diversity, and educating the general public and conservation stakeholders about North Carolina's wildlife resources.

The Elk Hollow Branch Tract and Rumpf Tract victories were made possible by private funds, loans from the Will Henry Steven's Revolving Loan Fund, The Community Foundation, and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. SAHC received grants from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. SAHC is currently seeking grants to repay these loans.

Forming partnerships with landowners and other organizations has been the key to the organization's success. The founders of SAHC laid the groundwork and forged relationships with landowners on Roan to set the bar for future land conservation, and the SAHC staff continues this work today.