



Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy

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Press Release

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SAHC Protects Farmland in the Sandy Mush Community

Buncombe County, NC- The Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC) continues its work of safeguarding North Carolina's unique natural resources and scenic beauty with its recent purchase of 76 acres in Sandy Mush Township, Buncombe County.

The property was placed under conservation easement in May of 2009 and is located in the Sandy Mush farming community, within the Newfound Mountains. Protecting this area was made possible by a grant from the Buncombe County Land Conservation Advisory Board and generous support from SAHC members Brad and Shelli Stanback along with other individuals in the Sandy Mush community.

These newly preserved acres are in close proximity to several SAHC protected tracts within the Newfound Mountains, adding connectivity among these protected landscapes. Linking these habitats is significant as it provides larger ranges for species, promoting plant and animal diversity.

Providing a shelter of predominately Oak-Hickory Forest, the property will continue to be a refuge for many animals including black bear, beaver, birds of prey and many migratory bird species. According to the North Carolina Wildlife Action Plan, "The importance of oak forest to wildlife of the region cannot be overstated...the wildlife food production capacity of oak forests is immense." The land also contains an area of Eastern Hemlock Forest.

While over half of the property is forested, the remaining portion is used primarily as farmland. Landowner, William Duckett, said that his family has owned the land for several generations and has used the land for farming since the early 1900s.

Duckett recalls, "When I was growing up people lived off the land. We had chickens and hogs and my grandparents had sheep and ducks. It was like a zoo!"

William grew up on the property with his sister Myrtle Duckett, who now lives in a nursing home. Myrtle has Alzheimer's disease, but William believes that she would be glad to know that the land is being protected. The revenue from the property helps with the costs of Myrtle's care and it would seem that the land is finding yet another way to give back to the family that has cared for it for over 200 years.

That is only one of the compelling reasons that the Ducketts have for deciding to protect the land. "Whatever happens [to the land] won't affect me much," said William. "I'm 74. It's the kids and grandkids. They helped in this decision."

William and his wife Mabel talk proudly about their two sons who continue to farm the land and their 16 year old granddaughter who loves to be involved in the farm, especially helping with the cattle. It is clear from their smiles that conserving their land was a decision made thinking of the betterment of their children's future.

Conservation of the property also results in the protection of tributary streams of the French Broad River Watershed, keeping the water from sources of sedimentation and other types of pollution. A network of streams, seeps, and springs runs throughout the property and feeds Robinson Creek, a tributary of Sandy Mush Creek which flows into the French Broad River.

Robinson Creek and Sandy Mush Creek are both classified as "Class C Waters" by the North Carolina Division of Water Quality, indicating that they are protected for recreation, fishing, wildlife, biological integrity, and agriculture. Sandy Mush Creek is also classified as trout waters, which means it has water quality that is high enough to sustain trout populations and provide conditions that allow for trout propagation.

SAHC is a non-profit, charitable organization whose mission is to protect the world's oldest mountains for the benefit of present and future generations. The land trust works with individuals and local communities to identify, preserve, and manage the region's important lands. In the last three decades, SAHC and its 1,500 members have helped ensure the protection of more than 40,000 acres throughout the mountain region, including key sites adjacent to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, along the Blue Ridge Parkway, and in the Highlands of Roan. The SAHC headquarters are in Asheville. To learn more about SAHC and how to join the effort to protect the future of the southern mountains visit www.appalachian.org.