



Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy

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Press Release

For Immediate Release
2 December 2009

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Foundation Grants Will Help The Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy Preserve Local Farms and Clean Water

Buncombe County, NC- The Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC) has been awarded grants from the Janirve Foundation and the Pigeon River Fund of The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina to support its efforts to preserve local working farms and protect water quality.

The Janirve Foundation awarded SAHC an \$18,000 grant to support its Farmland Preservation Initiative. Through this initiative, SAHC has already protected over 3,000 acres of working farms in Buncombe, Madison, and Haywood Counties. The Janirve grant will enable SAHC to reach out to additional farmers in agricultural communities such as Sandy Mush, Fairview, and Spring Creek, and complete conservation easements on farms in those communities.

A conservation easement is a voluntary agreement a landowner can enter with an organization such as SAHC, in which the landowner agrees not to convert the property to a real estate development, but continues to own and use the land as they have been doing. Landowners who enter conservation easement agreements can potentially qualify for federal and state income tax benefits. This makes conservation easements a powerful tool for preserving farms in the mountains.

Protecting working farms now is critical because farmland is disappearing in western North Carolina at an alarming rate. In the last two decades North Carolina has lost 2.37 million acres of crop and forest land due to intense real estate development. In the span of five years from 2002 to 2007, Buncombe County alone lost 10% of its farms to development and 24% of its farmland acreage.

“We are pursuing this initiative in order to work with outstanding family farms in the region now before the opportunity is lost, and help families preserve their farms for future generations,” said Carl Silverstein, Executive Director of SAHC. “These farms play a central role in the visual and cultural landscape of our region, which is key to economic development. Retaining places to grow food locally is also important.”

The Janirve Foundation is a private grant-making foundation established by the late Irving J. Reuter, an executive in the automobile industry. Janirve has a strong commitment to land and water conservation and has supported SAHC in the past in its efforts to preserve clean drinking water, wildlife habitat, farms and scenic landscapes in the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains.

The Pigeon River Fund has awarded SAHC a \$25,000 grant to support the organization working with farmers in the Spring Creek community in Madison County. The objective of this focused effort is to secure conservation easements that protect and improve water quality in Spring Creek and its tributaries.

The Pigeon River Fund of The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina was created by the State of North Carolina and Progress Energy to improve water quality in the streams and rivers of Haywood, Buncombe and Madison counties. The fund provides grants to nonprofit and public agencies that improve surface water quality, enhance fish and wildlife habitat, expand public access and increase awareness about protecting these resources.

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 nearly 50,000 acres throughout the mountain region, including key sites adjacent to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, along the Blue Ridge Parkway, in the Highlands of Roan and in the Sandy Mush farming community. 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.