

State, Conservancy Connect the Cumberlands, Saving 200 Square Miles of Forest

Largest conservation project in Tennessee since the Great Smoky Mountains National Park



A view of the Tennessee forests that were protected in the transaction.

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Nashville, TN — Nov. 8, 2007 — The Nature Conservancy and the state of Tennessee, teaming with two timber companies, have completed the [largest land protection deal in Tennessee](#) since the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

In June, the Tennessee legislature passed Governor Phil Bredesen's \$27.8 billion state budget proposal, which included \$82 million to fund the protection of 127,854 acres on the Cumberland Plateau.

The Cumberlands initiative is intended to connect the forestlands in Scott, Campbell, Anderson and Morgan counties with 66,000 acres of existing public lands, creating a protective corridor for wildlife as well as preserving a natural sanctuary for the public. The contiguous public landholdings involved in the project area are the Frozen Head State Natural Area, the Sundquist Wildlife Management Area and the Royal Blue Wildlife Management Area.

Scientists have ranked the Cumberland Plateau as globally significant for its diversity of plant and animal species. The area harbors increasingly rare species of bats, salamanders, fish and other creatures. Migratory songbirds in particular rely on these forestlands for habitat in spring and summer. In addition, large, wide-ranging mammals such as elk and black bear are sheltered here.

With the support of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Tucker Foundation, The Nature Conservancy has been focused on finding ways to protect this biologically rich and scenic area. Tennessee's State Wildlife Action Plan — developed cooperatively by the Conservancy and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency in 2005-06 — clearly

points to this northern Cumberland Plateau/Cumberland Mountains region as a priority for protecting at-risk wildlife species.

“This initiative will allow us to protect majestic woodlands on the northern Cumberland Plateau, which are some of the most important forests, mountains, streams and wildlife habitats left in North America,” Governor Bredesen has said.

The acquisition involved a sophisticated mix of fee title, conservation easements and timber rights in Scott, Campbell, Morgan and Anderson Counties. To accomplish this enormous undertaking, the state of Tennessee joined with The Nature Conservancy, Conservation Forestry LLC and Lyme Timber Company in an innovative partnership leveraging private equity with state and nonprofit funding.

The Nature Conservancy is contributing \$13 million to the project, while the two timber companies have invested \$40.2 million.

As part of the agreement, Conservation Forestry and Lyme Timber will acquire about 66,000 acres of forestland. Innovative working forest conservation easements, crafted by the Department of Environment and Conservation and The Nature Conservancy, will keep 42,075 acres of these acres open to the public for recreation and guide forest management in a sustainable manner, ensuring that the forests remain healthy and diverse and continue to provide forest products and important forest industry jobs. About 23,000 acres purchased by Conservation Forestry and Lyme Timber will not be included in the conservation easements.

Conservation of the property by the partnership will ensure that:

- working forestland is protected, sustaining forest-based jobs and the industry around them well into the future;
- current and future generations will continue to enjoy access to the property for recreation;
- the forests are well-managed, remaining healthy and intact, which will help maintain water quality for some 30,000 people in local communities that depend upon these watersheds as well as deter floods and erosion; and
- rare ecological lands are added to state ownership and protected for future generations.

Another component of the transaction was the acquisition of timber rights for 75,000 acres at Sundquist Wildlife Management Area that will be leased to Lyme Timber for 10 years. The forest management will also be subject to sustainable timber management restrictions.

“This is the kind of opportunity that doesn’t occur very often,” said Scott Davis, director of the Tennessee Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. “We have to seize this moment to protect one of the last great places left in the Tennessee — not only for us, but for future generations.”