

LIVING LANDS

Helping Land Trusts Conserve Biodiversity



NEWSLETTER

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Living Lands
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Conserve Biodiversity*

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USING CONSERVATION FORESTRY TO PRESERVE A LEGACY

An update from a 2008 Living Lands Biodiversity Grant Recipient

By Donna Alexander



Fall on Pine Mountain *Photo courtesy of KNLT*

In 1995, a grand discovery was made on a hidden tract of land within the vast 110-mile forested corridor of Pine Mountain in southeastern Kentucky. This more than 3,000-acre tract, known today as the Blanton Forest State Nature Preserve, is the largest old-growth remnant forest remaining in the state. Mixed mesophytic forests like Blanton represent the most diverse hardwood forests remaining on Earth-- a habitat type that once dominated Kentucky's Appalachian Plateau and survives on much of Pine Mountain today.

Around this discovery, a land trust was formed. The then nascent Kentucky Natural Lands Trust (KNLT) successfully raised \$3 million to purchase this old-growth tract before transferring it to the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission. Blanton Forest now

enjoys the highest protection status available for public lands in the state of Kentucky. The success and overwhelming support for this project gave KNLT the momentum to continue its conservation efforts in Kentucky.

Today, KNLT's 16-member Board of Directors, three full-time staff members and many partners have preserved thousands of acres of forestland in southeastern Kentucky, with a special emphasis on the biologically rich ridge of Pine Mountain.

Protecting a Legacy

The Pine Mountain Legacy Project is a landscape level undertaking focused on protecting one of the largest contiguous blocks of forestland remaining in Kentucky. A true gem, Pine Mountain already boasted significant

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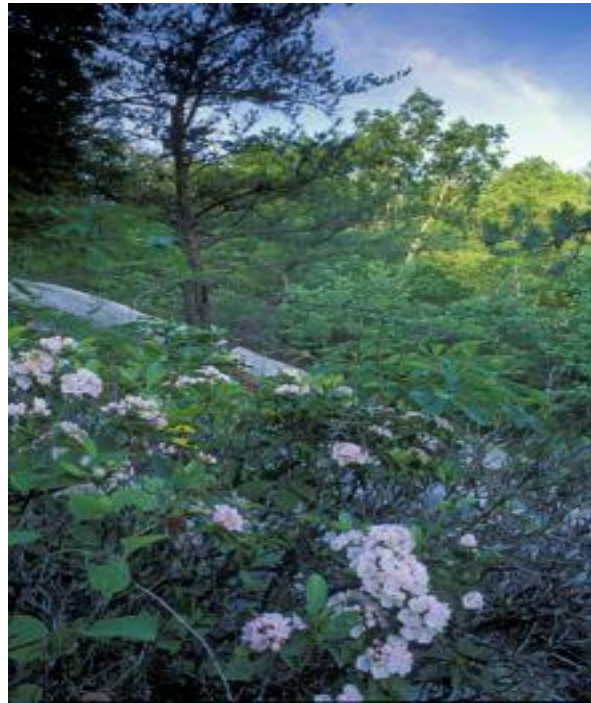
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public conservation acreage. Crossed by only six paved roads, the mountain's 150,000 acres are a refuge for a third of Kentucky's rare and endangered plant and animal species, including the endangered Indiana bat. Further, its uninterrupted ridgeline provides a migratory corridor for terrestrial wildlife and birds.

The Pine Mountain Legacy Project aims to maintain the largely intact forestlands blanketing this ridge. With it, they will preserve a rare and intact ecosystem as well as a vital north/south migratory corridor that is becoming increasingly important for species impacted by climate change.

A Conservation Vision

KNLT's protection strategy hinges on two primary mechanisms—protect highly sensitive ecological areas through land acquisition and maintain surrounding lands through conservation forestry easements. To date, this has been an effective strategy since KNLT has been able to purchase large blocks of important rural land in the region for \$400 to \$700 per acre. Even at these prices their mission is not to acquire everything, however, but rather to reach out to the numerous smaller acreage landowners to engage them in their conservation vision.



Forests on Pine Mountain

Photo courtesy of KNLT

Most smaller tracts (1 to 40 acres) are owned by private individuals engaged in non-industrial timber operations. The growing and processing of privately grown timber is one of the largest agricultural and natural resource industries in Kentucky, which ranks in the top three hardwood-lumber-producing states in the country. Despite the importance of this industry to the region, forest management assistance and education for private landowners is minimal. KNLT aims to fill this role, recognizing that by meeting the needs of these individuals, landowners can become important players in landscape-scale conservation.

Building a Conservation Forestry Community

With support from a number of funders, including a Living Lands Biodiversity Grant, and a partnership with MACED (Mountain Association for Community Economic Development), KNLT is promoting a new conservation forestry program to private forest managers in the region. Conservation forestry emphasizes the importance of soil and water quality, ecological diversity, wildlife habitat and overall forest health, while producing high-value timber

products for a wide range of commercial opportunities.

KNLT has developed a pilot project that will assist low-to-moderate-income landowners in realizing greater economic and environmental benefits from their forestlands. Through this pilot, MACED has become an aggregator with the Chicago Climate Exchange (CCX), a voluntary, legally binding greenhouse gas reduction and trading system. As an approved CCX offset aggregator, MACED will enroll thousands of acres of private forested land in eastern Kentucky and central Appalachia in a carbon sequestration project that promotes conservation forestry and offers alternative annual income for landowners through carbon offset projects.

KNLT is launching their Conservation Forestry Project on Daniel's Mountain, a 700-acre tract of historically mismanaged timberland that will serve as a demonstration forest. They have certified and enrolled the tract through MACED and will receive reimbursement for the carbon offsets from the CCX. KNLT will draft language for working forest conservation easements, target landowners interested in managing their forest land in conservation-minded ways and teach them the management steps needed to improve forest health and timber quality. The management recommendations

and working forest conservation easement language developed through this project will be used by forest landowners on Pine Mountain and ultimately by land managers throughout the state and nationally.

A Win-Win-Win

Through the conservation forestry project, KNLT is able to demonstrate that conservation forestry practices have both economic as well as biodiversity value. A true win-win-win for landowners, wildlife and our environment, this project is preserving local economies and culture, absorbing harmful carbon from our atmosphere and maintaining a vital migratory corridor with some of the most biologically diverse forest habitats in the world. And this is only the beginning. KNLT plans to use its experience on Pine Mountain to promote conservation forestry throughout the state and to assist other land trusts in using it to achieve landscape-scale conservation.

Donna Alexander is the program manager of the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust. For more information, please visit www.knlt.org/

2009 BIODIVERSITY GRANT FUNDING AVAILABLE!

Applications due by January 16th, 2009

Thanks to generous support from the Biophilia Foundation, the Living Lands Project will continue to offer small grants to local land trusts working on projects with high biodiversity value on private lands. The Living Lands Biodiversity Grants Program has been supporting land trusts since 2007. Grants support projects that lead to permanent protection, habitat restoration and/or management of native wildlife habitat and biodiversity on a specific property. Proposals requesting support for projects that include one or more of the following objectives will be considered:

Photo courtesy of Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy



Blazing Star growing in rare fen habitat

and hardwoods. The project will familiarize the land trust with restoration and management techniques that will build their capacity to do similar projects in the future.

Remove a Barrier

Resolve a short term but major obstacle in a current project with high biodiversity value. Project suggestions include: complete an appraisal, conduct a biological survey or wetland delineation, or develop a land management or protection plan.

Example Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy will use a Living Lands grant to develop an acquisition and stewardship plan to ensure conservation of the endangered

Build Capacity

Develop new skills relevant to wildlife and habitat conservation that can be applied to an existing project and that will build capacity for future projects. Project suggestions include development of an easement document or conservation plan that includes habitat restoration and management of at-risk habitat or hiring a professional contractor to provide training in habitat restoration techniques.

Example Black Swamp Conservancy will use a 2008 Living Lands grant to embark on their first major restoration project. They will restore a 252-acre parcel with significant biodiversity value from agricultural land to native grasses

Mitchell's satyr butterfly habitat and to offset appraisal costs of a 190-acre priority conservation area that supports numerous species and habitats identified by the Michigan State Wildlife Action Plan.

Restore Habitat

Restore or manage significant or threatened habitat listed in a state or regional wildlife plan. Working landscapes in need of restoration and management are of particular interest.

Example The Teton Regional Land Trust used a 2007 Living Lands grant to restore riparian habitat along one mile of the Teton River in Idaho. This project is occurring on a 200-acre working cattle ranch protected by a conservation easement with assistance from the landowners. The land trust intends to use the project as a demonstration site for restoration on other easement properties in the region.

How to Apply

Interested applicants may request up to \$10,000 for a specific project. A 50 percent match (1:2) of cash or in-kind contributions is required. For the full request for proposals, grant guidelines, application and more descriptions of previously funded projects, please visit our website at www.defenders.org/livinglands and click on "Grants and Other Opportunities" or contact Aimee Weldon at (202)-772-3265 or at livinglands@defenders.org

Photo courtesy of Teton Regional Land Trust



Teton Regional Land Trust restoration project

EASTERN SIERRA LAND TRUST: BLENDING RANCHING AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

In the summer of 2005, the Eastern Sierra Land Trust (ESLT) was presented with a unique opportunity to blend landscape-scale habitat conservation with active cattle ranching in eastern California. Bill Bramlette, a fourth-generation landowner of a 900-acre cattle ranch in Benton Hot Springs Valley approached ESLT about putting a conservation easement on his land. He and his family have grazed cattle on the property since the 1920s and Mr. Bramlette expressed a strong desire to protect wildlife habitat while continuing to ranch and graze livestock. A biodiversity microcosm, the ranch's 900 acres range through sagebrush-scrub covered hillsides, wet and alkali meadows, springs, seeps, riparian wetlands and ponds. Migratory birds abound, sensitive plants grow throughout, and rare endemic spring snails thrive in the many springs and seeps.



Ponds in the White Mountains offer an oasis to migrating birds. *Photo Courtesy of Stephen Ingram*

"This land is full of cultural, historic and natural resources that define not only the property but the region as a whole," explains Karen Ferrell-Ingram, ESLT's former lands director, who played a large role in putting this project together. Now serving as their executive director, she reminisces, "It was a property we didn't want to let go."

Needless to say, ESLT jumped at the opportunity and immediately formed a partnership with the landowners to develop an effective conservation plan for the ranch. This project is the first in the region to formally establish wildlife-friendly grazing practices on private lands and the

first for the land trust to monitor cattle grazing impacts on easement lands. Their hope is that this project will serve as a demonstration to other land managers in the region.

With help from a Living Lands Biodiversity Grant, ESLT has inventoried and mapped the habitats found on the property and designed a monitoring plan to document habitat quality and the impacts of cattle grazing. They are using this baseline to develop an adaptive management strategy with the landowner, which will be updated each year. Their goal is to protect the most sensitive habitats and initiate low impact grazing practices on the less sensitive lands to maintain biodiversity while still providing economic benefit to the landowner.

The project has gained significant attention in the local community with a large celebration held on the property to commemorate the easement signing. ESLT is also engaging the public in volunteer invasive species events on the ranch to help restore wildlife habitat and educate the community about invasive plants. And ESLT continues to learn and grow. The conservation plan that they have developed is a living document that will be adapted continuously as they test and refine land management strategies. Such a sensitive approach to land management will allow future generations of the Bramlette family and countless wild things to continue to live on and enjoy the land as they have for generations.

Photo courtesy of Stephen Ingram



Group learns about local flora during a field trip to the property

To learn more about Eastern Sierra Land Trust, please visit <http://www.easternsierralandtrust.org/>

TWO LAND TRUSTS SELECTED FOR CAPACITY BUILDING OPPORTUNITY

In our summer newsletter, we announced that Defenders had been awarded a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant to provide capacity-building workshops and grants to land trusts in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. We are very pleased to announce that we have selected two land trusts to participate in this unique opportunity, the Lower Shore Land Trust in eastern Maryland and the Capital Region Land Conservancy in central Virginia.

Although the landscapes in which these trusts work may appear very different, both are critically important for conserving the bay, its wildlife and its many other living resources. Both regions support continentally important bird habitat, large forest blocks, a diversity of marsh types and essential ecosystem services.

Through this capacity-building opportunity, the selected land trusts will receive comprehensive training in biodiversity conservation with input from local, state and national experts on important topics such as strategic planning, climate change, habitat restoration, monitoring and more. They will use this information, along with the help of professional GIS technicians, to design and map a strategic land-protection plan for their service areas.

Trained facilitators and finance experts will then assist them as they and their stakeholders develop a strategy to finance and implement their plan.

By designing a proactive and strategic approach to land conservation, the Lower Shore Land Trust and the Capital Region Land Conservancy are working to ensure that the living landscapes of today will continue to provide for wildlife and humans alike for generations. We look forward to working with them!



Photo courtesy of Katie Patton

A wetland property protected by Lower Shore Land Trust

UPDATE ON THE 2008 FARM BILL

Although the much-anticipated 2008 Farm Bill was signed into law this past June, the wait still continues on final rulemaking and funding levels that will determine how Farm Bill programs will be implemented. Below is an update on where we currently stand in this process:

Rulemaking

When Congress creates new programs or makes changes to existing programs, the agencies responsible must write rules that clearly define how those programs should be implemented on the ground. Rules for the Farm Bill conservation programs are set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and although this process is moving slowly, a set of interim rules are now expected to come out sometime in December.

Establishing rules is important because project applications often cannot be formally approved until rules are set. Because the process has been delayed, it is likely that many



Photo courtesy of Gary Kramer

programs will begin open enrollment immediately upon release of the interim rules in December. For those requiring significant rules changes, such as the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), enrollment may be delayed until final rules are set later in 2009.

Funding

The second element influencing Farm Bill implementation is funding. Because Congress did not pass their annual funding—or appropriations—bills this year, we are now operating under a continuing resolution (CR). The CR allows government programs to continue operations, but at funding levels established in the previous fiscal year. With the transition to a new

administration and Congress, the CR will likely be in effect until March of 2009, and it remains to be seen whether Farm Bill conservation programs will be fully funded through the appropriations

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process, especially given the tough economic challenges facing our nation.

What This Means for Land Trusts

Despite the general uncertainty on rules and funding, **you should continue to communicate with your local NRCS and FSA offices about developing project proposals.**

Some funding is available to states under the CR to implement many Farm Bill programs once interim rules are set in December —so don't wait to get your project in the queue. In fact, many states may be accepting sign-ups already in anticipation of the new rules. Contact your local NRCS or FSA agency representatives who are best positioned to help you with programs or projects that are likely to be considered in your state.

We will continue to provide updates as the Farm Bill details develop over the coming months. If you have any questions on the legislative, administrative or budget process, please don't hesitate to contact Aimee Weldon at aweldon@defenders.org or 202-772-3265.

LIVING LANDS AT RALLY

Rally came and went in a whirlwind of good friends, new ideas and inspiring stories. It was truly great to be in Pittsburgh to see so many old friends and to meet so many new ones. Thanks to all who attended the Biodiversity Track that Defenders co-sponsored with our colleagues at NatureServe and for keeping all of us on our toes with insightful questions and comments. We learned so much from you and hope that you feel the same.

We must extend a very special thank you to our many land-trust partners who generously provided presentations to make these workshops a success: Maine Coast Heritage Trust; Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy; Teton Regional Land Trust; Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage; Conservation Trust for North Carolina; Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust; and the Open Space Institute.

You may view the Powerpoints, with audio, for these presentations on our Website at:

www.defenders.org/livinglands/presentations

Living Lands—Helping Land Trusts Conserve Biodiversity

Living Lands is a Defenders of Wildlife project to support the work of local land trusts interested in protecting, enhancing and restoring native wildlife habitat and biodiversity.

Funded through generous support from the Biophilia Foundation, the Living Lands Project assists local land trusts in making strategic decisions about where to work to conserve high-priority native habitats and species and how to work to use effective land stewardship to restore and manage habitats for long-term benefits. We also help land trusts secure funding for projects that benefit wildlife and habitat.

Through the Living Lands project, Defenders of Wildlife is collaborating

with the Land Trust Alliance to assist local land trusts through a variety of approaches, including technical and financial assistance.

The Living Lands Project involves individual land trusts, state and federal agencies, conservation groups and other groups and individuals that support land trusts in their habitat conservation efforts.



***Vision:** A network of land trusts, working with private and public partners, to protect, restore and manage our living lands for biodiversity.*

***Mission:** To support and increase the capacity of the land trust community to conserve biodiversity on private lands through financial and technical assistance.*

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