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High Quality Forested Areas Preserved Within Wildlife Refuge

Berea, KY - The Indiana Bat Conservation Fund, managed by Kentucky Natural Lands Trust in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, recently funded the acquisition of two in-holdings within the Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge in Marshall County, Kentucky. These tracts - totaling around 453 acres - are largely forested and contain a mixture of upland and wetland habitats.

“These tracts are very important for conservation due to the large forest blocks they help maintain and due to their close proximity to an Indiana bat maternity colony east of rapidly-growing Paducah, Kentucky,” explained Hugh Archer, Executive Director of the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust. “These tracts will increase the refuge’s size by approximately 5 percent once they are transferred,” he added. Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge currently contains around 9,000 acres, the majority of which is open to the public.

In addition, the tracts are largely comprised of “xero-hydric flatwoods”. Xero-hydric flatwoods are a type of vegetation community associated with poorly drained soils that have a dense soil layer that is virtually impenetrable by water or roots, creating hydrologic conditions that alternate from saturated in the winter and spring to very dry in the summer and autumn months. These unusual hydrologic conditions form the foundation of a unique plant community that includes many species but which can be dominated by post oak (*Quercus stellata*) – often in almost pure stands.

Martina Hines, an ecologist with the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission in Frankfort, has studied and mapped most of the flatwoods in the area. “The Commission is very excited that these tracts have been acquired, because they contain some of the most extensive tracts of this very rare community type in Kentucky,” said Hines. “With proper management, these tracts and those already under management by Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge have the potential to become the most important location for xero-hydric flatwoods in the state.”

The Indiana Bat Conservation Fund has funded a variety of projects in Kentucky to conserve and restore summer and winter habitat for the federally endangered Indiana bats. Females use forested areas in the summer months to raise their young – called pups – and males and females use caves to hibernate in the winter. The Indiana Bat Conservation Fund has also been used to fund important bat research and monitoring efforts within the state.

The recently purchased tracts were acquired by Southern Conservation Corp. (SCC), a regional non-profit land trust active in the area, and will ultimately be added to the National Wildlife Refuge system. “We’re happy to help Clarks River refuge with these acquisitions,” explained

Jeff Jones, SCC's Executive Director. "Normally, the refuge would have purchased these tracts, but, in these severe economic times for the federal government, there was no federal funding available." SCC will hold and manage the tracts until sufficient federal funding can be secured.

Clarks River National Wildlife Refuge was established in July 1997 in order to protect, enhance, and manage a valuable bottomland wetland ecosystem, along the East Fork of the Clarks River, for the benefit of waterfowl, neotropical migratory songbirds, forest wildlife, riverine species, and a wide array of other diverse species associated with bottomland hardwood communities.

"We are very appreciative of our partners' efforts to secure these tracts for the refuge," said refuge manager Michael Johnson. "These are key tracts we have been working to acquire for some time. The East Fork of the Clarks River is one of the few rivers in western Kentucky that has not been channelized, so habitat restoration costs and overall management costs will be minimal. Purchase of these two tracts will help us protect about 3.5 miles of riverfront and more than 450 acres of wetlands and floodplains within our area of focus and will promote our efforts to conserve important habitat for the management of migratory birds and other wildlife at little cost to the American Public," he added.

About Kentucky Natural Lands Trust

KNLT is a statewide land trust committed to preserving Kentucky's diminishing natural places and protecting its rich biodiversity.

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