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*Kentucky Natural Lands Trust
Purchases Portion of “South America” in Kentucky*

Berea, Kentucky.....Kentucky Natural Lands Trust is pleased to announce the **purchase of 247 acres** of an area known to locals as “South America” on Pine Mountain in Eastern Kentucky. The area has been called South America for more than 100 years due to its remoteness. The land protects the lower portion of Laurel Fork, a small high-quality stream supporting a wide variety of aquatic life including several rare and endangered species.

“This area has been called South America since Bell County split off from Whitley County back in the 1800’s. There is very little in the way of roads and access points, and that’s why there is so much rich species diversity still in place here,” said KNLT Executive Director Hugh Archer.

The property contains fall “swarming” habitat for federally endangered Indiana bats that hibernate in nearby Limestone Cave, and funds were provided by the Indiana Bat Conservation Fund for the purchase of the property. “Swarming” occurs in fall in the forests surrounding the caves Indiana bats use to hibernate. During this time, the bats feed extensively to increase the fat levels in their bodies so that they can withstand the rigors of a long hibernation. This is also when the bats mate.

At least 24 native fishes have been identified in the stream on the property including the federally threatened Blackside dace, the federally endangered Cumberland Darter, and the Cumberland arrow darter. The federally endangered Cumberland elk toe mussel and another rare mussel, the Cumberland papershell, have also been documented from the stream.

Rare plants identified so far include golden club, Michaux’s bluets, Appalachian rosinweed, and rock harlequin. Other rare plant species found near the property include a rare goldenrod and blunt mountainmint, a rare mint that has not otherwise been documented in Kentucky in recent surveys.

About Kentucky Natural Lands Trust

KNLT is a statewide land trust committed to preserving Kentucky’s diminishing natural places and protecting its rich biodiversity. The land trust manages the Indiana Bat Conservation Fund in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect the rare Indiana Bat and restore its habitat. The Fund provides resources to conserve and restore summer and winter habitat and to provide research and monitoring.

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