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Recent South America Acquisition One of KNLT's Largest and Most Important

Berea, Kentucky.....Kentucky Natural Lands Trust has purchased nearly 1,600 acres of the Laurel Fork section of Pine Mountain in Whitley County, the second property purchased in an effort to protect an area known locally as "South America." Executive Director, Hugh Archer, stated, "This is one of the biggest land conservation acquisitions in the state, and we are not stopping here. We have our eye on another 2,000 acres and are excited that our project connects us with large conservation tracts in Tennessee and provides us with the opportunity to connect those to others in Kentucky."

Laurel Fork is completely forested, protects multiple headwater streams, and is part of the Pine Mountain landscape of 150,000 acres of contiguous forestland broken only by six roads along its 110 mile expanse. These landscapes are important for maintaining Kentucky's biological diversity and providing critical habitat and migratory corridors for plants and animals.

The Laurel Fork property supports a wide variety of aquatic life including several rare and endangered species. Numerous native fishes have been identified including the federally threatened blackside dace, the federally endangered Cumberland darter, and the increasingly-rare Cumberland arrow darter. The federally endangered Cumberland elktoe mussel and another rare mussel, the Cumberland papershell, have been documented from streams on the property. Several rare plants including golden club and rare types of goldenrod and mint have been identified so far. One of the property's caves contains a beetle not yet found anywhere else on earth. Retired state ecologist and KNLT board member Marc Evans said, "Protection of this area has been a priority for a long time, and I am excited to see this come to fruition. The diverse flora and fauna, the relative remoteness, combined with the beauty of Pine Mountain and Laurel Fork make this acquisition extremely significant. "

The Indiana Bat Conservation Fund (IBCF) of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service assisted in purchasing the property. The IBCF provides funding to conserve and restore Indiana bat summer and winter habitat and for research and monitoring efforts associated with the endangered species. US Fish and Wildlife Kentucky Field Office Supervisor Lee Andrews commented, "The conservation community in Kentucky seldom gets the opportunity to protect such a wild, wonderful, and ecologically-rich landscape. KNLT should be commended for working so hard and for so many years to pull together such a complex deal involving so many heirs to the property."

In addition to its amazing biodiversity, Laurel Fork is rich in history. Archeologists have discovered an abundance of evidence suggesting Native Americans inhabited this area for many years, and stories abound of moonshine-making and feuds among early settlers. An article in the July 12, 1888 *New York Times* tells of the Rose-Fustion conflict in Laurel Fork which spread to three counties and resulted in 200

deaths. In a later article, *The New York Times* describes federal agents destroying eight moonshine stills and exchanging fire with the “mountaineers.” After the raid, Sheriff Renfro described the landscape of the area remarking that the banks of Laurel Fork stream are the crookedest in the world. “Sometimes it is hard to tell which way it runs.”

Laurel Fork is a part of the Pine Mountain Wildlife Corridor project, a grand effort to protect and connect the entire 120 miles of the Pine Mountain ridge in Kentucky. Kentucky Natural Lands Trust, in partnership with the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission, has spearheaded this project since 1995 and has purchased and helped protect thousands of acres.

Kentucky Natural Lands Trust is a statewide land trust committed to preserving Kentucky’s diminishing natural places and protecting its rich biodiversity.

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