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**Agreement Offers Opportunity to Add 8,000 Western
North Carolina Acres to Conservation Ownership**

[BREVARD, NC] Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy (CMLC) and The Conservation Fund (TCF) announced plans today for the acquisition of the largest privately owned block of wilderness remaining in the southern Blue Ridge Mountains. Champion Cattle and Tree Farms, has signed an agreement to convey 8,000 acres in Transylvania County to the nonprofit conservation organizations. The forested tract, home to native brook trout, extensive timber resources, rare bogs, and stunning waterfalls encompasses most of the pristine headwaters and main stem of the East Fork of the French Broad River. CMLC and TCF are working to put the land into future public ownership and open it to public hunting, fishing, hiking and other multiple use management consistent with protecting water quality.

Champion Cattle and Tree Farms is a subsidiary of Financial Guarantee Corporation, owned by the Charles Taylor family. “The Taylor family has offered the opportunity to add another jewel to the crown of conserved land in western North Carolina,” said Kieran Roe, executive director of CMLC. “The conservation of the East Fork Headwaters tract will yield many public benefits: permanent protection of a clean water supply, extensive hunting and fishing opportunities, a new driver for the local recreation and tourism economy, and the preservation of habitat for some of North Carolina’s rarest plant and animal species,” he added. According to Dick Ludington, southeast regional director of TCF, “Congressman Taylor’s family’s willingness to provide this land has made this acquisition possible. This is the last opportunity we will have to acquire such a sizable and significant tract in the southern Appalachians for conservation ownership ever again.”

Conservation of the East Fork Headwaters tract will have a regional impact. The tract is bounded by the North Carolina/South Carolina state line for over eight miles. Nine miles of the Foothills Trail, a major east-west hiking path, winds through the tract creating a link between Caesar’s Head State Park in South Carolina and North Carolina’s Gorges State Park. The Foothills Trail Conference, which maintains the trail, has operated under a year-to-year lease on the Taylor property, but public ownership would allow this section of the 107-mile trail network to remain permanently intact. The acquisition will also protect the North Carolina section of the top of Sassafras Mountain, the highest peak in South Carolina.

The East Fork is classified as “Outstanding Resource Waters” by the N.C. Division of Water Quality, a designation reserved for rivers and streams of the highest quality and ecological significance. The East Fork flows to the French Broad River, which serves as a back-up drinking water source for the Asheville Regional Water Authority and is expected to increase in importance as a public water supply as regional population grows in coming decades.

The acquisition project will open up over 50 miles of streams teeming with rainbow, brown, and the elusive Southern Appalachian-strain of brook trout, the region’s only native trout. Coldwater sport fishing is a key driver in western North Carolina’s tourism industry. The NC Wildlife Resources Commission calculates that trout fishing generated \$147 million in revenue for the area in 2008. The conservationists are seeking to open the land for public game hunting as well.

Because East Fork Headwaters sits squarely in the middle of existing vast acreages of publicly conserved land, the forested slopes and drainages provide a critical wildlife migration corridor. For decades, Champion Cattle and Tree Farms and preceding landowners have managed the land for multiple uses, including forestry, hunting, fishing, hiking and wildlife habitat. The tract is home to rare plant communities, including pockets of Southern Appalachian bog. The project lies atop the Blue Ridge escarpment, one of the most important biodiversity hotspots in world. This transition zone between the piedmont and the Blue Ridge Mountains is rife with micro-climates and micro-habitats such as spray cliffs near waterfalls and deep gorges.

The Financial Guarantee Corporation, founded by Charles Taylor over 50 years ago, manages agricultural properties from Virginia to South Carolina using advanced silviculture and wildlife management practices. Taylor, who represented Western North Carolina in the NC State House, State Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives, is the senior member of the Taylor family. He is Chairman of Champion Cattle and Tree Farms, which acquired the East Fork Headwaters tract in stages starting in the early 1980s. “When my wife, my sons and I began to talk about what we wanted to see happen to the property, it became clear that conserving it for the public was an idea we all supported,” said Taylor.

Taylor’s adult children: Owen Taylor, Captain Bryan Taylor United States Army, and Charles Robert Taylor, all serve on the board of directors of FGC and are now rearing their own families. “We grew up hiking to these magnificent waterfalls and fishing in these beautiful trout streams” Owen Taylor noted. He will be representing the family in finalizing the conservation sale. “By working with the conservation groups, we hope that our children and future generations will continue to have access to the land while opening it up to wider public enjoyment and protecting its water supplies for long-term community benefit.”

The property is under contract by the conservation groups for \$33 million. This represents a gift of 40% to 50% of its recently appraised market value. Fred and Alice Stanback of Salisbury, N.C. have expressed an interest in supporting the acquisition with a lead gift and the organizations are raising other private contributions to the project. CMLC has also submitted a 2010 proposal to the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund requesting a grant of \$5.38 million. TCF and CMLC are reaching out to additional public and nonprofit partners to participate in the acquisition project.

Transylvania County’s recently completed economic development plan identifies the natural environment and recreation opportunities as key contributors to the county’s future growth. Since 2000 the county has seen over \$749 million in new construction, of which new retirement and second

home construction account for \$670 million. Visitors attracted by the region's natural amenities are prime prospects for eventual re-location.

Tourism made a \$77 million contribution to the county's economy in 2008. That same year, local tax revenues from travel and tourism accounted for \$6.7 million, or \$225 per county resident. According to North Carolina representative David Guice, who represents Transylvania County in the state General Assembly, "For the county known as the Land of the Waterfalls, the addition of the Champion property and its numerous waterfalls to public access will help attract new visitors who do so much to support our local businesses."

North Carolina State University studies show that new residential development in once rural communities often costs counties more in services that need to be provided than the tax revenues brought in by the development. "Development plays a very important role in Transylvania County's economy," notes county commissioner Daryle Hogsed. "At the same time, conserving unique and undeveloped properties like this East Fork tract can help keep the county's property tax burden low. Because few county services are required, conservation for hunting, fishing and other recreational access should provide a net gain to county revenues."

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Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy, based out of Hendersonville, N.C., helps landowners protect local land and water resources vital to natural heritage and quality of life. As a local nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the natural beauty, water quality, wildlife habitat, and farmlands of Western North Carolina, CMLC is helping to create a regional network of more than 18,500 acres of protected farm, forest, park, and natural lands. Founded in 1994, CMLC has protected land in Henderson, Transylvania, and parts of neighboring counties. Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy offers monthly hikes and a variety of volunteer opportunities for members and the public. More information is available by calling (828) 697-5777 or on the web at www.carolinamountain.org.

Founded in 1985, The Conservation Fund is dedicated to advancing America's land and water legacy. We conserve land, train leaders and invest in conservation at home. From our headquarters in Arlington, Virginia and our field offices across the country, we've saved over six million acres of wild havens, working lands, vibrant communities and more. As a trusted real estate partner, we help government agencies, land trusts and nonprofit organizations acquire and conserve land for recreation, habitat, historic value and more. We also develop market-based conservation strategy that balances environmental protection with community and economic development. Finally, we work directly with communities to offer conservation programs that provide land-use planning, economic development, leadership training and the application of innovative technology. Visit TCF on the web at www.conservationfund.org.