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**\$125,000 AWARDED TO MOUNTAIN LAND TRUSTS FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION ON
THE STATE WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN**

Asheville – Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy and nine other land trusts that comprise the Blue Ridge Forever coalition are sharing a \$125,000 grant from The Conservation Fund, a national land conservation organization. The grant will help the land trusts to educate the public about North Carolina’s State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) and how it plays into land protection projects in the mountains.

For more than 60 years, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission has helped to restore and manage hunting and fishing resources for the state. In 2005, the Commission created the State Wildlife Action Plan that expands the scope of the agency to non-game species. It identifies 371 priority species and categorizes those species within 23 habitat types, such as mountain bogs, rock outcrops, high elevation habitats, caves and mines. This proactive plan prescribes actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become rare and more costly to protect.

“The adage ‘an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure’ holds as true for wildlife as it does for us,” said Kieran Roe, Executive Director of CMLC. “It can be very expensive to recover a species once it is endangered. It is far more cost effective to take a proactive approach and protect the habitat of these species now.”

The grant from The Conservation Fund is made possible with funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. It will strengthen the natural relationship between Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. CMLC works in Henderson, Transylvania, and parts of neighboring counties with willing landowners to protect some of the critical habitats prioritized in the Wildlife Action Plan.

A number of biologically diverse habitats and creatures call our southern Blue Ridge Mountains home. For instance, on a recent CMLC easement rare species and communities were protected. Four natural communities were identified, with the most significant finds being the rare High Elevation Granitic Dome habitat, which is characterized as smooth rock with no crevices, and occurrences of French Broad Heartleaf, which is a threatened plant species found only in our region. By working together, CMLC and the landowners were able to preserve forever the diversity of the land as well as their legacy.

“With 90% of land in North Carolina in private ownership, the land trusts’ ability to work locally with landowners is vital to the success of the Wildlife Action Plan,” said Carol Price, Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator for the Wildlife Resources Commission. “The protection of intact wildlife habitat benefits all of us with clean drinking water, better air quality and a more stable ecosystem.”

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The action plan was one of the data sources used by the Blue Ridge Forever coalition to identify Dupont State Forest and the Upper French Broad River Watershed as areas in urgent need of protection in its recently released Conservation Vision for Western North Carolina. Two of the Vision's five criteria relate to protecting wildlife, through the conservation of lands where state and nationally significant species occur and connecting protected lands to create wildlife corridors.

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Blue Ridge Forever is a coalition campaign led by local land trusts and national conservation organizations to raise public awareness and financial resources to safeguard land and water in the Southern Blue Ridge for present and future generations. The coalition works in local communities to ensure that critical lands are protected for clean drinking water, recreation, wildlife habitats, tourism, and working farms. To learn more, visit www.blueridgeforever.info.