

Naturally Kentucky

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It is the mission of the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission to protect Kentucky's natural heritage by: (1) identifying, acquiring and managing natural areas that represent the best-known occurrences of rare native species, natural communities and significant natural features in a statewide nature preserves system; (2) working with others to protect biological diversity; and (3) educating Kentuckians as to the value and purpose of nature preserves and biodiversity.



Blanton Forest Grows...

by Ron Scott
Land Protection Specialist

*See back page for information on
how you can help Blanton Forest*

Blanton Forest is growing in every sense of the word. At a June 16 open house event to celebrate the tremendous public support for preserving Blanton Forest in Harlan County, it was announced that we had recently acquired the remaining large tract of old-growth forest as part of the Blanton Forest State Nature Preserve. This acquisition and upcoming dedication will help ensure the protection and preservation of Blanton Forest in perpetuity.

According to Don Dott, executive director of the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission, "We are thrilled to be able to obtain the second half of this stately and magnificent old-growth forest for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations of Kentuckians." He added, "Blanton Forest is not only a great repository of biological diversity but also a point of pride for the entire state."

State and local officials and citizens gathered at Camp Blanton, a private, nonprofit facility adjacent to the state nature preserve, to express their appreciation for Blanton Forest, the largest, old-growth forest in the Commonwealth and one of the largest east of the Mississippi River. Food, entertainment and educational displays kept the throngs of forestlovers busy, while commission and Division of Forestry staff conducted guided hikes along the preserve's hiking trails.

The additional 1,164-acre tract adjoins the existing 1,075 acres of old-growth forest purchased in 1995 and brings the total combined acreage of protected core and buffer land within the preserve to 2,574 acres. We purchased the newest tract through a discounted sale of the property from the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust

(KNLT), which had acquired the land in December 1999. KNLT, a private, nonprofit organization, was created in 1995 to help raise funds to acquire and permanently protect the unique natural resources of Blanton Forest. Combined funding for the purchase included a substantial appropriation from the state General Fund, private donations, a Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund grant and a federal Clean Water Act § 319 (h) Non-Point Source Water Pollution grant.

Department for Natural Resources Commissioner Hugh Archer said, "This old-growth forest community is awe-inspiring and humbling. It provides an opportunity for research and education, the best kind of economic development opportunity for the region, and will remain a crown jewel of the public's preserve system." He added that, "The folks who have dedicated so much of their private time and money to partner with the government programs to establish our largest nature preserve deserve the thanks of generations of future Kentuckians. There is more work to do to secure and buffer the area. This acquisition should be the seed for continued protection efforts all along the Pine Mountain system."

KNLT board member David Burns stated about Blanton Forest in an eloquent editorial to the Lexington Herald-Leader, "We inherit the land and its resources from those who preceded us; we have an obligation to be good custodians, manage the resources intelligently and sustainably and convey this legacy to our children."

Commission staff and volunteers are actively working on a trail system within Blanton Forest, which we anticipate opening to the public in the fall of 2001. Presently, access to this state nature preserve is by permission only.

Blackacre - Reflections on Our First Preserve

by Joyce Bender
Manager, Nature Preserves and Natural Areas Branch

When we began preparing for our silver anniversary, we looked back over the last twenty-five years and started to think about the commission's "firsts." There are a lot of firsts for us to be proud of, but acquiring our first preserve ranks up there as a defining moment that we had finally made good on the legislature's 1976 mandate to acquire a system of nature preserves. Blackacre was our first nature preserve. Dedicated in March 1979, the 170-acre Jefferson County home of Judge Macauley and Emilie Strong Smith has become a prized jewel in the nature preserve system. The Smiths donated the property to the state for use as an environmental education facility and to preserve a rural way of life that they felt was fading fast. Indeed, twenty-two years later the treeline that rings the historic farmstead serves as a green barrier, screening the preserve from the rapid pace of development.

The fields, ponds and woods have been the scene of many educational undertakings since the first classes started to use the preserve in 1981. Elementary and middle school children have thrilled at their first encounter with the wildlife that inhabits the preserve. High school students have gotten their first exposure to research projects that have whet their appetites for further explorations of our natural world. College-age students and teachers have found that there's always more to learn. Outreach programs have benefited the public with opportunities to learn about the area's ecology, rural life and cultural history. Descendants of the Tyler family who originally settled the land in the 1790s and built the beautiful brick house, stone cottage and impressive barn still return to experience their family connections.

With our focus on inventorying Kentucky's natural heritage and protecting rare species and natural communities, we do not have the staff expertise or funds to maintain historic structures and provide daily environmental education instruction. We have two partners that pull most of the weight at Blackacre. The first-class educational programming that has developed at Blackacre is the result of educators in the Jefferson County Public Schools system (JCPS) believing in the preserve's potential. Working with bright, creative minds over the years, the wide range of lesson plans JCPS now

offers include projects in history, art and literature as well as science. Programs have been developed for University of Louisville students and JCPS teachers to attend in-service training at Blackacre.

Building maintenance, capital improvements and operational costs are handled by the Blackacre Foundation Inc. Created in 1983 by the Smiths, the foundation has contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to an endowment and for building repairs and improvements, and general operations of the preserve. From 1996-1998 Mrs. Smith and her son John donated approximately \$2 million to the foundation to purchase 101 acres of fields and forest as buffer land to the south and east of the preserve. This land had been slated for subdivision development. A portion of their gift is now used as a community garden. Other important improvements include connection to the municipal water supply, major renovations of the stone cottage, development of a visitor center and road improvements. Restroom construction, ramp installation and additional renovations to the brick house are planned. The foundation is also coordinating weekend visits for the general public and providing programming for non-JCPS students.

Another first for the commission is the direct involvement of the legislature in helping to plan the future for a state nature preserve. During the 2001 legislative session, a resolution sponsored by Senator Tim Shaughnessy was passed to create a task force to examine additional means to protect Blackacre and enhance our efforts to provide educational opportunities to the citizens of Jefferson County. The task force membership includes state legislators who represent Jefferson County as well as members of the Blackacre Foundation, the JCPS, the Commission, the Kentucky Heritage Council, the UK School of Agriculture, Jefferson County government, and leading citizens of Jefferson County. We look forward to working with Senator Shaughnessy and the task force to enhance our ability to protect Blackacre for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

Public visitation at Blackacre will begin again September 2 and continue each Sunday through November 18, 2001.

For information on visiting Blackacre, telephone 502-897-0362

Celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission

Join us for these field trips organized especially to celebrate our 25th anniversary.

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON STATE PARK NATURE PRESERVE

Learn about Kentucky's diverse and beautiful dragonfly and damselfly faunas at the lakes and wetlands in the Henderson area with invertebrate biologist Ellis Lauder milk. Bring a pair of close-focusing binoculars, if possible, for a better view of some species. On Aug. 3 at 7:30 p.m. (CST), view a slide show: "An Introduction to Kentucky Dragonflies and Damselflies." On Aug. 4 from 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., take a field trip to Wilderness Lake inside the preserve, and side trip to Sloughs Wildlife Management Area, Sauerheber Unit. Contact Ellis Lauder milk by phone at 502-573-2886 or by e-mail at ellis.laudermilk@mail.state.ky.us for more information.

WHEN: Friday and Saturday, Aug. 3 and 4, 2001

WHERE: J J Audubon State Park – Henderson County

DURATION: Field trip on Aug. 4 from 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. CST
(9:00 a.m. ~ noon Wilderness Lake and noon ~ 4:00 p.m. Sloughs)

DIFFICULTY: Moderate hike

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: Minimum 10 – Maximum 20

LICKING RIVER AT QUIET TRAILS STATE NATURE PRESERVE

The Licking River is one of Kentucky's best remaining large streams and a great place to spend a hot summer day. On Sunday, Aug. 12, commission aquatic biologist Ronald Cicerello will lead a field trip to the river at Quiet Trails State Nature Preserve to look for fishes and mussels. Of the 54 species of mussels known from the river, 44 are still present. One-third (84) of Kentucky's native fishes inhabit the Licking River. Participants will help collect fishes and mussels with the goal of seeing as many of these beautiful, and in some cases imperiled, animals as possible. You will learn where and how these animals live and why some are rare. Register early. Bring a change of clothes or your bathing suit and wading shoes, pack a lunch and hope for normal river conditions! Please register with Ronald Cicerello via e-mail at ronald.cicerello@mail.state.ky.us or phone at 502-573-2886 by Aug. 10. He will contact you to discuss trip details and to provide directions to the preserve.

WHEN: Sunday, Aug. 12, 2001

WHERE: At state nature preserve parking lot near Sunrise in Harrison County

DURATION: 10:00 a.m. ~ 2:00 p.m. EST

DIFFICULTY: We will hike 0.9 mile one way to the river and walk on the uneven river bottom.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: Minimum 10 - Maximum 20

JESSE STUART STATE NATURE PRESERVE

Hike the hills and hollers that inspired Jesse Stuart to write about the lore and landscape of rural Kentucky. As we take a leisurely hike we will learn about the natural and cultural history of this land that Jesse Stuart chose to protect as a state nature preserve. Contact Dave Skinner by e-mail at david.skinner@mail.state.ky.us or by phone at 502-573-2886 for more information.

WHEN: Saturday, 10:00 a.m. EST Aug. 25, 2001

WHERE: Meet at the preserve parking lot on W-Hollow Road
between State Routes 1 and 2 south of Greenup in Greenup County

DURATION: This hike will be about 2 ½ miles and last as many hours.

DIFFICULTY: Moderate hike

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: Minimum 10 – Maximum 25

Celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission

BAD BRANCH STATE NATURE PRESERVE

Take a relatively strenuous hike up Pine Mountain through the preserve to observe migrating hawks from "High Rocks" a natural sandstone exposure along the mountain's crest. Bring a pair of binoculars, lunch, and sufficient water. Contact Brainard Palmer-Ball by phone at 502-573-2886 or by e-mail at brainard.palmer-ball@mail.state.ky.us for more information.

WHEN: 8:00 a.m. EST, Saturday, Sept. 22, 2001

WHERE: Meet at state nature preserve parking lot on KY 932 in Letcher County

DURATION: All day (until approximately 6:00 p.m.)

DIFFICULTY: Strenuous; bring lunch and water

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 10 Minimum - 20 Maximum

GRIFFITH WOODS

Visit a Bluegrass Savanna remnant. Griffith Woods is probably the best-remaining remnant of the unique Bluegrass savanna. Once occupying a large area of the Inner Bluegrass region this community type is now considered one of the rarest, natural communities in the U.S. View magnificent blue ash and chinquapin oaks more than 300 years old and with an average girth of three to four feet in diameter. Contact Marc Evans by phone at 502-573-2886 or by e-mail at marc.evans@mail.state.ky.us for more information.

WHEN: 9:00 a.m. EST, Saturday, Sept. 22, 2001

WHERE: Meet at B P station at corner of U.S. 460 and St. Rt. 353
in Centerville in Bourbon County

DURATION: Until 12:00 noon

DIFFICULTY: Easy

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 10 Minimum - 20 Maximum

EASTVIEW BARRENS STATE NATURE PRESERVE

Walk through the tallgrass prairie, observe beautiful fall wildflowers, examine the results of prescribed fire in the oak barrens and learn about our restoration successes. Contact Rick Remington by phone at 270-745-7005 or by e-mail at rick.remington@mail.state.ky.us for more information.

WHEN: 9:00 a.m. EST, Saturday, Oct. 6, 2001

WHERE: Elizabethtown Burger King (Highway 62) Exit #94 I-65 in Hardin County

DURATION: Until 12:00 noon

DIFFICULTY: Moderate - some off-trail hiking, up hills, etc. Total distance:~2 miles

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 10 Minimum - 20 Maximum

FLORACLIFF STATE NATURE PRESERVE

Join Joyce Bender and Floracliff Manager Carey Bateman for a leisurely hike through the Floracliff Sanctuary in Fayette County. Features include Elk Lick Falls and Kentucky's largest travertine deposit. Hike the rim trail above Elk Lick Creek and take in the colors of autumn. Contact Joyce Bender by phone at 502-573-2886 or by e-mail at joyce.bender@mail.state.ky.us to sign up for the hike or for more information. Bring water and a snack.

WHEN: 1:00 p.m. EST, Saturday, Oct. 13, 2001

WHERE: Judy Lane Grocery on U.S. 25 in Fayette County

DURATION: 2 - 3 hours

DIFFICULTY: Moderate hike

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 10 Minimum - 25 Maximum

~ Hikes continued on next page ~

Celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission

PINE MOUNTAIN FALL WEEKEND OCT. 20-21, 2001

Blanton Forest State Nature Preserve (Hike to Knobby Rock)

WHEN: Saturday, Oct. 20, 2001, 9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m. EST

WHERE: Harlan County

LENGTH: 2.4 miles

DIFFICULTY: Moderate/strenuous

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 15

Join Kyle Napier and Joyce Bender for a hike through Kentucky's largest, old-growth forest. Hike through the towering hemlocks and see trees that have been standing since before this nation was born. Knobby Rock offers spectacular bird's-eye views of the surrounding forest. Contact Kyle Napier by phone at 606-633-0362 or by e-mail at kyle.napier@mail.state.ky.us for more information.

Hi Lewis Pine Barrens State Nature Preserve

WHEN: Saturday, Oct. 20, 2001, 2:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. EST

WHERE: Harlan County

LENGTH: 1.5 miles

DIFFICULTY: Strenuous

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 15

Join Kyle Napier and Joyce Bender for a hike through this extremely rare Pine Barrens community. Highlights will include an unusual mix of plants typically thought of as prairie plants, fruiting American chestnut trees, and massive sandstone outcrops and cliffs. Come see how fire has played a major role in maintaining this unique community. Contact Kyle Napier by phone at 606-633-0362 or by e-mail at kyle.napier@mail.state.ky.us for more information.

Bad Branch State Nature Preserve

WHEN: Sunday, Oct. 21, 2001, 9:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m. EST

WHERE: Letcher County

LENGTH: 7.5 miles

DIFFICULTY: Strenuous

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 15

Join Kyle Napier and Joyce Bender for a hike through one of the most scenic and biologically significant areas in eastern Kentucky. Highlights will include an array of plants more common to northern climates, a 60-foot waterfall and one of the most pristine streams in the state. The "High Rock" area offers a spectacular view of the Cumberland Plateau. Contact Kyle Napier by phone at 606-633-0362 or by e-mail at kyle.napier@mail.state.ky.us for more information.

Celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission

TOM DORMAN STATE NATURE PRESERVE OWL PROWL AND NIGHT HIKE

Want a unique outdoor experience? Join preserve manager Dave Skinner on this hike to explore the night forest. A full moon and leafless trees should illuminate our path surprisingly well, but flashlights are recommended as a backup light source. We will learn about sensory perception and nocturnal wildlife. Owl calling will also be a part of this hike. Chances are good that an owl may land in the trees around us. Contact Dave Skinner by phone at 502-573-2886 or by e-mail at david.skinner@mail.state.ky.us for more information or to preregister for this field trip.

WHEN: Friday, 5:00 p.m. EST Nov. 30, 2001

WHERE: State Nature Preserve parking lot in
Garrard County

DURATION: 2 hours

DIFFICULTY: Moderate

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: Minimum 10 - Maximum 20

Mountain Wildflower Weekend kicks off 25th anniversary

by Nick Drozda
Botanist

On the weekend of May 11, approximately 50 people attended one of several events held to celebrate our 25th anniversary. Dubbed the Mountain Wildflower Weekend, the event featured guided hikes with KSNPC botanists on three state nature preserves on Pine Mountain – Bad Branch SNP, Blanton Forest SNP, and High Lewis Pine Barrens SNP. Another hike was conducted at Pine Mountain State Park Nature Preserve and was led by park naturalist Dean Henson. Three slide programs were presented on Friday evening at the state park lodge. The weekend gave many a rare chance to view the spectacular beauty and scenery of Pine Mountain, and the chance to walk in the largest tract of old-growth forest remaining in Kentucky at Blanton Forest.

Highlights of the weekend included the opportunity to see several of Kentucky's interesting or rare plants, including pink lady's slipper, showy orchis, rose-bay, flame azalea, little brown jug, indian cucumber-root, bead-lily and rock-harlequin. Dr. Allen Risk of Morehead State University provided the weekend's participants with a real treat. Dr. Risk is an expert on mosses and liverworts, the plants that botanists call bryophytes. He not only gave a talk on bryophyte identification on Friday evening, but he also led a bryophyte hike to Bad Branch on Saturday.

Tom Dorman State Nature Preserve

On June 12, we joined with the Kentucky River Authority in a ceremony to rename the Tom Dorman State Nature Preserve in Garrard and Jessamine counties.

With a gathering of supporters, friends and interested individuals, Stephen Reeder and Donald Dott, executive directors of the Kentucky River Authority and the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission, respectively, spoke of Tom Dorman's contributions to the Commonwealth and to the Kentucky River.

KSNPC Secretary Ken Jackson offered our agency's appreciation and gratitude to Dorman during the ceremony that took place at the preserve's trailhead located in Garrard County. Jessamine County Judge-Executive and Kentucky River Authority Chair Neil Cassity added his thanks to Dorman's preservation and protection efforts.

After some humble remarks and a few comments from his "bigger picture" perspective, Dorman thanked the participants. He said he was proud of the work toward dedication of this state nature preserve and protecting the unique natural features of the Kentucky River palisades area.

Dorman currently serves the public as executive director of the Kentucky Public Service Commission. He is a resident of the Kentucky River watershed in Franklin County.

The Tom Dorman State Nature Preserve is one of 41 preserves located throughout Kentucky.

Director's Notes

by Don Dott,
Executive Director

So far, 2001 has been an exciting and momentous year! First and foremost this year has been, and will continue to be, a celebration of the agency's 25th anniversary. I hope you participate in one of the anniversary year hikes led by our expert biologists. Deborah White's Wildflower Weekend was a great success, and there are other events planned for the rest of the year. Certainly the highest profile, and perhaps most significant, is acquisition of the remaining old-growth tract at Blanton Forest in Harlan County. These new acres will also put us over the 15,000 milestone in the number of acres protected as state nature preserves. We have also acquired "Three Ponds," our first preserve on the banks of the Mississippi River. With Bad Branch SNP on Pine Mountain only a few miles as the raven flies from the Virginia border, we can now claim preserves border-to-border. We have expanded the breadth of our biological inventory expertise by upgrading Ellis Lauder milk's position to a full-time invertebrate biologist. Additionally, we have promoted Joyce Bender and Deborah White into branch manager positions. These promotions are well-deserved and are part of a reorganization that will assist in better administration and management of our programs and staff.

Lower tax receipts have hit the state budget hard. Typically, our budget is allowed minor increases to keep pace with increased costs, but instead we face projected budget cuts for FY 2002-2003. The size of the cuts is still unknown, but will range from minor to quite serious. This is not a state of affairs I relish. Most telling will be the next biennial budget enacted by the General Assembly during the January 2002 session. My biggest concern is that the budget cuts will mean fewer resources for us to accomplish our mission of preserving the native biodiversity of our Commonwealth when the threats to it are escalating.

The American Planning Association reported last year that Kentucky ranks *third* nationally behind only Pennsylvania and West Virginia in the rate of land development per capita. Land conversion ranks as the primary threat to our natural areas and the biological diversity they harbor. The scale of logging is at or near an all-time high. While we certainly must have the wood the forests can provide sustainably, logging will also impact the

remnant natural areas we seek to preserve. Last year a several-hundred-acre tract of Pine Mountain forest believed to be old growth slipped from our grasp when the land owner sold the timber. The old-growth tract of Blanton Forest just acquired was damaged by an illegal logging operation that impacted about 20 acres in 1999. In addition to these losses, many more natural areas fall to other types of land development as traditionally urban activities continue to expand into the countryside.

Too often, lost natural areas are not recognized as tragedies. They may be viewed as simply the loss of a natural area that, while nice to look at, will only really be missed by the unfortunate wildlife. The problem is we don't even know what we are losing. Each of these natural areas is potentially the last home for a species that has become rare due to habitat loss or degradation. Each loss of a species is *irrevocable*. Each loss of a natural community – a unique assemblage of plants and animals (down to the microbes, etc.) - is *irrevocable*.

Though most of us don't know what function each of the parts in our personal computers perform, we certainly wouldn't open the back and start pitching them. But this is exactly how we treat the biological parts of our ecosystem. Some nondescript grass may contain a gene for a more productive, disease-resistant corn plant. An unassuming, little mushroom may be the equivalent of the orange mold that led to penicillin. What other tree may prove as beneficial as the willow that led scientists to synthesize aspirin? What other unrecognized species may hold a cure for cancer? Almost a fourth of all medical prescriptions throughout the world are compounds derived from plants and microorganisms, or a synthetic version of these chemicals. There are many reasons to safeguard our biological diversity, from the pragmatic to the ethical.

Yes, the examples above are hypothetical, but they are based on the only such resources we have – the wealth of variety of the biological organisms that inhabit our world. Each one lost is gone forever, yet another curious piece tossed out from the back of our personal computer.

On average, Kentucky lost 47,400 acres of forest and cropland annually during 1992-1997, according to USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

How you can help

As KSNPC Chair Clara Wheatley told the crowd assembled at the June 16 public event at Blanton Forest, "Blanton Forest is a gem, a library of natural history whose pages need only to be turned. It can teach and inspire future generations of land stewards."

You can help us preserve Blanton Forest. Every little effort and each small donation assist in accomplishing the goal of protecting Blanton Forest and acquiring adjacent buffer land. Visit the Web page of the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust at www.blantonforest.org and view pictures of Blanton Forest, learn more about this unique natural treasure and find out how you can save this legacy. See snapshots of our June 16 event, and read all about the ongoing work to save Blanton Forest.

You can help support the work of the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission. Visit our Web page at

www.kynaturepreserves.org and support funding for our program and our mission of natural land preservation, biological inventory and species protection.

You can personally participate in preserving Blanton Forest and assist in saving other rare tracts by joining our statewide volunteer program.

You can buy nature license plates, donate part of your Kentucky state tax refund or otherwise directly contribute to the Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund, join an environmental group, become better informed about environmental issues, write letters to elected and appointed officials and participate in identifying, prioritizing and preserving our dwindling natural areas.

Blanton Forest needs you. All of Kentucky's environment needs all of us.

CONTACT KENTUCKY NATURAL LANDS TRUST AT WWW.BLANTONFOREST.ORG TO DONATE TO THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN TO ENLARGE AND PROTECT BLANTON FOREST

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