

## Mulberry Creek land added to Pisgah National Forest

Karen Chávez, EDT May 20, 2015

[Us forest service](#), [national forests](#), [pisgah national forest](#), [nantahala](#), [uqharrie](#), [croatan](#), [mulberry creek](#)



This is one of the many tributaries to Mulberry Creek that will be protected and conserved now that this property is part of Pisgah National Forest in Caldwell County. (Photo: U.S. Forest Service/Special to the Citizen-Times)

HICKORY – The most beloved — and at times the most crowded — national forest in the country is getting a little more breathing room. [Pisgah National Forest](#), which covers more than a half-million acres of heavily forested mountains, mile-high peaks, waterfalls, streams and rivers along the eastern edge of the mountains of Western North Carolina, just added another 517 acres of important conservation land thanks to federal money from the [Land and Water Conservation Fund](#). The property is near Mulberry Creek in Caldwell County. The [Trust for Public Land](#) bought the property for \$1.7 million and sold it to the Forest Service for the same price, in two separate transactions, according to a statement from the land trust.

The first 318 acres was sold three years ago, and the final 199 was sold on May 11. The Forest Service bought the land with money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the federal government's main source of money for protecting land. Fund money comes

from federal receipts collected by the government from oil and gas drilling on the Outer Continental Shelf.

"This was a rare opportunity to preserve an important tract of forest just an hour from Charlotte that protects the headwaters of the Catawba River and the water supply for millions of North Carolinians," said Kent Whitehead, the Carolinas director for The Trust for Public Land. While federal funds were being sought for the Forest Service to purchase the lands for Pisgah National Forest through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, The Trust for Public Land worked with the landowner to purchase the land for protection, said Nicole Doss, communications manager for the trust. The landowner was Quality Land Holdings LLC. The land had been set for development, which made it even more important to purchase for conservation, said Matt McCombs, spokesman for the U.S. Forest Service in Asheville.

"The Trust for Public Land is always seeking land as part of a larger program, the North Carolina 'Threatened Treasures initiative,' which prioritizes the purchase of lands at high risk of development for homes," McCombs said. "Land trusts are looking to identify lands that are in-holdings — private lands fully surrounded by national forest land — or adjacent to national forest land, which contain important natural resources."

In the case of Mulberry Creek, the tract contains the headwaters of the Johns River, which feeds into the Catawba River, which is a primary water supply for cities in both North and South Carolina. "This made it a very appropriate and high value for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is very competitive," McCombs said. "The Trust for Public Land was able to purchase it and hold it until LWCF funding was available and bring it into the boundaries of Pisgah National Forest. One of the fundamental reasons the national forests exists is to protect water quality." Access is off of Mulberry Creek Road (State Road 1368) near where Anderson Creek enters Mulberry Creek. There is no established access beyond an unimproved road that is gated at the intersection with Mulberry Creek Road. Now that the land is being administered by the U.S. Forest Service, the local ranger will begin the process of establishing sustainable access for the general public to this newest member of the Pisgah National Forest family.

The tract does include eight miles of stream frontage, making it potential prime fishing habitat, as well as a place where people can enjoy nature viewing, McCombs said.

U.S. Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., a supporter of LWCF, recently introduced legislation to reauthorize the program, which expires at the end of September unless Congress acts.

"I have seen firsthand the role that the Land and Water Conservation Fund plays maintaining North Carolina's reputation as one of the most scenic and unique states in the country," Sen. Burr said in a statement. "LWCF is the best dollar-for-dollar

conservation program Congress has ever created and has a proven track record of making good on their promise to conserve parks, open spaces, and wildlife habitats for the benefit of future generations."

The Pisgah National Forest is home of the first tract of land purchased under the Weeks Act of 1911, which led to the creation of the national forests in the eastern United States. Together with North Carolina's other three national forests — the [Nantahala](#) on the far western edge of the state, the [Uwharrie](#) in the Piedmont and the [Croatan](#) on the coast — the lands draw more than 6 million visitors a year. The Pisgah National Forest, which passes through Asheville, is considered the most visited in the state, and one of the most visited national forests in the country. The Trust for Public Land creates parks and protects land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come. Nearly 10 million people live within a 10-minute walk of a Trust for Public Land park, garden, or natural area, and millions more visit these sites every year. McCombs said the newly acquired Mulberry Creek land will be part of the ongoing analysis in the [Nantahala-Pisgah National Forest Plan Revision](#), which will dictate how the forests in North Carolina are managed for the next 15 years. "The final 200 acres was Phase 2 of another purchase made in 2012. It sounds small, but that 200 acres is extremely important. It contains the headwaters of one of the most heavily used water basins in North Carolina, the Catawba River Basin," McCombs said. "Any time you can conserve headwaters of major river systems, you're doing a world of benefit. There will be potential for more recreation, camping, fishing, and wildlife habitat. It's all in good shape, and it's an excellent addition to the Forest Service. "

Source: <http://www.citizen-times.com/story/sports/outdoors/2015/05/20/mulberry-creek-land-added-pisgah-national-forest/27658441/>