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Catawba Falls trail opens to the public

By Bruce Henderson

bhenderson@charlotteobserver.com

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Catawba Falls, in the headwaters of the Catawba River, has become publicly accessible as part of Pisgah National Forest.

Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina, a regional land trust, said today it has sold to the U.S. Forest Service 88 acres that include a trail to the spectacular series of falls. The tract is in McDowell County near Old Fort.

The Forest Service paid \$713,000 that Congress approved in December under legislation sponsored by U.S. Reps. Heath Shuler, D-N.C., and David Price, D-N.C. The money came from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which uses federal royalties from oil and gas leases.

Foothills Conservancy sold the land at a \$124,000 discount made possible by a gift of that amount from Salisbury philanthropists Fred and Alice Stanback.

The falls have been part of the Pisgah forest since 1989 but didn't have a trail that was open to the public, said Foothills land protection director Tom Kenney. The sale announced today includes a tract that allows public access.

Legislation to expand the Pisgah's boundaries to include the new purchase, cosponsored by Sens. Richard Burr, R-N.C., and Kay Hagan, D-N.C., is before the Senate. Similar legislation has already passed the House with bipartisan support.

"Acquiring this tract has been a priority for North Carolina's national forests for more than a decade," said Marisue Hilliard, supervisor of the state's national forests.

Foothills Conservancy has protected another 1,384 acres in the Catawba headwaters, adjoining the Pisgah forest, since 2005.



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