

Local Land Conservation Projects Compete for Statewide Grant

By Joel Frady

Two local conservation projects aiming to protect lands of the Little Peak Back Country and Pond Mountain are among the nine projects in North Carolina chosen to compete for a \$3,000 grant being offered by the Great Outdoor Provision Company.

According to the Great Outdoor competition web site, the company is holding the contest - which the public is voting on - because Great Outdoor Provision celebrates "the protection of the lands, waters and wildlife in North Carolina."

The National Committee for the New River (NCNR) is sponsoring the Little Peak Back Country project. The 83-acre property borders the New River State Park on three sides and could help expand the park.

The NCNR is also co-sponsoring the Pond Mountain project with High Country Conservancy and the primary sponsor, the Blue Ridge Rural Land Trust (BRRLT). The 1,795-acre property could provide the public access for educational, recreation and forestry purposes.

Walter Clark, executive director of BRRLT, said that people should vote for the Pond Mountain project to protect land "that actually formed the northwest corner of the state between North Carolina, Virginia and Tennessee.

"I think everyone at every land trust would like to leave a conservation legacy," he later said. "There are few opportunities that come along that involve being able to protect a piece of land of this size and of this beauty. It's a real opportunity for the land trust, Ashe County and the state of North Carolina."

Chris Arvidson, assistant director of NCNR, said that people should vote for the Little Peak project because "it's a really great way to help the New River State Park expand the opportunities for back country experience to the public" and that "it protects a really important part of the habitat for the river. It helps with wildlife corridors. It's a great forested area, and it's really rugged. It's going to be a really great experience for people to have in their back yard."

Although both projects are competing, neither feels that having two Ashe County projects on the ballot will hurt the chances of either.

"Regardless of whether or not we win or lose, it will bring attention to all of these projects, which is the idea," said Clark. He noted that they partnered with the two other organizations on the Pond Mountain project because "that lends some greater credibility and support to the project."

"We always like to work together with those guys," said Arvidson. "We definitely don't feel like we're in competition, we're partners."

Arvidson spoke positively of having two nominees.



"This means we have two chances to win," she said, and even offered a solution for people who want to support both projects: vote for both.

"Just go to a computer and vote for one, then go to another computer and vote for the other one," she said.

To vote for the contest, which ends on June 4, click to www.greatoutdoorprovision.com/search/Vote+for+the+land.