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Bear Paw State Natural Area in Avery to expand

STAFF REPORTS

The new Bear Paw State Natural Area on the Avery/Watauga border will grow to 341 acres following the Council of State's approval of a recent land donation. Senator Joe Sam Queen, who secured passage of the legislation in the Senate, praised the action that will further preserve this wilderness area. The Council of State is comprised of the Governor and seven other statewide elected officials and must approve state land transactions.

The General Assembly approved legislation in 2008 to designate Bear Paw a State Natural Area, which is part of the State Parks System that is focused on preserving and protecting areas of scientific and ecological value. The Bear Paw State Natural Area was established with an initial land acquisition of 331 acres in 2008 and 2009. The expansion adds 10 additional acres donated by the High Country Conservancy. Bear Paw is located just north of Grandfather Mountain and the town of Seven Devils. The area's name comes from the Cherokee "yonah-wayah" or "bear's paw" and is a beautiful rugged mountaintop that is a habitat for many rare plant species including Heller's blazing star, Blue Ridge goldenrod and Roan rattlesnakeroot.

The 2008 law also designated Yellow Mountain on the Avery/Mitchell County lines as a State Natural Area. The State Parks System is in the process of acquiring land for the future Yellow Mountain Natural Area. Additionally, the General Assembly approved Senator Queen's bill to make Grandfather Mountain a state park last year.

"I am so pleased that the Council of State has approved the land purchase that will preserve Bear Paw for generations to come," said Senator Queen. "The mountaintops belong to everyone in North Carolina—from Bear Paw to Yellow Mountain, from Roan Mountain to Mount Mitchell to Grandfather Mountain—and I am proud that we are protecting them for the future. It is the beauty of the mountains that drives our economy in Western North Carolina and to have a bright future, we must continue to invest in preserving that beauty."
