



March 4, 2009

## Conservation easement approved for Hemphill Farm

*Dale Neal*

Ed Hemphill's farm has been in his family for 150 years, adjacent to the historic birthplace of Civil War-era Gov. Zebulon Vance.

Hemphill wants to see the future of the farm preserved for his daughter and grandson and their descendants. "I hate developers dividing farms into tiny lots and selling them for high prices. I detest movement. I guess I'm old."

The north Buncombe farmer got his wish Tuesday when the Buncombe County commissioners approved a \$50,000 grant that will help the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy put the 64-acre Hemphill Farm under a conservation easement.

The Hemphill Farm is the latest piece of the conservancy's larger strategy to protect views around the Vance Birthplace, explained William Hamilton, the Farmland Protection Program manager for the conservancy.

Development threatens farms like Hemphill's throughout the Reems Creek area where water and sewer lines can be easily extended, Hamilton said.

Under conservation easements, landowners still own and can live on the property and can pass it on to their heirs, but they give up rights to develop the land.

The conservancy has been talking with Hemphill since about 2007 to protect his property. Hamilton pointed to 516 acres under easements owned by the conservancy in the area, which also includes the 1,866-acre Woodfin Watershed.

"Vance Birthplace only owns about 2 or 3 acres but they get about 10,000 visitors a year," Hamilton explained. "The people who lived on historic homesteads were entirely dependent on the productive landscape around them. Having just an isolated Civil War-era cabin surrounded by subdivisions would take that (site) out of context."

The grant is the latest in about \$3.3 million the county has spent since 2007 to protect scenic views and working farms. The conservancy has raised matching funds from state foundations and private donations to pay for surveys, appraisals and legal work.

Easements that the conservancy has purchased in Sandy Mush protect the ridges that are visible from downtown Asheville and the Grove Park Inn, according to Carl Silverstein, executive director of the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy.

Other projects have ensured the future of working farms like the Hickory Nut Gap, which provide fresh produce and locally grown meat for area tailgate markets and restaurants.

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