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Saving mountains

JOURNAL EDITORIAL STAFF

Cheers to those who have pulled off a deal that conserves almost 1,500 scenic mountainous acres in McDowell County for generations to come. State funds have been withdrawn or frozen for many projects of this type, even as developers continue to carve up our mountains. Cooperative conservation efforts are crucial to preserve our environment and to keep tourists coming to our mountains.

The McDowell project benefited from state money, but only because that money had been allocated a few years ago. The Conservation Trust for North Carolina brokered a deal by which the state, members of the Stanback family of Salisbury and other donors put up \$3.67 million to buy a permanent conservation easement from a subsidiary of CSX railroad. The subsidiary will continue to own the land and run trains through it, but most of the woods on the land will never be developed or logged, the *Journal's* Monte Mitchell reported.

This land is laden with breathtaking views and history. It includes about 1.5 miles of the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, used by mountaineers who helped defeat the British at Kings Mountain in 1780; and about 4.5 miles of land along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Habitat for wildlife will be preserved, as will more than seven miles of the headwaters of the Catawba River, which provides water for 1 million people. The area's tourist base is also protected.

Bill Carson, who bought the neighboring nonprofit Orchard at Altapass with his sister and wife 15 years ago, had been worried that development would spoil the area. "We watched with fear and trembling as that land there between the spiny ridges was going to be gobbled up," he said.

A deal to build a gated community was proposed, but fizzled.

Some mountain development is necessary to provide housing and economic development. But it must be held in check and balanced with efforts that preserve the very views that tourists are coming to see in the first place.

Margaret Lillard of the Conservation Trust noted that investing in conservation is more than "large-scale landscaping." It promotes tourism and agriculture, protects drinking water and encourages public health by providing recreational opportunities, she said.

Cooperative efforts to preserve our mountains are essential.