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Little Yellow tract a gem in N.C. crown

Nature Conservancy protects 'keystone' in state's highlands.

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In a prolonged economic downturn that has robbed many of their jobs, their homes and their security, it's easy to forget about the important work yet to be done in so many parts of our lives.

So when an organization like the Nature Conservancy's North Carolina chapter announces the preservation of a highly significant tract of land that will ensure its stunning views, magnificent topography and vital habitat will remain intact for generations to come, it's cause for celebration.

The Nature Conservancy's acquisition of 466 acres in Avery and Mitchell counties of Little Yellow Mountain came with the help of a \$1.2 million loan from the Open Space Institute. The tract includes a 5,504 foot peak - one of the highest peaks in the Southern Appalachians. Its purchase also means that North Carolina's impressive state parks system will grow. In time, the conservancy intends to transfer the tract to the state parks system's new Yellow Mountain State Natural Area.

The conservancy notes this is part of an ecologically important region known as the Greater Roan Highlands. It's a principal part of the viewscape from such landmarks as the Appalachian Trail and the Big Yellow Mountain Preserve.

But it's important for far more than human enjoyment of a lovely mountain landscape. The land, says David Ray of the conservancy's Mountain Project, is a keystone tract because of its value to animals. "It provides a safe corridor for wildlife movement and protects natural communities and rare plants that are found in the area," he said in a news release.

That's critically important because of the rapid population growth in this state. While mountain areas may appear to be unaffected by the residential growth of the Piedmont, pressure to build second homes, golfing resorts and commercial properties, and the ever-present interest in logging untouched forests, have consumed much of the state's available land.

The conservancy's work across the state, coupled with private works of philanthropy and that of other environmental groups and state and local agencies, has performed an outstanding service in preserving what is best about our natural resources.

There's much more to say, but this will start the job: Thanks very much.



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