

# OVERLOOK *on the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau*

Spring, 2007

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*The mission of the Highlands-Cashiers  
Land Trust is to preserve the natural  
areas, scenic beauty, and green spaces of  
Highlands and Cashiers for the enjoyment  
and benefit of the public.*

*A trek to a hidden treasure*

## The Henry M. Wright Expedition

By Gary Wein

**O**n March 12, six intrepid explorers, lead by Jim Whitehurst, explored the boundaries of the Henry M. Wright Tract. This 22-acre site is one of four remnants of what's left of the primeval forest that once covered thousands of acres from Highlands to Whiteside Cove up until the 1940s. The remainder of this forest was cut in the late 1950s. This tract was preserved by Henry M. Wright who in his generosity gave it to the Nature Conservancy in 1967. In 1988 they gave it to the Land Trust for our care and stewardship.

Jim Whitehurst played a large role in that decision to allow our Land

Trust to take care of this site. He was the volunteer custodian for the Nature Conservancy. Jim recently offered to lead a field trip to the site and introduce it to a couple of new board members and myself.

The day began with Jim briefing us on the hazards that might be encountered in the forest including steep slopes, bears, dog hobble, rhododendron thickets and a sense of awe. We didn't see any bears, we did trip over a lot of dog hobble, and all of us were awestruck by the beauty of this site.

This incredible forest is one of

**Expedition** continued on page 4

*The intrepid explorers of the Henry Wright Tract at the end of the day. From left to right: Julie Schott, Jim Whitehurst, Marcia Moore, James Tate, and Anya Hinkle, Highlands Biological Station Associate Director.*





**Learning from  
the Past—  
Planning for the  
Future**

In March, 2003, the Highlands Land Trust developed a strategic plan that would carry the organization through 2006, with the help of Chuck Roe, Southeast Director of the Land Trust Alliance. In an all-day seminar the board of directors worked to dissect our by-laws bringing the Land Trust into compliance with the national oversight organization, the Land Trust Alliance.

Having been asked by community leaders in the Cashiers area, a decision to extend the boundaries of the Land Trust into Jackson County was made and the name changed to the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust. The board of directors increased to a total of 22 members, which would allow representation to equalize between the two communities.

Committees were formed to meet the needs of the growing organization's mission of preserving green space for the benefit of the public. Those committees were responsible for the goals of Con-

servation and Land Protection; Stewardship; Public Education and Outreach; Membership / Fundraising; Finance; and Administration.

It is now time to evaluate the 2003–2006 Strategic Plan and develop another strategic plan that will carry H-CLT through 2010. On March 24, 2007, Chuck Roe again facilitated a retreat to help the board of directors and executive director write goals for the next three years. Those goals will be shared with H-CLT supporters via the next edition of the newsletter, "The Outlook."

The Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust is the oldest land trust in North Carolina and one of the oldest in the United States. Drawing upon history and learning from examples set by strong leadership in earlier times, your land trust learns from the past to prepare for the future in its mission to preserve the natural and cultural heritage for our children and grandchildren.

I once read, "We did not inherit land from our parents; it is on loan to us by our children and grandchildren." Keep in mind that the future is sometimes more important than the past, but we can learn from our past mistakes and achievements. Learning from the 2003–2006 Strategic Plan will help us develop an even better plan for the next five years.

Thank you for your support!

**Mercedes Heller  
President, H-CLT**

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*A review from Executive Director Gary Wein*

## A snapshot of the H-CLT year

**B**elieve it or not, it's been less than ten months since Mike Cavender went off to sail the Pamlico River and I came on board. For me it has been a really exciting time as I began to get a handle on how a land trust is supposed to operate. There is a lot to running a land trust and while I have learned a lot so far, I still have a lot to learn. However, I'm beginning to be able to ask the right kinds of questions. I'm sure I have made a few mistakes, but I'll not tell you about those. I'll just tell you about the things we did right.

Last year we preserved six properties—three conservation easements and three donated properties—that will protect more than 80 acres in the Highlands-Cashiers area. Three pieces of property were donated to the Land Trust this fall: a ten-acre tract at Rhodes Big View; a 6.5-acre tract on Bald Rock Mountain at the Divide; and a 2-acre tract on Hardscrabble Road. Three conservation easements were granted at the end of 2006: Laurel Knob (32.5 acres); The Hedges on Satulah Mountain (6 acres); and Lonesome Valley (26 acres).

The biggest change in the office is that we have gone from a staff of one part-time person to two full-time staff members. I came on as the new full-time executive director in May, 2006, and in February we added our second full-time staff member, Julie Schott, as our new development coordinator. Julie hails from Franklin, and got a degree in International Business from Western Carolina University. We managed to steal her from Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School. She's already rearranged the office and painted the walls. Be sure to stop by and see the changes in the office next time you are in town.

Not only did the Land Trust have to tolerate a rookie executive director, it elected an entire new executive board. Fortunately, they were much more experienced than the executive director. Working with a board of directors is a brand new experience for me, and has been a challenge at times. What an awesome group of dedicated folks! They've been tolerant of my silly questions and made sure I follow up on the good ideas, not the bad ones. Two folks have really stood out for me. I want to give a special thank you to

Mercedes Heller and Richard Melvin for always being there with sage advice and encouragement.

In addition to the properties we conserved this past year we have been pursuing the acquisition of Delany Bog. On February 26, 2006, we signed an option that should lead to the transfer of this property to the state of North Carolina. This has been a much more active approach to land acquisition than the other six projects last year. If we are successful we will preserve 38 acres that contain a mountain bog, a population of Fraser's loosestrife (state endangered), 1200 feet along the East Fork of the Chattooga River, and remnants of an old growth forest.

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In August, President Bush signed the new Pension Bill, which changed the personal income tax deduction rate for a conservation easement from 30% to 50%, and the years over which you can carry the deduction from six to sixteen. This change is currently only in effect for 2006 and 2007. We are also seeing a lot of interest in landowners reducing their property taxes through conservation easements as Macon County reassesses property values. As of the end of February we have already had 14 contacts. It promises to be a very busy year.

As a professional ecologist with an academic background, I have seen and helped organize a number of lecture series. The Zahner lecture series is a class act and is a true gem of the Land Trust Education Program. We had 12 great lectures in 2006, and had record attendance that exceeded 2005 by 30%. We also held two lectures in Cashiers that were well attended. These were so successful we decided to partner with the Village Green and start a new lecture series called The Village Nature Series. We will host five speakers on the last Wednesday of the month from May through September. Look for more details in the next newsletter.

As part of the process to comply with the Land Trust Alliance standards, we developed a three-year Strategic Plan. It ended in 2006. The board of directors met this March to begin the development of a new three-year Strategic Plan with the help of Chuck Roe. It's a lot of work, but a critical element to a successful program in land conservation.

## Meet our new Development Coordinator

*I would feel more optimistic about a bright future for man if he spent less time proving that he can outwit Nature and more time tasting her sweetness and respecting her seniority.*

Elwyn Brooks White, *Essays of E. B. White*, 1977



I believe that knowing what a person stands for, knowing what matters to them most, gives true insight into who they really are. These borrowed words from E. B. White could easily be interpreted as my personal credo, giving perhaps the most simple and clearest insight into who I am. It is with immense enthusiasm that I welcome the opportunity to serve as the new development coordinator for the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust.

I come to the Land Trust with a wide spectrum of experience which I believe will be helpful in my new position, as I will have the opportunity to wear many hats. During my four years as Inn manager at the Old Edwards Inn, I had countless opportunities to see Highlands through the eyes of natives, transplants and tourists; these perspectives have, no doubt, given me a unique understanding of this great community. After leaving the Inn, I completed a dual degree: a B.S. in International Business from Western Carolina University and a Bachelor of Economics in International Business and Management Studies from the Hogeschool Brabant in the Netherlands. Since my return to the U.S., I have worked as restaurant manager at Highlands Country Club and most recently as part of the advancement team at Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School. My volunteer work

includes: marketing and promotion assistant for the fair trade organization, Ten Thousand Villages; reforestation worker for a U.S.F.S.-funded reforestation project; and hurricane clean-up with the Mississippi Presbytery in Gulfport, Mississippi.

Although I have had the opportunity to live literally from coast to coast, I chose Macon County as my home over 12 years ago, and have developed a love for and connection with Highlands. It is a place that has become very close to my heart. Like many of you, I have seen changes here over the past several years. I recognize that not all change is good, but some is indeed quite positive. My goal is to work with the Land Trust to help preserve the very elements that brought most of us here in the first place.

Promoting our mission means preserving the outdoor playground I enjoy so much. Aside from hiking and camping, I take every opportunity to fulfill my love of exploration through travel—near and far. I also enjoy expressing my artistic side through various forms of “creative recycling.”

When you find yourself in the area, please stop by the office. I welcome any insight or suggestions for the possible growth of the Land Trust and its mission.

**Julie Schott**

### Expedition continued from page 1



*Three CEP students surround the Cheoah Hemlock in the Henry M. Wright Tract.*

It was number one until just a few weeks ago when Leviathan in the Smoky Mountains was determined to be just 19 cubic feet larger.

the best examples in western North Carolina of the Canada Hemlock Forest. Some of the trees have been dated at over 450 years old. One of these trees, the Cheoah Hemlock, is the second largest measured hemlock in the world at 62.5 inches in diameter.

The Henry M. Wright Tract has been the subject of several scientific studies and publications. Most recently the large trees were the focus of the 2006 Carolina Environmental Program (CEP) students. They set up long term monitoring plots that can be used to determine the impact of the hemlock woolly adelgid on the forest.

In addition to the wonderful Canada hemlocks there are Carolina hemlocks and even a couple of rare mosses.

Many of you may already know the location of the HMW tract, but I won't tell the rest of you where it is. The site is sensitive to human trampling, and we want to take good care of it. But maybe we can convince Jim to take another group to visit this site next year for a dose of awe.

# Members and Donors for 2006

The following people are the backbone of our financial support, and we are deeply grateful for their belief in our mission. We have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the various lists. If your name was omitted, please let us know so we can give you recognition in our next newsletter.

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# Highlands Greenway 2006 Annual Report

**D**uring 2005 The Highlands Greenway Committee was formed. We are a volunteer committee consisting of various organizations interested in the greenway:

*Chair, Hillrie Quin*  
*Audubon Society, Dr. Doug Landwehr*  
*Churches, Rev. Brian Sullivan*  
*Garden Clubs, Mercedes Heller*  
*Highlands Biological Station, Patrick Brannon*  
*Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust, Dr. Gary Wein*  
*Highlands Historical Society, Dr. Ran Shaffner*  
*Planning Board, Clem Patton*  
*Recreational users, Dale Stika*  
*Town of Highlands, Selwyn Chalker*

We applied for and received a grant from the National Park Service's Rivers & Trails Conservation Assistance Program. This grant provided the expertise of two Park Service planners during 2006. We also received a small grant from Kodak, administered by The Conservation Fund.

After many scouting trips and meetings, we developed a comprehensive conceptual map of potential greenway and bikeway locations in Highlands and the surrounding Extra Territorial Jurisdiction. We also developed a Strategic Plan which we presented to the town board in August. We asked for three things: approval of the strategic plan and the conceptual map, assistance of the planning board on ordinance changes needed to implement the greenway, and future discussion with the town regarding funding.

We have since met with the planning board and started the complex process of determining what ordinances will require changes. We have asked the town board to include \$300,000 in the next budget for the greenway. Assuming we get the required ordinance changes and the initial budget from the town, we will hold public meetings in the spring and summer of 2007, work on the detailed planning and additional funding needed for our first section of the greenway, and prepare for the construction of our first section in 2008.

This is a long-term project, well supported by the community and the town government. Its realization will make a significant difference in our community by providing safe walkways to work, school and shopping, reducing the need for automobiles and parking. It will also provide an opportunity for a greater appreciation of our natural and historical heritage, leading to its preservation.

**Hillrie Quin**  
 Vice President, H-CLT

# Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust

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## *Conservation Initiative Underway with New Hire*

Asheville resident Phyllis Stiles began work January 2007 as the new Blue Ridge Forever campaign director, charged with major gift fundraising for the thirteen western North Carolina land conservation organizations—including the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust—devoted to protecting land and water resources in the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains. The five-year goal of the campaign is to protect 50,000 acres by 2010.

“Phyllis has an immense passion for conservation and a contagious energy to do good work,” said Megan Riley, BRF partnership coordinator. “She will lead the partners of Blue Ridge Forever to tap new funding sources to protect the Southern Blue Ridge in this critical decade of land conservation.”

Phyllis came to the Partnership from Mars Hill College in North Carolina, where she was the director of corporate and foundation relations, and has more than 15 years experience in fundraising. Her previous positions



included directing Leadership Haywood and Leadership Asheville and working from Western Carolina University to direct a natural resource management project in West Africa.

“Our Blue Ridge Mountains have been a refuge for millions of lowland visitors like me for generations—a place to feel at home and be restored,” Phyllis said. “This region is counting on those of us who live and visit here today to preserve its exceptional landscapes. I am honored to be a part of the Blue Ridge Forever team.” Phyllis enjoys hiking and “shrooming” and learning to play the upright bass.