

# Old Rocky Mountain

## Conservation Easement Phase II

### Baseline Documentation Report

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## **1. Summary: Conservation Values and Purpose for Baseline Documentation**

This baseline document is designed to document the background ecological condition, human and natural features, and conservation values of the 2015 Conservation Easement Area, the second phase of a conservation easement, hereafter referred to as “Conservation Area”, owned by private individuals, on Old Rocky Mountain, Macon County, NC. This document serves as a baseline for future monitoring of the Conservation Area and also provides recommendations for management. The conservation values entail the natural and cultural resources contained within the Conservation Area, such as (but not limited to) water resources, historical and archeological features, soils and geological features, rare and endangered flora and fauna, significant natural communities, and other notable ecological features. Organizations such as the NC Natural Heritage Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, regional land trusts, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, NC Division of Water Quality, and NatureServe – a consortium of state Natural Heritage programs, consider these features to be significant and track them as such to prioritize conservation actions.

This Baseline Documentation report was developed from existing documents, GIS data, photographs of the Conservation Area, and a series of field visits. This report was prepared by Ed Schwartzman, owner of Joe Pye Ecological Consulting. Mr. Schwartzman has 13 years of professional experience working as a biologist in North Carolina for the NC Division of Water Quality and NC Natural Heritage Program.

### **Purpose of Baseline Documentation**

For every conservation easement that the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust (HCLT) receives, a Baseline Documentation Report (“Report”) must be completed. The Report documents the important conservation values protected by the conservation easement and the relevant natural and man-made features and conditions of the Conservation Area at the time the conservation easement is conveyed. This information serves as a baseline for future monitoring and enforcement of the conservation easement.

The Report is also required to comply with IRS regulations when the landowner is taking advantage of the tax deduction for a conservation easement donation. IRS regulations specify that conservation easement donors are responsible for providing baseline information.

The Report includes a narrative description of natural and man-made features, on-site photographs, and relevant maps such as survey plat, geographic location, proximity to protected areas, aerial photograph, vegetation and natural features, soils, man-made features, and where photographs were taken.

This Report is signed by its author and both the landowner and the HCLT Executive Director sign an acknowledgement of the accuracy of the Report prior to or at closing. At least three full-color copies of the baseline documentation report are produced for signatures at closing. One goes to the landowner, one is for the HCLT archives, and the third is for HCLT’s working files. More copies may be produced if grant-making agencies or other parties are involved in the project.

As owners exercise reserved rights, or as other changes to the property occur, HCLT will add further descriptions, photos, and maps to the baseline report to provide a continual record of changes to the Conservation Area.

## **Summary of Conservation Values**

A number of conservation values were identified during assessment and field inventory of the Conservation Area. The following features contribute to the significance of the Conservation Area:

### Water Resources

- Headwaters of Little Salt Rock Creek (Class C) and Ellijay Creek (Trout, Class C), a tributary to the Cullasaja River.
- Approximately 5,968 linear feet of Little Salt Rock Creek and 810 feet of unnamed tributaries to Ellijay Creek.
- Frequent rocky seeps and boulderfields with subterranean flow.

### Proximity to Protected Land and Significant Natural Heritage Areas

- Surrounded on three sides by lands protected by conservation easements held by Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust and North American Land Trust respectively.
- Adjacent conservation lands effectively link this tract to a large block of U.S. Forest Service – Nantahala National Forest that spans the Cowee Mountain range.
- Immediately adjacent to two Natural Heritage Program natural areas with moderate overall natural heritage significance ratings.
  - Brushy Ridge
  - Little Rocky Mountain

### Rare Species and Natural Communities

A total of 9 elements occurrences registered in the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program database within one mile of the site, including plants, animals, and natural communities:

- One occurrence of a Federal Species of Concern/State Special Concern animal species within 0.25 mile of the Conservation Area.
- Three occurrences of State Rare-listed plant species within one mile of the Conservation Area.
- Seven natural community element occurrences are documented on the adjacent lands protected by conservation easements within one mile of the Conservation Area.

### Additional Natural Features

- Five natural communities are present in the Conservation Area, including an old-growth example of Northern Hardwood Forest (Typic Subtype). One of the communities present, High Elevation Birch Boulderfield, is considered limited in North Carolina and is only represented by 20-30 examples.
- Three species (two plants and one animal) tracked as Watch List by NC Natural Heritage Program present in the Conservation Area.

## View-shed

- The Conservation Area is visible from prominent viewpoints public and private land including:
  - The Blue Ridge Parkway, including Richland Balsam and Tannasse Bald
  - Great Smoky Mountain National Park, including the Cataloochee Divide
  - Nantahala Mountains, including Albert Mountain, Wayah Bald, and Wesser Bald
  - Plott Balsam Mountains
  - Franklin, NC