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## **Land Trusts preserve 10,000 acres in 2009**

[http://www2.wataugademocrat.com/story/Land\\_trusts\\_preserve\\_10,000\\_acres\\_in\\_2009\\_id\\_001796](http://www2.wataugademocrat.com/story/Land_trusts_preserve_10,000_acres_in_2009_id_001796)

Despite the challenges posed by the current economic climate, North Carolina's mountain land trusts project that they will protect 50,000 acres by the end of 2010--the goal set by the Blue Ridge Forever coalition. In 2009, the 10 land trusts that comprise the coalition protected 10,257 acres in Western North Carolina, the equivalent of 7,770 football fields.

As they head into the final year of the campaign, the coalition members have protected 329 properties, to total 45,046 acres. They credit the landowners with whom they have worked with during this campaign for much of their success. At least seventy-five percent of these landowners donated a portion or in some cases all of the value of the property.

"The physical and economic landscapes have changed over the course of this campaign, but the generosity of individuals who have donated land or given financial support has been a constant in helping protect many of the places we all love," said Eric Hiegl, executive director of High County Conservancy.

Land trusts permanently protect land with high conservation values, such as clean drinking water, wildlife, scenic vistas and working local farms. They work with willing landowners, public agencies, and private and public funders either to negotiate conservation agreements or to acquire land in order to protect it forever.

"Land trusts work closely with landowners to tailor plans for their individual needs and wishes, including land donations in wills and estates," said George Santucci, executive director of National Committee for the New River.

By working together through the Blue Ridge Forever coalition, mountain land trusts have made the best use of their resources and expertise in the face of continuing limits on public funding. Blue Ridge Forever's Conservation Vision has helped the land trusts focus their conservation priorities for private and public partners, and for their own long-range planning.

"The downturn in the economy has been a blessing and curse for the land trusts," said Walter Clarke, executive director of Blue Ridge Rural Land Trust. "There are important tracts that we could not have dreamed of being able to afford at the start of our campaign in 2006 that we now have protected forever. As we stretch to protect our final 4,954 acres we hope that more people will lend their support, not merely to help us reach a number, but to help themselves by protecting North Carolina's critical natural resources - clean drinking water, parks and trails, beloved mountain vistas, and working forests and farms."

Blue Ridge Forever Coalition Campaign Statistics Summary:

Protected 10,257 acres (74 projects) in 18 mountain counties in 2009.

Protected 45,046 acres (329 projects) in 23 mountain counties, 2006-2009