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DATE

*New Conservation Property Protected in Whitley County*

**Berea, Kentucky**..... We are pleased to announce that on Earth Day the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust (KNLT) purchased the first of several targeted conservation lands adjoining one of Kentucky's most remote and wild areas, the Archer Benge State Nature Preserve. This preserve covers 1,864 acres along the Laurel Fork in Whitley County and provides important habitat for numerous rare native fish and mussels, the federally listed Indiana Bat, and several rare plants. It's the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest nature preserve in the state, and, with the help of KNLT, it will continue to grow. The 46 acre addition will be followed by purchase of several other contiguous tracts this year as we fill out the protected watershed boundaries and protect significant bat caves on the property.

These protected areas near the Tennessee line create a southern anchor for the Pine Mountain Wildlife Corridor project, an effort by KNLT to protect the 120-mile migratory wildlife corridor on Pine Mountain stretching from Tennessee through Whitley, Bell, Harlan, Letcher and Pike counties and into Virginia. This is one of the most rugged, least developed areas of Kentucky. With continued success, this area of conservation lands will grow significantly.

KNLT Executive Director, Hugh Archer, explained, "It's very rewarding to make this addition that will increase the protection of the Pine Mountain Wildlife Corridor. Our next phase of protection work now underway includes about \$7 million in new projects all under negotiation. This would not be possible without our broad support base of individuals and key partners such as the Forecastle Foundation along with lead gifts from long time supporters, Christina Lee Brown and Tom Dupree, Sr. We are very grateful for their vision of protecting Kentucky's most treasured and sacred places."

Kentucky Natural Lands Trust has preserved significant wild lands across Kentucky but is focused primarily on large contiguous tracts of forest that are critical to the survival of many plant and animal species. Efforts are aimed at preserving natural heritage in ways that also benefit local, regional and global communities.

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