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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Kentucky Natural Lands Trust Establishes Warbler Ridge Preserve on Pine Mountain**

**Berea, KY** December 2, 2020 - Kentucky Natural Lands Trust (KNLT) protected an additional 1,368 acres on Pine Mountain near Cumberland, Kentucky, establishing the Warbler Ridge Preserve. The preserve combines this newly acquired tract with land protected in 2017, creating the land trust's largest preserve totaling 2,456 acres. This is one of the most unique conservation projects in KNLT's history.

This project builds upon the organization's 25-year history of working to protect Pine Mountain, a biologically diverse and climate resilient landscape that is important to local, regional and global communities. Pine Mountain is a 180,000-acre wildlands corridor running from Tennessee through Kentucky to Virginia. Through a public-private partnership 68,500 acres have been protected by federal, state and nonprofit conservation organizations.

Pine Mountain provides habitat for thousands of species of plants and animals; nearly 100 of these species are considered rare, some found nowhere else on the planet. The new preserve protects documented populations of frostweed and yellow wild indigo, as well as the Pine Barren Natural Community, a G2-globally imperiled community. The tract also protects contiguous forest that is known summer and swarming habitat for the endangered Indiana and northern long-eared bats.

Warbler Ridge is adjacent to the E. Lucy Braun and Hi Lewis Pine Barrens State Nature Preserves, adding to the overall connectivity of the Pine Mountain Wildlands Corridor and securing an important link in the Great Eastern Trail. The preserve protects the headwaters of several tributaries to the Kentucky and Cumberland rivers, water sources for many communities and key habitat for rare fishes, mussels, crayfishes and aquatic plants. Ultimately the waters flow into the Ohio River forming the fourth-largest watershed on the planet.

The land was acquired from the Southeast Education Foundation whose mission is to support the Southeast Kentucky Community & Technical College network. The proceeds from KNLT's

purchase of the land will be deployed by the foundation for student scholarships and campus investments in Whitesburg, Cumberland, Harlan, Pineville and Middlesboro.

“This project illustrates our science-driven and community-minded conservation work. The new preserve safeguards biodiversity while supporting the emerging outdoor recreation industry and the local community college system. This was a notable achievement that has significant benefit for the region.”

~ Greg Abernathy, KNLT Executive Director

This conservation work was made possible through partnerships KNLT has established with individual donors, foundations, and local and state agencies.

### **About Kentucky Natural Lands Trust**

KNLT is a nationally accredited non-profit working to protect, connect and restore wildlands, large forest tracts and migratory corridors. Efforts began in 1995 with the preservation of Blanton Forest, expanded to the Pine Mountain Wildlands Corridor, and now include a range of conservation projects statewide. KNLT uses a wide variety of tools to conserve natural areas and to work with forest landowners. Through partnerships with government agencies, nonprofits, corporations and private individuals, KNLT has protected over 15,500 acres of wildlands and assisted with protecting an additional 34,500 acres. For more information on how you can help KNLT protect wildlands, visit [www.KNLT.org](http://www.KNLT.org).