



LAND & WATER CONSERVATION FUND REQUEST | FISCAL YEAR 2010

Project Name:

New River, Virginia
Jefferson National Forest

Parcel: 485 acres

LWCF request: \$1,275,000

Total project value: \$1,600,000

Natural Resources

Unique geological features
New River watershed
Jefferson National Forest
Appalachian Trail corridor

Significance

Rare species habitat
Watershed protection
Contiguous wildlife corridor
Health & safety
Open space protection
Scenic views and ridgelines
Outdoor recreation

For 30 years the final alignment of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail along the New River in Giles County, Virginia, remained unresolved due to conflicts between hiker safety and land ownership. The current route passes through private land owned by Celanese LLC and is open only at their discretion. The footpath parallels US 460 and skirts a large chemical plant operated by the owners.

Not only does this route offer little scenic and recreational value, there are safety hazards to users of the Trail, with its proximity to busy Route 460 and the need to cross a fly-ash pit access road traveled heavily by dump-trucks. In addition to safety concerns, this section of America's premier National Scenic Trail could be closed to public access at any time.

After years of negotiations, the current Celanese LLC administration has expressed willingness to sell the rights to a 400-acre parcel on which the Trail could be relocated. The National Park Service is currently under contract to purchase fee rights to the 60-acre Carter property; easements with as many as 12 adjacent small lot ownerships would complete the relocation to a safe and far more scenic route.

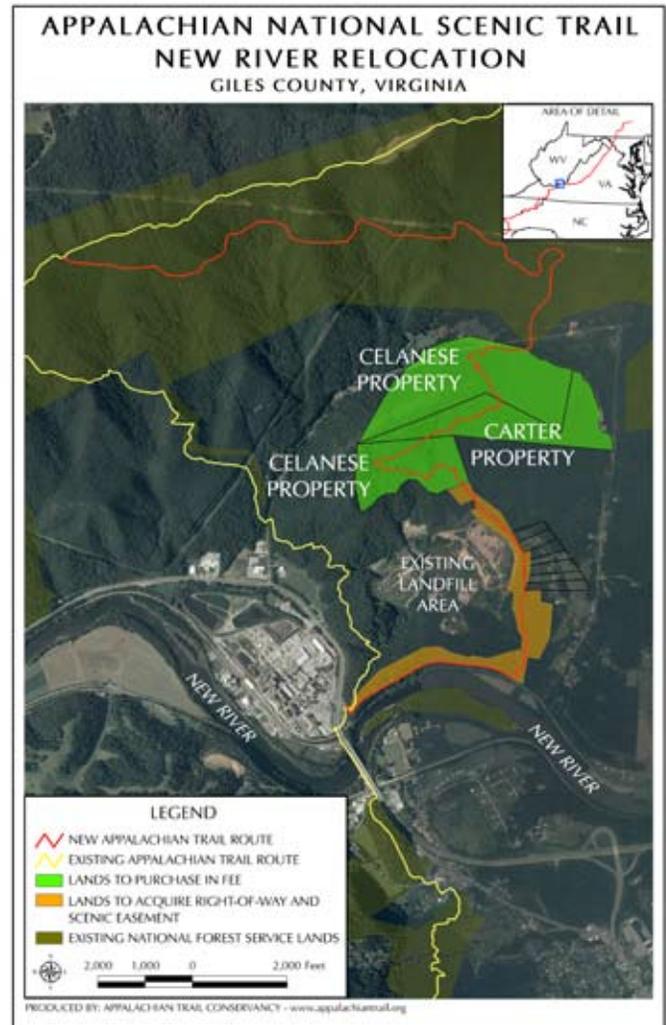


The 1.5-mile relocation will solve safety and public access issues for the Trail, and protect significant natural resources. There are geologically unique karst features on the properties which need to be protected. While it is difficult to survey these subterranean habitats, they are likely to harbor several species of concern; in fact, at least eight of southwest Virginia’s imperiled species are usually found within such habitats.

This area is also a part of the New River watershed. Located within a mile of the river’s banks, its intact forested condition provides significant ecological services in reducing sedimentation and ensuring groundwater recharge. If the area is not protected, there is significant potential for erosion and sedimentation to the New River associated with clear-cutting or future development. The New River – an American Heritage River – plays a profound role in tourism, which has been identified locally as a rapidly expanding economic force.

Adding this exceptional piece of land to the Appalachian Trail corridor extends the buffer zone around what is now among the narrowest segments of the greenway. This route functions as a prime wildlife corridor, especially for certain migratory passerine bird species.

This project benefits from wide public support as it will alleviate impacts of potential development on adjacent private landowners and provide the local community with an outstanding recreational



opportunity. The popular southwest Virginia area has identified outdoor recreation as a prime vehicle for economic growth.

In this vein, there is an opportunity to make the relocated Trail fully accessible in accordance with the new guidelines for national park amenities. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) is currently engaged with the Giles County Historical Society to develop an accessible section of the A.T. as it passes through one of the County’s most significant historical sites. Lessons learned from this small project will transfer to the more significant New River relocation project.

ATC has already secured \$150,000 from a private donor toward acquisition of this property, and Celanese LLC officials have expressed interest in a bargain sale to expedite the resolution of the situation.