

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ROCKY FORK LAND ACQUISITION

Greene and Unicoi Counties, Tennessee
Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork is located next to the TN/NC state line, just off 1-26 about 30 miles south of Johnson City, TN and 30 miles north of Asheville, NC, within the Cherokee National Forest. At 10,000 acres, it is the largest unprotected wild mountainous property remaining within national forest boundaries in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. About one-third of the tract lies in Greene County, TN; the remaining two thirds are in Unicoi County, TN.



Photo by Greg Hutson

The property contains primarily hardwood forests and is prime habitat for bear and other wildlife. Over a mile of the Appalachian Trail passes through the property (this represents over 17% of the A.T. right-of-way remaining to be acquired), then skirts the Rocky Fork tract for several more miles. Some 16 miles of blue ribbon trout streams, with numerous cascades and waterfalls, flow through the property. This includes the waters of Rocky Fork, Lower Higgins Creek and Flint Creek. Additionally, several sensitive species are known to occur on the tract including the star-nosed mole, woodland jumping mouse, smoky shrew, a potential new species of salamander, peregrine falcon and rare bats.

The Rocky Fork tract also includes scenic high elevation heath and grass balds and the upper watershed of streams draining into the Sampson Mountain Wilderness, which adjoins the property to the north. Of historical note, one of the last and bloodiest of frontier battles against the Cherokee, led by John Sevier (the first Governor of Tennessee), occurred January 10, 1789 at a site near Flint Creek on this property.

Because of the tract's exceptional trout fisheries and bear habitat, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) has been managing Rocky Fork under annual leases for many years.

A well graded network of narrow woods roads lace the area, providing a scenic and erosion resistant trail system for hikers, mountain bikers, fishermen, hunters and other recreational users. Access to the property takes about five minutes from Exit 5 of 1-26. The westbound scenic overlook on 1-26 provides sweeping views of the property.

It is proposed that Rocky Fork be purchased with about one-half of the land owned by the Cherokee National Forest and about one-half owned by the State of Tennessee and managed in a cooperative way for public use and enjoyment.