



# The Southern Blue Ridge

PROTECTING  
OUR HERITAGE

The Southern Blue Ridge is a region of superlatives – 9.4 million acres of ancient mountains stretching across Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. The area harbors the last remaining large, intact temperate forests in the Eastern United States, purifying drinking water and filtering air for millions of Americans. A third of the United States population lives within a one-day drive of the Southern Blue Ridge, making it a popular tourist destination and a valuable economic driver. The Southern Blue Ridge has a rich cultural heritage that is closely linked with nature. People have lived, worked, fished and hunted in these mountains for generations.

The Southern Blue Ridge supports an incredible array of animals and plants. The Great Smoky Mountains alone are home to 1,400 types of flowering plants and a hundred species of trees – that’s more tree species than found on the whole European continent. Many of these plants are rare or threatened; of the 4,000 plant species found in the Southern Blue Ridge – 400 are considered rare and 250 occur nowhere else in the world.

As the population expands, the Southern Blue Ridge will play an even more important role in meeting basic human needs and boosting the economy. The region faces tremendous pressure as it lies close to some of the country’s fastest growing urban areas. A healthy Southern Blue Ridge is crucial to the continued public health and economic health of the region.

**OUR VISION:** The Southern Blue Ridge will sustain healthy, connected forests and rivers, vital for people, animals and plants; it will continue to provide clean water and clean air; and its beauty will continue to renew and inspire future generations.

Although the Southern Blue Ridge is beautiful and home to an extraordinary array of plants and animals, it is not pristine. For centuries it has been used and sometimes abused, leaving a legacy that must be restored. Much of the area needs restoration if it is going to sustain people and nature into the future.

A recent large scale forest study of the Southern Blue Ridge gives us a good tool for finding where to protect additional land and how those forests that are already protected should be managed.

The Nature Conservancy has worked in the Southern Blue Ridge for more than 50 years. While we have had great success, we recognize today we must work collectively and collaboratively to achieve our vision of a healthy, connected region. We must work closely with partners, particularly the federal government. We must also work closely with each other; instead of each state chapter working inside its borders, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and Georgia chapters are working together for the greater good across the entire region. This leveraging ensures that we are getting the most out of the dollars that you contribute to further our work.

## HOW YOUR SUPPORT WILL HELP THE SOUTHERN BLUE RIDGE

### *Enhance Public Land Management*

The U.S. Forest Service owns and manages a third of the region, approximately 3.2 million acres. With limited acquisition dollars and high value mountain land, influencing public land management is our best route for having the most impact on the Southern Blue Ridge. U.S. Forest Service lands are quite literally the people’s land. All of us own it, and will benefit from its sound management. The Nature Conservancy is:

- Contributing our scientific and restoration expertise to the Forest Service as it develops plans that will guide forest management for the coming decades.
- Partnering with the Forest Service in a number of areas including forest restoration and identifying key tracts for conservation.

### *Protect Land for People and Nature*

While 40 percent of the Southern Blue Ridge is in conservation, there are still gaps. Continued recovery from the economic downturn and a big reduction in public conservation funding means that we have to be smarter as we decide what areas need to be conserved. The Nature Conservancy is:

- Using science to prioritize how to spend precious land protection dollars.
- Protecting tracts that are the most valuable when it comes to the services they provide to people and nature.

### *Bringing Fire Back to the Land*

The Southern Blue Ridge has been shaped by fire. The absence of fire the past century has imperiled the forest; plants and oak trees are being shaded out of existence; there are many plants that are fire-dependent; without fire, they will disappear. Large amounts of fuel have built up, threatening nearby human communities with wildfire. The Nature Conservancy is:

- Leading the Southern Blue Ridge Fire Learning Network, which brings scientists and land managers together to understand the role fire plays in our forests and develop solutions to bring fire back to the forest.
- Leveraging our resources to assist public agencies with controlled burns.

### *Keeping Pests and Disease at Bay*

The Southern Blue Ridge has been heavily affected by non-native pests in the past, and more than likely this will continue into the future. It is estimated that American chestnuts once accounted for a quarter of all hardwood trees in the region. Today, there are no American chestnut forests left – obliterated by a fungus accidentally introduced by man. There are new pests and pathogens already in the US that could do irreparable damage to our Southern Blue Ridge forests if introduced here. The Nature Conservancy is:

- Building effective partnerships that increase funding for research and pursue policy changes that promote prevention and control.
- Supporting outreach efforts to develop early detection and rapid response to new invasive species and limit the spread of those that already exist.



Millions of acres of forest draw people to the Southern Blue Ridge © KAREN TAM



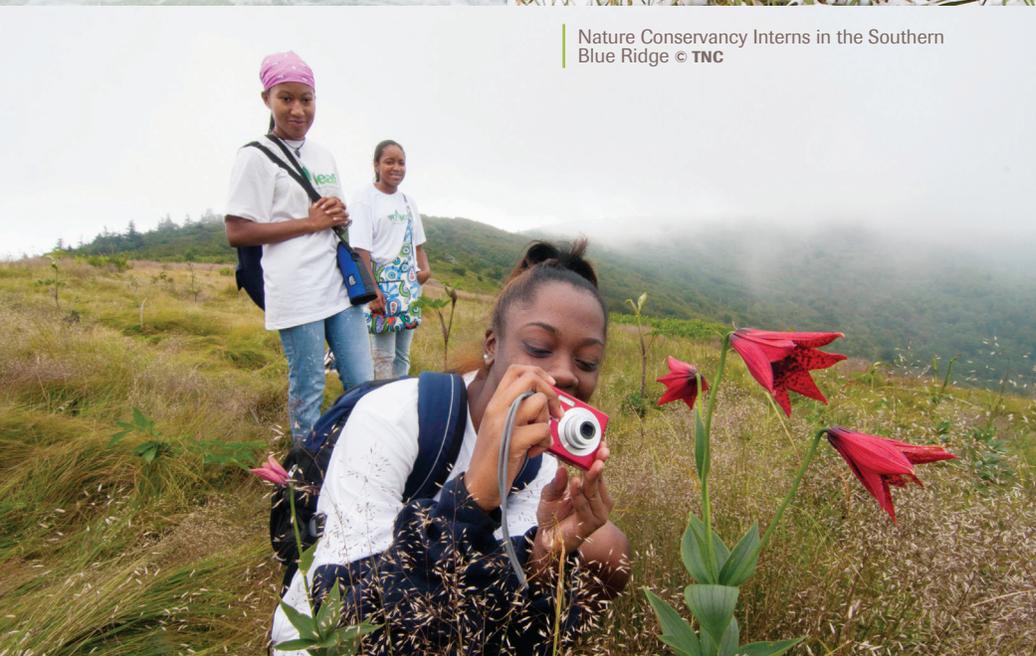
Heller's blazing star – one of the many native plants that is fire-dependent. © DAVID BLEVINS



Kayakers are drawn to the area's whitewaters © JOHN MACDONALD



Wild turkey © BRADY BECK



Nature Conservancy Interns in the Southern Blue Ridge © TNC

# A Call to Action: WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

We can only achieve the large scale conservation victories necessary to save the Southern Blue Ridge with the support and involvement of people like you who share our passion. We need your help to make our vision reality:

## → GIVE ←

*Your contributions will help us enhance public land management, protect key lands and improve forest health.*

## → SUPPORT ←

*Work with us to influence public land management in your backyard.*

## → VOLUNTEER ←

*Help us improve the Southern Blue Ridge by volunteering with The Nature Conservancy in your community.*



FOR MORE INFORMATION  
→ [nature.ly/sbrforests](https://nature.ly/sbrforests)

## WHY THE NATURE CONSERVANCY?

The Conservancy uses a strategic, science-based approach. The Nature Conservancy is the largest conservation organization in the world, working in all 50 states and more than 30 countries. Because of its reach, it can draw on the intellectual capital of scientists in its ranks and across academia.

The Conservancy approaches conservation challenges in a nonconfrontational way, looking for a pragmatic solution. It recognizes that no single organization can solve a conservation problem; solutions are community-based and community-driven. It acknowledges that in order for conservation to succeed, stakeholders must believe in and support the conservation approach.