



Commonwealth of Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet

Matthew G. Bevin, Governor

Charles G. Snaveley, Secretary

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Office of Kentucky Nature Preserves Established *Kentucky State Nature Preserves, Wild Rivers, and Heritage Land Conservation Fund consolidate into one agency*

Frankfort, Ky. (June 6, 2018) – The Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet has announced that the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission (KSNPC), the Kentucky Wild Rivers System (WRS), and the Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund (KHLCF) have consolidated into the new "Office of Kentucky Nature Preserves" (KNP).

Senate Bill 129, passed by the 2018 General Assembly and signed by Governor Matt Bevin, created the new office, which is supported by the Kentucky Resources Council (KRC) and other conservation groups.

"This a very exciting chapter in Kentucky's conservation history," said incoming KNP Executive Director Zeb Weese, who has served as Director of the KSNPC since 2016. "This will allow us to more effectively coordinate activities on over 120 natural areas and nature preserves in over 70 counties, while expanding our capacity to monitor rare species, manage and restore important habitat, and maintain our hiking trails."

Since 1976, the KSNPC has dedicated 63 state nature preserves in addition to managing nature preserves and natural areas throughout Kentucky. KNP will continue those efforts as Kentucky's natural heritage program. KNP also will continue to coordinate with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for federally endangered and at-risk plants under Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act.

With the consolidation, the KHLCF Board remains and will continue to oversee the purchase and conservation of natural areas.

Over the past two years, using funds from “Nature’s Finest” license plates and other sources, the KHLCF Board has awarded funds to 30 projects to conserve 6,000 acres. In the last few months the fund purchased over 1,000 acres that added to the Steel Hollow Natural Area on the Little South Fork Wild River. It will soon add another 1,000 acres to natural areas in Bullitt County. The KNP will assume the monitoring of the conservation easements held by the KHLCF Board.

KNP also will monitor Kentucky's Wild Rivers corridors. The nine legally designated Wild Rivers conserve the largest free-flowing rivers in Kentucky for aquatic species habitat as well as for scenery and recreation.

“After 30 years of working with conservation programs including Nature Preserves, Division of Water’s Wild Rivers, and the Heritage Fund, I am excited about the opportunities for coordination, efficiency, and logical interface that the consolidation of these natural area protection programs will provide,” said Hugh Archer, past chairman of the Nature Preserves Commission and current member of the KHLCF Board.

The staff of the Wild Rivers and KHLCF programs are being incorporated into the KNP, increasing the staff dedicated to land management while reducing administrative duplication. KNP natural areas managers will oversee passive recreation and habitat restoration projects on natural areas and wild rivers as well as nature preserves in an expanded "Natural Areas Branch."

Greg Abernathy, executive director of the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust, said reorganization diversifies and strengthens the organization. “As the conservation landscape continues to change and evolve it is reassuring to know the state will continue its commitment to this essential work,” Abernathy said.

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