



Commonwealth of Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet

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Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission Dedicates 61st State Nature Preserve *1,864 acres in Whitley County Protected*

Frankfort, Ky. (March 20, 2013) –The Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission (KSNPC) dedicated its 61st state nature preserve during the March quarterly meeting.

The newly formed Archer Benge State Nature Preserve is a result of partnerships with the Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund, the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust, the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the estate of the late William Dennis Benge of Fort Wright, Kentucky, which will now protect 1,864 forested acres along Laurel Fork in Whitley County.

Additional funds provided by American Electric Power, whose subsidiary Kentucky Power serves a significant portion of eastern Kentucky, helped make the purchase possible through a grant provided under a consent decree with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), under the Clean Air Act.

The purchase creates the eighth state nature preserve on Pine Mountain and protects a significant portion of one of the largest forest blocks in Kentucky, which lies in the Laurel Fork watershed. These lands contain significant natural areas that include globally rare species of plants such as the rock harlequin; fish, such as the federally threatened blackside dace and Cumberland arrow darter; as well as federally listed mussels.

The commission purchased the land from the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust (KNLT), a nonprofit organization directed by Hugh Archer.

“KNLT purchased the land from the private landowner, paid for its first survey and cleared title issues,” Archer said. “It was sold to the commission at a significant

discount and supported by funds from the Indiana Bat Mitigation Fund, which is overseen by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.”

Protecting the forested slopes of Pine Mountain in Whitley County and caves for the Indiana bat will conserve important habitat for this endangered species. This is especially critical as these beneficial insect-eating mammals are being decimated by White Nose Syndrome in many parts of the country.

Benge bestowed a \$202,000 donation upon the commission with the stipulation that the money be used to purchase exceptional land. Members of the Benge family – sister Carol Johnson and niece Connie Johnson – were both in attendance for the dedication.

“My uncle felt very strongly about preserving land and wildlife habitat. He was an avid nature photographer and took action that would ensure permanent protection. He conducted extensive research and concluded that the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission was the best agency to achieve this goal,” Connie Johnson said during the ceremony.

“When it came time to choose a name for the new preserve, “Archer Benge” just seemed to be a custom fit,” said Don Dott, director of KSNPC. “We wanted to demonstrate our appreciation for the many years of hard work and success Hugh Archer has achieved in protecting natural lands on Pine Mountain. He has pulled together land deals I didn’t think were possible,” said Dott.

The new preserve creates a southern anchor for the goals of both KNLTP and the commission by protecting a 120-mile migratory wildlife corridor, which extends the length of Pine Mountain into Tennessee.

“We also honor the foresighted and generous contribution of Mr. Benge, who wished to see nature protected permanently for the benefit of Kentucky’s wildlife,” added Dott. To help protect Kentucky’s rich natural heritage for future generations, the Benge family encourages others to include donations in their wills and estate planning.

KNLTP is continuing to work to protect even more of this portion of Pine Mountain, in one of the most rugged, least developed areas of Kentucky. With continued success, this area of protected land will grow significantly.

To learn more about the commission and its work protecting natural lands and rare and endangered species, contact the office at 502-573-2886, visit online at <http://naturepreserves.ky.gov> or Facebook at <http://facebook.com/ksnpc>.