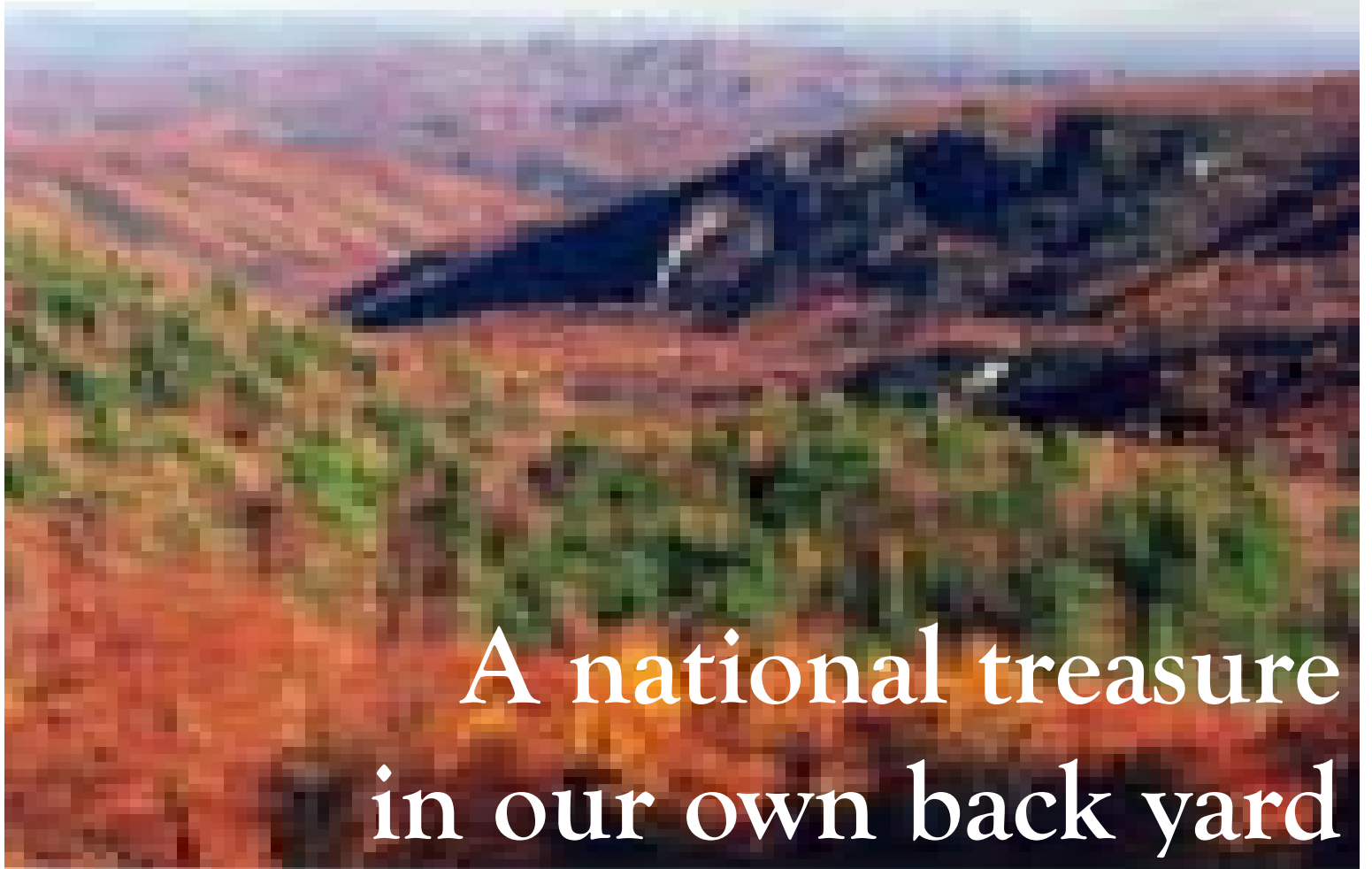


# *Lost Cove/Harper Creek*



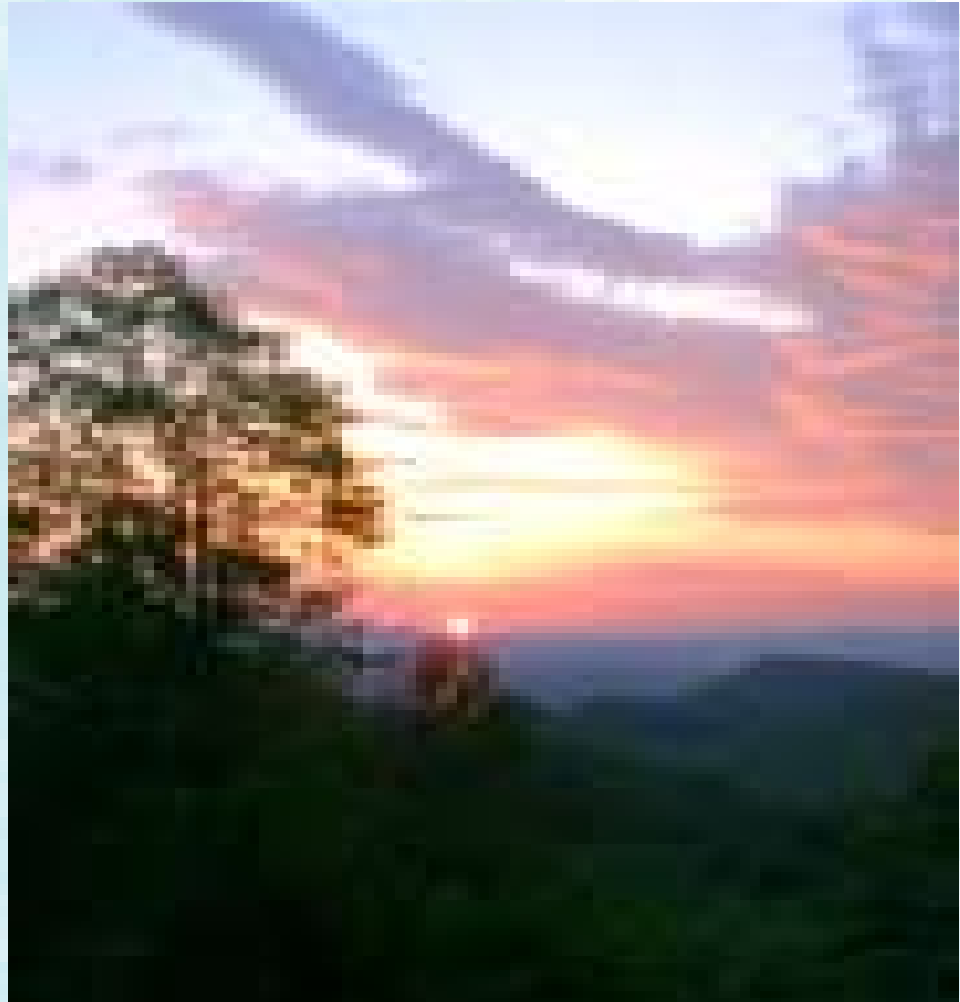
A national treasure  
in our own back yard

## Morning at Lost Cove/Harper Creek

As the sun rises in the East across the Piedmont, the long, undulating trill of a Winter Wren bursts suddenly from somewhere beneath the forest canopy. Just as suddenly, the forest returns to silence. Almost silence. Silence except for the rhythmic chatter of a nearby stream, and the soft rustle of poplar leaves, and the occasional distant thumping of an amorous Ruffed Grouse, or the silvery splash of a Brook Trout feeding on the morning hatch of mayflies. This is the world that Native Americans enjoyed for thousands of years and that early explorers discovered when they first ventured into the unmapped mountains of North Carolina two centuries ago.

Welcome to Lost Cove and Harper Creek, where the rhythms and cycles of nature continue as they have for millenia. It is a place where families can still see and explore a world where the forces of nature reign supreme; where children still go swimming in natural swimming holes on a hot summer day, or learn to fish for trout in cool, unpolluted streams; where hikers and hunters still find the quiet solitude of nature – a sanctuary from their otherwise crowded and busy lives.

Lost Cove and Harper Creek are two of the last remaining wild areas that have escaped the rapid development of North Carolina's high country. They are national treasures in our own back yard, but their future remains uncertain.



## About Lost Cove/Harper Creek

Lost Cove and Harper Creek consist of 12,850 acres of roadless National Forest land in Avery and Caldwell counties in western North Carolina. These areas are popular with both local residents and tourists for hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, horseback riding and many other purposes. In addition, one of the wildest and most scenic portions of North Carolina's Mountains to Sea Trail runs through these areas. All told, there are more than 35 miles of hiking and horse trails in Lost Cove / Harper Creek, many with stunning mountain views and vistas that look far across the Piedmont. There are few better places in all of the Appalachians to appreciate the splendid colors of fall foliage or a beautiful mountain sunrise. The easy access to these areas by road also means that favorite trails, waterfalls, fishing holes and hunting spots can be accessed within a day's hike.

The streams in this area run into Wilson Creek, one of our region's few federally-designated Wild and Scenic rivers. The waters run cool and clean because their headwaters are protected from road building and logging. Native populations of Brook, Brown and Rainbow Trout still thrive in both Harper Creek and Lost Cove Creek. The creeks, as they cascade down the steep slopes from Grandmother Mountain to the Piedmont create some of our region's most beautiful waterfalls. The area is also abundant with game, such as White-tailed Deer, Turkey and Grouse, and is on the Audubon Society's list of Important Bird Areas for the diversity of native birds that reside there, and the large number of rare and declining bird species that find critical habitat in the broad expanses of mature forest.

All of these factors make Lost Cove / Harper Creek an excellent candidate for wilderness designation, and in fact, the U.S. Forest Service has recommended them for wilderness designation since 1987. Also important in the Forest Service's recommendation is the lack of reasons to not designate Lost Cove / Harper Creek as wilderness. For instance, there are no

inholdings of private land in the areas, and access for timber and mineral extraction is very poor. Because of the historic difficulty in accessing timber, these areas contain some of the few remaining patches of old growth forest in the region.



“I think Teddy Roosevelt was a great president because he protected so much wilderness, and I am glad to have been able to visit and hike in a lot of wilderness out west because he protected it. I support wilderness designation for Lost Cove and Harper Creek so that future generations can enjoy our wilderness as well.”

– Joe Gobel, sportsman, hiker and resident of Hickory, North Carolina



*An Aerial view of Lost Cove.*

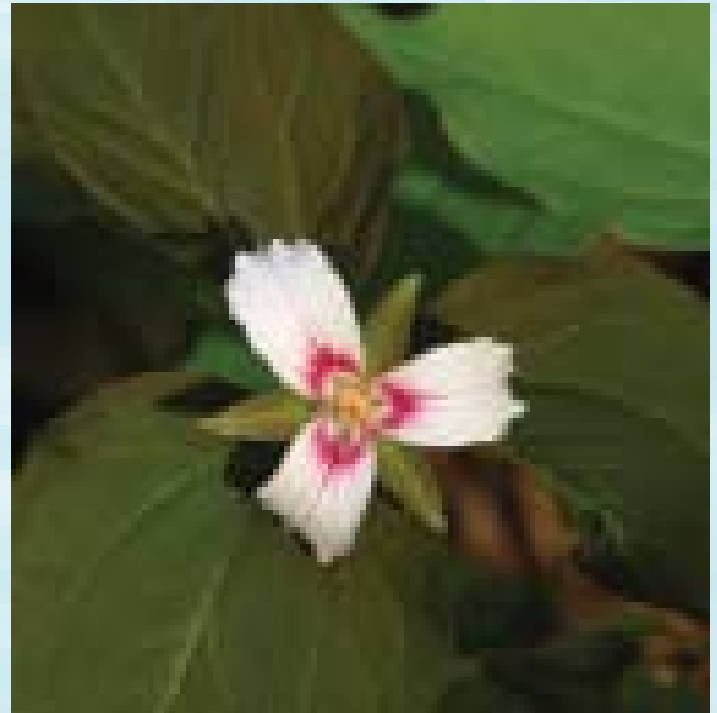


Courtesy of U.S. Govt.

*Black Bear.*

"Tourism is the number one industry in our state and county as well. Many of the other main industries are in trouble right now. According to our surveys, the reason people come to the mountains is because of the scenery. We have to preserve that, and I think that wilderness designation of Lost Cove and Harper Creek will help us protect scenery."

– Hugh Morton, Owner of Grandfather Mountain,  
Former President of the North Carolina Tourism  
Association, Banner Elk, North Carolina



*Painted Trillium.*

# Why Designate Wilderness?

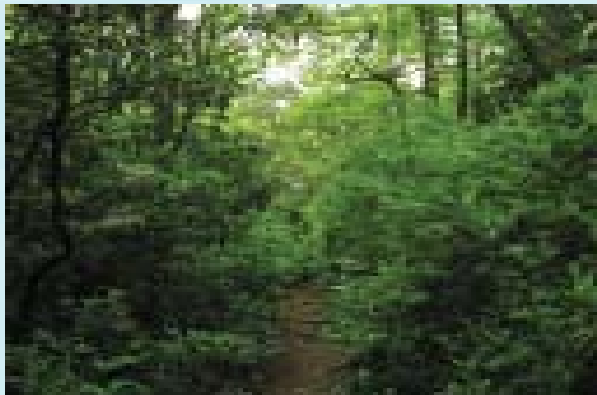
The authors of the Wilderness Act recognized that wilderness is a critical resource for our nation. There are few arguments for wilderness protection more cogent and compelling than those found in the Wilderness Act itself. Following is the statement of purpose for the Wilderness Act of 1964:

“ In order to assure that an increasing population accompanied by ex-



panding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States and its possessions, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition, it is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness. For this purpose there is hereby established a National Wilderness Preservation System to be composed of federally owned

areas designated by Congress as “wilderness areas”, and these shall be administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness...”



*Trail in Harpers Creek WSA.*



*Mountain Laurel blossoms.*



*Screech Owl.*



*Day breaks at Little Lost Cove Cliffs.*

“We need to stop the destruction of our forests somewhere – there needs to be places where we don’t develop and build roads and log. The quality of life is why people come here, it’s what our businesses depend on. We need to protect our last wilderness areas in Avery County, it’s a big part of our quality of life.”

– Sherry Garris, Real Estate Broker and Business Owner  
Banner Elk, North Carolina



## What is Wilderness?

Again, the Wilderness Act itself provides one of the best definitions of wilderness. Here is the definition of wilderness, excerpted from the Wilderness Act:

“A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.”







*Flyfishing at Lost Cove.*

## What is allowed in Wilderness?

- ◆ Hiking
- ◆ Camping
- ◆ Hunting
- ◆ Fishing
- ◆ Horseback riding
- ◆ Rock climbing
- ◆ Skiing and snowshoeing
- ◆ Canoeing, rafting and kayaking
- ◆ Wildlife viewing
- ◆ Most other forms of non-motorized outdoor recreation
- ◆ Any activity at all that is deemed, by the President of the United States, essential for national security



## What is NOT allowed in Wilderness?

- ◆ Mechanized equipment \*
- ◆ Road building and maintenance
- ◆ Motor vehicles \*
- ◆ Mountain bikes
- ◆ Permanent structures
- ◆ Mining
- ◆ Timber harvesting

\* It is important to realize, however, that in the case of emergencies, any of these restrictions can be temporarily removed. Such emergencies can include:

- ◆ fire suppression
- ◆ health and safety
- ◆ law enforcement
- ◆ removal of deceased persons
- ◆ aircraft accident investigation

For instance, motor vehicles were used in many wilderness areas in Texas during the search for fragments of the space shuttle Columbia after it's explosion in January, 2003. This was able to occur without any major restrictions from the federal government, or opposition from conservationists.



Rich Stevenson

*Waterfall at Lost Cove Creek.*



Mark Shelley

*Flyfishing at Harpers Creek WSA.*

"I have been a conservationist and hunter and fishermen my whole life. I support wilderness for the hunting and fishing opportunities it provides. The federal government recognizes that this is a unique and special place and that they cannot do any better managing it than by just letting it remain as it is. I feel honored that our county has a small area that is being recognized by a lot of people as being unique in the world. If you want to show some-

one what Avery County looked like in the 18th century, this is what it looked like."

– Jay Leutze,  
Sportsman and Conservationist.  
Newland, North Carolina



Courtesy of U.S. Govt.

*Brook Trout.*

“There is no way that wilderness will lead to more wildfire. The ancient forest is much more fireproof than these new ‘healthy forests’ they talk about. In wilderness, the duff is well shaded and damp, the limbs are higher up – it’s just more fireproof. Also, most forest fires are started by people, and they are generally started close to roads. When you build more roads, you open up the forest to more fire potential.”

– Don Sanders, retired from the Forest Service Southern Region after 28 years of service, ???, South Carolina



Lenny Geckik

*Hardwood forest interior in the Harper Creek Wilderness Study Area.*

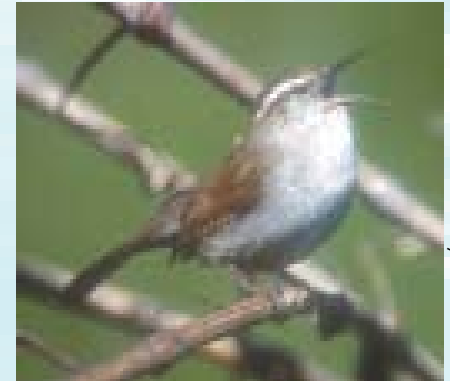


Lenny Geckik

*Autumn forest floor in Harper Creek WSA.*

“I have 25 persons working for me and I can attest that a lot of jobs are dependent upon Lost Cove and Harper Creek being managed as a Wilderness area.”

– Pete Pickering,  
General Manager of  
Appalachian Challenge  
Guide Service, Banner Elk,  
North Carolina



Courtesy of ????

*Bewick's Wren.*

# Dispelling the Myths about Wilderness

**Myth:** Wilderness designation erodes private property rights.

**Reality:** Only federal land may be designated as wilderness, and restrictions on logging and road construction in no way apply to adjacent private lands. Wilderness designation makes no change to what you do on your own land, and it never will.

**Myth:** There is already too much land designated as wilderness.

**Reality:** Only 0.3% of North Carolina's land is protected as wilderness. If our state were a 1500 square foot house, that portion set aside as a wilderness sanctuary would be the size of a linen closet. Most of the other 99.7% is available for development, timbering and mining. In addition, recent US Forest Service polls show that more than 70% of people in the South favor new wilderness designations in their own state.

**Myth:** Designating wilderness will reduce jobs in the local timber industry.

**Reality:** There is no reason why a single job would be lost in the local timber industry due to wilderness designation. Commercial logging has not been allowed in Lost Cove and Harper Creek for nearly 20 years.

**Myth:** Fires, insects and disease cannot be controlled in wilderness areas.

**Reality:** The wilderness act states that, "such measures may be taken as necessary in the control of fires, insects and diseases." Accordingly, motorized equipment like helicopters are used frequently to fight fires in wilderness when lives and property in or outside the wilderness area may be endangered.

**Myth:** Wilderness is restrictive of recreational opportunities and available only for the young, healthy and wealthy.

**Reality:** One of the most important purposes of wilderness designation is to offer a wide variety of recreational opportunities (see sidebar). Also, in a 1992 report to Congress, 76% of persons with disabilities surveyed said that they do not believe that wilderness designation diminishes their ability to enjoy an area.

**Myth:** Wilderness designation disallows motorized transportation in emergencies.

**Reality:** The Wilderness Act allows for agencies to use motorized equipment for search and rescue, law enforcement, aircraft accident investigation, and in any circumstance where motorized equipment is found to be the minimum tool necessary for administration of the area.

**Myth:** Wilderness areas get overrun as more tourists come to an area once it is designated wilderness.

**Reality:** Nature-based tourism is on the rise everywhere in our region, and all natural areas that are popular with tourists are in danger of being over-used whether or not they are designated wilderness. The commonsense solution to this problem is to designate more public land for recreation purposes. This particularly makes sense for communities in the vicinity of potential wilderness, as recreation, according to Forest Service studies, is the most valuable use of public lands for many communities near national forests.

# Political History of Lost Cove/Harper Creek

**1984** – Both Lost Cove and Harper Creek are designated as Wilderness Study Areas by an act of Congress. Congress recognizes that these areas have outstanding wilderness potential, but refrain from a wilderness designation because traces of uranium were recently found in the Harper Creek Area. Although it turned out that there was not enough uranium to mine in Lost Cove and Harper Creek, it would still take a second act of Congress to designate these areas as Wilderness.

**1987** – The U.S. Forest Service recommends Lost Cove and Harper Creek for wilderness designation in the revisions of the Pisgah National Forest Management Plan.

**1990** – Congressman Cass Ballenger (R-10<sup>th</sup> NC) first introduces a wilderness bill for these areas in his district. The bill is entitled the Western North Carolina Wilderness Protection Act. The bill is introduced at the end of the session and passes in the House of Representatives, but does not have sufficient time to pass the Senate.

**1991** – Congressman Cass Ballenger reintroduces the Western North Carolina Wilderness Protection Act for a second time. In his statements on the floor of the House, Congressman Ballenger states, “I grew up in the mountains of North Carolina, and have a real appreciation for the natural resources and the beauty that the western part of our State has to offer. I want to ensure that future generations, including my own grandchildren, will have the opportunity to enjoy these resources and beauty just as I have. I urge your support of the Western North Carolina Wilderness Protection Act.” The bill passes the House but dies in committee in the Senate.

**1993** – Congressman Ballenger introduces the Western North Carolina Wilderness Protection Act for a third time. In his statements on the floor of the House, Congressman Ballenger states, “Lost Cove and Harper Creek would be a welcome addition to the small wilderness in North Carolina.... It is unique in that it contains black bear sanctuaries and native trout populations. Additionally, this beautiful wilderness is surrounded by Forest Service roads, making it easily accessible to tourists and residents who want to hunt, fish, camp, and hike. This land warrants our protection for generations to come. The growing demand for wilderness recreation, coupled with the need to preserve the rich biological diversity of the southern Appalachian Mountains, makes legislative action imperative.” Once again, the bill easily passes through the House, but dies in committee in the Senate.

**2002** – The Avery County Commissioners pass a resolution in opposition to wilderness designation, citing concerns that such a move would jeopardize wildlife management options and the ability to fight wildfire. Conservationists maintain that the timber industry lobbyists and local allies that backed this resolution used blatantly false information to organize local opposition to wilderness.

# **What you can do to Preserve this National Treasure**

\* Photography in this brochure by Matthew Wasson or as noted.

