



# NATIONAL FORESTS IN NORTH • CAROLINA

USDA FOREST SERVICE, 160A ZILICOA STREET, ASHEVILLE, NC 28801

## NEWS • RELEASE

### *For Immediate Release*

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### **Scenic Linville River Tract Above Lake James Added to Pisgah National Forest**

**May 10, 2002, Morganton** – More than 600 acres of scenic land along the Linville River between Lake James and the Linville Gorge is being added to the Pisgah National Forest, extending public access to the lower Linville River and launching a major expansion of the national forest above Lake James.

The United States Forest Service (USFS) has purchased a 607-acre tract on the river's west side in Burke County that was originally owned by International Paper Corporation.

Strong public support for shoreline and watershed protection at Lake James prompted U.S. Representatives Charles Taylor and Cass Ballenger and U.S. Senator John Edwards to seek funds to expand the Pisgah National Forest at Lake James in both McDowell and Burke counties. To date, \$6.5 million has been allocated for this purpose.

“Lake James is a local treasure, enjoyed by hundreds of thousands every year,” said Congressman Cass Ballenger. “By securing this funding, I’m glad to have played a role in preserving our natural resources for current generations, as well as for the future enjoyment and recreation of residents and visitors alike.”

“Securing funds to preserve these lands has been something I’ve fought for since I came to the Senate,” Senator John Edwards said. “I’m proud to have helped lead an effort that will benefit every hiker, biker, hunter, camper, and fisherman who uses Lake James and the Pisgah National Forest.”

“This is great news for our county and Lake James,” said Trossie Wall, Chairman of the Burke County Commissioners. “The preservation of Lake James, its undeveloped shoreline and clean waters, is foremost in the

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thoughts of many of our citizens. Adding this land along the Linville River to the national forest helps protect the Linville Gorge as well as the waters that fill the lake.

“I appreciate the hard work of the Foothills Conservancy, Senator Edwards, Representatives Ballenger and Taylor, and all who continue to support efforts to protect Lake James,” Wall said. “I am very pleased that the U. S. Forest Service has decided to expand the Pisgah National Forest at Lake James and that they are interested in acquiring additional lakeshore and watershed lands.”

Since 1998, the Foothills Conservancy, a regional land trust, has worked with local citizen groups, including Citizens to Save Lake James and the Lake James Environmental Association; other conservation groups; and with local, state, and federal officials to craft and promote a plan for protecting the northern shores and watersheds of scenic Lake James, including lands adjacent to the Linville Gorge Wilderness Area. Expansion of the Pisgah National Forest is a key component of this protection plan.

“The conservation and public recreational benefits of protecting these vital Lake James watersheds are immeasurable,” said Susie Hamrick Jones, Executive Director of the Foothills Conservancy. “This is a wise investment in our future. We applaud Congressmen Ballenger and Taylor, Senator Edwards, and the citizens and leaders of Burke and McDowell counties for recognizing the value of these watersheds and for supporting this strategic expansion of the Pisgah National Forest above Lake James.”

Citizens, public officials, and conservationists broadly support protection of Lake James and its largely undeveloped shoreline and watersheds to protect water quality and wildlife habitat, preserve the lake’s spectacular mountain vistas, and expand public recreational opportunities at the lake and along the lower Linville River.

Lake James, the first impoundment on the Catawba River, is a 6,500-acre lake, which lies at the foot of the Pisgah National Forest and the Linville Gorge Wilderness Area in Burke and McDowell counties. Boaters, fishermen, swimmers, hikers, and picnickers crowd year-round to the 565-acre Lake James State Park and a few other public access areas to enjoy the clean, clear waters of the lake; its forested shoreline; and the panoramic Blue Ridge Mountains rising above the lake. In Burke County alone, close to a half million people visit the lake each year.

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