



Tuesday, 11/30/04 | Middle Tennessee News & Information

Straight to the source http://www.tennessean.com/growth/archives/04/11/62170124.shtml?Element_ID=62170124

Quest to preserve area around trail gets lift with bill

By ANNE PAINE
Staff Writer

The Fiery Gizzard Trail that winds along a boulder-strewn creek and past giant hemlocks is getting a boost from the federal government.

Congress passed a spending bill that includes \$2 million that could buy about 4,000 acres of the private land that the trail crisscrosses.

The Fiery Gizzard, part of the South Cumberland State Recreation Area, lies about 90 minutes southeast of Nashville, between Monteagle and Tracy City.

"It is fortunate that a lot of this property has not been developed," said Nashvillian Sue Atkinson.

Her late husband, Marvin Runyon, a powerhouse as one-time U.S. postmaster general, TVA chief and CEO of Nissan Motor Manufacturing Corp. USA, brought attention in the nation's capital to the area. He worked with Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., among others, to try to secure the funding.

"Marvin and I fell in love with the South Cumberland Plateau in the 1980s," she said. "We spent a great deal of time on the mountain and came to appreciate what a totally unique resource our state has."

The trail, named one of the top in the country in *Backpacker* magazine, is about 12.3 miles long, leading past one hemlock that is estimated to be 500 years old, rock chimney formations and a 70-foot waterfall.

The Civilian Conservation Corps built much of the trail, 90% of which is on private property, during the Depression.

The fragmented nature of the South Cumberland State Recreation Area leaves great swaths of bluffs and gorges that are not in the public domain, including much of the Fiery Gizzard area.

A campaign, called Saving Great Spaces, of which Runyon was a leader, is pushing to preserve more of the area for future generations.

"I can't overstate how crucial this is to the long-term survival and enjoyment of this trail," said

Nashvillian Woody McLaughlin, who is past president of the Friends of South Cumberland State Recreation Area.

Gov. Phil Bredesen had committed to put more than \$2 million into Fiery Gizzard because of its significance, said Jim Fyke, deputy commissioner for conservation and state parks with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation.

This will allow the state's conservation dollars to go further, he said.

McLaughlin said much remains to be learned about the federal money, including what kind of a local match might be needed.

Anne Paine can be reached at apaine@tennessean.com or 259-8071.