

Southern Highlands Reserve Conserved Lands

North American Land Trust statement:

“Since 2000, the Southern Highlands Reserve has executed and acquired a series of Conservation Easements with North American Land Trust on sensitive properties located at the top of Toxaway Mountain. Beginning in 2002, they commenced an ambitious plan to create a native plant arboretum and research center on these protected properties. The Reserve is a private operating foundation dedicated to the preservation, cultivation and display of plants native to the southern Appalachian highlands.

Through its unique vision, and with the help of diverse group of renowned professionals including landscape architects, biologists and engineers, the Southern Highlands Reserve has created a one-of-a-kind research area. Although private, upon request, the likes of academics, teachers, students, horticulturists, and others of like mind will be able to use the Reserve for scientific research and as an area for the exchange of ideas and dissemination of information. In addition to natural areas that are used for research projects, the Reserve will also maintain what will likely become the largest, or at least most diverse, collection of native southern Appalachian plants and their cultivars. From an ecological perspective this provides a "safe harbor" for a dwindling floristic gene pool in light of unchecked development in the southern Appalachians.

An impressive feature of the Reserve is the trails that have been cut along the cliff faces on the Balentine I and III Conservation Areas. These trails provide access to not only beautiful places, but to arguably some of the most sensitive and rare natural community types in the southern Appalachians (High Elevation Granitic Dome and Spray Cliff communities). Across the face of one granitic dome a Via Ferrata has been installed. This is essentially a trail up and across a vertical cliff face. It is accessed using climbing gear and clipping into a cable that stretches 700 feet along the cliff face. This will provide cliff face researches easy, safe access and greatly minimize the potential impact cliff face communities might endure if free reign were allowed on the cliff face.

The NALT staff and Board of Directors have been inspired with the scope, dedication, and respect for the ecological integrity put forth in this visionary project and are proud to be a partner.”