

Presented to the Board of Directors of the North Carolina Nature Conservancy by Hervey McIver, October 9, 1981.

This report outlines the significance of certain lands within and outside of the Bluff Mountain Preserve and lists recommendations aimed at completing protection of the mountain's natural features.

The first step to complete protection is to determine on the ground the Conservancy's boundary lines. This can be done by mutual consensus with adjacent landowners or by a survey. The property lines presented in map 1 that are in question are based on old, vague surveys and do not follow natural topographic features. These lines include a portion of those below the bluff, all to the south along the access road and flatrock area, and much of the western tract.

ACQUISITIONS NECESSARY FOR PROTECTION

Critical area below the bluff and waterfall - #1 on map 1 and map 2

Recommendation: In order to consolidate the significant forest lands below the bluff as outlined in map 2, portions of property owned by Dallas Sturgill and Kermit Lawrence (A) and Jules Bagdan (B) must be acquired. Negotiations with Sturgill and Lawrence will be required to clarify the unsurveyed line between their property and the Conservancy's.

Basis for the recommendation: The Conservancy-owned land immediately below the bluff is highly significant as an excellent example of a high elevation cove forest over hornblende gneiss. Acquisition of the Sturgill-Lawrence and Bagdan tracts within the critical area will insure protection of the cove watershed in addition to preserving the outstanding vista from the Lookin' Off Place.

Diversity is high within the canopy, subcanopy, and herb layers of the cove forest. The cove and adjacent rocky bluffs is habitat for 11 endangered or threatened plant species including a very large population of the NC endangered Carolina saxifrage (Saxifraga caroliniana) along the bluff seepages. A pair of ravens (NC special concern) nest on the bluff overlooking the cove.

The proposed areas for acquisition lie along the ridge top and slopes of the two ridges defining the valley below the bluff. To the north on the Sturgill-Lawrence property the area consists of a portion of the cove slope and a large flat with remnants of very large chestnuts. A well-developed stand of red oak and sugar maple has replaced the chestnut. The NC endangered golden saxifrage (Chrysosplenium americanum) occurs in a few of the numerous seepages along the uphill edge of the flat.

The southern ridge, ridge slope, and small flat below the Carolina hemlock stand, in part owned by Jules Bagdan, is dominated by chestnut oak with a shrub layer of rosebay rhododendron and mountain laurel. The steep, rocky, northeast slope with numerous seepages probably accounts for the xeric-mesic combination of chestnut oak and Rhododendron maximum.

Acquisition Strategy: Acquisition of these two areas may be achieved through purchase, gift, or land swap. Jules Bagdan, a summer resident of Ashe Co., has previously expressed interest in a gift/purchase arrangement for portions of his tract. The critical Bagdan property has little marketable timber and little potential for development. Negotiation with Bagdan about a gift of land should be initially pursued. Dallas Sturgill, a local businessman, is willing to negotiate a land sale and may be interested in a land swap.

Rash Property - #2 on map 1

Recommendation: Acquisition of the small holding owned by Fred Rash is necessary to consolidate Conservancy ownership south of Bluff Ridge.

Basis for the recommendation: Fred Rash, a local dealer in real estate, owns a few acres along the north ridge west of Perkins Rock. The area lies south (TNC side) of the ridge line. The potential exists for an erosion and siltation problem in the watershed above the fen should the area be disturbed.

Northern slope below the Cowface - #3 on map 1

Recommendation: No acquisition necessary.

Basis for the recommendation: Tucked beneath the northern rock outcrops and slopes within 100 feet of the Cowface and immediate east-trending ridge, outside the preserve, lie 8 NC endangered or threatened plant species. These include Carex misera (E), Clematis verticillaris (E), Diervilla lonicera (E), Gymnocarpium dryopteris (E), Saxifraga caroliniana (E), Lonicera dioica (T), Lycopodium selago (T), and Potentilla tridentata (T). It is the only site on Bluff for oak fern (Gymnocarpium). This fern as well as the rock clematis are at their southernmost limit on Bluff Mountain, disjunct 200 miles from northern Virginia.

No acquisition is necessary below the Cowface due to the remote, steep, and rugged nature of the site and lack of marketable timber.

Lewis Property - #4 on map 1

Recommendation: Acquire the Lewis property as a buffer slope to the south of the critical fen/flatrock area.

Basis for the recommendation: The community of the upper portion of the Lewis property is a well-developed, old growth sugar maple forest with high herb diversity on a rich, steep, rocky slope. The endangered rock clematis and threatened ginseng occur in the woods. Below are old fields and a house near the Bluff Mountain gate. This house would provide a fine home for a caretaker within sight of the Preserve entrance.

The Lewis property would provide adequate bufferage along the southern and most accessible side of the mountaintop. Mrs. Lewis is an elderly widow with no apparent heirs.

POTENTIAL TRADELANDS

Southwestern property - #5 on map 1

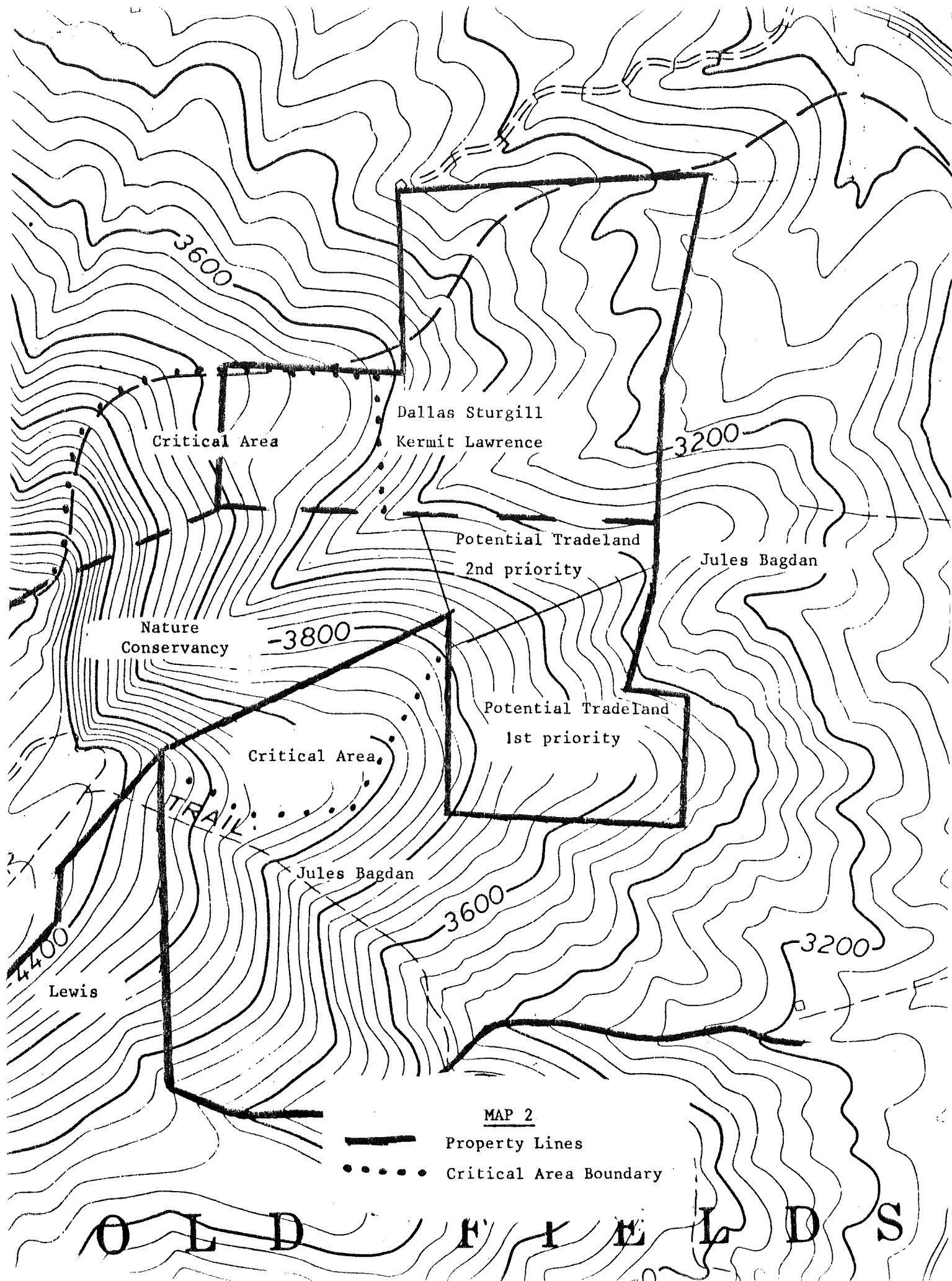
The southwestern property presently serves as a large buffer to the upper portions of Bluff Mountain. A large part of this land could be sold as tradeland without endangering the highly significant mountain sites. The forest is composed of mixed hardwoods. A few significant plant species may occur in this area. The likely occurring species are found elsewhere on the Preserve. Wild Turkeys (NC special concern) are known to roam the tract.

The potential tradeland has been divided into two pieces of differing priority based upon the degree of bufferage provided to the high ridge top.

Eastern area below the Bluff and waterfall - #6 on map 1

The Conservancy owns approximately 50 acres of non-significant, second-growth red oak and sugar maple forest well below the bluff. This area is good timber producing land and is suitable for development.

The first priority portion lies outside of the Bluff stream drainage. The second priority area could be retained to insure preservation of the forested vista from the Lookin' Off Place.



Map 1

