



# News Release

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September 12, 2014

**For Immediate Release**

*Editor's note: Contact info below. A page of quotes from participants follows.*

## Cheat Canyon is West Virginia's Newest Conserved Natural Area

*Government agencies, conservation groups, and businesses celebrate \$7 million project to protect iconic landscape*

**MORGANTOWN, WV** – The Conservation Fund, The Nature Conservancy, and the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources – allies in the permanent conservation of West Virginia's Cheat Canyon – gathered today with funding partners and the community to celebrate this conservation success story and participate in the dedication of the canyon to the people of West Virginia.

More than \$7 million has been raised to preserve the canyon, an achievement celebrated by the conservationists, whitewater enthusiasts, business leaders, government officials and community members at the event.

The public-private partnership that made the project a reality includes:

- Private funding provided through generous gifts to The Nature Conservancy, including \$2.6 million from the estate of Charlotte Ryde and a combined gift of \$1 million from Warburg Pincus and Antero Resources. This \$1 million gift from Warburg Pincus and Antero Resources enabled this project to move forward at a critical time.
- A package of public grants from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund and the West Virginia Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund, as well as mitigation dollars.

West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin stood high over the canyon at the popular overlook at Coopers Rock State Forest and formally welcomed the public to the Cheat Canyon Wildlife Management Area. Located upstream of Coopers Rock, with more than 3,800 acres of remote canyon forest surrounding seven miles of roaring whitewater, the Mountain State's newest natural area helps to conserve:

- most of the canyon not already included in Coopers Rock State Forest and Snake Hill Wildlife Management Area, and the spectacular view that people enjoy from Coopers Rock;

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- a section of river that has been called one of the most “ecologically intact” in the Central Appalachians by The Nature Conservancy, due to the absence of dams and the river’s connection to well-forested headwaters;
- public access to seven miles of the 330-mile Allegheny Trail, which had been re-routed away from the canyon after it was closed by a previous owner – a resource for hikers, bird-watchers and other outdoor enthusiasts;
- nearly all of the Cheat River used for whitewater rafting and kayaking, from put-in to take-out, rim to rim, protecting the water quality and the view for the benefit of users; and
- fishing opportunities for smallmouth bass, as well as hunting opportunities for deer, turkey, bear and squirrel.

“The conservation efforts we celebrate today are a result of the decades of work and millions of dollars in investments from those in our local communities, public agencies and conservation groups,” Gov. Tomblin said. “When we work together to support these public-private partnerships, we are providing further opportunities to create areas for West Virginians to enjoy all of the natural beauty our state has to offer.”

Cheat Canyon is a deep gorge through which the Cheat River flows from Rowlesburg in Preston County, on its way to Cheat Lake in Monongalia County, not far from Morgantown. Known mostly as a whitewater hotspot, the Cheat River draws tourists from throughout the Eastern U.S. And a warm water fishery continues to make a remarkable recovery as water quality issues upstream are addressed.

Cheat Canyon also is significant because of its rich diversity of plants and animals – from black bear and bobcat in its forests to uncommon bats and green salamanders in its caves to large-flowered Barbara’s buttons along the river. More than ten endangered, threatened, or globally rare species occur in the Canyon, including the flat-spined three-toothed land snail, which exists nowhere else on earth, and the Indiana bat, both protected by the federal Endangered Species Act.

**(SEE FOLLOWING PAGE FOR PARTICIPANTS’ QUOTES)**

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**The Nature Conservancy** is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. To date, the Conservancy and its more than one million members have been responsible for the protection of more than 18 million acres in the United States and have helped preserve more than 117 million acres in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. Together with our members and conservation partners, the Conservancy has protected nearly 120,000 acres of critical natural lands in West Virginia. Visit The Nature Conservancy on the Web at [www.nature.org/westvirginia](http://www.nature.org/westvirginia)

**The Conservation Fund** is a top-ranked, national nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting America's favorite places before they become just a memory. A hallmark of the Fund's work is a deep, unwavering understanding that for conservation solutions to last, they need to make economic sense. Since its founding in 1985, the Fund has helped its partners safeguard wildlife habitat, working farms and forests, community greenspace and historic sites totaling more than 7 million acres nationwide. Learn more at [www.conservationfund.org](http://www.conservationfund.org).

## **CHEAT CANYON DEDICATION EVENT (9/12/2014)**

### **Quotes from participants**

#### Joe Manchin, U.S. Senator, West Virginia

"The conservation of Cheat Canyon demonstrates the importance of state-federal-private partnerships in protecting our nation's spectacular natural areas," said Sen. Joe Manchin. "The Land and Water Conservation Fund, America's principal program for protecting iconic landscapes, plays a critical role in these partnerships, and I am proud to cosponsor legislation that would fully fund and permanently reauthorize this program."

#### Jay Rockefeller, U.S. Senator, West Virginia

"The preservation of this canyon area was made possible through the commitment and longstanding efforts of a diverse and dedicated group. Led by the Nature Conservancy, the Conservation Fund and West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, federal, state, private and nonprofit organizations worked to identify and preserve seven miles of the Cheat Canyon for future generations. This designation is important for all West Virginians who value West Virginia's rich natural heritage and care deeply about environmental stewardship."

#### Reggie Hall, West Virginia Director, The Conservation Fund

"We thank Governor Tomblin for his leadership in protecting a truly wild and wonderful West Virginia place," said Reggie Hall, West Virginia Director for The Conservation Fund. "We also thank Senators Manchin and Rockefeller and Representatives McKinley and Capito for their continued support of important conservation programs like the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year."

#### Glenn Prickett, Chief External Affairs Officer, The Nature Conservancy

"We are humbled by the passionate and sustained outpouring of support for protecting this cherished landscape," said Glenn Prickett, Chief External Affairs Officer for The Nature Conservancy. "The number of public and private organizations and individuals that have supported this effort to conserve Cheat Canyon demonstrates the importance of this place to people across West Virginia and beyond."

Chip Kaye, Co-Chief Executive Officer, Warburg Pincus

"Warburg Pincus is honored to play a role in the conservation of a landscape of such beauty and importance to the people of West Virginia and the region," said Chip Kaye, Co-Chief Executive Officer for Warburg Pincus. "Collaborations among the private, public, and non-profit sectors – such as this one to protect Cheat Canyon – are critical to provide the resources needed to effectively protect our most important lands and waters."

Paul Rady, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Antero Resources

"Conservation groups recognized decades ago that without diligent stewardship, Cheat Canyon could lose its environmental and recreational splendor," said Paul Rady, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer for Antero Resources. "At Antero Resources, we're proud to be part of a project that will fulfill this longstanding goal, and our investment reflects our commitment to West Virginia and its people."

Amanda Pitzer, community member:

"The Cheat Canyon is a special place to me, my family, and many people who live, work, and play here," said Amanda Pitzer, Preston County resident. "Conservation of the canyon is a major step forward for the county's growing recreational tourism industry of boating, fishing, hunting, hiking, and birding. The Cheat is our playground!"

Dan Leahy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:

"The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is so pleased to have been able to work in partnership with the State and private conservation partners to contribute funding through our Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund to conserve this beautiful landscape and the habitat that it provides for plant and animals," said Dan Leahy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Terrell Ellis, Vice Chair, WV Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund

"The WV Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund was created to support the conservation of lands and waters with outstanding natural, recreational, and other critical public values," said Terrell Ellis, Vice Chair of the WV Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund. "Cheat Canyon is such a place, and I am thrilled that the Fund was able to invest in its protection."