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LOCAL COMMUNITY CELEBRATES CHIMNEY ROCK ACQUISITION;

Partners Honored For Contributions in Conservation Effort

CHIMNEY ROCK – The key players in North Carolina’s successful efforts to purchase Chimney Rock Park for addition to the state parks system were honored with national recognitions during a special celebration Sunday at the park.

Lewis Ledford, director of the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation, presented three awards from the National Association of State Park Directors, a professional partnership of the nation’s state parks directors created to further the efforts of natural resource conservation and public lands stewardship through partnerships and professional leadership. The national association, which held its annual meeting earlier this month in Williamsburg, Va., approved six national awards for the year. Three were for North Carolinians.

Ledford presented the NASPD awards to Sen. Walter Dalton; Mike Leonard, national board member of The Conservation Fund and a trustee of the N.C. Natural Heritage Trust Fund; and Dick Ludington, southeast regional director and senior associate of The Conservation Fund.

“These three individuals have each made extraordinary contributions as part of the Chimney Rock preservation effort,” Ledford said in presenting the award. “They stepped up to the plate on behalf of all North Carolinians and our guests so that this and future generations will be able to enjoy one of our national, natural treasures.”

Sen. Dalton was the chief sponsor of legislation authorizing a state park at Hickory Nut Gorge in 2005 and secured a \$15 million appropriation in 2006 to be used to acquire Chimney Rock State Park. While working on behalf of The Conservation Fund, Ludington and Leonard were instrumental in securing the private donation that ultimately made the Chimney Rock purchase possible.

“This was truly a great thing we did working together,” Sen. Dalton said. “We need to do more of it. We need to continue to add to the state parks system. It is what makes us great.”

“It has been my lifelong dream to contribute to creating and adding to state parks and other lands set aside for public enjoyment,” said Leonard, accepting the awards for himself and Ludington who was unable to attend. “This award is not about me. It is about the many partners who came together to make this a reality.”

In January, Gov. Mike Easley announced North Carolina’s agreement to purchase the 996-acre Chimney Rock Park and its signature 315-foot spire overlooking Lake Lure for \$24 million. The state officially purchased the property in May during a private closing. Sunday’s events were designed to allow all those who participated in the purchase to celebrate the acquisition. During the 2007 General Assembly, lawmakers officially re-named the state park in the Hickory Nut Gorge to Chimney Rock State Park.

In another presentation yesterday, Suzie Hamrick Jones, executive director of the Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina, honored Jim Proctor, mayor of Lake Lure, Barbara Meliski, mayor of Chimney Rock Village, and Jerry Stensland, a planner with Rutherford County government, with awards for their hard work in the conservation effort.

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