

# TENNESSEE BIODIVERSITY PROJECT: Sherwood Forest—Partnerships Protecting Vast Biodiversity in the Cumberlands

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Sherwood Forest - the name alone inspires visions of green woodlands of deepening shadows, craggy corners, and discoveries hidden. In the southeastern limits of Franklin County, near the Alabama state line, Tennessee has found its own Sherwood Forest.

The [new Sherwood Forest](#) is a roughly 3,000-acre addition to [South Cumberland State Park](#), which along with a contiguous 1,000 acre Division of Forestry (TDF) parcel constitutes a 4,000-acre conservation purchase completed in 2016 by the state and many partners. The TDF parcel is dominated by the table lands of the Cumberland Plateau whereas Sherwood Forest, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) portion, is defined by the steep slopes of the Plateau escarpment and is known for an abundance of limestone, sinking streams, and steep climbs. It truly represents the consummate place to “get away from it all.”

The manner by which the State of Tennessee came to own such a remarkable place is a long and twisted tale, but can be summed up in our continuing appreciation for the many partners that made a very complicated real estate transaction possible - including The Nature Conservancy, The Land Trust for Tennessee, the Conservation Fund, U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy Program, Tennessee Division of Forestry, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Open Space Institute, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, and of course the landowner, Sherwood Mining Company (SMC).

In the end, the state received surface acres and timber rights to the land, with SMC retaining mineral rights and the ability to operate a surface limestone quarry in an approximately 200-acre operational area, as well as the ability to deep mine limestone should such be necessary.



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The deep, dark, and new Sherwood Forest.

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A number of rare and precious plants and animals make Sherwood Forest home. At one time considered the flagship species of these hills, the federally threatened land snail *Anguispira picta*, or Painted Disc, is a globally rare mollusk known only from Sherwood. The forest now protects 30-40% of the known range of this species. The snail frequents the craggy limestone outcrops and bluffs in the forest, where it blends in seamlessly with its surroundings, often retreating to deep crevices where it can remain undetected.

Other rare animals known from the site include the Eastern Small-footed Myotis (*Myotis leibii*), Rafinesque's Big-eared Bat (*Corynorhinus rafinesquii*), and the Allegheny Woodrat (*Neotoma magister*), all of which are considered "In Need of Management" species by the TWRA. Just beyond Sherwood's borders are four other rare species, some of which may be present inside its boundaries as well: Barking Treefrog (*Hyla gratiosa*), Four-toed Salamander (*Hemidactylum scutatum*), Green Salamander (*Aneides aeneus*), and Prickly Cave Crayfish (*Cambarus hamulatus*).

As the Southern Cumberlands are regarded as a biodiversity hotspot for limestone obligate species - including copious cave fauna - protection of forested acres on the surface protects a network of sinkholes and sinking streams critical for cave organisms below.

Another major driver for the acquisition of Sherwood Forest was the discovery of the federally endangered Morefield's Leather-flower (*Clematis morefieldii*) and a rich flora including several state-listed species, also associated with limestone outcrops. American Smoke Tree (*Cotinus obovatus*) and Cumberland Rosinweed (*Silphium brachiatum*) are frequently found near the Leather-flower but in slightly more open and dry habitats. The continued protection of state-listed species at sites like Sherwood Forest helps to prevent them from becoming rare enough to consider for federal listing. Potential habitat also exists for the federally threatened white fringeless orchid (*Platanthera integrilabia*) which occurs in the uplands along wet swales and Sphagnum bogs. This habitat is likely suitable for several amphibian species as well.

Access to the property is via State Route 156 and the Old CCC Road, which leads visitors to a graveled parking area and trailhead. At present, the sole trail gives hikers a preview of the landscape atop the Cumberland Plateau. Future trail extensions will allow visitors to see deep into the limestone escarpment that hosts so many of its rare species.

In the end, protection of these lands conserves not only the biodiversity emblematic of Franklin County's portion of the Cumberland Plateau, it also preserves [historic](#) and [prehistoric](#) components of the [Sherwood community](#).



A view of the steep slopes of the Southern Cumberland Plateau escarpment.



Morefield's Leather-flower

All photos by TN Natural Heritage Program.

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