

Army purchases acreage adjacent to Fort Knox

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Body

Courtesy of Bernheim Forest manager Andrew Berry

The Army has purchased 155 acres of forest land adjacent to Fort Knox in Bullitt County so it can be preserved. It will be held by the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust for conservation purposes.

The \$255,000 sale closed at the end of last month, said attorney Eric Farris, who represented the land trust in the deal, which was protecting the land against development.

The project was funded by the Army's Compatible Use Buffer program, which aims to "establish buffer areas around Army installations," according to the Army's website.

The 109,000-acre Fort Knox takes in roughly one-third of Bullitt County's 300 square miles, most of it heavily forested, as well as portions of neighboring Hardin and Meade counties.

The newly acquired property is home to a variety of wildlife and contains a mature bottomland hardwood forest with many large swamp white oak, sycamore, box elder and sweetgum trees.

Land trust executive director Hugh Archer said part of the stream known as Crooked Creek passes through the property, which is between Belmont and Collings Hill roads directly east of the Fort Knox boundary.

"People purchase homes next to bases then are surprised when they hear hellfire missiles and Apache helicopters," Archer said.

Archer said his nonprofit organization originally came to the Fort Knox area to negotiate and hold conservation easements on properties within a 1-mile radius of the base.

The Army continues to offer residents money for easements, but Archer said money has been coming in slower than expected.

Archer's land trust is working with Bernheim Forest officials in hope of preserving the area's migratory connection between Fort Knox and the forest, which has been threatened by development for decades since they were divided by the construction of Interstate 65 (formerly the Kentucky Turnpike).

Among the active animals on the property are North American river otters.

"We want to take care of the critters that are still there," Archer said.

In addition to the 14,000-acre Bernheim, the Belmont-Clermont area also is home to the 1,500-acre Knobs State Forest, acquired in 2006 as the first state Forest Legacy project, and the Boy Scouts' 770-acre Camp Crooked Creek, which has served local Scouts since 1988.

Trails won't be developed on the new land trust property, but deer hunting will be allowed, Archer said.

It's the first Bullitt property controlled by the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust, which gets about 90 percent of its donations from Louisville residents, Archer said.

Other properties it controls mostly are in Eastern Kentucky, such as the 3,000 acres of the protected Blanton Forest on Pine Mountain in Harlan County.

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Archer said his organization is not an advocacy group - most of the money it collects goes into land purchases.

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