

{ ENVIRONMENT }

IN THE FACE of this administration's environmental cutbacks and weakening of regulations that would guard our waters and public lands, it may seem that conservation is a losing battle. But there are bright spots in the landscape of environmental activism. The Nature Conservancy, for one, has not slowed down in its mission to preserve plants, animals, and natural communities by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. In 2002, the 50-year-old nonprofit organization acquired 321,530 acres of land and played a key role in helping other conservation organizations acquire another 262,992 acres.

One victory site is the more than 9,000 acres of land that the Conservancy acquired last March on and around **Warm Springs Mountain in Virginia**. The forested mountaintop is home to rare plants and animals, including a globally rare montane pine barren. The acquisition enables the Conservancy to protect and restore the habitat of this wildlife, and it helps stitch together surrounding undeveloped public lands—including 170,000 acres in the Warm Springs District of George Washington National Forest—ensuring that the larger mountaintop area will remain intact as a protected property. This acquisition is the single largest land purchase ever in Virginia—an optimistic development during these bleak economic times.

A silver lining to the tragedies of September 11, 2001, says Joy Grant, vice president and managing director of the Atlantic conservation region for the Conservancy, was the large number of people who decided to update their wills and leave money to environmental charities. "Possibly because they realized the fragility of life and wanted to take action immediately, people re-evaluated their wills and recognized that the environment can provide a sense of comfort and continuity," explains Grant. "That people still want to preserve our lands for future generations is a shining light of hope." —RACHEL RABKIN

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