

LAND DONATED TO CONSERVATION GROUP

Forever wild

Atlanta couple is honored for preserving land

BY HARRISON METZGER

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GERTON — Dr. Tom Florence and his wife, Glenna, have a plan for the 600 acres their family has owned for decades on the slopes of Little Pisgah Mountain, but it does not involve development.

Five years ago the couple donated a half interest in the property to the Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy of Hendersonville.

This month they are donating their remaining interest to the non-profit land trust, ensuring this spot in northwestern Henderson County remains forever wild.

"I wanted it preserved like it is," said Florence, 80, who retired here about 15 years ago after practicing urology in Atlanta. "I did not wish for any development to occur on it, because its natural state is its best state."

At a time when more and more mountain land is being developed for homes, businesses and other uses, the Florences decided to make most of their land a nature preserve. The property includes unusual plant communities, forests of trees 60 years old and older, rock outcrops and waterfalls, as well as remnants of an historic road.

The couple, who have three children and six grandchildren, are retaining about 30 acres for their family home. They and their children and grandchildren will help manage the 600 acres, monitoring the land and maintaining trails there.



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PLEASE SEE LAND, 8A

Tom and Glenna Florence stand on their property in Gerton.

Land

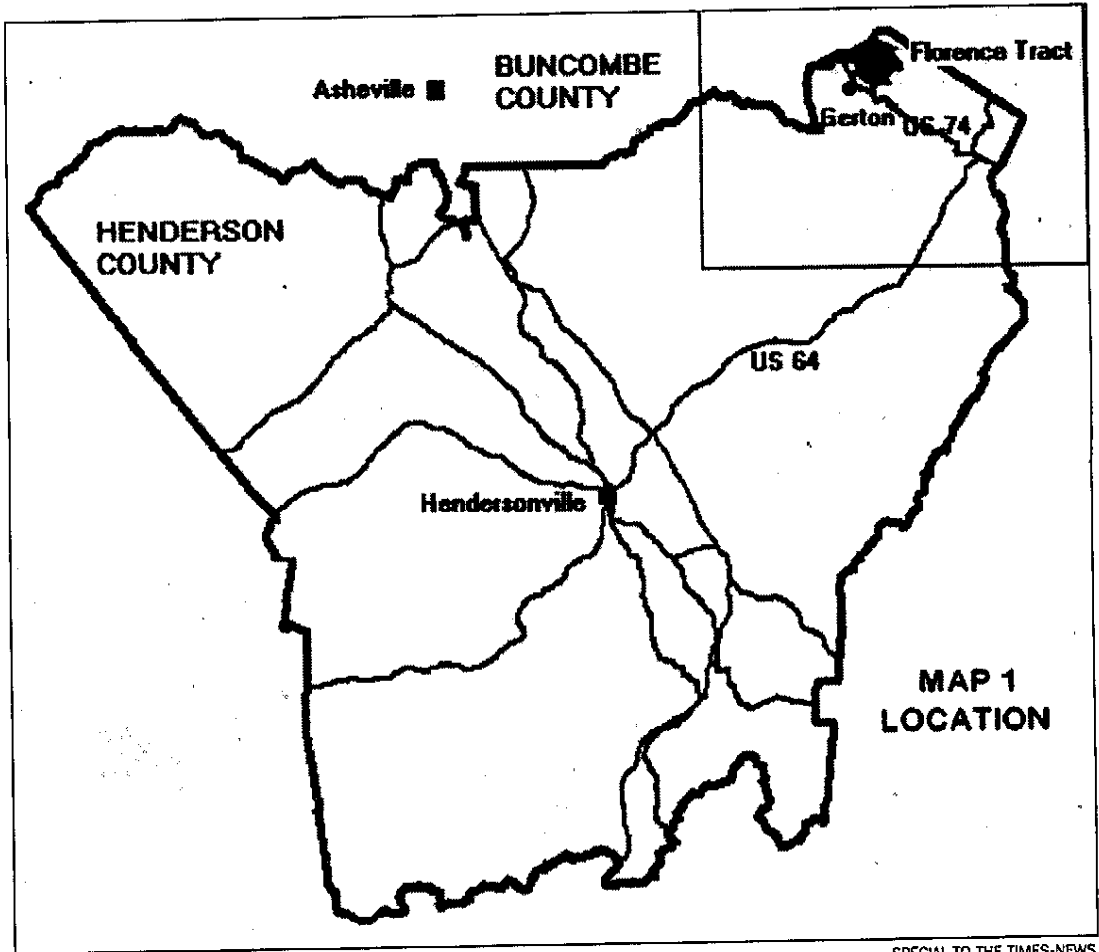
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The property will not be open to the public except for groups who get advance permission to study nature or help maintain the tract. That includes members of the Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy, which voted to name the property the Florence Preserve.

The group completed a management plan for the property last year, through the efforts of Johanna Clausen, a conservancy trustee, and funds from the Community Foundation of Henderson County. Goals of the plan include maintaining healthy natural habitats and cultural historic features, as well as protecting clean water and preventing erosion.

The group hopes to enlist neighbors in Hickory Nut Gorge and members of the conservancy to help manage the property. Volunteers will help by monitoring natural communities of plants and animals, clearing and maintaining trails, helping map the land and controlling exotic plants.

"We are planning on having a lot of member outings there," said Kieran Roe, executive director of the group. "People who are interested are welcome



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This map shows the location of the property, near Gerton, donated by the Florences.

to come to one of our outings."

Florence started bringing his family to spend the summer in Gerton when he bought his first parcel of land on Little Pisgah in

1966. He and his wife continued to buy adjacent parcels over the years, building a cabin and later a permanent home on the land.

"This land was once the home of about 10 different farms and houses of people who farmed the land or timbered the land many years ago," Florence said. "They left a few farm roads and trails we have kept open so people can walk on the trails and view the property."

The Old Buncombe Turnpike runs through the middle of the property. The road served for many years as a main passage-way from the lowlands through the mountains to the west in the years before railroads came to the mountains. Remnants of its foundation can still be seen.

The Florences first learned of the Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy through Anne Ulinski, a local botanist and founder of the group. Ulinski

and the Florences both belonged to the Western North Carolina Botanical Club and she told them about the conservancy's work to preserve mountain land.

People who donate land or easements to conservation groups can claim them as charitable deductions on their federal income tax. By donating the land in two installments, the Florences were able to take deductions over a 10-year-period. Such donations can also reduce the value of a family estate, helping save heirs from having to pay inheritance taxes.

The Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy plans to honor the Florences Saturday at its autumn fund-raiser at the Rugby Range near Arden, Roe said. People interested in learning more about the land or the conservancy can call him at 697-5777.