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JUDY MURRAY NAMED ROBERT SPARKS WALKER LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD WINNER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL WORK

Part of Governor's Environmental Stewardship Awards

NASHVILLE – Judy Murray, who has led an inspired life dedicated to conservation in Southern Appalachia, has been named winner of the 2022 Robert Sparks Walker Lifetime Achievement Award.

The award is part of the annual Governor's Environmental Stewardship Awards administered by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC). The announcement was made at the annual awards luncheon today.

"The Highlands of Roan is an enchanting area that is lucky to have had an advocate like Judy Murray," said TDEC Commissioner David Salyers. "We are grateful to Judy for using her expertise, time and energy to support the protection of this part of Tennessee, and we know countless Tennesseans have been inspired by her deep and genuine affection for this land."

"Judy has profoundly impacted conservation of one of Tennessee's unique and priceless natural treasures," said SAHC Executive Director Carl Silverstein. "These high-elevation grassy mountaintops are home to rare plants and animals that thrive nowhere else in the world and are a beloved destination for people to enjoy hiking, camping, birding, fishing, hunting and other recreational activities. This award recognizes Judy's monumental efforts in scientific study, management, and long-term preservation of the Highlands of Roan, and we are so proud of her legacy."

Murray is one of the founding members of the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC), a nonprofit established in 1974 to protect the many treasures of the Roan Highlands and the Southern Appalachians.

Murray's love for nature was first inspired by a family vacation in the 1950's through the Adirondack Mountains. Upon graduation from Florida State University in Tallahassee, FL, Murray accepted a chemist position with Tennessee Eastman Company (now Eastman Chemical Company) in Kingsport, TN. Within days, she was hiking and enjoying the spectacular vistas from the grassy ridges of the Highlands of Roan and was soon a member of the Tennessee Eastman Hiking and Canoeing Club.

Murray and six other members of the hiking club formed a working group to further protection of the Appalachian Trail and the magnificent grassy balds of the Roan massif. The group grew and was formalized in 1966 as the Roan Mountain Preservation Committee of the Appalachian Trail Conference, with the goal to preserve the views and landscape surrounding the Appalachian Trail through the Highlands of Roan.

During this time, Murray resigned her position with the Tennessee Eastman Company to return to school, graduating with a master's degree in Ecology from the University of Tennessee in 1974. In the same year, Murray became SAHC's first Roan Stewardship Director – a position she held for 40 years until her retirement in 2014.

SAHC's nonprofit charter was expanded to include North Carolina and now, nearly 50 years later, the organization continues to build on the foundational work laid by Murray. SAHC protected 1,644 acres of lands in 2021, including 1,050 acres in the Highlands of Roan, of which 150 acres have recently been added to Roan Mountain State Park.

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2022 Governor's Environmental Stewardship Award Winners

Robert Sparks Walker Lifetime Achievement Recipient

Winner: Judy Murray

County: Sullivan County

Category: Robert Sparks Walker Lifetime Achievement

There are few people who can truly be described as committing a lifetime of sacrifice and passionate hard work to an endeavor with modest monetary reward yet boundless benefit to the greater good of humankind and nature. Judy Murray, however, is just such a person. Judy was first inspired by nature on a quintessential family vacation in the 1950s when her family traveled by car from New York City to Canada. On the return trip, and especially as the family traveled through the Adirondack Mountains, Judy fell in love with nature and the mountains.

As a young lady, Judy joined and supported the Scenic Hudson organization in New York. Upon graduation from college in 1960, Judy sought a job that would enable her to further her interests in the outdoors and the mountains, accepting a chemist position with Tennessee Eastman Company (now Eastman Chemical Company) in Kingsport, Tennessee. Within days, she was hiking and enjoying the spectacular vistas from the grassy ridges of the Highlands of Roan and was soon a member of the Tennessee Eastman Hiking and Canoeing Club. An inspired life dedicated to conservation, Judy's early experiences with the Hiking Club led to her lifelong work in the Highlands of Roan.

Judy and six other members of the hiking club formed a working group to further protection of the Appalachian Trail and the magnificent grassy balds of the Roan massif. The entire area was threatened by development for resorts and vacation homes. The group of seven hiking club members started meeting at members' homes in Johnson City to discuss how to safeguard the vulnerable Roan lands for present and future generations. The group grew and was formalized in 1966 as the Roan Mountain Preservation Committee of the Appalachian Trail Conference with the goal to preserve the views and landscape surrounding the Appalachian Trail through the Highlands of Roan.

In 1974, the U.S. Forest Service and the Roan Mountain Preservation Committee created a landscape-scale "Highlands of the Roan Composite Plan". The plan identified tracts needed to protect the bald areas and the Appalachian Trail, established alternatives for acquisition if the tracts were not available in their entirety, identified the fragile resources of the bald areas, and described broad management direction of these lands.

To accelerate the protection of critical land across the Highlands of Roan and along the Appalachian Trail, Judy, and other members of the Roan Mountain Preservation Committee founded the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC) as a Tennessee non-profit land trust. The organization was created to raise funds to purchase lands for which the Forest Service was not funded.

During this time Judy realized that she wanted to devote more of her time and energy to conservation. Judy resigned her position with the Tennessee Eastman Company to return to school. She knew that increased knowledge of the interaction of living organisms and their environment was key to protecting and managing the unique and fragile Highlands of Roan. Graduating with a master's degree in Ecology from the University of Tennessee, Judy became SAHC's first Roan Stewardship Director in 1974. A position she held for 40 years until her retirement in 2014.

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SAHC's non-profit charter was expanded to include North Carolina and now, nearly 50 years later, the organization continues to build on the foundational work of the Roan Mountain Preservation Committee. SAHC protected 1,644 acres of lands in 2021 including 1,050 acres in the Highlands of Roan, of which 150 acres have recently been added to Roan Mountain State Park. SAHC, its members and donors, and in partnership with many organizations and agencies, has protected over 19,000 acres in the Highlands of Roan and over 75,000 acres throughout the southern Appalachian Mountains. SAHC is a leading land trust nationally and is fully accredited by the Land Trust Alliance.

Judy has spent her life dedicated to preserving the beautiful and ecologically rare Highlands of Roan. This has been accomplished through hard work and personal sacrifice, vision and extraordinary communication skills, stubborn determination, and encyclopedic knowledge of the area and ecology. But perhaps more than anything, Judy was able to use her deep and genuine love and respect for nature and people to align interests and spur action. Continuing the early collaborative efforts of the Roan Mountain Preservation Committee with the Forest Service and other organizations, Judy, as SAHC's Roan stewardship director, established the Roan Stewardship Committee to bring together a larger community of interested parties. And through all of this, Judy was able to build trust and respect among landowners whose cherished land had been part of their families for generations, thus opening the door to conversations about conservation and ultimately protecting their land. Landowners have many fond memories of working with Judy and often ask about her years after her retirement. These relationships formed a bedrock of trust that has led to a conservation success story that was unimaginable when the small group of individuals met in Johnson City over 50 years ago.

Whether leading a day-long workshop, applying the power of persuasion, or rallying volunteers, Judy got results. Getting to shared goals and prioritized projects was just the start of Judy's work. Once plans were developed and projects agreed-to, the hard work of implementation began. One of Judy's strengths has been her ability to recruit and lead volunteers to carry out the many projects needed to protect and restore the Highlands of Roan. From restoration of Golden Wing Warbler habitat in the Hampton Creek Cove State Natural Area, removing invasive Garlic Mustard from Roan Mountain State Park, to mowing blackberry and other woody growth from the grassy balds, legions of volunteers have accomplished herculean goals.

A wonderful example is the annual effort undertaken by multiple groups and agencies to remove blackberry and other woody plants slowly encroaching on the grassy balds, threatening not only the unique habitat but also the attractiveness of the region to many thousands of annual visitors. Volunteers use loopers, rakes, hand scythes, and heavy-duty power equipment to mow down the growth, manually replicating as best possible what was done for centuries by fire and grazing animals. Each summer dozens of acres of grassy bald are restored by these efforts. And for many, it is a cherished annual event.

Along the way, Judy has been repeatedly recognized for her tireless contribution to conservation and protection of the Highlands of Roan. She was twice awarded the Tennessee Eastman Hiking and Canoeing Club's Hiker of the Year Award and co-chaired the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's 50th anniversary biennial meeting. She contributed to Roan Seasonal Ecologists with mentoring and inspiration. She also added knowledge and guidance to numerous articles and scientific studies of the Highlands of Roan. Judy formally retired from her position as the SAHC Roan stewardship director in 2014, but her efforts to celebrate and protect the Highlands of Roan continue. And even at 84 years of

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age, she actively participates in strategy and planning activities as a member of the SAHC Roan Stewardship Advisory Committee. She's always willing to share her knowledge, offer perspective and advice and lend a helping hand. Her legacy is also evident in the continuing success of SAHC.

As a founder, Judy was instrumental in shaping and leading the organization. Mentoring and inspiring staff members and scores of volunteers has insured that SAHC's success is carried to other conservation challenges. This work has been accomplished using the same principles Judy embodied as she led stewardship of Roan – building trusting relationships with the community, partnering with state, federal, and other conservation organizations, and ensuring that the hard work gets done.

As a final testament to Judy's lifelong commitment to conservation and the protection of the Highlands of Roan, she commissioned Jens Kruger, a member of the Blue Ridge Music Hall of Fame and recipient of the Steve Martin Prize for Excellence in Banjo and Bluegrass Music, to compose a musical celebration of the Highlands of Roan and to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first meeting of the Roan Mountain Preservation Committee. The result, the *Roan Mountain Suite*, premiered on October 15, 2016, at the Paramount Center for Performing Arts in Bristol, Tennessee. The performance of the Kruger Brothers and the Kontras Quartet was met with enthusiasm and multiple standing ovations. It was a thrilling evening that would not have been possible without Judy's vision, powers of persuasion and patronage.

"Sometimes I like to be the last one to turn in for the night, when I have the stars, the wind, and The Rock to myself. A time for silent reflection from the place I love most in the world." - Judy Murray