

Community forest sought for Wildcat Falls parcel

WATERSMEET — Northwoods Alliance Inc. is seeking to protect Wildcat Falls near [Watersmeet](#).

Wildcat Falls is a remote waterfall about nine miles from [Watersmeet](#). It is one of several features on a 160-acre property Northwoods Alliance is seeking to protect into perpetuity, said Casey Clark, a conservation coordinator with Northwoods Alliance.

The property had been part of the Ottawa National Forest until 2016, but was traded away in a controversial land swap.

The controversy lagged for several years with legal litigation following U.S. Forest Service administrative appeals.

The Forest Service exchanged 240 acres of Ottawa National Forest land for 420 acres of cut-over acreage near the Porcupine Mountains.

“In the minds of the conservation plaintiffs, the property’s special features were at stake. This includes the falls, Scott and Howe Creek, rock outcrops and especially old-growth features in the cedar and hemlock forested stands,” Clark said.

“In a positive turn of events following the 2016 land swap, a conservation-minded partnership in the Northwoods Alliance’s network negotiated and purchased the Wildcat Falls property from the new owner and has requested our assistance in procuring a permanent, publicly beneficial conservation solution,” said Clark. “Northwoods Alliance is striving to develop a community forest for the property and if fundraising keeps momentum through this year, we will apply for a Community Forest and Open Space Conservation program grant from the Forest Service, state and private forestry through the Michigan State Forester in 2019,” Clark said.

The grants can match up to 50 percent of acquisition value, making local fundraising critical to achieve the goal.

“A community forest at Wildcat Falls would involve the greater community for the benefit of future generations. The management, activities and land use are guided with community input,” Clark said.

Partners in support of the effort include the Copper Country Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Friends of Sylvania, Jack Parker Associates, Keweenaw Land Trust, Partners in Forestry Co-op and The Wilderness Society, as well as the Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition, which recently approved a \$10,000 award to boost local fundraising.

Northwoods Alliance is a nonprofit conservation group and a public charity and is spearheading the fundraising efforts.

Several outings to Wildcat Falls will be hosted this year to highlight the natural features the project aims to protect.

More information is available at nwa@nnex.net, 715-479-8528, or visit <http://www.northwoodalliance.org> or <http://www.partnersinforesstry.com>