



**NOMINATION OF C. THOMAS WYCHE
FOR THE
2004 ASLA OLMSTED MEDAL**

I am pleased to nominate my colleague and friend C. Thomas Wyche for the 2004 ASLA Olmsted Medal -- I can think of no one more qualified than Tommy Wyche to meet the criteria of this award. Tommy's life work has been devoted to leadership, vision and stewardship. For the past 35 years, he has devoted a significant portion of his personal and professional time to the conservation of approximately 100,000 acres of magnificent wilderness forests in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North and South Carolina. Without the leadership of his conservation efforts, much of this land would today doubtless be gated communities, golf courses and shopping centers. Instead, these lands are home to pristine rivers, lakes and waterfalls, undisturbed hiking trails, and campsites in a lush environment that supports an ecosystem of great richness and diversity.

Tommy Wyche is a 78 year old attorney who lives in Greenville, South Carolina. He graduated from Yale University in 1946 with a degree in electrical engineering and earned his law degree from the University of Virginia in 1949. Since that time, he has been in the private practice of law with Wyche, Burgess, Freeman, & Parham in Greenville. His scholastic honors include honorary doctorate degrees from Clemson University, Furman University, and Wofford College; Omicron Delta Kappa; Raven Society; and Member Virginia Law Review.

In the early 1970s, Tommy conceived the idea of permanently preserving a large wilderness area spanning the Blue Ridge Mountains of northern Greenville County, South Carolina along its border with North Carolina. The area includes the city of Greenville's Table Rock Reservoir lands on the west (9,800 acres) and the City's Poinsett Reservoir lands on the east (19,000 acres) and a 10,000-acre "bridge" of land between the two. The entire area is now generally known as the "Mountain Bridge." The region is part of South Carolina's Blue Ridge Escarpment where the rolling hills of the Piedmont suddenly rise up to the stunning cliffs, gorges and waterfalls of the mountains. Among the region's prime features are Raven Cliff Falls, a 400-foot waterfall and one of the highest east of the Mississippi, and the striking rock monolith known as Table Rock.

In 1973, Tommy organized Naturaland Trust, one of the first land trusts in South Carolina history, to spearhead the project. Over the next 15 years, he participated in numerous face-to-face meetings with the private owners of the properties in the 10,000-acre "bridge" and ultimately convinced all but two of them to make a "bargain sale" of their tracts to the State. At the time, the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund would match 50 percent of the fair market value of state-acquired lands. With the support of Governor James Edwards, and his successor, Governor Richard Riley, acquisition of the various properties began. With just two exceptions, all of the landowners donated



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half of the value of their property to the State, thus enabling South Carolina to fund the land purchases solely with Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds. Thus, South Carolina, which had no available funds, acquired these magnificent properties at no cost to the State.

The owners of the Raven Cliff Falls tract were less generous. They would sell, but only at full value. Tommy went to work and found a \$1.6 million contingency grant from the United States Department of the Interior to acquire this property. Raven Cliff Falls is now one of the Southeast's most remarkable natural wonders. Subsequently, Tommy and Naturaland Trust sponsored the construction of an 80-foot suspension bridge across Matthews Creek in the Jones Gap-Caesar's Head area, providing an unprecedented spectacular view of the 420-foot gorge into which Raven Cliff Falls plummets. (All of the materials for the bridge were carried into the remote project site by hand by students and conservation volunteers).

The crowning achievement of Tommy's efforts in the Mountain Bridge came in 1993 when the City of Greenville granted to The Nature Conservancy a conservation easement that permanently protects all 29,000 acres of the Table Rock and Poinsett reservoir lands. It was the largest conservation easement ever received by The Nature Conservancy in the Eastern United States and the fourth largest in the nation. To convince the water system commissioners and to document the significance of the watershed lands, Tommy chaired a study commission that produced (at Tommy's own expense) a voluminous report of the biology and ecology of the watershed properties in the Mountain Bridge Wilderness. Scientists were astonished by some of their discoveries: new champion-size trees, trophy-sized brook trout, and a stunning variety of birds, reptiles, amphibians, plants, and insects -- including rare and endangered species. The study concluded by describing the watershed lands as "the most significant wilderness remaining in South Carolina."

This wilderness area of nearly 40,000 acres is easily accessible to millions of people. The South's "boom towns," Atlanta and Charlotte, are only a three hour drive away, while the 600,000 residents of the Greenville-Spartanburg metropolitan area can reach the area in about 45 minutes.

The Mountain Bridge project is, in essence, the story of a series of cooperative partnerships created and sustained by Tommy Wyche: a partnership between conservation and the individual landowners who made the "bargain sales" of their properties; a partnership between conservation and the Greenville Water System; a partnership between state governmental agencies (Parks and Recreation Department and the Wildlife Commission) who entered into a joint venture agreement (the first in South Carolina) to manage the area; and a partnership between conservation and the federal government, as evidenced by the acquisition of the Raven Cliff Falls tract. It should be noted that Naturaland Trust has received consistent and substantial support from individuals associated with almost every major corporation in this area -- the former Multimedia Corporation, Liberty, Fluor Daniel, PYA Monarch, Delta Woodside, and so forth.

After the successes with the Mountain Bridge, Tommy continued to pursue the preservation of the special areas of the Blue Ridge Escarpment. His exceptional skills as a nature photographer and writer were manifested in his two books on the area, *South Carolina's Mountain Wilderness: The Blue Ridge Escarpment*, published in 1994, and *The Blue Wall: Wilderness of the Carolinas and Georgia*, published in 1996. These outstanding books, full of rich photographic evidence of the extraordinary beauty and biodiversity of the Blue Wall area, were critical to raising awareness and the grassroots and

legislative support for the public acquisition of over 52,000 acres of lands in the Jocassee Gorges area in the Carolinas in 1998.

Tommy was integrally involved over many years with the management of Duke Power to encourage them to make the Jocassee Gorges lands available to public entities for acquisition and protection. He was essential in facilitating the behind-the-scenes political and financial support necessary to make this project possible, and he was also heavily involved in the recruitment of private, public, State and financial support for the purchase of the Jocassee properties. South Carolina's Governor at the time, David Beasley, in speaking of the purchase called this "the most significant land protection project in the Southern Appalachians in the latter half of the Twentieth Century."

His efforts in protecting our mountains continue unabated. During the past five years Tommy has been instrumental in establishing the Blue Wall Preserve, consisting of 2,500 acres on the eastern end of the Blue Ridge Escarpment near Tryon, North Carolina. These lands are now owned and operated by the South Carolina Nature Conservancy and the State Heritage Trust. Once again, through negotiations with private property owners and other partners, and by risking personal resources, this new gateway to the Blue Ridge Escarpment area now serves as a trailhead connection between the Mountain Bridge and the Palmetto Trail which is being developed from the mountains to the coast of South Carolina.

He continues to work with conservation partners in the Carolinas, to protect sensitive lands and to fill in critical gaps of the mosaic of mountain properties that he has helped to weave together for over 30 years. Over the last year, Tommy acquired critical additions to the Mountain Bridge Wilderness Area, most recently Bald Rock, a 163-acre scenic overlook and important conservation buffer, which has long been a local de facto recreation site. Tommy secured the Bald Rock site and two adjoining properties at his own expense for eventual transfer to the state's Heritage Trust Program. He is currently negotiating some additional key acquisitions.

Throughout his career Tommy Wyche has used his skills as an attorney and his network of relationships in the corporate, political, and conservation communities to work "conservation magic" in this nationally significant Blue Ridge area of the Carolinas and Georgia. He has systematically and tirelessly worked his unique process of education, public awareness, documentation through his keen eye and exceptional skill as a nature photographer, and by simply showing them the special places to raise the public's awareness and the conscience necessary to protect these special lands. Ultimately, it has been Tommy's vision of the possibilities of what this exceptional area could be that has enabled the successful preservation of roughly 100,000 acres of the Blue Ridge Escarpment -- an accomplishment of national significance. These lands will now be protected for the study, enjoyment, and inspiration of many generations to come.

Mr. Wyche's National Environmental Awards include: The Garden Club of America Frances K. Hutchinson Medal, 1999; The Alexander Calder Conservation Award (one recipient selected nationwide each year), 1996, presented by the Conservation Foundation in partnership with Union Camp Corporation; The Nature Conservancy Oak Leaf Award (one of four nationwide) 1995; and Gulf Oil National Conservation Award (one of ten nationwide) 1983.

His State and Local awards include: South Carolina Wildlife Federation Environmentalist of the Year, 1979; The Order of the Palmetto awarded by Governor Beasley in 1996, the highest award for

public service given by the State of South Carolina; selected to carry the Olympic Torch in Greenville for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games held in Atlanta, GA; and selected as one of the Best Lawyers in America for Trusts and Law, 1983, and for Corporate Law, 1997-1998 and 1999-2000.

U.S. Patents held include: Flexible Parabolic Arch; Adjustable Rung Ladder; and Computer Generated Virtual 3-D Trail Map.

Comments on the conservation works of Mr. Wyche include:

- “In your most vivid imagination, think of what it would be like to experience total immersion within the unspoiled beauty of the Jocassee Gorges, while disturbing nothing by your presence. That is the pure joy you will find as you read *The Blue Wall*. It is a masterpiece.”

Comments by James G. Martin, Ph.D., from the cover of *The Blue Wall: Wilderness of the Carolinas and Georgia*, Photography by Thomas Wyche, Text by James Kilgo; Westcliffe Publishers; Library of Congress Catalogue Number: 96-608886. (James G. Martin is Former Governor of North Carolina, and Former U.S. Congressman)

- “The Blue Wall is a stunning tribute to the beauty and splendor of this special place. Everyone who reads this book will be inspired to help preserve a wonderful part of the country.”

Comments by the Honorable Fritz Hollings, from the cover of *The Blue Wall: Wilderness of the Carolinas and Georgia*, Photography by Thomas Wyche, Text by James Kilgo; Westcliffe Publishers; Library of Congress Catalogue Number: 96-608886. (The Honorable Fritz Hollings is U.S. Senator, South Carolina and Former Governor of South Carolina)

- “The people of South Carolina are very fortunate, indeed, to be the beneficiaries of the far-sighted vision – spanning nearly a century – of Duke Power, in giving the ‘conservation communities’ in South and North Carolina the opportunity to acquire more than 69,000 acres of mountain and river lands for enjoyment and use by the public.. The beautiful photographs by Thomas Wyche show that these are truly ‘Special Places’.”

Comments by the Honorable Jim Hodges, from the cover of *Mosaic: 21 Special Places in the Carolinas*, Photography and Text by Thomas Wyche; Westcliffe Publishers; International Standard Book Number: 1-56579-426-5. (The Honorable Jim Hodges is Former Governor of South Carolina)

Janice Cervelli Schach, FASLA
Dean, College of Architecture, Arts and Humanities

March 9, 2004

Date

Note: Mr. Wyche's photographs, copies of newspaper and magazine articles, Mr. Wyche's books and Mountain Bridge Trail Guide which are described in some of these articles, a half hour video program narrated by Joanne Woodward that has run several times on ETV in both North and South Carolina, and letters of recommendation are available for the committee's review.