

Big Laurel Branch Wilderness Addition

Cherokee National Forest

4,446 acres, Carter and Johnson Counties, Tennessee

Description

Located in the Watauga Ranger District in the northern Cherokee, the Big Laurel Branch addition is an important enhancement to the existing Big Laurel Branch Wilderness. This addition will provide permanent protection for over 4.5 miles of the famed Appalachian National Scenic Trail between the Iron Mountain Shelter and the Vandeventer Shelter -- just south of scenic Shady Valley.

The parcel is located along the slopes of Iron Mountain just north of Watauga Lake. Elevation in the parcel ranges from 2,200' to 4,160' above sea level. The area contains mature stands of hardwood forest along the Appalachian Trail and is home to abundant wildlife. At lower elevations, stands of White Pine can be found. Tennessee Wild volunteers have seen signs of black bear, bobcat and coyote while in the area performing trail maintenance. The area offers spectacular opportunities for hiking, hunting, backcountry camping, solitude, and wildlife viewing.



In addition to the recreational amenities, the forests contained within the Big Laurel Branch addition provide protection for the area's pristine waters. This includes Watauga Lake and the Watauga River; both of which are important fisheries. Wilderness designation will also protect the viewshed of Iron Mountain from Watauga Lake and nearby communities.

Location

The area is just north and west of Elizabethton, Tennessee. The Wilderness Study Area can be accessed via Watauga Dam Road (to the south) and Tennessee HWY 91 (to the north). Those wishing to see the area can backpack in and camp at one of the Appalachian Trail shelters or in one of the several campsites found along the trail. The small community of Hampton, TN with the Braemar Castle hiker hostel makes an excellent base of operations for visiting this area and the nearby Pond Mountain Wilderness. By trail, the area lies approximately 30 miles from the town of Damascus, Virginia.

For more information contact:

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