



In One Place, the Best of the Mountains

THE MEDIA ROOM

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News Releases

News Release from NC Governor Mike Easley Regarding the Sale of the Park

January 29, 2007

Gov. Mike Easley announced today that the state of North Carolina has agreed to purchase the landmark Chimney Rock Park in Rutherford County from the Morse family's Chimney Rock Company. The park will become the centerpiece of a new state park under development in Hickory Nut Gorge. The agreement sets a purchase price of \$24 million for the 996-acre park and its signature 315-foot spire that overlooks Lake Lure.

"Chimney Rock is one of the most visible images of our state's landscape and giving it an honored place in our state parks system is a conservation success story for all North Carolinians," Easley said.

"The Morse family has maintained careful stewardship of this land for generations and the state will continue to protect these natural resources."

Funding for the acquisition comes from a \$15 million appropriation in the state budget and various grants from the state's Parks and Recreation, Natural Heritage and Clean Water Management Trust funds. A private donor, who wished to remain anonymous, also contributed \$2.35 million for the purchase.

The agreement is the result of two years of negotiations between Chimney Rock Co. and the state. Under the terms of the agreement, Chimney Rock Co. will continue to operate the park through 2007 while the state parks system develops an operations plan.

Chimney Rock Park has been a tourist attraction in western North Carolina since a stairway was built to the rock's summit in 1885.

In 1902, Lucius B. Morse of Missouri bought the site and began developing the park. Its facilities include a tunnel and elevator to the rock summit, a visitor center, nature center and a network of hiking trails to geologic points of interest and the 404-foot Hickory Nut Falls.

"As stewards of this special property for more than 100 years, our goal was to achieve an outcome that was the best result for the land, the community, our associates and our family," said Todd Morse, president and general manager of Chimney Rock Co.

"We're happy that the Morse family's legacy of stewardship will be formally recognized and shared with state park visitors for generations to come."

"Today we make sure this important landmark will be protected so future generations will be able to enjoy it as we can today," said state Sen. Walter Dalton (D-Rutherford).

"Those of use who live in this area are thankful for the stewardship of the Morse family and grateful to all

North Carolinians who recognize the importance of protecting our natural heritage."

"I am delighted that we are adding nearly 1,000 acres of scenic western North Carolina's to our state's protected lands," said state Rep. Bob England (D-Rutherford).

"I will continue to see that the state makes these kinds of investments to preserve North Carolina's pristine resources."

Chimney Rock Park adjoins property the state acquired for Hickory Nut Gorge State Park, a new state park slated to open in 2008.

The state parks system has acquired 2,264 acres on both sides of the rugged gorge for the state park. The gorge has been considered a premier state park site in the system's New Parks for a New Century initiative, which examined areas throughout the state as potential state parks or state natural areas and found the gorge to be a significant center of biodiversity and natural heritage.

For more information on the acquisition of Chimney Rock Park, please visit the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation website at <http://ils.unc.edu/parkproject/ncparks.html> or call 919/715-8709.

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Chimney Rock Park | Highway 64/74A | PO Box 39 | Chimney Rock, NC 28720
1-800-277-9611 | visit@chimneyrockpark.com

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