

David Welch, a former Plant Conservation Program administrator with the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, was recently posthumously honored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a 2016 Recovery Champion, one of only a handful to receive this distinction annually.

Welch passed away in July 2016 after a battle with cancer, but was working on conservation projects until just before his death, including the transfer of the 30-acre Detore Tract to the Tater Hill Preserve in Boone.

In addition to being honored, a permanent marker recognizing Welch's contributions will be installed at the Detore tract, which was officially designated as the Welch Tract during a special dedication ceremony in July.

In recognizing Welch, the USFWS noted his role in securing grants that would lead to the creation of the Bat Fork Bog Preserve and the expansion of Tater Hill Preserve. The Bat Fork Bog is home to bunched arrowhead, swamp pink and other rare plant species. The Tater Hill Preserve is home to Gray's lily and other at-risk species.

"David and his staff did an excellent job of using funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Grants to States Program for meaningful, on-the-ground plant conservation projects throughout North Carolina. From the coast to the mountains, David and his staff worked in one way or another to benefit all 26 federally listed plants known from North Carolina," wrote Dale Suiter, endangered species biologist with the USFWS Raleigh Office. "I always enjoyed working with David and I could count on him to do the right thing and to move these species a little closer to recovery."

Over the years, Welch also worked tirelessly to protect the Venus flytrap, and assisted in ginseng marking efforts in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to thwart poaching.

"David was committed to land conservation and eager to learn and practice restoration. He was passionate without rancor, supportive without being intrusive, and always listened – a rare attribute. He knew how to compromise without giving up his principles or expecting that of others," wrote Katherine Schlosser, president of the Friends of Plant Conservation.