



Bald Mountain from Newsome Bluff. © M Leonard

## **TUCKERTOWN GAME LANDS: ENSURING PIEDMONT HUNTERS HAVE READY ACCESS TO GAME LANDS AND PROTECTING DRINKING WATER**

**T**he COVID-19 shutdown made it clear that more people want to get outside and hunt. Hunting licenses increased by 20 percent from May to December 2020 over the same period in the previous year. Providing game lands that are easily accessible to the people living in the Piedmont are particularly important because the network of game lands is stronger in the mountains on the coastal plain. For years, hunters had flocked to the Tuckertown Game Lands in Davidson and Montgomery counties. Although owned by Alcoa, much of the property had been enrolled in the state game lands program. But, that left the game lands in danger of being developed.

As part of relicensing its hydroelectric dams on the Yadkin River Alcoa agreed to sell 2424 acres of rare Piedmont game land to the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, ensuring that the game lands will be permanently protected for hunting and other recreational uses. The Tuckertown Game Land represents 7.5% of the State's piedmont game lands. Eighty percent of North Carolinians live within 100 miles of the property. This acquisition will also protect 31 miles of undeveloped shoreline on Tuckertown Lake, which is part of the Yadkin/Pee Dee River basin – more than 1.7 million people rely on the basin for their drinking water.

But the clock is ticking. Permanent protection of Tuckertown Game Lands will only become reality if the State can close the deal, with its \$8.5 million price tag by September 2021. Three Rivers Land Trust, NC Wildlife Federation, The Conservation Fund, and many others are working with the Wildlife Resources Commission to raise the public and private funds necessary to secure the property and to maintain public access to game lands and recreational waters.

Game Lands and hunting are an important part of North Carolina's cultural heritage. Providing game lands that accessible to all parts of the state are important. While public game lands meet a vital outdoor recreational need, they also provide other benefits such as protecting drinking water.

