

Land agreement finalized on property next to Mazda Toyota plant

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LIMESTONE COUNTY, Ala.- This week, a multi-million dollar deal was reached to preserve hundreds of acres west of Huntsville. The news comes after a lawsuit was filed to protect the threatened spring pygmy sunfish.

The new billion-dollar Mazda Toyota plant is taking shape along Greenbrier Road. But for over a year, conservation advocates have had their eye on the nearby Beaverdam Creek.

"Just because it's rare and small, it doesn't mean it's not worth saving," Tennessee Riverkeeper representative David Whiteside said.

They've been fighting to ensure the grand plans for a factory don't threaten the spring pygmy sunfish.

On Friday, they got some welcomed news as a \$10 million deal was finalized to buy just under 500 acres next to the plant.

"This is a huge environmental victory because preserving huge tracts of land is great for water quality, it can also improve air quality in our area and enhance property values," Whiteside said.

A spokesperson for the deal tells me the \$10 million to buy the land came from the Forever Wild Land Trust. That group receives around \$15 million a year from the Alabama Trust Fund for land acquisition.

"At the end of the legal battles and environmental enforcement actions, I think this is a solution that all of the parties involved are happy with," Whiteside said.

The agreement ensures the land is protected, no pesticides, heavy equipment, or water diversion can be used within 150 feet of the tract.

"With this news, it certainly feels like Christmas came early for the people of north Alabama," Whiteside said.

Whiteside said there's another tract of land near the plant that's around 500 acres that they're also hoping to preserve.

Mazda Toyota leaders said they plan to start building vehicles in 2021.