

# Waterrock Knob Regional Vision Plan

A Collaborative Regional Vision for the Heart of the Plott Balsam Mountains

North Carolina

2018

Prepared by:



Prepared for:



PRESERVATION  CONSERVATION  RECREATION  HERITAGE  TOURISM







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## THE MANAGEMENT TEAM



Thanks to the management team who helped guide and secure funding for this plan. The team consisted of:

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With support provided by other members of these organizations

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to the following organizations that provided funding assistance for this plan:



## CONSULTANT/AUTHOR OF PLAN





## WHAT THE VISION PLAN IS:

- A vision plan that is REGIONAL, and not just a plan for conserved properties.
- A compilation of stakeholder input, with their direct statements reflected in the major themes of this document.
- An opportunity to study the formalization of a partnership of stakeholders and what work could be done collaboratively.
- An evaluation of opportunities and challenges and the key themes for how to address them.
- Information that will aid the National Park Service in future planning efforts.

## WHAT THE VISION PLAN IS NOT:

- It is not prescriptive towards any specific property, and does not call out any specific improvements or changes.
- While this is not a comprehensive Master Plan, it is an essential first step for an integrated vision.
- It is not a plan for federal lands; planning of that nature requires compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).



## HOW WILL THIS DOCUMENT AID THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE IN FUTURE PLANNING?

A significant amount of lands addressed in this Vision Plan are or may be future National Park Service land.

The following is an outline of how the Vision Plan relates to decision-making within National Park Service Lands:

### FUTURE DECISIONS COMPLY WITH THE GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Blue Ridge Parkway has a general management plan which **clearly defines the direction for resource preservation and visitor use**. The plan was developed in consultation with other agencies, tribal governments, stakeholders, and the general public.

Existing land or future land transfers to the National Park Service **would fall under the Blue Ridge Parkway's Management Plan which identifies this area as a "Special Natural Resource" zone. This zone has the highest level of protection on the Parkway**. This zone is established for areas with rare or endangered plant/animal species. Some management strategies of this zone include:

#### NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION:

- Close areas completely or seasonally to reduce impacts to flora and fauna.
- Modification of natural resources will only occur to restore habitat or mitigate impacts caused by humans. There is an emphasis on research, inventory, monitoring, prescribed burns, pest/invasive species management.
- Timbering is not allowed on any National Park Service lands.

#### RECREATION/VISITOR USE:

- Visitor opportunities are limited to avoid human impacts on the ecosystem.
- Educate visitors on reducing their impact to the natural environment.
- Visitor access will be oriented towards those with higher levels of backcountry skills and visitor use levels will be low.
- Hiking and backpacking is limited to designated trails only.
- Backcountry camping at designated sites will be considered.
- No horseback riding, mountain biking, or motorized vehicles are allowed.
- Law enforcement will be prioritized for resource protection.
- A limited number of unpaved trails provided in a manner that limits habitat fragmentation and protects natural resources.
- Existing developments that are not consistent with natural resource protection will be removed.
- Hunting is not allowed on any National Park Service lands.

### FUTURE DECISIONS GO THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING

This planning focuses on how to implement activities and projects needed to meet the management plan's objectives. Typically triggered when a project will be underway in 2-5 years, the plan will outline specifics to the project and analyze complex, technical, and sometimes controversial issues.

### FUTURE DECISIONS GO THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Environmental analysis can take place concurrent with implementation planning. Resolution of resource issues is accomplished through environmental analysis, as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

The National Park Service will gather input on the proposed action, the purpose and need, and other issues. While various aspects of planning may take place prior to initiating the NEPA process, the appropriate level of NEPA review must be completed before the NPS takes an action that has the potential to affect the quality of the human environment.

Next steps if it complies with the mgmt. plan



**BACKGROUND**

The preservation of 5,329 acres surrounding the Blue Ridge Parkway has propelled the collaboration of many partners involved in this major success. Moving forward, these many partners envision a landscape-wide collaborative; one that is defined at an ecosystem scale, a landscape rich with common heritage, and tied by recreation and tourism opportunity. This region includes the Plott Balsam Mountains and Waterrock Knob itself, which is the highest peak in the rugged Plott Balsam Mountain range and one of the highest and most scenic destinations on the Blue Ridge Parkway. This region is considered one of the most precious landscapes along the Parkway and in the Eastern United States due to its biodiversity, unique high-elevation spruce-fir forests, threatened and rare flora and fauna, breathtaking views, and sacredness to the Cherokee people. Gateways to the landscape are the quaint mountain communities of Waynesville, Maggie Valley, Sylva, and Cherokee and the Waterrock Knob-Plott Balsams as their scenic backdrop.

**THE PROCESS**

For the many compelling reasons listed above, the development of the Waterrock Knob Regional Vision Plan was pursued. The plan is a joint effort of many, with leadership from the National Park Service and the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation to deepen the collaboration and conversation with stakeholders and the public. The goal was to create a clear vision and opportunities for

collaboration in the Waterrock Knob-Plott Balsam region. A comprehensive stakeholder engagement process brought over 30+ organizations, including conservation groups, recreation interests, land trusts, economic development/tourism interests, heritage interests, and local municipalities together to create a regional vision. The process explored opportunities for partnerships with stakeholders to collaborate and provide assistance to deliver information to the National Park Service to help move the project forward.

**THE VISION**

To understand the complexity and density of natural and cultural resources of this landscape, a thorough analysis identified the most important resources to preserve, promote, and manage. This analysis aided stakeholder dialogue when discussing how conservation, recreation, and tourism can coexist, with minimal impact to this rare and sensitive landscape. The ultimate Waterrock Knob Regional Vision Plan was crafted through dialogue with stakeholders and the general public.

*The plan's vision is that "The Waterrock Knob region balances resource conservation and recreation. It has a regional collaboration that conserves rare ecosystems, provides sustainable recreation and tourism opportunities for regional trail connections and backcountry experiences, and presents immersive opportunities into the rich Cherokee and Appalachian cultural heritage of the region."*

**THE PLAN**

This plan identifies ways in which partners can help with funding, planning, technical assistance and outreach. Collaboration opportunities exist for resource protection, visitor use and recreation, heritage promotion and preservation, land conservation, creating a regional identity, and providing interpretation and educational opportunities. This plan can serve as a foundation for the National Park Service in scoping for future actions related to any new properties and specific planning activities. Management of NPS lands will be subject to NPS law and policy. This collaborative, coordinated approach will ensure the protection and enjoyment of the region as a whole for years to come.



SECTION

2

BACKGROUND

## Introduction

### The Waterrock Knob Planning Area within the Plott Balsam Region

The Waterrock Knob and surrounding peaks in Western North Carolina are one of the highest points along the Blue Ridge Parkway, and one of the most rare and biodiverse landscapes in the East. Elk, rare salamanders, flying squirrels, and slowly disappearing high elevation spruce-fir forests all inhabit the breathtaking landscape of the Waterrock Knob Region—also known as the Plott Balsams. As the scenic ridgeline backdrop and outdoor playground to four mountain communities, this region helps feed the engine of tourism that makes up a large component of local economies. Additionally, a large portion of the Waterrock Knob region serves as the watershed for Maggie Valley’s drinking water supply.

### How This Vision Plan Came to Be and its Collaborative Partners

Because of the unique and disappearing treasures of this landscape, and the economic benefit of conserving its resources, a large collective of organizations have recently come together to conserve over 5,300-acres of contiguous land surrounding Waterrock Knob (see page 4 to view these properties). As a joint effort of the National Park Service, the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, The Conservation Fund, The Nature Conservancy, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, the Conservation Trust for North Carolina, and Mainspring Conservation Trust, an informal conservation collaborative has formed to identify partnering opportunities. Other State and local government, non-profit, and tourism partners are eager to help sustain and promote the natural and recreation values of this region and have offered input and assistance in both this visioning process and beyond.

### How This Vision Plan Came to Be

In 2016, informal conversations with partners (coordinated by The Conservation Fund) led to the idea of developing a vision plan for the region, with the newly +/-5,000 acres as the centerpiece. The Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation agreed to lead the process of finding funding for the plan and guiding the planning process.

## THE VISION PLAN PROCESS:

### BIRTH OF THE IDEA (2016)

Informal meeting of stakeholders interested in developing a Vision Plan for the region

Management Team formed to oversee the Vision Plan Process

### COLLABORATION (FALL 2017)

Stakeholder Online Survey  
Stakeholder Workshop (over 40+ stakeholder organizations attended) provided more detailed input

### REVIEW & INPUT (2017-2018)

Project Management Team review of draft Vision Plan  
Stakeholder review of draft Vision Plan

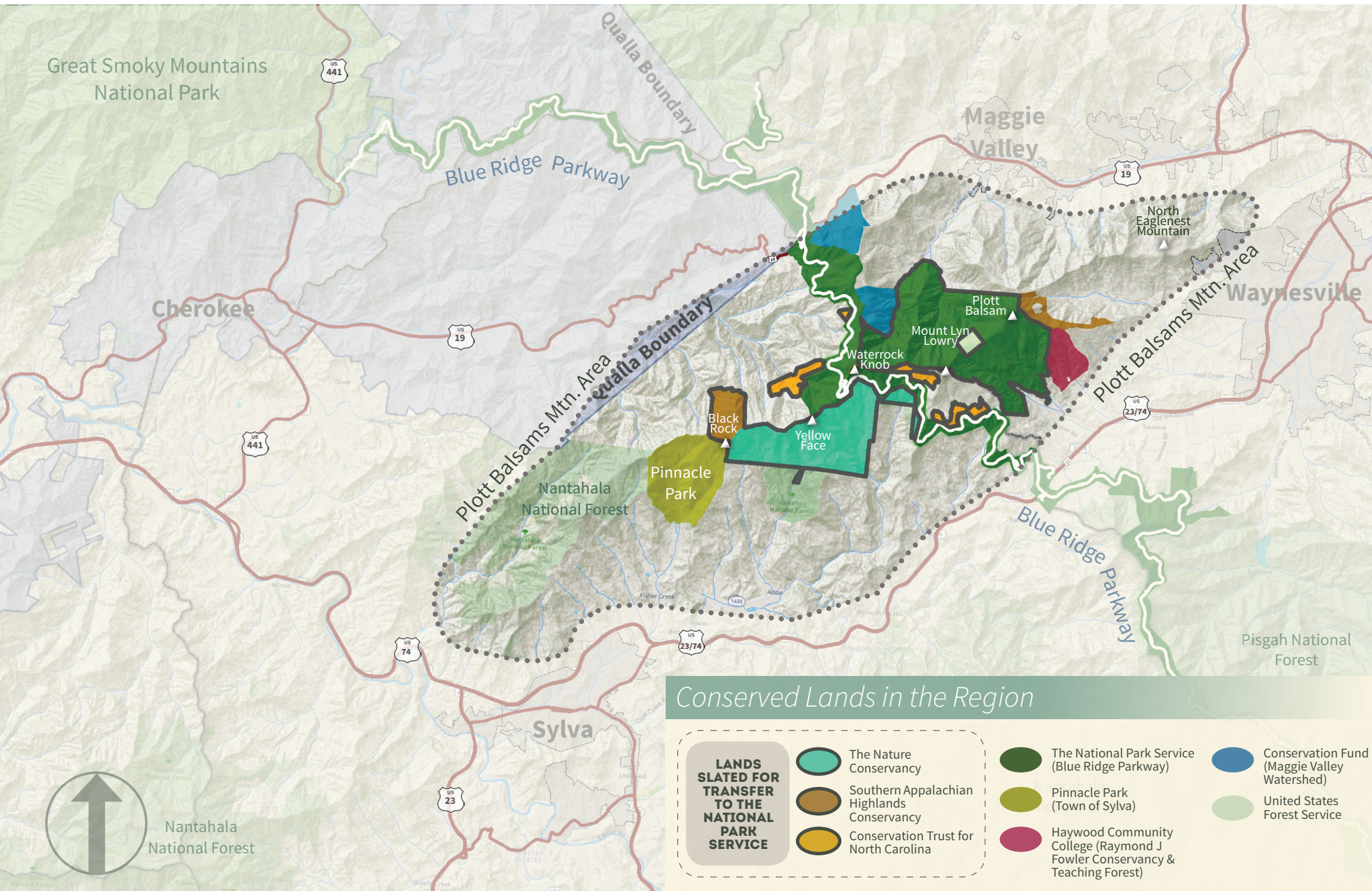
### PUBLIC COMMENT (EARLY 2018)

Public Open House / Public Input  
Engaged and new stakeholder and the general public were invited to this open house to provide input to the plan.

### FINALIZE (EARLY 2018)

Vision Plan Finalized





# THE WATERROCK REGION

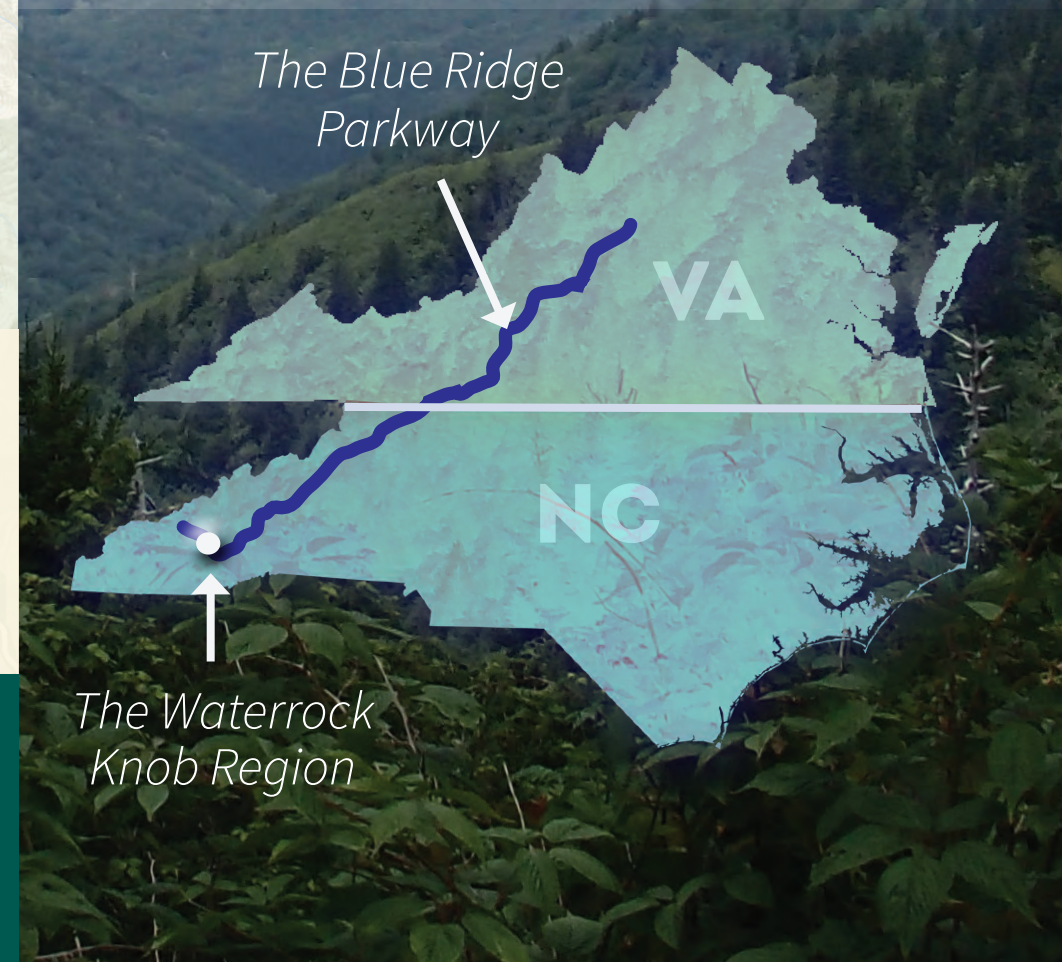
## Waterrock Knob Region Facts:

The Waterrock/Plott Balsam Mountain region is over **77 SQUARE MILES**

**15 MILES** of the Blue Ridge Parkway travels through this region

There is over **12,511 ACRES** of conserved land, with over **25%** of the Plott Balsams conserved

**12 MILES** of the Mountain-to-Sea Trail runs through the region





PROPERTIES						ALLOWED PUBLIC USES	RESTRICTED USES
PROP ID	NAME	ACRES	OWNER	OWNERSHIP TYPE	MANAGER		
<b>A</b>	Blue Ridge Parkway/ National Park Service (NPS)	4,316	The National Park Service	Fee Simple	NPS	SEE NOTES TO RIGHT	
LANDS SLATED FOR TRANSFER TO THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE							
<b>B</b>	Conservation Trust for North Carolina (CTNC) Property	370	CTNC	Fee Simple	CTNC		
<b>C</b>	Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC) Property	319	Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy	Fee Simple	SAHC		
<b>D</b>	The Nature Conservancy Property	1,654	The Nature Conservancy (TNC)	Fee Simple	TNC	SEE NOTES TO RIGHT	

Properties B-D are slated to be transferred to the National Park Service (NPS)-Blue Ridge Parkway.

Current use of NPS property and future lands transferred into NPS ownership is guided by the Blue Ridge Parkway Management Plan and the process outlined at the beginning of this document.



PROPERTIES						ALLOWED PUBLIC USES	RESTRICTED USES
PROP ID	NAME	ACRES	OWNER	OWNERSHIP TYPE	MANAGER		
<b>E</b>	Plott-Balsams Tracts	214.55	Pigeon Cove Development LLC Villages Of Plott Creek Land	Easement	SAHC		
<b>F</b>	Maggie Valley Watershed	346.19	The Conservation Fund (TCF)	Easement	SAHC	Note: The property is in process of being purchased during the development of this plan. Public access would likely be restricted.	
<b>G</b>	Haywood Community College Raymond J. Fowler Conservancy & Teaching Forest	328.9	Haywood Community College	Fee Simple	HCC	The property is currently closed to public access and it utilized for research. The College may be open to discussion about future public access.	
<b>H</b>	Nantahala National Forest	2,590	United States Forest Service (USFS)	Fee Simple	USFS		
<b>I</b>	Pinnacle Park	1082.8	Town of Sylva	Easement	CWMTF		
<b>J</b>	Sons, LLC*	76.45	Private-easement held by The Conservation Fund (TCF)	Easement	TCF		

**LEGEND**

**D** Lands recently or potentially conveyed to Federal ownership

**I** Other conserved properties

**CONSERVATION LANDS**

**ALLOWED PUBLIC USE/RESTRICTED USE**

<b>Yes/No</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>
Hiking	Off Highway Vehicles
Trailhead	Structures
Mountain Biking	Road Building
Fishing/Hunting	Sustainable Timber Harvesting
Horseback Riding	

Blue Ridge Parkway	Conservation Lands
Major Roads	Qualla Boundary
Minor Roads	Municipal Boundary
Peaks Above 6000-foot Elevation	County Boundary
Parkway Scenic Viewpoints	Parcels

## CONSERVED LANDS & ALLOWED USES



## SECTION

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**THE VISION:** The Waterrock Knob region balances preservation, resource conservation, and recreation. It has a regional collaboration that conserves rare ecosystems, provides sustainable recreation and tourism opportunities for regional trail connections and backcountry experiences, and presents immersive opportunities into the rich Cherokee and Appalachian cultural heritage of the region.





## PRESERVATION & CONSERVATION

**Continue to conserve lands and prioritize all future work through the lens of its value to preservation.** Prioritize all future work based on its benefits to habitat connectivity, protection of rare and threatened species, protections of rare and threatened water supply, and viewshed protection.

**Identify opportunities to collaboratively manage the patchwork of public and private lands.** Collaborate with federal, state, and local governments, non-profits, higher learning institutions, and landowners/landowner associations. Tackle preservation and conservation opportunities and threats related to habitat connectivity, invasive species, climate change, land preservation, water supply protection, and sustainable timber management. Develop a collaborative monitoring and research strategy to support collaborative management decisions.

**Use the region as a living laboratory.** Collaborate with schools, non-profits, and others to educate both locals and visitors on the incredible resources of the Waterrock Knob region and the threats to it.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM

**Develop a key message and compelling story.** Look at what ties the region together and begin to tell a compelling and concise story about what makes this region unique from a natural and human perspective. Collaborate with the tourism partners to share the key message on conservation and recreation. Look at new education mediums that are remote, digital, and are at gateways to the region. Consider programming that ties the region together like self-guided tours, utilizing current resources (phone apps, media etc.).

## RECREATION

**Identify opportunities for a regionally connected trail system that is sustainably located to have minimal impact on natural systems.**

Connect the local communities of Maggie Valley, Waynesville, and Sylva to the mountain, through existing or planned greenway, trail, and on-road connections. Analyze existing trails to understand whether they are sustainably located and built.

**Identify opportunities to collaborate on a comprehensive recreation management strategy.** Collaborate with federal, state, and local governments, and non-profits to determine how recreation resources can best serve the public while minimizing the impact to natural systems and ensuring the region does not feel “over-run”.

**Educate users** on recreation opportunities along with interpretation that encourages “Leave No Trace” principles and an understanding of the precious resources of the landscape.

## HERITAGE

**Integrate Cherokee Indian heritage deeper into the story and interpretation of the Waterrock Knob region.** Work with the Eastern Band of Cherokee to explore ways to interpret and include programming for visitors of the region. Interpret the deep significance this region has to the Cherokee.

**Explore and further interpret early settler and Appalachian culture.** Highlight the roots of hunting and agriculture heritage. Highlight the history of homesteading and the relationship between white settlers and other cultures.

**Explore a deeper history, looking beyond the typical “white settler” history lens.**

**Utilize existing heritage partners to help tell and promote the tapestry of heritage.** Highlight surrounding artisans, music, and historic landmarks.

*How were the vision and themes developed?*

Through a reiterative process, over 40+ stakeholders gave input on what outcomes and goals they would like to see established for the region. These were further vetted through a workshop and public open house.

*these themes are direct stakeholders comments paraphrased.*







*View of the Plott Balsam/Waterrock region from Maggie Valley*

*Image courtesy of Carol H Highsmith via the Library of Congress*




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**Continue to preserve lands and prioritize all future work through the lens of its values to preservation.**

PRIORITIZE THE FOLLOWING:	POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION:
<b>Viewshed Protection</b>	Land trusts and regional/county planners collaborate on viewshed protection opportunities.
<b>Spruce/Fir Forests/Hemlocks</b>	Identify opportunities for spruce-fir and hemlock restoration as well as opportunities to educate the public.
<b>Drinking Water Supply Lands</b>	Look at dedicated sources of funding for headwaters protection. Protect Campbell and Jonathan Creek watersheds. Engage municipalities and counties in continued and increased collaborations.
<b>Natural Communities That Are Rare, Threatened, or Declining</b>	<p>Target the protection and restoration of key species, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North Carolina flying squirrels</li> <li>• Spruce/fir forests</li> <li>• Rare salamanders</li> <li>• Rock gnome lichen</li> <li>• Small whorled pogonia</li> <li>• Rusty patch bee</li> <li>• Spruce fir moss spider</li> <li>• Indiana bat</li> <li>• Gray bat (potential)</li> </ul> <p>Develop more Natural Heritage Program surveys and collaborate with partners to do collaborative surveys/bio-blitzes to determine extent of these communities.</p>
<b>Sacred Elements of the Natural World</b>	Work with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to identify sacred waters, plants, and other elements that are significant to the Cherokee.

**Identify & Collaboratively Manage Threats.**

PRIORITIZE THE FOLLOWING:	POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION:
<b>Restore Healthy Fire Regime in Applicable Landscapes</b>	<p>Look at Ecozone mapping for support and planning.</p> <p>Collaborate with partners for prescribed fire opportunities.</p> <p>Work with private landowners to achieve goals for prescribed fire and invasive species.</p>
<b>Collaboratively Work to Control Invasive Species</b>	Look at means to collaboratively target invasive species like the hemlock and balsam woolly adelgid.

  
*Themes and statements are direct stakeholder comments paraphrased.*





## Manage Timber Sustainably.

*Note: Timbering is not allowed on National Park Service lands.*

PRIORITIZE THE FOLLOWING:

**Manage Timber Sustainably Where It Is Allowed & Work with Private Landowners to Adopt Forest Management Plans**

POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION:

Collaborate on timber and resource harvesting activities to protect resources and minimize impact to flora, fauna, and recreation. Ensure there is adequate erosion prevention and sediment control.

Reach out to private landowners to provide assistance on obtaining Forest Management Plans and forest certification. Aid landowners in understanding rules and regulations. Grow landowner peer networks that encourage the development of these plans and share local assistance resources. Work with land managers to ensure timbering does not negatively impact adjacent public lands.

### WHAT IS GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE?

*Green infrastructure, is defined by the Conservation Fund as "a planned and managed network of natural lands, working landscapes and other open spaces providing many environmental benefits, including flood protection, cleaner air and water, and connected wildlife habitats. Plans can help to restore and protect their top natural assets and support economic development."*

## Conserve an Interconnected Natural Network.

PRIORITIZE THE FOLLOWING:

**Develop A Regional Green Infrastructure Network Of Connected Land And Habitat**

POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION:

Share GIS data across partners, collaborate on technical assistance, develop and utilize a hub/linkages map that can be shared among partners. Work with NC Natural Heritage staff and other interested partners on green infrastructure planning.

Establish a green infrastructure plan for the region, which includes all lands, not just public lands. Address climate change threats as part of this plan.

**Study And Provide Connected Habitat Suitable For The Reintroduction Of Elk**

Collaboratively assess the needs for elk habitat (i.e. early successional habitat) and weigh against conservation of rare or threatened natural communities.

Analyze opportunities for safe crossing of larger game, with designs for elk specifically.

*Themes and statements are direct stakeholder comments paraphrased.*

## Collaboratively Monitor & Develop a Living Laboratory.

PRIORITIZE THE FOLLOWING:

**Identify Opportunities for Collaborative Monitoring Regionally & Expand Surveys of Natural Communities**

POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION:

Look at opportunities to monitor and collaborate on projects including: wildlife cameras, citizen science, use of volunteer naturalists for species studies (i.e. flying squirrels, birds, salamanders, vegetation, etc.). Utilize I-Naturalist and other online programs. Connect with master naturalist programs to have them involved in projects.

Collaborate with the Appalachian Highlands Science Learning Center (AHSLC) at Purchase Knob through coordination of research, citizen science projects, and biodiversity inventories. Additionally, the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program staff can aid in inventories. Other research partners could be Western Carolina University and Haywood Community College.

Work with Discover Life In America, a non-profit that collaborates on monitoring and bio-blitz projects. This organization can assist with this on both public and private lands.

Collaborate on natural community surveys (all taxa biodiversity inventories) to determine areas where current or future recreation may be best sited. Continue to expand surveys beyond those areas. Consider doing surveys throughout several seasons to obtain the most accurate information.

Explore opportunities to work with researchers and surrounding universities.

## Collaborate on Education & Outreach.

PRIORITIZE THE FOLLOWING:

**Educate Schools/ Adjacent Landowners, & the General Public**

POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION:

Work with Western Carolina University and Haywood Waterways on outreach to the public and schools about the value of the area to the water they drink.

Connect with "gateway" communities of Sylva, Maggie Valley, and Waynesville to have citizenry understand the benefit of the region to their daily lives.

Reach out to adjacent landowners to build relationships and educate on pressing issues.

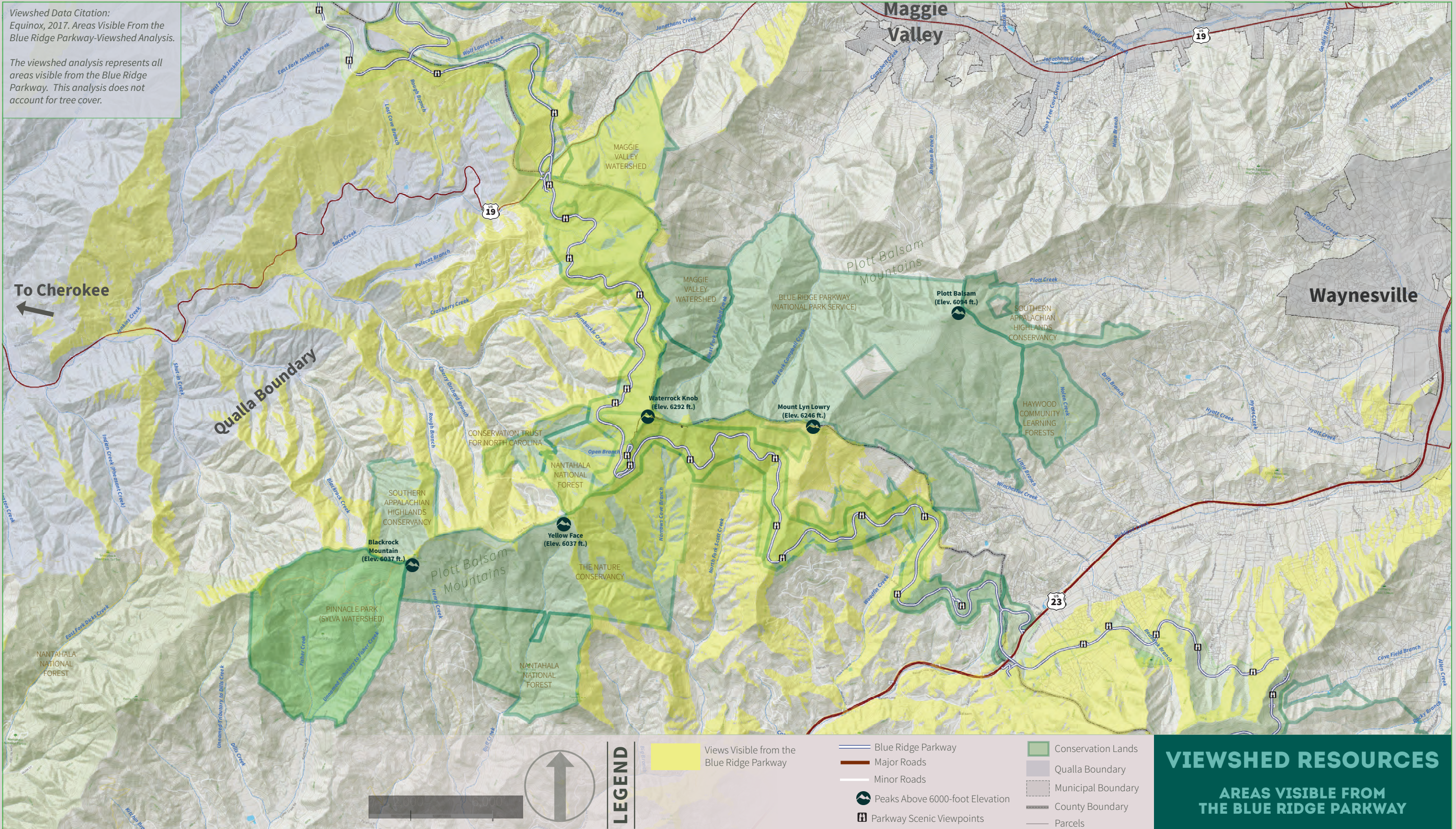
Develop curriculum in conjunction with NPS/AHSLC that can be shared with schools.





Viewshed Data Citation:  
Equinox, 2017. Areas Visible From the  
Blue Ridge Parkway-Viewshed Analysis.

The viewshed analysis represents all  
areas visible from the Blue Ridge  
Parkway. This analysis does not  
account for tree cover.



**VIEWSHED RESOURCES**

AREAS VISIBLE FROM  
THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY



# VIEWSHED PROTECTION

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

IMMEDIATE COLLABORATIVE  
OPPORTUNITIES MOVING  
FORWARD

- 1) **Identify lands most critical to viewshed protection** for both the Blue Ridge Parkway and other conserved properties with public access.
- 2) **Consider viewshed protection opportunities as part of green infrastructure planning and work with regional and county planning partners to identify opportunities for viewshed and visual resource protection.**

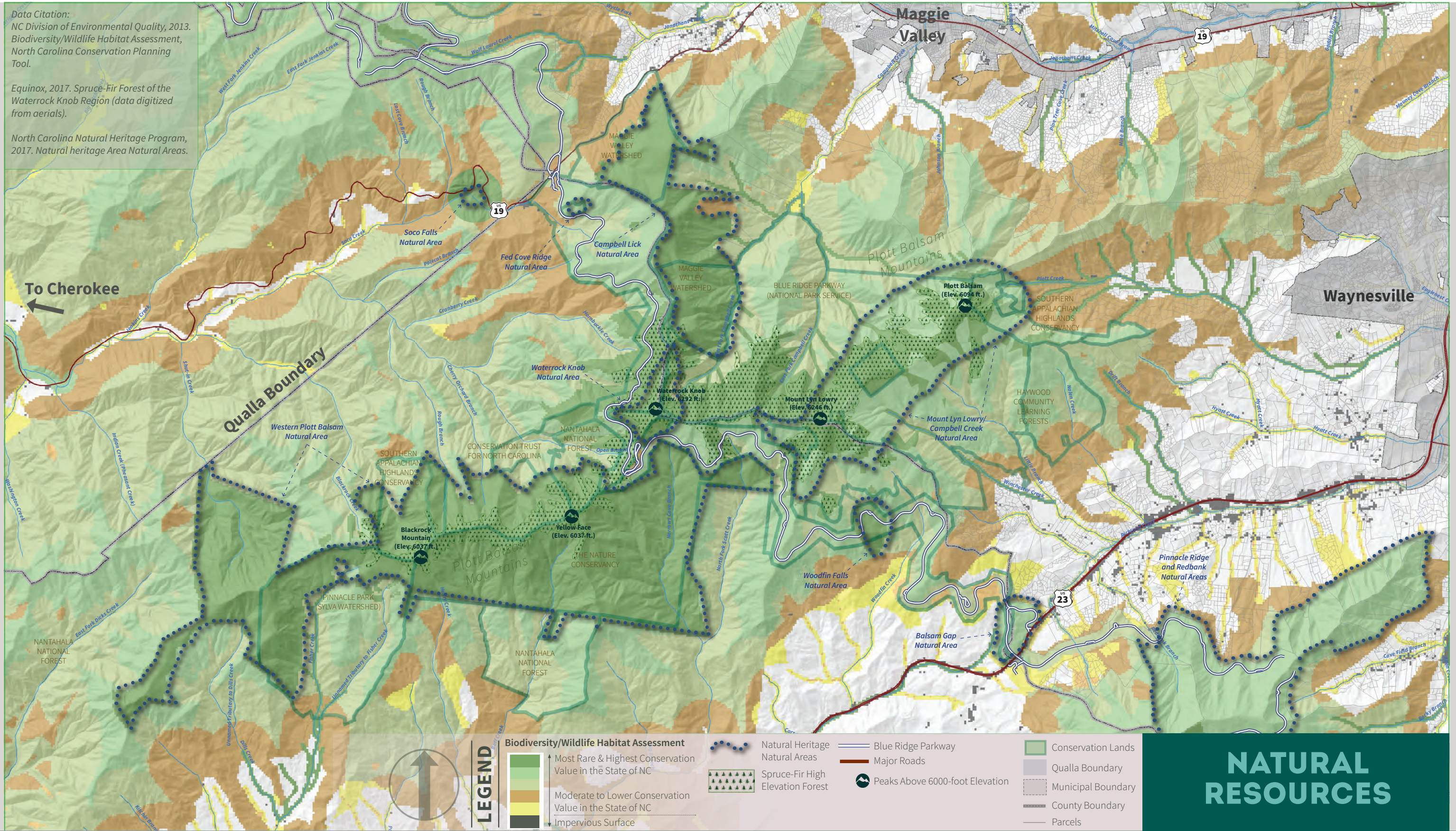




Data Citation:  
 NC Division of Environmental Quality, 2013.  
 Biodiversity/Wildlife Habitat Assessment,  
 North Carolina Conservation Planning  
 Tool.

Equinox, 2017. Spruce-Fir Forest of the  
 Waterrock Knob Region (data digitized  
 from aerials).

North Carolina Natural Heritage Program,  
 2017. Natural heritage Area Natural Areas.





## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

IMMEDIATE COLLABORATIVE  
OPPORTUNITIES MOVING  
FORWARD

- 1) **Consider forming an interdisciplinary collaborative working group of natural and cultural resource and recreation specialists and stakeholders to determine where recreational opportunities are appropriate and how to minimize the impact from existing or planned recreation amenities like trails.**
- 2) **Collaborate with Federal, State, and local governments, conservation non-profits, and others to identify a “natural infrastructure plan” that identifies wildlife hubs and corridors. As part of this plan, develop strategies for conservation and preservation actions associated with priority resources (i.e. spruce/fir forest, rare and threatened species).**
- 3) **Bring researchers and universities to the table to collaborate on, and identify, research opportunities.**
- 4) **Investigate the potential for a working group of partners willing to collaborate on increasing natural survey/inventory data for the region.**

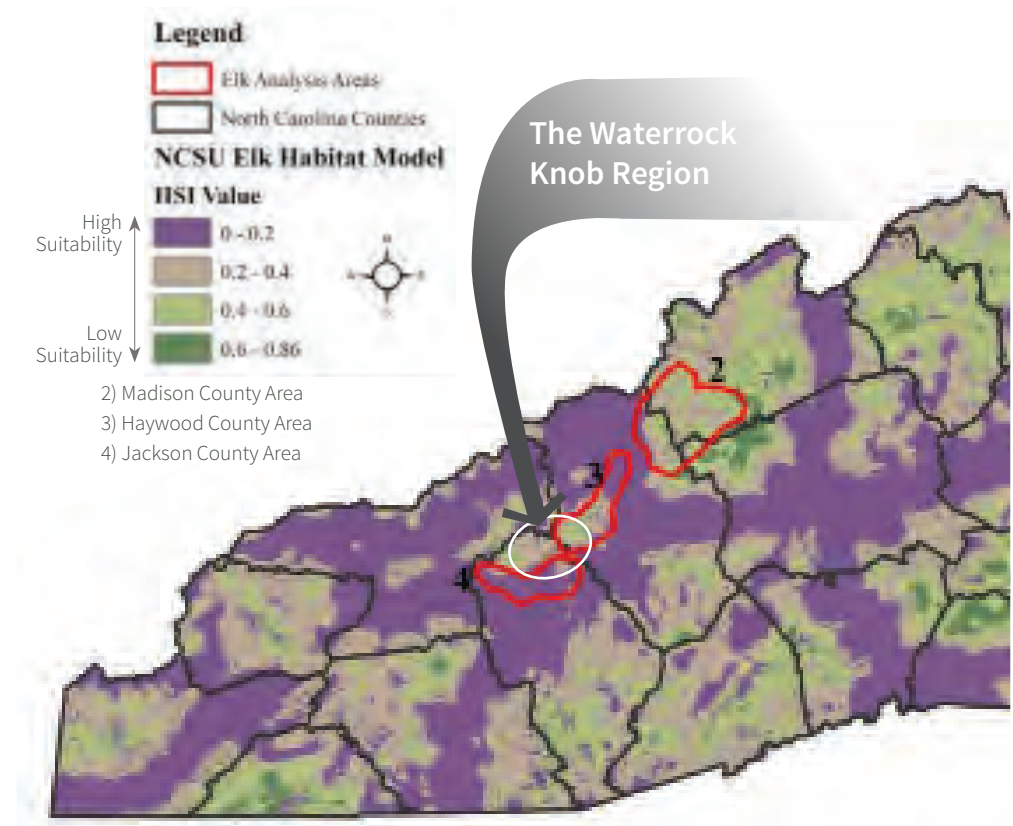
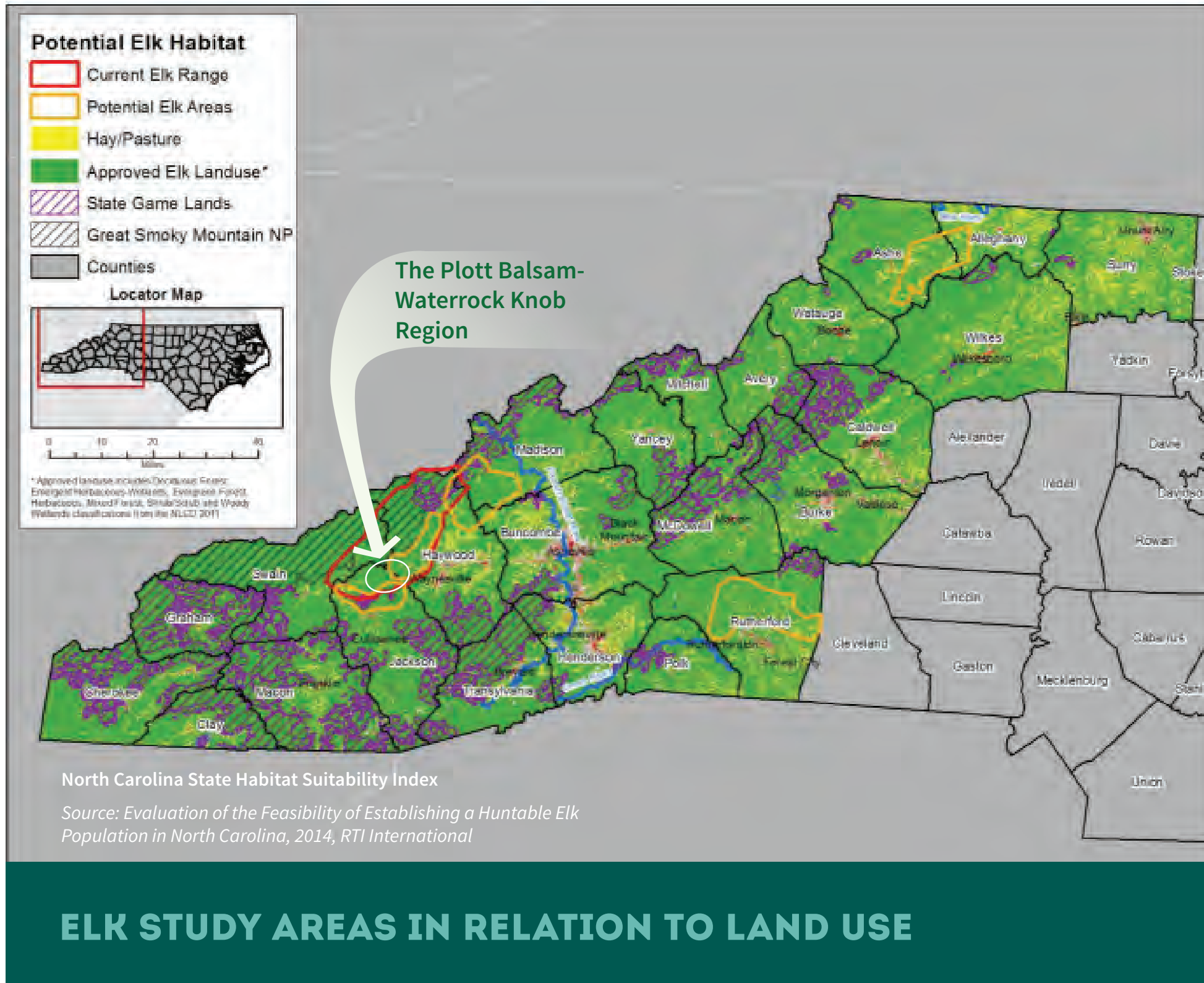
# NATURAL RESOURCES

Waterrock Knob lies within the Plott-Balsam Mountains that are so named for their historic settlement (ca. 1750) by the Johannes Plott family and the dark spruce-fir forests, known regionally as ‘balsams’, covering their highest peaks. These and other high-elevation forests in the area contain an abundance of unique flora and fauna.

The federally endangered spruce-fir moss spider lives in dense moss mats on boulders under spruce-fir, while threatened saw-whet owls nest in the branches above. Rare pygmy and Weller’s salamanders forage on the moist forest floor and in crevices along cliffs where endangered rock gnome lichen grows best. Endangered Carolina northern flying squirrels make their nests in yellow birch trees, and rock voles, smoky shrews, and long-tailed weasels scurry amidst boulders and talus.







This model was developed to indicate suitable habitat for elk as part of a statewide study

**North Carolina State Habitat Suitability Index**  
 Source: *Evaluation of the Feasibility of Establishing a Hunttable Elk Population in North Carolina, 2014, RTI International*

The NC Wildlife Resources Commission, the Conservation Fund, and others have been working to increase elk habitat just north of the Waterrock Knob region. In 2014, a state-supported study determined a portion of the Waterrock Region was suitable for increasing elk populations. Recently, a 1,925-acre Game Land just north of the region was set aside to provide more habitat for elk and hopefully decrease elk-human conflict. Dialogue on the appropriateness of increasing elk habitat in the Waterrock Knob region has been minimal. Inter-agency and non-profit collaboration and dialogue on this topic could be a critical part of the development of a regional “green infrastructure plan.”





## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

IMMEDIATE COLLABORATIVE  
OPPORTUNITIES MOVING  
FORWARD

- 1) **Analyze environmental impacts of elk expansion in the Waterrock Knob region.** Develop a working group of federal, state, non-profit organizations (like land trusts or the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation), and universities to weigh the positive and negative impacts.
- 2) **Analyze visitor/tourism impacts expanded elk populations may bring to the Waterrock Knob region.** Evaluate the negative and positive impacts of increased tourism.
- 3) **Collaborate with partners to identify where safe crossing improvements can be made for elk (and other wildlife), especially around barriers like Soco Gap (Hwy 19) and the Great Smoky Mountains Expressway (Hwy 74/23).**

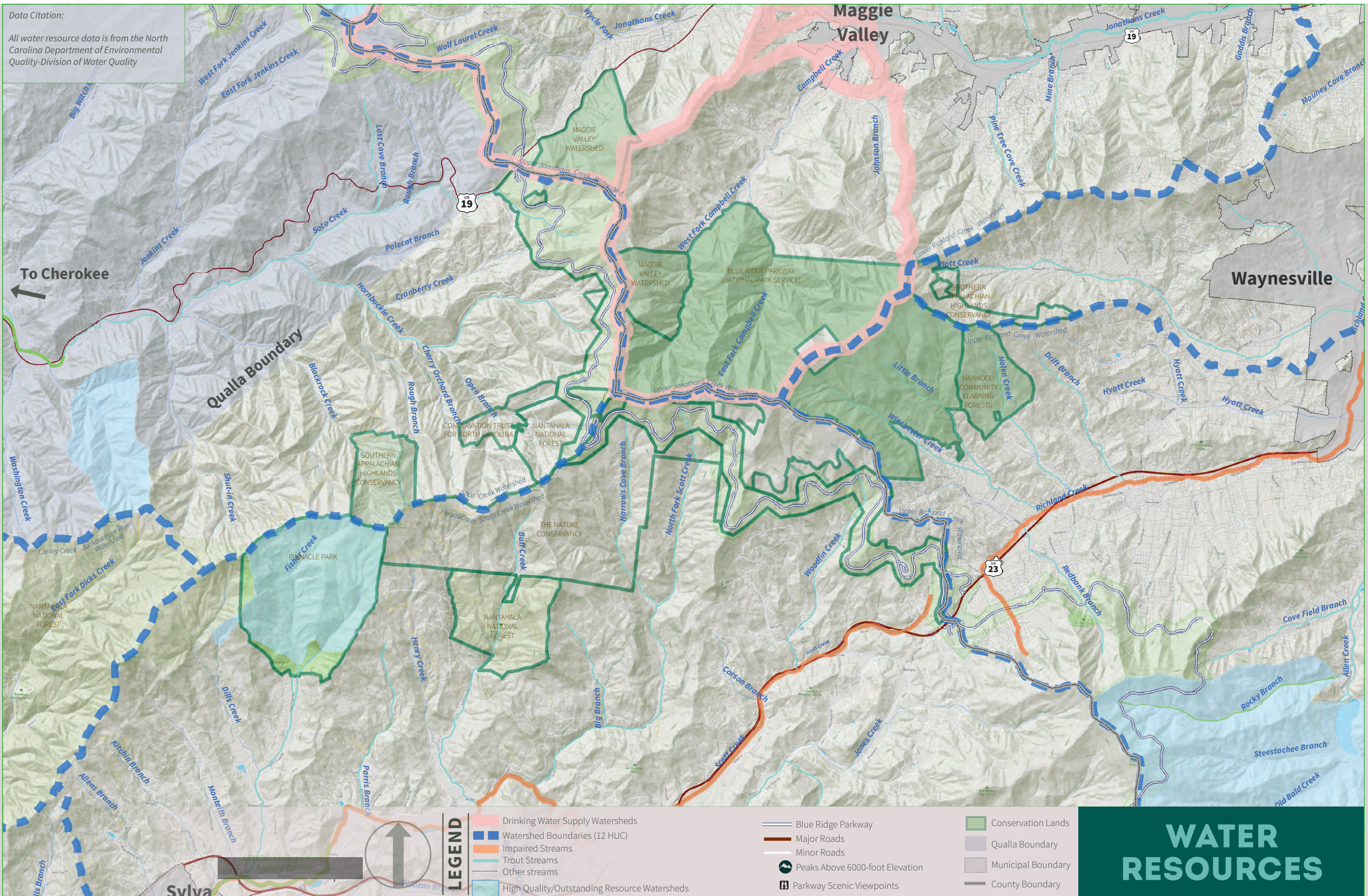
In the past, herds of elk would roam across Waterrock Knob, grazing in grassy gaps between forested ridges; today those elk are returning thanks to long-term regional conservation efforts to improve and manage for their habitat.

# ELK HABITAT





Data Citation:  
 All water resource data is from the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality-Division of Water Quality



**WATER  
 RESOURCES**



## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

IMMEDIATE COLLABORATIVE  
OPPORTUNITIES MOVING  
FORWARD

- 1) **Prioritize preservation of the headwaters of Maggie Valley's drinking water supply** (Campbell Creek watershed).
- 2) **Partner to improve the quality of impaired waters like Scott and Richland Creeks** through collaboration on outreach, stormwater best management practices, and preservation of headwaters.
- 3) **Collaborate on and utilize water resource funding opportunities** like the Pigeon River Fund and the Clean Water Management Trust Fund.

Nearly 150 miles of pristine streams spring from and drain through the mountains of the Waterrock Knob Region; in fact, the peak was named as such because of a perennial spring near the summit where hunters would refill their canteens.

Locally important streams such as Campbell, Fisher, and Scott Creeks have headwaters contained on conservation lands within the area. **These waters support healthy populations of Southern Appalachian brook trout, an ecologically and culturally significant fish. They also supply clean drinking water for the towns of Maggie Valley and Sylva.**

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians consider waters draining westward from Waterrock Knob toward the Qualla Boundary to be sacred, even more so in the fall when the deciduous trees 'return their medicine to the Long Man'.

# WATER RESOURCES





SECTION  
**4**  
KEY  
THEMES  
  
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## Connected Resources and Collaborative Recreation Management.

PRIORITIZE THE FOLLOWING:	POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION:
<b>Collaborate on Opportunities to Connect Trails And Communities Regionally and Identify Multiple Points Of Access</b>	<p>Connect the surrounding communities of Sylva, Waynesville, Maggie Valley, and Cherokee to the Waterrock Knob region.</p> <p>Collaborate with local communities on their county/municipal trail and/or greenway plans and analyze the best connections to the heart of the Waterrock Knob region.</p> <p>Consider using the Mountains-to-Sea Trail as the spine of the regional trail systems that connects all communities.</p> <p>Identify how surrounding landowners access current trails and analyze if this access should be improved or relocated.</p>
<b>Analyze and Promote On-road Bicycle Routes</b>	<p>Look at county/regional plans for bicycle (on-road) routes and determine how these routes could be promoted as part of the recreation experience.</p>
<b>Collaborate on Planning, Trail Development, &amp; Maintenance</b>	<p>Work collaboratively in planning with landowners, recreation volunteer groups, and trail building professionals to implement and maintain the trail system of the region.</p>
<b>Consider Mountain Biking Where Appropriate</b>	<p>Analyze Pinnacle Park or any other areas where mountain biking may be feasible. Assess current and proposed mountain bike trails based on sustainable trail principles.</p>
<b>Collaborate on Wayfinding &amp; Other Regional Efforts</b>	<p>Look at ways that recreation can be approached from a regional level so that using trails across boundaries makes sense and creates a seamless user experience. Collaborate on blazing and recreation maps. Work with trails clubs, university clubs, etc. on outreach and trail maintenance.</p>

## Ensure User Impact are Not Detrimental to Recreation Experience or Natural Systems.

PRIORITIZE THE FOLLOWING:	POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION:
<b>Identify Strategies to Prevent Overuse and Direct Users Into Less Sensitive Areas</b>	<p>Look at strategies to manage waste, large user groups, parking and other impacts due to elevated recreation demand.</p> <p>Consider identifying several designated backcountry camping locations, possibly with permit requirements. Consider a permit system for other recreation uses.</p> <p>Build for future use, not today's use, especially as it relates to trails.</p> <p>Identify areas where access may not be provided due to sensitive natural resources.</p>
<b>Weigh All Recreation Decisions on Their Level of Impact to Natural Resources Including Analysis of Existing Recreation Infrastructure</b>	<p>Work with natural resource professionals (like the NC Wildlife Resources Commission and National Park Service) and natural resource inventories/surveys to fully understand sensitive areas where recreation amenities may need to be relocated or avoided.</p> <p>Analyze existing trails (whether official or user created) and determine if trail or portions of trail should be closed or relocated. Develop a plan for comprehensive trail improvements and management over time.</p> <p>Work collaboratively in planning with the surrounding community and land owners, trail building professionals, and potential volunteer maintainers.</p> <p>Ensure that trails are built to the most current sustainable trail standards.</p>
<b>Engage with "South Beyond 6,000" Peak Bagging Program to Understand the Current Program</b>	<p>Identify where users want to go (i.e. 6,000-foot elevation peak baggers) and determine solutions to minimize their impact.</p> <p>Work with Carolina Mountain Club to determine how this program should be promoted in the Waterrock Knob region that has several 6,000 foot + elevation peaks.</p>

  
*Themes and statements are direct stakeholders comments paraphrased.*







Themes and statements are direct stakeholders comments paraphrased.

## Plan For A Variety of Recreation Uses and Experiences.

PRIORITIZE THE FOLLOWING:

**Plan for Front Country & Backcountry Experience**

POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION:

Identify where front and backcountry experiences can occur, with recreation opportunities supplied for all abilities. Look to enhance experiences for the automobile-based user, those with disabilities, front country, and backcountry users.

Identify opportunities for expanded front country access and to provide multiple points of access to the backcountry to alleviate pressure on any specific access point.

## Limit, but Allow Hunting/Fishing in Specific Areas.

PRIORITIZE THE FOLLOWING:

**Consider Outreach to & Restrictions on Outfitters**

**Identify and Provide Outreach on Where Hunting & Fishing Is Allowed**

POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION:

Reach out to outfitters (especially fishing) to share information on allowed uses and restrictions

Engage NC Wildlife Resources Commission Fish Biologists to survey streams for trout to develop an angler access plan. Engage NC Natural Heritage Program as well.

Consider locals who have been hunting and fishing in this area and receive feedback from them.

### A NOTE ON UNOFFICIAL TRAILS

Unofficial trails are referenced throughout this document, including the recreation map on the following page. Unofficial trails are historic trails which have been user created, and may potentially have negative impact on fragile ecosystems and/or may not be built sustainably.

Unofficial trails under National Park Service (NPS) management, will be analyzed as to whether they meet the objectives of the Blue Ridge Parkway's Management Plan. Any NPS recommended changes will follow the process outlined at the beginning of this document.





Data Citation:

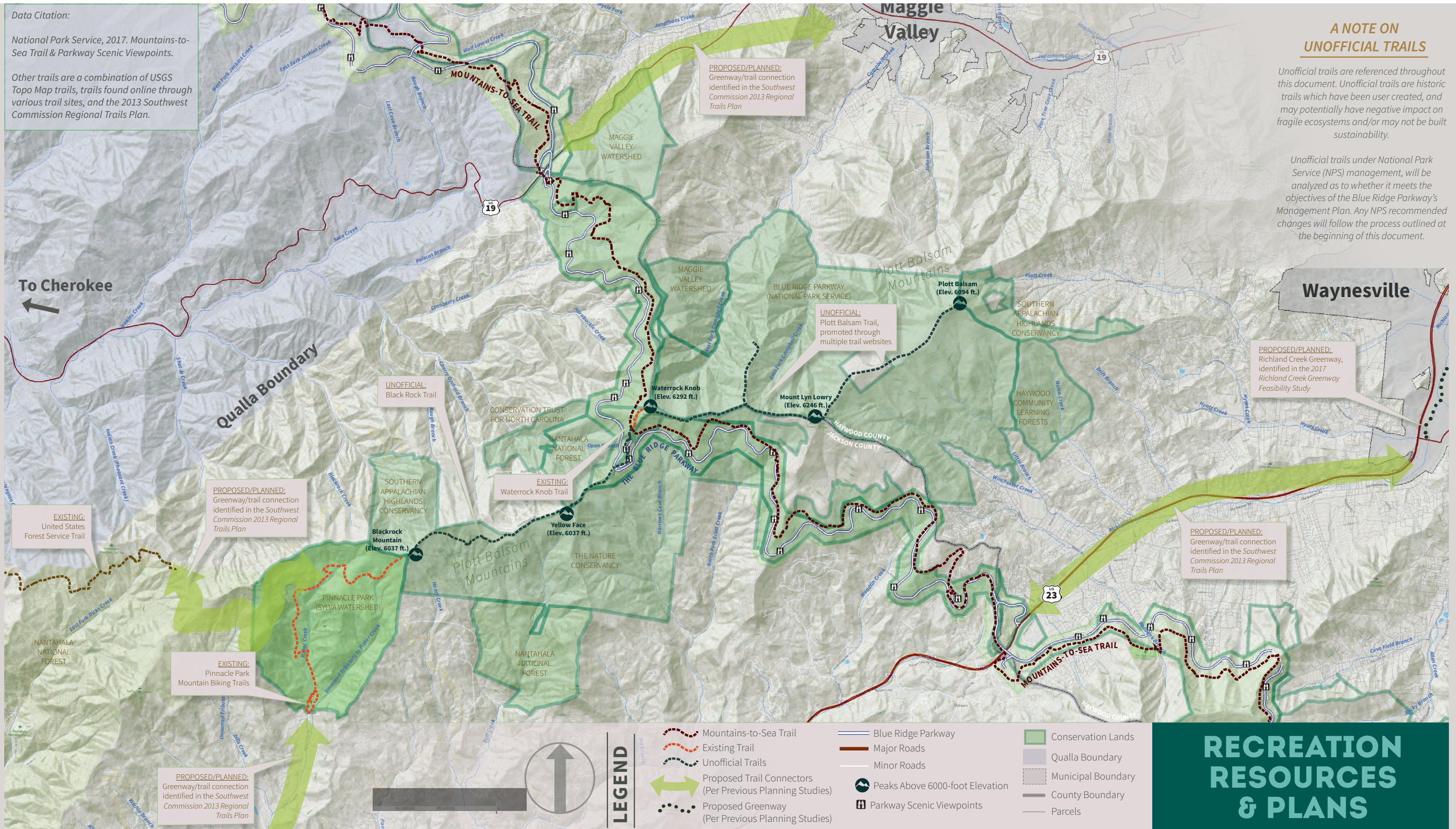
National Park Service, 2017. Mountains-to-Sea Trail & Parkway Scenic Viewpoints.

Other trails are a combination of USGS Topo Map trails, trails found online through various trail sites, and the 2013 Southwest Commission Regional Trails Plan.

A NOTE ON UNOFFICIAL TRAILS

Unofficial trails are referenced throughout this document. Unofficial trails are historic trails which have been user created, and may potentially have negative impact on fragile ecosystems and/or may not be built sustainably.

Unofficial trails under National Park Service (NPS) management, will be analyzed as to whether it meets the objectives of the Blue Ridge Parkway's Management Plan. Any NPS recommended changes will follow the process outlined at the beginning of this document.



LEGEND

- - - Mountains-to-Sea Trail
- - - Existing Trail
- - - Unofficial Trails
- - - Proposed Trail Connectors (Per Previous Planning Studies)
- - - Proposed Greenway (Per Previous Planning Studies)
- Blue Ridge Parkway
- Major Roads
- Minor Roads
- Conservation Lands
- Qualla Boundary
- Municipal Boundary
- County Boundary
- Parcels
- Peaks Above 6000-foot Elevation
- Parkway Scenic Viewpoints

RECREATION RESOURCES & PLANS





# RECREATION

The land, water, and habitats contained within the Waterrock Knob region are a massive draw for tourism and recreation. Tourists visiting surrounding cities often find refuge in the natural landscape found along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Regionally-significant trails, including extensive segments of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail and well-traveled yet unofficial trails like Blackrock Trail and Plott-Balsam Trail, intersect at the Blue Ridge Parkway's Waterrock Knob Visitor Center. The Blackrock Trail extends southwestward towards Sylva's Pinnacle Park, while the Plott Balsams Trail tracks eastward along the ridges and gaps between Waterrock Knob and Plott Balsam Knob; both trails offer stunning views of the surrounding landscape and traverse a wide range of natural habitats. Clean, cold creeks cascading down from the ridges entice anglers far and wide to try their hand at hooking a brook trout.



## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

IMMEDIATE COLLABORATIVE  
OPPORTUNITIES MOVING  
FORWARD

- 1) **Determine, through collaboration with the National Park Service and public input, the future of “unofficial trails”** by determining if they should be relocated, removed, rehabilitated, or remain as-is.
- 2) **Develop a recreation working group that can provide feedback and collaborate on planning for future recreation initiatives in the region.**
- 3) **Collaborate on joint recreation public information materials that can be shared with the public,** by Federal Agencies, Tourism Development Authorities, published maps, online media, and on the tourism front-line (outfitters, visitor centers, etc.)

Photo courtesy of Southern  
Appalachian Highlands Conservancy





SECTION  
**4**

KEY  
THEMES

HERITAGE

**Interpret Layers of History for Outreach, Interpretation, and Heritage Tourism Opportunities.**

PRIORITIZE THE FOLLOWING:	POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION:
<p><b>Share Historic Cherokee Indian Meaning, Value, Uses, and Traditions</b></p>	<p>Integrate Cherokee Indian place names into the interpretation of the region.</p> <p>Share traditional Cherokee Indian stories that relate to the landscape.</p> <p>Collaborate with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to provide programming at Waterrock Knob that celebrates traditions, crafts, etc.</p>
<p><b>Integrate European Settler/Appalachian Folk History, African American, and Latino History</b></p>	<p>Tell stories of early European settlers and the music, craft, and culture that has influenced American culture. Share what life was like as a homesteader. Tell stories of colorful or influential people. Example: share the story of Popcorn Sutton and bootleggers.</p> <p>Interpret heritage of other cultures that don't have as much visibility, like African American and other culture's stories. Don't shy away from stories that may be "tough" to tell.</p>
<p><b>Interpret Interdependence of Man &amp; Environment-Use of Natural Resources by All Cultures</b></p>	<p>Interpret heritage of hunting, including elk and bear. Integrate history of the Plott hound and Plott family.</p> <p>Interpret Cherokee Indian traditional uses of natural materials in the landscape.</p> <p>Interpret local history of the lumber and railroad industry and its impact on the landscape.</p> <p>Tell the story of the Blue Ridge Parkway and its relationship to communities as an early history in land planning.</p>
<p><b>Develop Heritage Theme Tours</b></p>	<p>Use key heritage themes to build upon heritage driving tours.</p> <p>Utilize and build upon the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area's work like their waysides, music trail, and artist studio and directory.</p>

**Identify Important Historic Sites and Work to Preserve Them.**

PRIORITIZE THE FOLLOWING:	POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION:
<p><b>Identify Important Historic Sites and Work to Conserve Them</b></p>	<p>Work with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and the National Park Service to identify important sites that are sensitive and should be protected. Survey and identify tribal priorities/concerns through engaging elders.</p> <p>Identify and work with the National Park Service to list historic sites on the National Register of Historic Sites.</p> <p>Support historic gems in the region that provide economic value.</p>

*Themes and statements are direct stakeholders comments paraphrased.*

*View of Plott Creek with the Plott Balsam/Waterrock Region in the background, circa 1911*

*Image courtesy of Herbert Pelton, via the Library of Congress*







## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

IMMEDIATE COLLABORATIVE OPPORTUNITIES MOVING FORWARD

- 1) **Collaborate with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians on further planning to interpret and reintegrate Cherokee heritage, stories, names, and meaning back into the landscape.**
- 2) **Develop themed heritage routes/tours** within the region in collaboration with the Tourism Development Agencies, and other interested parties.
- 3) **Consider development of a heritage working group to provide input of heritage-related planning work.**

View of Plott Creek with the Plott Balsam/Waterrock Region in the background, circa 1911

Image courtesy of Herbert Pelton, via the Library of Congress

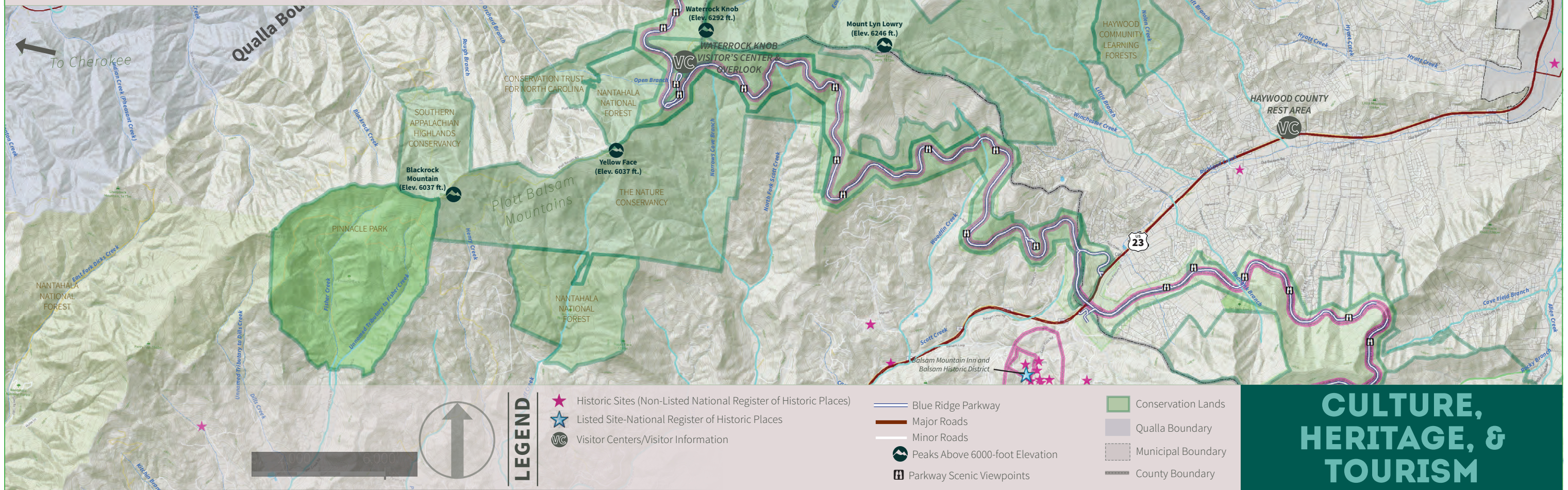




## THE HISTORY OF THE NAME PLOTT BALSAM MOUNTAINS

Data Citation:  
NC State Historic Preservation Office,  
2017. National Register of Historic  
Places.  
[www.gis.ncdr.gov/hpoweb/](http://www.gis.ncdr.gov/hpoweb/)

Excerpt taken from the Parkway's Plott Balsam Overlook sign...  
"Before you lies the massive Plott Balsam Range. On one of its eastern slopes Henry Plott, a German immigrant's son, made his home in the early 1800's. In this game-filled frontier, hunting dogs were a prized possession. Here Henry Plott and his descendants developed the famous Plott Bear Hounds carefully selecting for the qualities of stamina, courage, and alertness the breed possesses today." >> The Plott Hound is now North Carolina's official state dog



## CULTURE, HERITAGE, & TOURISM





SECTION  
**4**

**KEY  
THEMES**

**TOURISM  
& ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT**

**Collaborate on Opportunities with Tourism Partners.**

PRIORITIZE THE FOLLOWING:	POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION:
<p><b>Collaborate on Marketing the Waterrock Region &amp; Its Opportunities</b></p>	<p>Develop a marketing approach for the Waterrock Knob region, with communities serving as major gateway destinations to the Blue Ridge Parkway. Consider consistent naming, like the Waterrock Knob Recreation Area.</p> <p>Market as a hidden gem, whether natural or human created.</p> <p>Collaborate on marketing materials like maps and driving tour itineraries.</p> <p>Collaborate on the economic benefit of the region. Share data on visitation, visitor interests, economic impact, etc.</p> <p>Inventory and utilize existing programs, like the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area's programs, existing phone apps, etc.</p>
<p><b>Collaborate on Educating the Public About the Region and It's Resources</b></p>	<p>Find ways to integrate "Leave No Trace" and natural resource messages into tourism partner's marketing and information materials. Work with partners to ensure accurate sharing of information regarding access to trails and conserved lands.</p> <p>Reach out to diverse user groups and tell users of all abilities and interests on how they can enjoy this landscape. Provide opportunities for the beginner and expert explorer.</p> <p>Develop heritage themes surrounding the marketing of elk and cultural stories to attract younger generations of visitors.</p>
<p><b>Expand Heritage Tourism Promotion</b></p>	<p>See actions in the Heritage "potential actions section."</p> <p>Collaborate on heritage tourism themes, wayfinding, and self-guided tour itineraries for a variety of user groups.</p> <p>Integrate Cherokee themes into heritage tourism and recreation development. I.e. Use Cherokee method of trail wayfinding (bending trees), or other ideas for wayfinding or interpretation of the landscape.</p> <p>Consider creative means beyond signage to tell the heritage story of the region, like a heritage guide, or audio tour..</p>

**Promote this Area Through Media.**

PRIORITIZE THE FOLLOWING:	POTENTIAL FOR COLLABORATION:
<p><b>Share this Region and Its Many Assets, with Key Conservation Messages Weaved Throughout</b></p>	<p>Determine key themes and messages and work with partners on crafting a well balanced message about tourism/economic development and conservation. Keep this message consistent.</p> <p>Collaborate on publishing stories in publications like North Carolina Now, Our State, etc..</p> <p>Include the marketing of gateway communities of this region, promoting Maggie Valley, Waynesville, Sylva, and Cherokee.</p>

*Themes and statements are direct stakeholders comments paraphrased.*

Haywood and Jackson County Tourism Development Authorities have a strong focus on promotion of natural, recreation, and heritage assets of their counties and are on the front-line of understanding visitor needs as it relates to the Waterrock Knob Region.





# TOURISM & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

IMMEDIATE KEY  
CONSIDERATIONS MOVING  
FORWARD

- 1) **Work with Tourism Development Agencies (TDAs) to update recreation information as needed.** Look for collaborative opportunities for land managers and TDAs to update and share recreation information to the public.
- 2) **Identify opportunities within this Vision Plan where TDAs may want to provide staff or monetary support.**
- 3) **Establish a tourism working group** to further identify projects, actions, and opportunities identified within this plan.
- 4) **Engage the tourism industry in sharing key conservation, preservation, education, and recreation messages** providing information on visitor centers, chambers, lodging, etc. Team to communicate and integrate the “Leave No Trace” ethic in communications and marketing.





## KEY CONSIDERATIONS IN FORMALIZING COLLABORATION

### IMMEDIATE KEY CONSIDERATIONS MOVING FORWARD:

#### 1) Define Purpose, Vision, Goals, and an Action Plan

Use the core vision and themes of this vision plan as the basis for a well-defined collaboration that formalizes priorities and partnerships.

#### 2) Define Leadership/ Organization Structure

Consider what partners may want to form working groups to accomplish specific actions and how leadership and decision making will be determined.

#### 3) Defining What It Is & Isn't

Define whether the collaboration is for information sharing only, for technical input, or more formalized roles. While informal collaboration may occur at first, more formalized collaboration could be analyzed.

#### 4) Identify Staff & Funding Support

Determine if there is need for staff support to facilitate the collaboration of partners and cross-pollination of collaborative work. Collaborate on finding funding for specific collaborative projects and determine who will be the project lead for staff or finding funding support.

#### 5) Establish a Frequency of Collaboration

Determine if it makes sense to convene all partners once a year, semi-annually or just around specific projects.

#### 6) Define Means of Communication

Determine who will communicate to partners and what communication medium is best to keep partners in the loop on current and proposed collaborative projects, updates, and success.

#### 7) Collaborate on Implementation and Accomplishment Tracking

Determine the best means to track progress in collaborative planning and projects.

## THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE & LARGE LANDSCAPE COLLABORATION

*The National Park Service (NPS) has embraced their role in large landscape collaborations and is engaged in many collaborations across the country.*

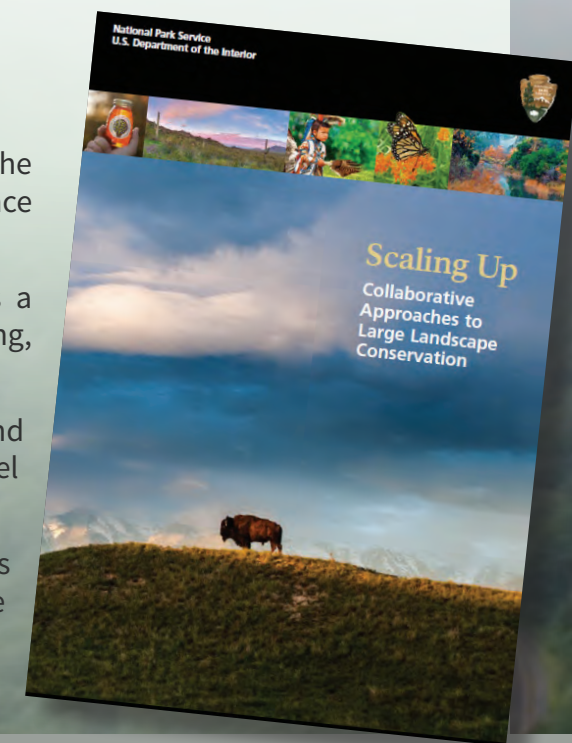
*Two recent major statements of support for large landscape collaborations by the NPS are **Scaling Up: Collaborative Approaches to Landscape Conservation** and **A Call to Action for Preserving America's Special Places in the Next Century**.*

**“A second-century National Park Service will manage parks as cornerstones in protecting broad natural and cultural landscapes. Threats unforeseen a century ago have emerged beyond park boundaries and demand solutions that are large in scope and require collaboration with partners.”**

*—A Call to Action for Preserving America's Special Places in the Next Century*

#### Goals of the call to action include:

- Manage the natural and cultural resources of the National Park System to increase resilience in the face of climate change and other stressors.
- Cultivate excellence in science and scholarship as a foundation for park planning, policy, decision making, and education.
- Achieve a standard of excellence in cultural and natural resource stewardship that serves as a model throughout the world.
- Collaborate with other land managers and partners to create, restore, and maintain landscape-scale connectivity.





## SECTION 5



# COLLABORATION


































# COLLABORATION & MOVING FORWARD: HOW PARTNERS WANT TO BE INVOLVED MOVING FORWARD

 Planning Assistance  
 Funding Assistance

 Technical Assistance  
 Outreach Assistance

POTENTIAL COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS	..THEMES..				POTENTIAL FOR ASSISTANCE AND COLLABORATION	POTENTIAL COLLABORATIONS/INTERESTS	ATTENDED STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP
	RECREATION	CONSERVATION	ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM	HERITAGE			
<b>FEDERAL PARTNERS</b>							
National Park Service	◆	◆	◆	◆	 	Work with partners for provided input on collaborative management. Plans to own core properties of the Waterrock Knob area. Collaborate with partners, working together beyond boundaries as part of a formal collaborative organization.	◆
Nantahala National Forest (USFS)	◆	◆	◆	◆			
Appalachian Highlands Science Learning Center (AHSLC) at Purchase Knob		◆			  	Collaborate with the Appalachian Highlands Science Learning Center (AHSLC) at Purchase Knob through coordination of research, citizen science projects, and biodiversity inventories.	
<b>TRIBAL PARTNER</b>							
Eastern Band of Cherokee	◆	◆	◆	◆	  	Re-establish the footprint and heritage of the Cherokee, to present in the landscape through place names and projects. Work to collaborate on conservation, heritage, and education. Consider including this as part of EBCI "heritage corridor" planning efforts (Cowee/Nikwasi).	◆
<b>STATE PARTNERS</b>							
NC Trails Program	◆	◆	◆		  	The Mountains-to-Sea Trail is a State Trail. The Trails Program can provide signage for the trail and regional planning assistance for trail connectivity. The program has funding, with over \$1.5 million annually to fund trail projects. It also provides technical assistance by designing trails and improving existing trails for regional and state trails.	◆
NC Parks & Recreation Program	◆	◆	◆		  	This program provides funding for recreation improvements on property controlled by local government (PARTF funding). It also provides technical support for recreation planning undertaken by local governments. They would consider participating in work groups involved in green infrastructure and recreation planning.	◆
NC Wildlife Resources Commission		◆			 	Collaborate in resource assessment (e.g., habitat and species surveys), habitat restoration, and the development of a broader conservation plan for the area. This plan would incorporate a larger context of adjacent and nearby conservation lands (e.g. Silvers Game Land). NCWRC be able to serve on a task force to develop a recreation/management plan for the area. It will be essential for us to perform surveys for rare/ SGCN species and their habitats for planned infrastructure.	◆
Clean Water Management Trust Fund	◆	◆			  	Clean Water Management Trust Fund's role will be to support protection/acquisition of additional lands, and to steward existing conservation easements surrounding the Waterrock core areas. CWMTF may help guide park/recreation development that is compatible with our resource protection framework.	◆
<b>LOCAL GOVERNMENT PARTNERS</b>							
Haywood & Jackson County Tourism Development Authorities	◆		◆	◆	  	Create awareness and educate the traveling public while promoting the region. Has funding to help promote and can also support with volunteers.	◆
Town of Maggie Valley	◆	◆	◆			Interested in collaborating in conservation /management of the "region's" natural resources, especially the headwater of the Maggie Valley water supply watersheds, promoting the connectivity in economic , cultural, and recreational systems.	◆
Jackson & Haywood County	◆	◆	◆	◆		Collaborate with local communities and partners to work on connectivity.	◆
Town of Sylva	◆	◆	◆			Owner of Pinnacle Park, will continue to maintain Pinnacle Park trails. There is a recreational and tourism draw with visitors to the park and Sylva. The alternate Mountains-to-Sea Trail goes through Pinnacle Park and travels to Sylva. There is future opportunity to develop Pinnacle Park-Town connections for this route. Town is supportive of protecting conserved lands, natural resources, important viewsheds, and steep slopes around Sylva's city limits.	◆
Town of Waynesville	◆	◆	◆		 	Waynesville is a "gateway community" that can provide the resources for services to the area: hotels, map/access information, guide services, outfitters, etc. Town would be a supportive promotional partner and would be open to serving on an inter-agency planning group, if developed.	◆
Haywood Community College (Teaching Forest)	◆	◆			 	The college is looking at developing loop trails within the Raymond J Fowler Conservancy & Teaching Forest or connecting to other trails outside of the property. The forest is open for research and in the past the school has done research on timber management and the Northern Flying Squirrel. School uses forest to instruct. Public access is not currently allowed, but may be considered in the future.	





# COLLABORATION & MOVING FORWARD: HOW PARTNERS WANT TO BE INVOLVED MOVING FORWARD

 Planning Assistance      Technical Assistance  
 Funding Assistance      Outreach Assistance

POTENTIAL COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS	THEMES				POTENTIAL FOR ASSISTANCE AND COLLABORATION	POTENTIAL COLLABORATIONS/INTERESTS	ATTENDED STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP
	RECREATION	CONSERVATION	ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM	HERITAGE			
<b>NON-PROFIT PARTNERS</b>							
Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation	◆	◆	◆	◆		Potential to sponsor, support, convene, and fund any future developments needed on-site or in a partnership with other groups.	◆
The Conservation Fund	◆	◆	◆			The Conservation Fund will continue to work with MUSD Sylva/ Pinnacle Park and NC Wildlife Resources Commission to conserve properties in the Plott Balsam Mountain and in Maggie Valley. The fund's national capital investment fund could assist small natural resource businesses including outfitters, breweries, lodging and restaurants. The Fund is now working with Maggie Valley Sanitary District to protect its Campbell and Jonathan Creek water supply watersheds and is acquiring properties that are within this planning area. The Fund is also working with the Town of Sylva to expand its Pinnacle Park to protect the headwaters of Blackrock Creek.	◆
Main Spring Conservation Trust	◆	◆		◆		Collaborate in conservation/protection of properties surrounding the existing conserved properties included in this area. Participate in the development of a sustainable trail system within the area to promote and facilitate recreational access, particularly as the area becomes more of a destination and the trails receive more use. Work to protect the quality of the land, which goes hand-in-hand with development of a sustainable trail system. Establishing a working group of stakeholders to collaborate on comprehensive recreation, trail and conservation management, and utilizing best management practices, should be future priority.	◆
The Nature Conservancy	◆	◆				Advising on fire and forest management, supporting the BRPs efforts to restore fire acquisition of adjacent properties. Forest resource management, sustainable hemlock management, management of non-native species, climate change resilience, making sense of how to manage properties for future resilient forests, and utilizing Nature Conservancy mapping data that can help inform planning efforts.	◆
Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy	◆	◆		◆		Continue and expand land conservation to preserve scenic views and to help expand boundaries of conserved lands. Collaborate to prioritize lands to pre-serve-working with NPS, CTNC, TCF, Mainspring, and others. Educate local communities about the park. SAHC has and Equity, Diversity and Inclusiveness initiative - good opportunity to get involved in local, diverse communities.	◆
Conservation Trust for North Carolina	◆	◆				Continue to protect land in the region through acquisition and conveyance to NPS and conservation easements on privately owned land. Continue to collaborate with NPS (BRP), SAHC, TNC, TCF to preserve more land in the region for multiple uses and benefits. CTNC's NC Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) is available to construct trails in the region. CTNC will also continue to promote benefits and opportunities associated with conservation lands around Waterrock Knob and beyond through various avenues to the public and funders and politicians. Explore opportunities for youth to engage in conservation and recreation opportunities in the region. This could involve organized field trips from local schools and clubs, trail building and maintenance by the NC Youth Conservation Corps or similar programs, NPS ranger-led programs, etc.	◆
Southwestern Resource Conservation and Development Council	◆	◆	◆			Primarily working on collaborative planning and working with bordering landowners to promote wise resource management, preserve agriculture/timber/etc. industry and heritage, and preserve views. Connecting those landowners to technical expertise, resources to achieve wise management.	◆
Haywood Waterways Association	◆	◆	◆			Promotion of the Waterrock Knob region as a recreational and natural resources. Collaborate with "Get to know your watershed" program. Helping public understand where their water comes from, headwater protection, and watershed protection. Can provide grant assistance for land acquisition as well as volunteers. Currently collaborate with the TDA, municipalities, and county.	◆
Blue Ridge National Heritage Area	◆	◆	◆	◆		Blue Ridge National Heritage Area works to promote and protect the music, crafts, outdoors, foodways, and Cherokee Culture in this region. As financial supporter of this plan, it is anticipated that BRNHA will continue to support many elements of this plan.	
Root Cause		◆	◆			Root Cause is working in the area to promote forest management plans on private property. Working with Haywood Community College, Root Cause is building a peer network of landowners that will help promote these plans and to share other available resources to their peers. Root Cause is telling the story of the rich heritage of sustainable timber management (starting with the Cradle of Forestry) and how it can be tied to both conservation and economic development.	

## OTHER POTENTIAL PARTNERS TO COLLABORATE WITH:

FEDERAL PARTNERS	STATE/LOCAL GOVERNMENT PARTNERS	TRIBAL	UNIVERSITIES/HIGHER LEARNING	NON-PROFITS	OTHER
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park	State Historic Office, NC Forest Service, Chambers of Commerce, County Parks and Recreation Departments, NC Department of Transportation, Elected Officials, Tourism Development Authority Board Members	The Cherokee Museum and the Cherokee Heritage Foundation	Mountain Heritage Center (Western Carolina University), Haywood Community College Forest Management Program	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, NC Wildlife Federation, Trout Unlimited (Local Chapters), Audubon Chapters, Open Space Institute (climate resiliency)	Neighboring Landowners, Cycling Organizations, Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association (SORBA), Motorcycle User Groups, Local Bicycle Shops and Other Type of Outfitters, Recreation User Groups, Angler and Hunting Groups, Church and Youth Groups (Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts)





SECTION  
**6**

KEY  
THEMES

PUBLIC  
PROCESS

## THE PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

In early 2018, a Public Open House was held to allow public comment on this plan. Over sixty people attended, including many stakeholders who were involved in the original stakeholder workshop.

Attendees were asked to provide comment on anything they see. The following are comments placed near the relating themes and statements:

### PUBLIC COMMENTS ON THE PLAN

#### RECREATION RESOURCES & PLANS

- Dirt path single track trails; ridgeline connections, Maggie [Valley] [to] Cherokee;
- Protect sensitive habitats on Plott Balsam Knob during trail design;

#### TOURISM & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- A Tour Map in Cherokee syllabary (and Roman characters in smaller print)
- Cherokee themes should include both historical and contemporary – a vital, living community;
- Focus on local communication and awareness;
- Have the Appalachian Adventure Company help with media;

#### HERITAGE

- It is important that, while sharing traditional Cherokee culture, to weave in the story of the contemporary Cherokee Nations as living communities. Include Cherokee Nation and UKB in Oklahoma.

#### RECREATION

- Work with local land trusts to secure conservation of properties in trail plans – make sure they have GIS data trail easements;
- With trail construction, consider all parts of NEPA, cleaning trail

- equipment in this very sensitive environment, and long-term invasive control on these trail vectors;
- SOAR is a camp/school located on Rosemount Road – we use Waterrock Knob area a lot for sunset celebrations, picnics, and day hikes. SOAR has students throughout [the] school year who can provide service (i.e. trail maintenance);
- Let the Appalachian Adventure Company guide hiking and backpacking trips;
- Are there plans for front country camping? Tents? RVs? Hook-ups?
- Continue to allow access for hikers for dogs;
- Allow camping on the [Blue Ridge] Parkway (on the Mountains-to-Sea Trail);

#### PRESERVATION

- In many cases the reintroduction of a fire regime and invasive [exotic] species control are linked issues and a comprehensive management plan should include both;

#### CONSERVATION

- SOAR students would benefit from outreach – we'd love to teach our students about their backyard!
- Use existing GIS networks; land trust coalitions have [recently] done a lot of work [in] consolidating data; check Blue Ridge Forever; need better GIS data support, distribution for regional commissioned trail plans;

The public were allowed to place stickers on the themes to show what they were most interested in seeing in the future—the placement of stickers prioritized their interest

Note: Only themes/opportunities selected by the public are listed here

### OPPORTUNITIES THE PUBLIC IS MOST INTERESTED IN

- Prioritize natural communities that are rare, threatened or declining
- Engage tourism industry in sharing key conservation and recreation message, get more info about the area to visitor centers, chambers, hotels/b&b's, etc
- Connect trails and communities regionally & utilize the mountains-to-sea trail as the regional trail that all connector trails connect into, creating a regional system
- Provide a different level of recreation for differing abilities and experiences
- Develop a regional green infrastructure network of connected land and habitat
- Identify important historic sites and work to conserve them
- Prioritize spruce/fir and northern hardwoods & drinking water supply
- Identify strategies to manage from overuse-don't want to see a graveyard fields
- Prioritize viewshed protection
- Interpret interdependence of man & environment-use of natural resources by all cultures, not just white settler history
- Share historic Cherokee Indian meaning, value, uses, and traditions
- Restore fire regime with controlled management of ecological health and to control invasive species, if needed
- Engage local schools, teach them about the region and get them out into the landscape
- Monitor regionally/develop a regional monitoring strategy
- Use the region as a living laboratory for classroom education and research
- Study and provide connected habitat suitable for the reintroduction of elk
- Manage timber sustainably, if needed
- Determine how the "south beyond 6,000" (peak-bagger) program can best and most appropriately promote the 6,000+ peaks in the area
- Limit, but allow hunting in specific areas
- Analyze and promote on-road bicycle routes

### OPPORTUNITIES THE PUBLIC EXPRESSED LESS INTEREST IN

## THE STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP

In 2017, over forty stakeholders attended a full-day workshop to help build the core of this plan. The themes were developed through survey responses and workshop input by these stakeholders.

