Budget Amendment for Conservation Easements

Ariel Zijp

Farmland Preservation Manager

Buncombe County Ag & Land Resources

September 15, 2026

Land Conservation Requests

- **Agricultural Advisory Board Recommendations**
  - 4 Conservation Easements
  - Agricultural Growth Zone Grant Renewal Request

- **Land Conservation Advisory Board Recommendations**
  - Camp Sequoyah Conservation Easement

- **Tonight's request resulting in an RBA -**
  - Allocate $311,300 of the $750,000 FY27 Budgeted funds
  - Allocate $2,288,000 of the remaining Open Space Bond Funds

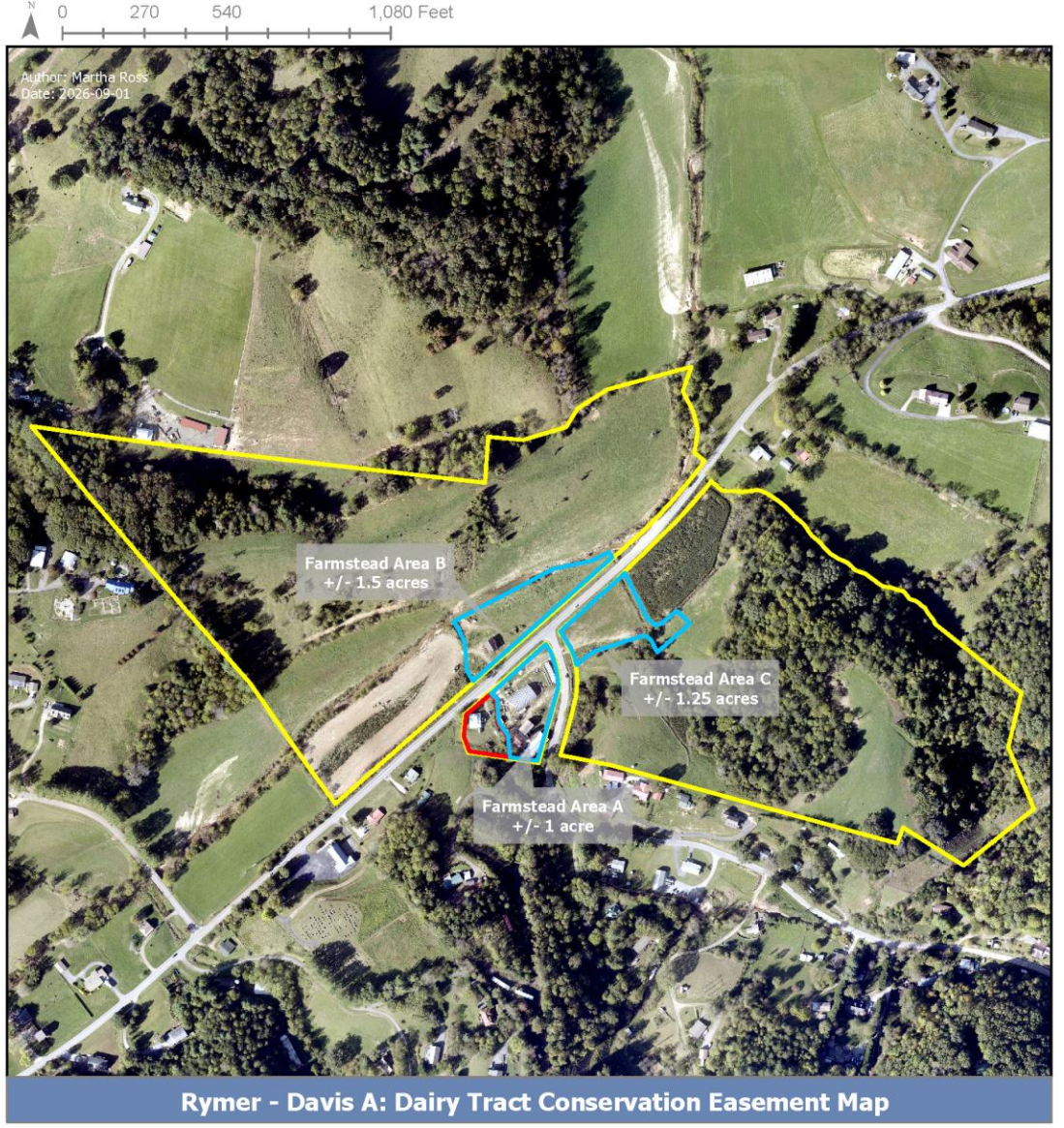
Rymer-Davis A: Dairy Tract

+/- 60.7 acres on Newfound Road

- 52% prime soils – pasture for cattle, crop fields for hay and corn
- Viewshed Protection along a commuting road
- Newfound Creek runs through the Property
- Leicester – Sandy mush Conservation Focus Area
- Meets 6 of the 7 Open Space Bond eligibility criteria

Budget:

- Current Transaction Cost Request (Fund 224): **$62,400**
- Future Easement Acquisition: 50% Easement Value
  - 25% Agricultural Growth Zone Grant - $159,500 (estimate)
  - 25% Open Space Bond - $ 159,500 (estimate)



Rymer-Davis B: Forest Tract

+/- 51.4acres on Newfound Road

- 15% prime soils – forested land for timber
- NC Century Farm
- Leicester – Sandy mush Conservation Focus Area
- Meets 5 of the 7 Open Space Bond eligibility criteria

Budget:

- Current Transaction Cost Request (Fund 224): **$60,600**
- Future Easement Acquisition: 50% Easement Value
  - 25% Agricultural Growth Zone Grant - $87,500 (estimate)
  - 25% Open Space Bond - $ 87,500 (estimate)



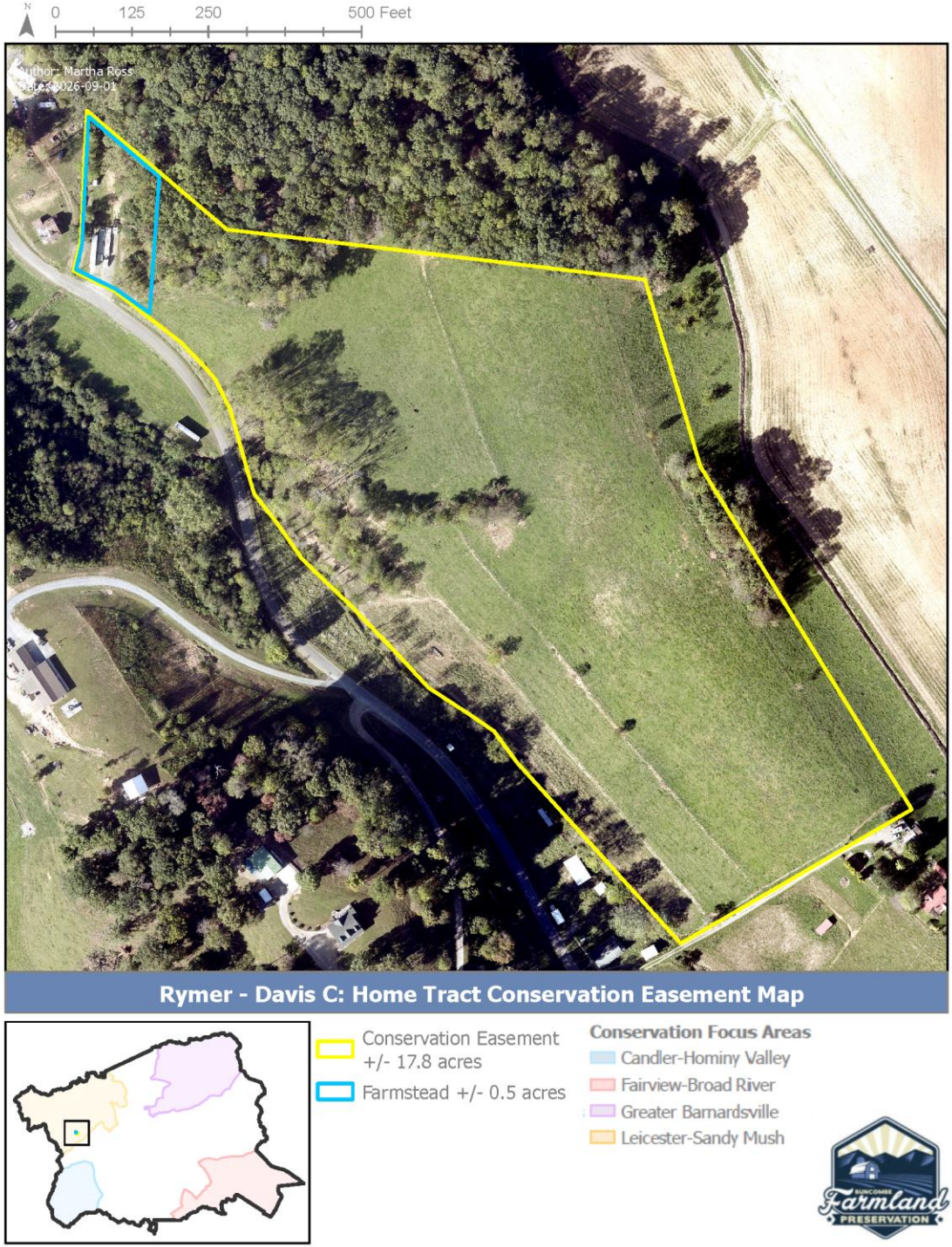
Rymer-Davis C: Home Tract

+/- 17.8 acres in Newfound

- 43% prime soils – pasture for cattle
- NC Century Farm
- Leicester – Sandy mush Conservation Focus Area
- Meets 5 of the 7 Open Space Bond eligibility criteria

Budget:

- Current Transaction Cost Request (Fund 224): **$53,000**
- Future Easement Acquisition: 50% Easement Value
  - 25% Agricultural Growth Zone Grant - $91,250 (estimate)
  - 25% Open Space Bond - $ 91,250 (estimate)



Ruby Brown Farm

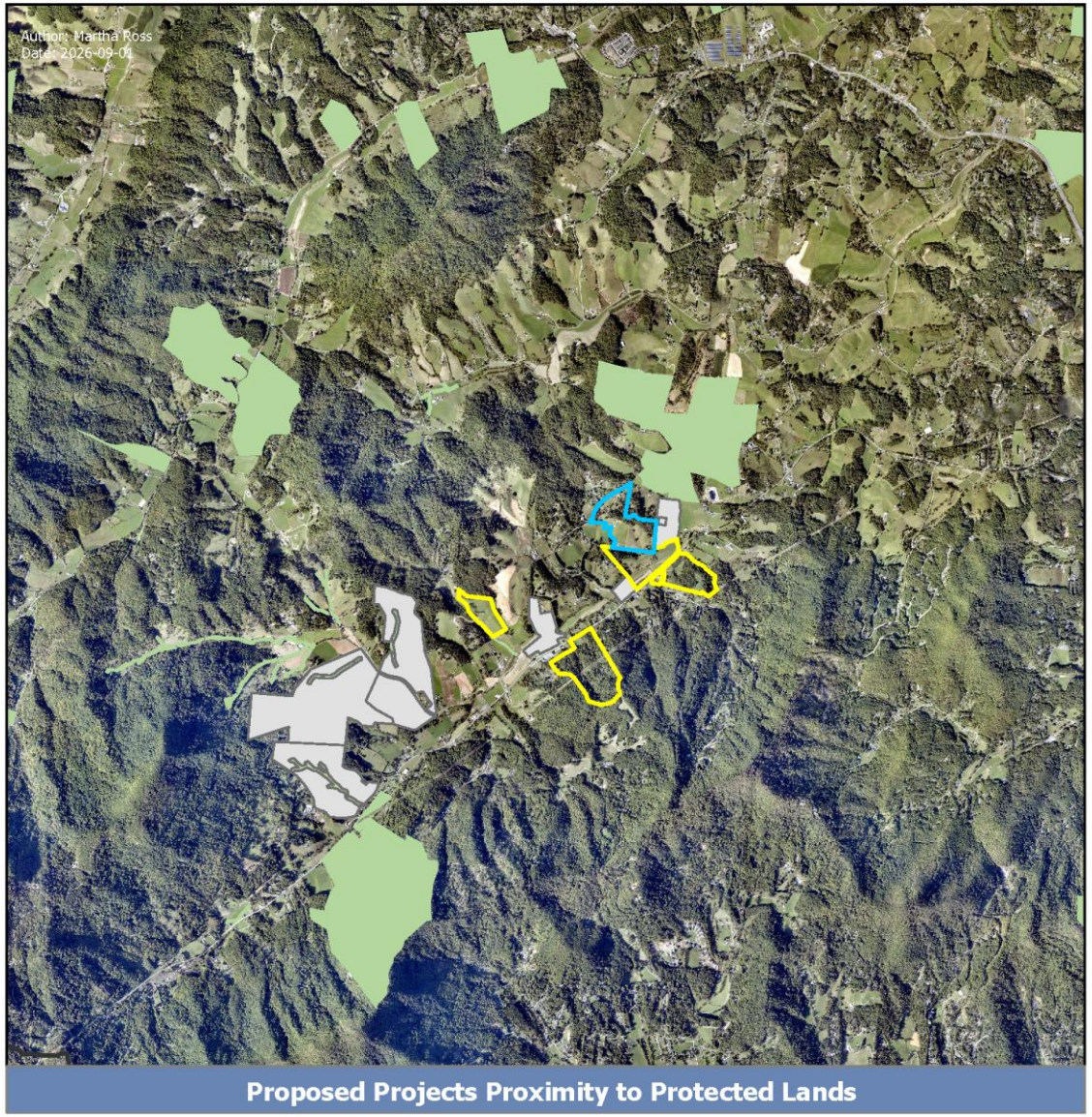
+/- 40 acres on Browntown Road

- 90% prime soils – pasture for cattle
- NC Century Farm
- Leicester – Sandy mush Conservation Focus Area
- Meets 5 of the 7 Open Space Bond eligibility criteria

Budget:

- Current Transaction Cost Request (Fund 224): **$59,800**
- Future Easement Acquisition: 50% Easement Value
  - 25% Agricultural Growth Zone Grant - $182,250 (estimate)
  - 25% Open Space Bond - $182,250 (estimate)



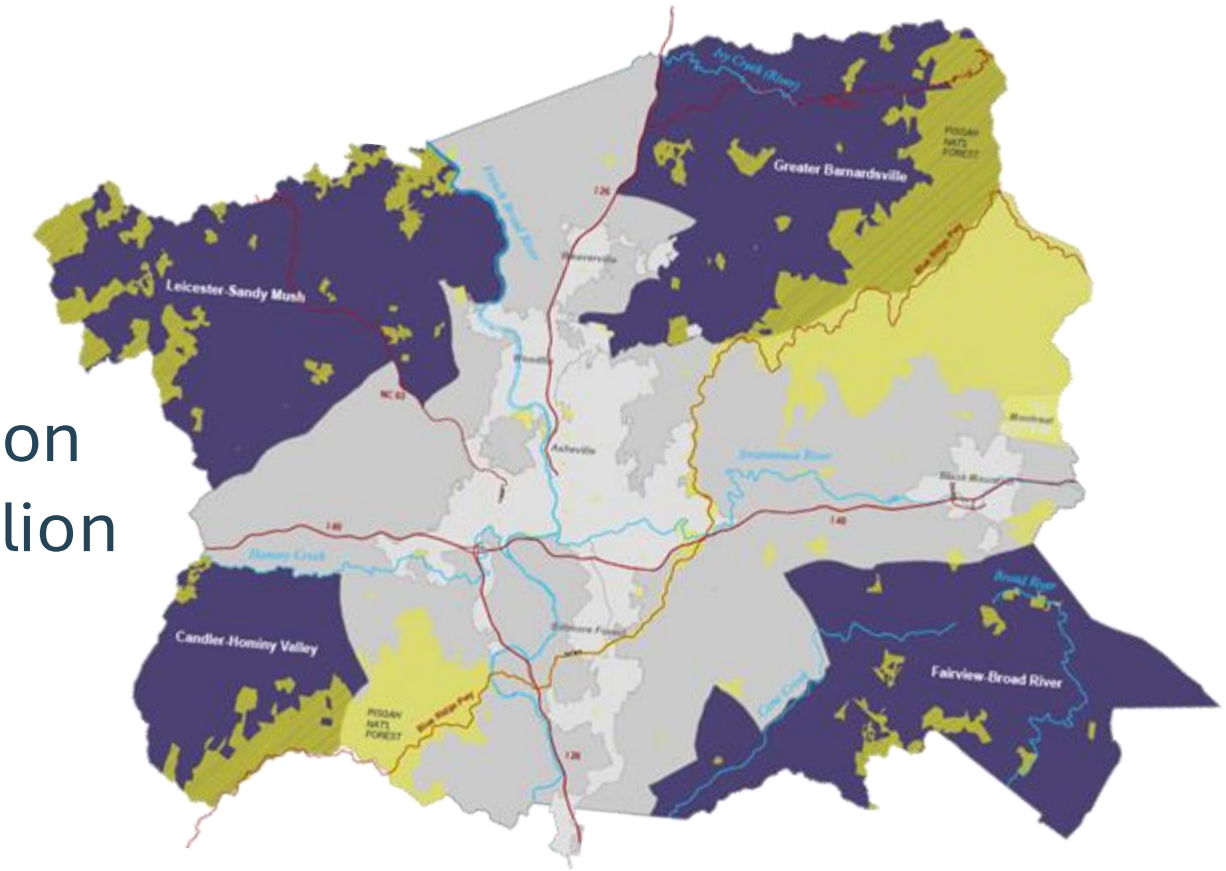


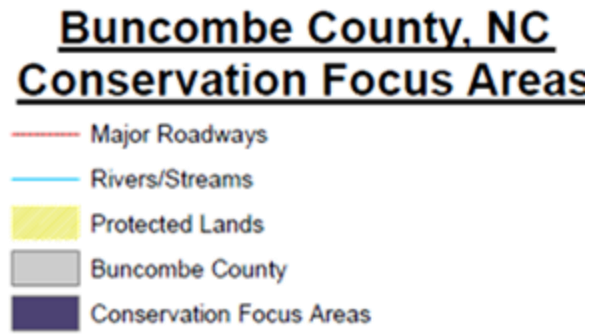
Proposed Project Proximity to Protected Lands and Ongoing Projects

Agricultural Growth Zone Grant Renewal

- 2024: AGZ Grant Received for $2 Million
  - Grant requires 50% match = $2 Million from Open Space Bond
  - Remaining funds earmarked for ongoing projects

- 2026: AGZ Renewal Application – $2 Million
  - Request for $2 Million from Open Space Bond for matching funds





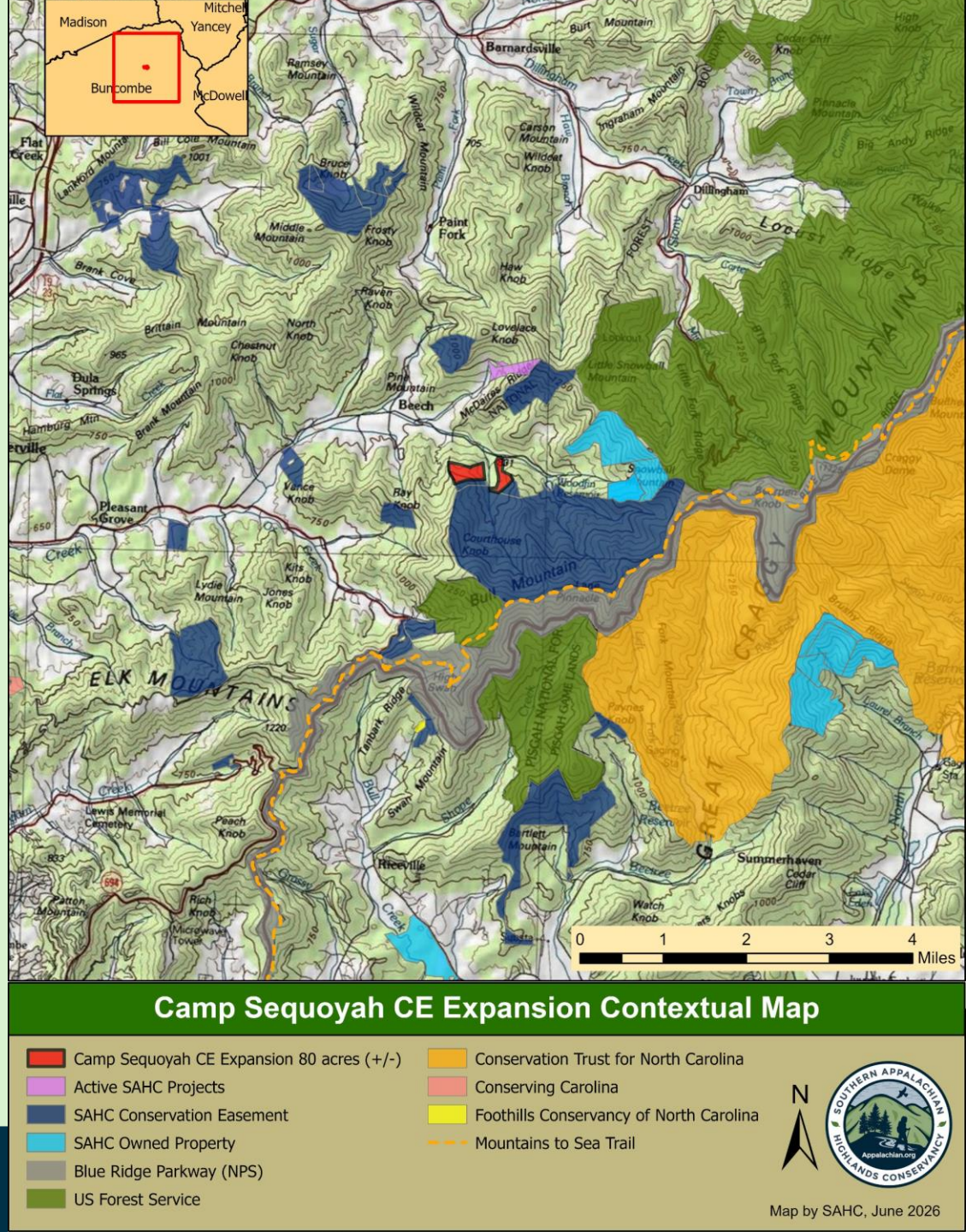
Buncombe County Open Space Bond

Camp Sequoyah Conservation Easement

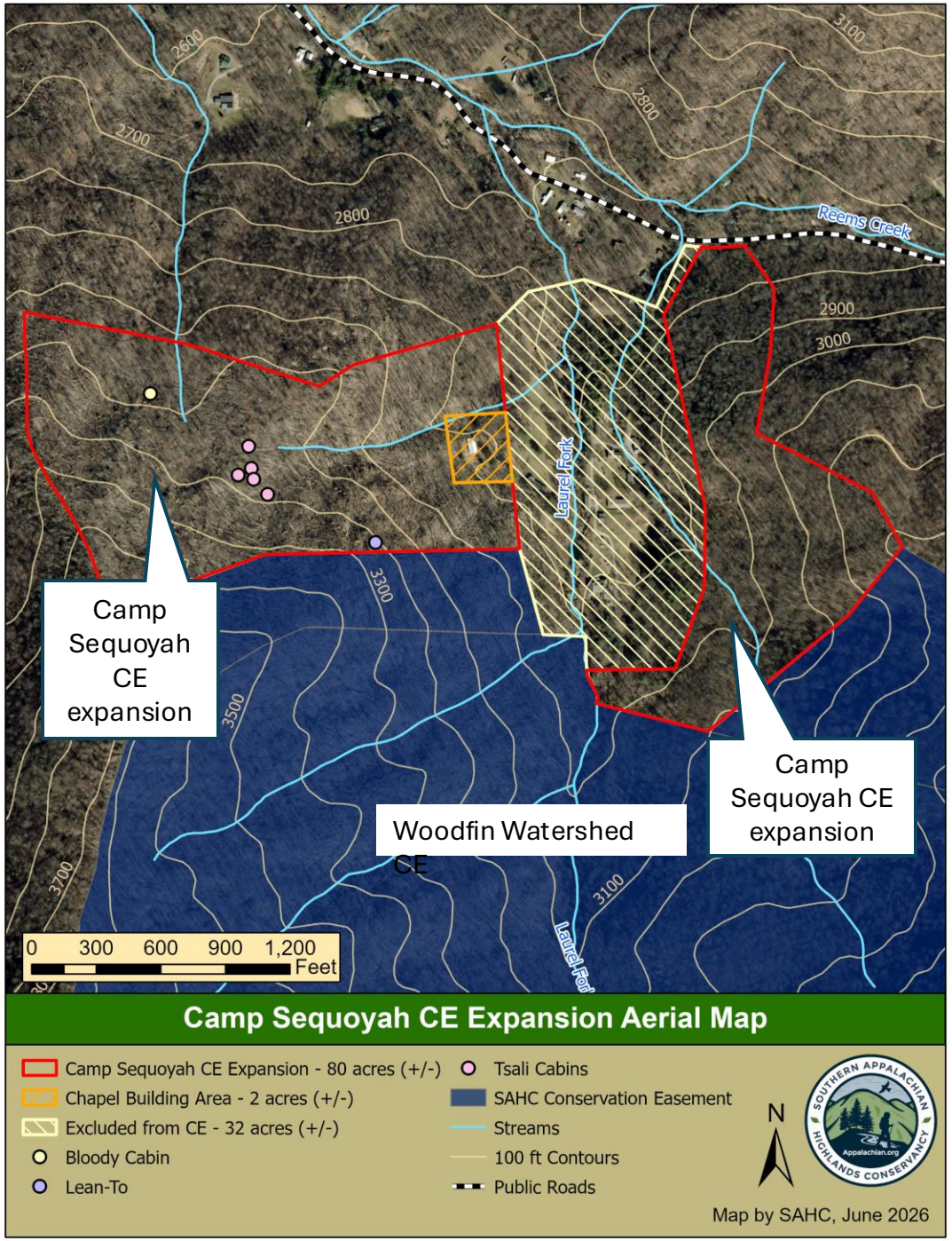
Michelle Pugliese, Land Protection Director
Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy

Camp Sequoyah CE Expansion

- **80 acres** (+/-), adding to existing 37-acre conservation easement
- 4 out of 7 Open Space Bond Easement Purchase Criteria. (only need 2 out of 7 for eligibility)
- Adjacent to SAHC's Woodfin Watershed conservation easement
- Close proximity to multiple SAHC protected lands
- Scenic views from Snowball Mountain Trail (Pisgah National Forest), Blackberry Inn Road, Reems Creek Road



BUNCOMBE COUNTY



Natural Resources Summary

- Within SAHC's Black Mountains Focus Area
- Ranks as Model Priority in SAHC's 2018 Land Protection Program Strategic Planning prioritization model
- Woodfin Watershed/Camp Sequoyah Natural Area (rank Very High)
- Wildlands Network's Wildlife Connectivity Corridor (Tier 1)
- Audubon Society's Black and Great Craggy Mountains Important Bird Area
- TNC's Black Mountains Forest Matrix Block
- Ranks Above Average in TNC's climate resilience model
- Four tributaries to Reems Creek, including main branch of Laurel Fork – Class B (primary contact recreation) and Trout waters
- Historic significance of Camp Sequoyah (1925-1978) with continued visitation and restoration by camp alumni and landowners

Camp Sequoyah CE Expansion Funding Breakdown

- SAHC paying 50% of CE value = $288,000
- Transaction cost estimate = $95,000
- Funding requests
  - Buncombe County–
    - $288,000 – Easement Purchase from Open Space Bond
    - $63,500 – Transaction Costs from FY27
  - Private donor - $34,000



Recap of Easement Requests

Owner	Holder	Board	Size	Region	Transaction Costs FY27	Bond Easement Purchase
Rymer-Davis A: Dairy Tract	BC	AAB	61	Newfound	**$62,400**	Future request
Rymer-Davis B: Forest Tract	BC	AAB	51	Newfound	**$60,600**	Future request
Rymer-Davis C: Home Tract	BC	AAB	18	Newfound	**$53,000**	Future request
Ruby Brown Farm	BC	AAB	40	Newfound	**$59,800**	Future request
Camp Sequoyah	SAHC	LCAB	80	Weaverville	**$63,500**	**$288,000**
Supplemental Funding Requests	BC	AAB			**$12,000**	
NCDA ADFPTF AGZ Grant Match	BC	AAB				**$2,000,000**
Totals					**$311,300**	**$2,288,000**

Open Space Bond Funds

Total Bond Funds	**$30,000,000**
Project Funds Allocated	$21,603,803
Admin Funds Allocated	$937,213
Recommended Allocations 9/15/26	$2,288,000
Projects Pending Future Approval	$2,442,775
Remaining Unallocated	**$2,728,209**



Request for Board Action:

Approve Conservation Easement funding requests:

- **$311,300:** FY27 Budgeted funds
- **$2,288,000:** Open Space Bond

Appendix

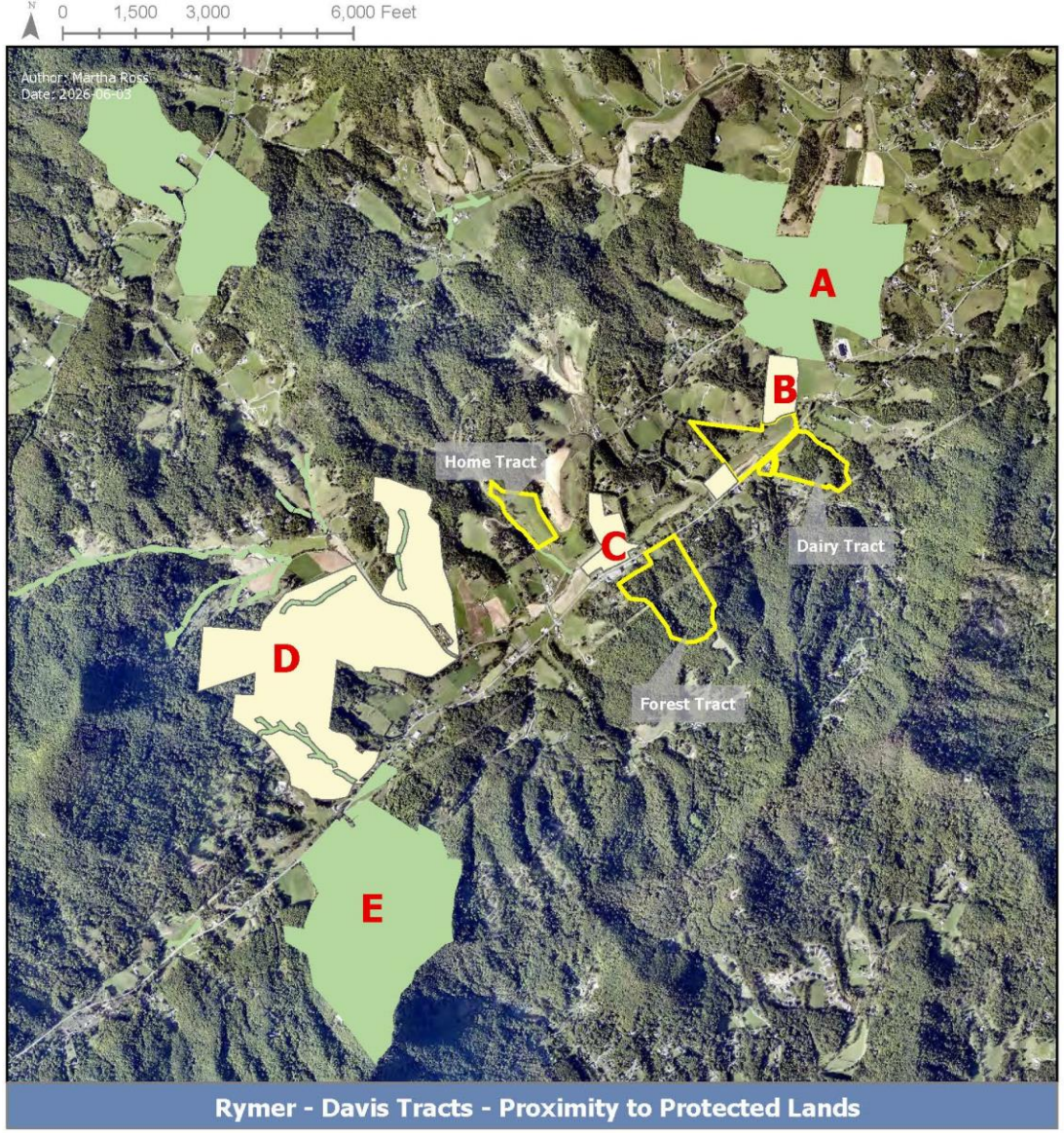
Proximity to Protected Lands

Rymer-Davis Farm

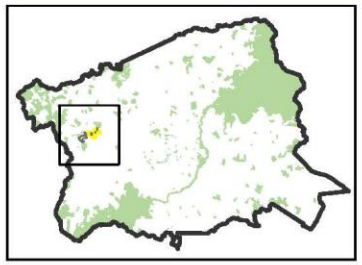
Previously Protected

A. Brown Family Farm
B. Brown Legacy Farm (ongoing)
C. Saddlebrook Farm (ongoing)
D. Morgan Branch Farm (ongoing)
E. Jasperwood Easements

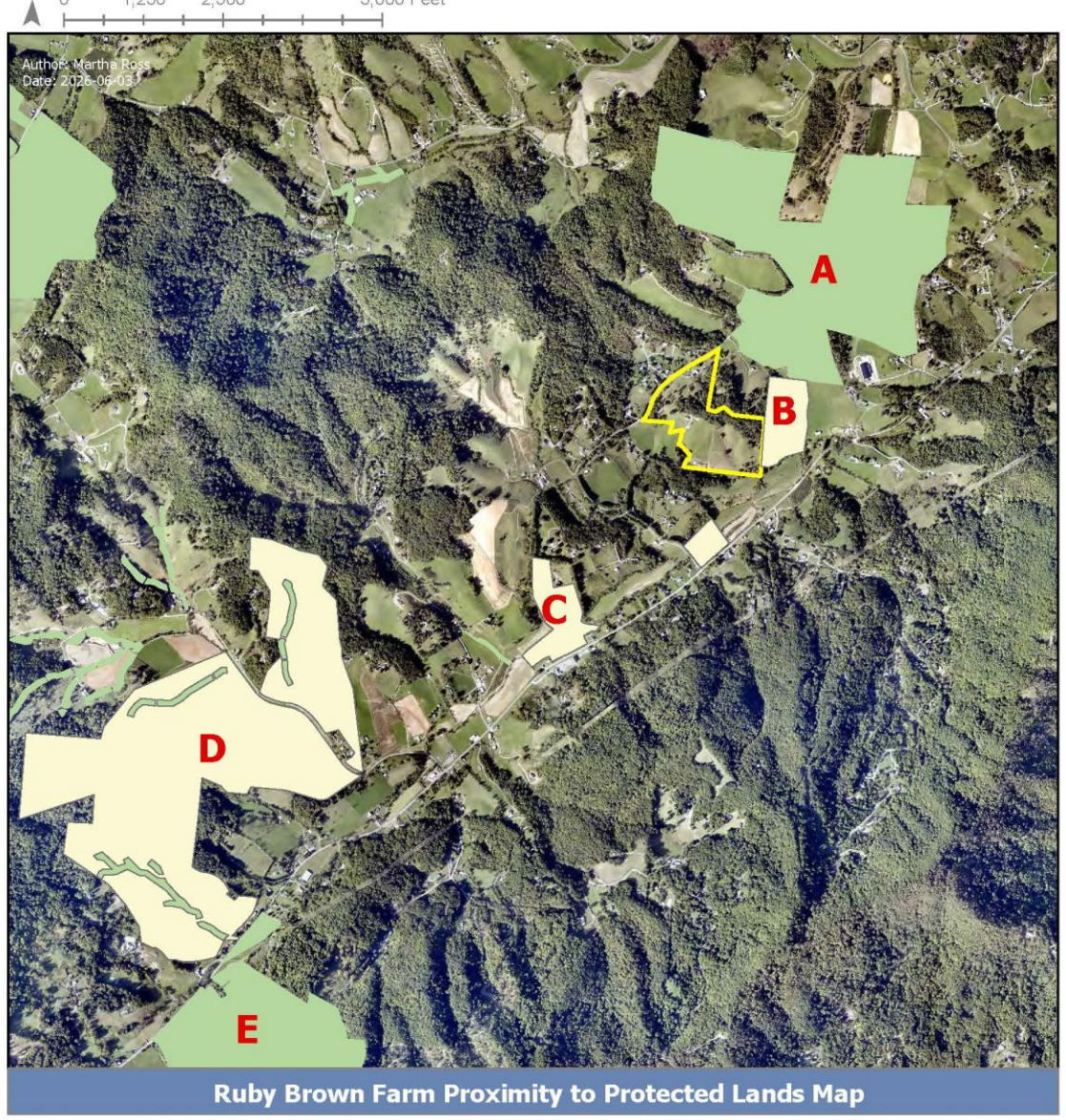




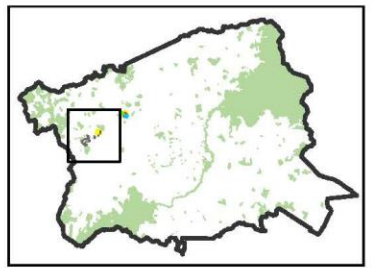
Rymer - Davis Tracts - Proximity to Protected Lands



Conservation Easements
Protected Lands
Ongoing Easement Projects



Ruby Brown Farm Proximity to Protected Lands Map



Conservation Easement +/- 42 acres

Protected Lands

Ongoing Easement Projects

Ruby Brown Farm

Previously Protected

A. Brown Family Farm
B. Brown Legacy Farm (ongoing)
C. Saddlebrook Farm (ongoing)
D. Morgan Branch Farm (ongoing)
E. Jasperwood easements



Open Space Bond Eligibility for County Easement Purchase Requirements

Meets 2 of the following criteria:

- ❑ Is this in one of our designated farmland priority regions?
- ❑ Is this property in proximity to other protected lands?
- ❑ Does this property have prime, unique, local, or statewide important agricultural soils?
- ❑ Is this a project with a significant environmental, or scenic importance?
- ❑ Is this an active working farm or century farm?
- ❑ Is the size of the property significant?
- ❑ Is this a time sensitive project? (Elderly landowner, financial hardship, forced sale)