Passive Recreation Lands Funding Recommendations

Presented by

Rachael Sawyer, Strategic Partnerships Director

November 4, 2025

Open Space Bond

- In November 2022, Buncombe County voters approved a $30 million general obligation bond with the following goals:
  - Support greenway infrastructure
  - Protect farmland and natural resources while also contributing to the county's goal of conserving 20% of the County's land by 2030
  - Increase access to recreational activities and protect natural resources



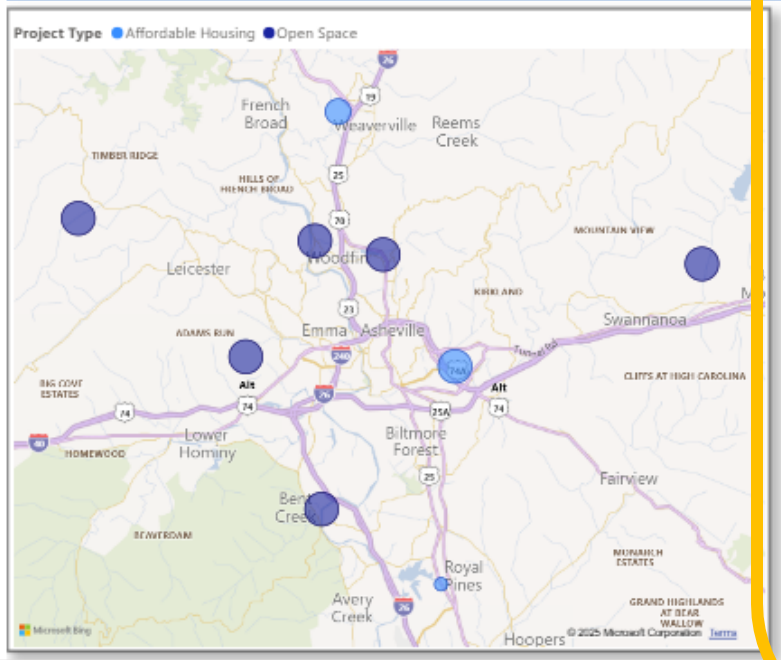
Investments to Date

Affordable Housing & Open Space Bond Tracking

Last Updated 10/17/25

Affordable Housing Bonds

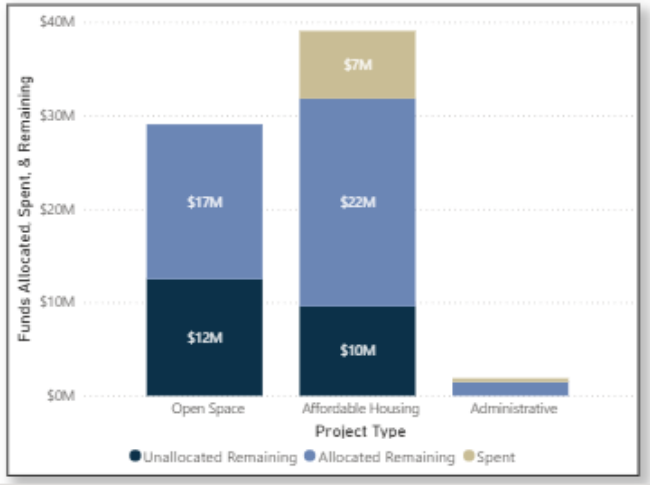
$30.4M Amount Allocated OF $40M Affordable Housing Total Bond



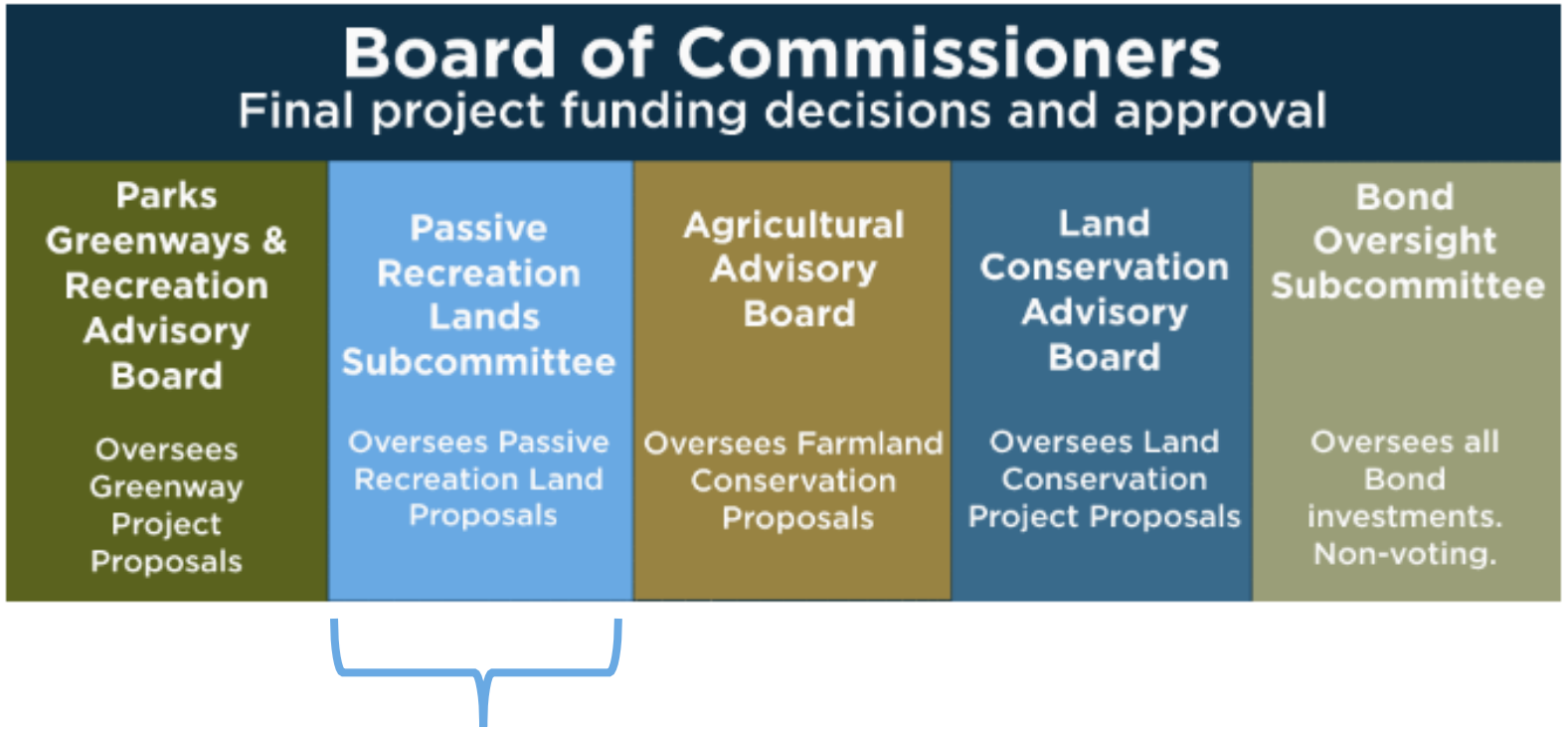
Open Space Bonds

$17.5M Amount Allocated OF $30M Open Space Total Bond

Currently **18** projects have been approved to move forward across both the Affordable Housing and Open Space Bond portfolios.



Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee



Comprised of 7 members appointed by the Parks Greenways & Recreation (PGR) Advisory Board and the Land Conservation Advisory Board (LCAB)

PGR:

- Ann Babcock
- David Burdette
- Kevin Conrecode
- Lena Richards

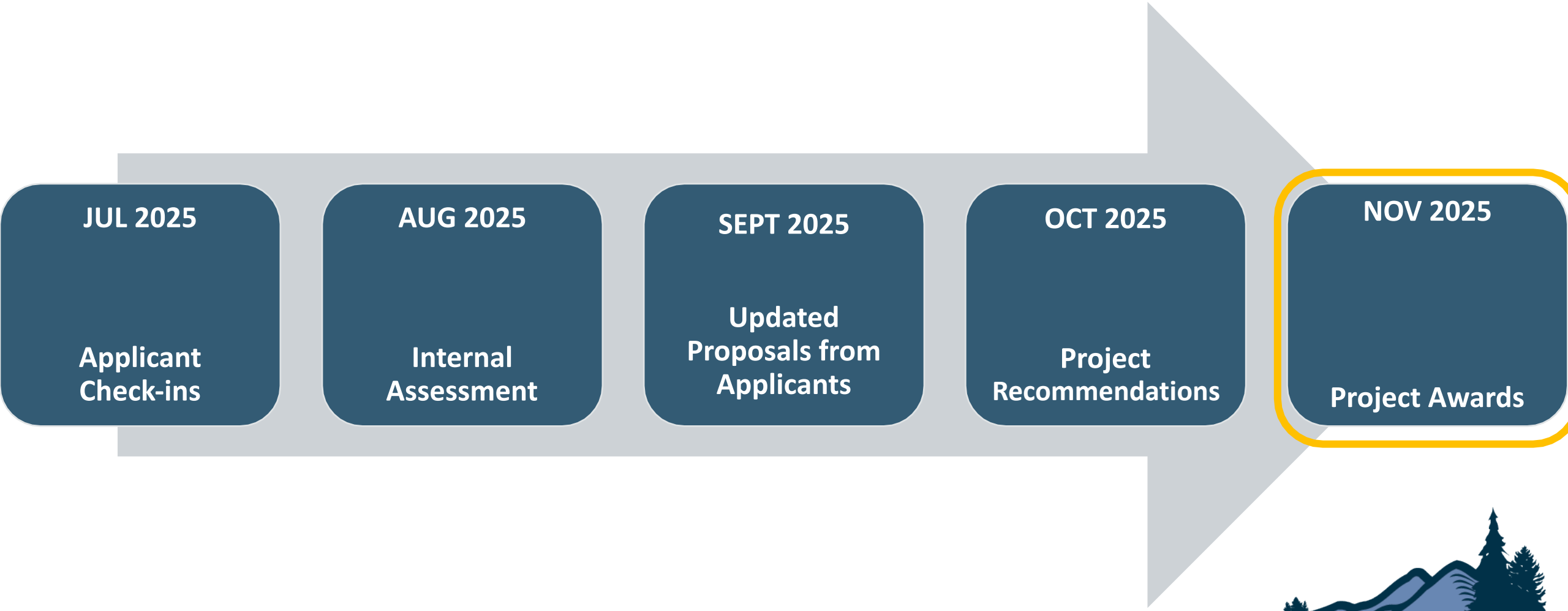
LCAB:

- Bob Gale
- Matt Fusco
- Bob Turner

2024 Schedule



2025 Schedule



Project Criteria

- Funding for publicly-accessible land, outdoor space, waterbodies, and corridors where passive recreational activities – such as hiking, birding, bicycling, and wildlife viewing – place minimal stress on a site's resources in a designated area
- Funding is available for both acquisition and improvement projects for passive recreation
- Emphasis on projects that also deliver land conservation and/or greenway components
- Disallowable costs include planning, engineering & design, administration, and operation
- Completed projects must be accessible by the public in perpetuity

The Project Review Process

Staff Review

Vets eligibility, reviews legal authority, and assigns scores using standardized, points-based evaluation criteria

Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee

Digs deeper into scored projects, hears presentations, attends site visits, reviews information, makes recommendations

Board of Commissioners

Makes final decision regarding project funding

Proposals Received

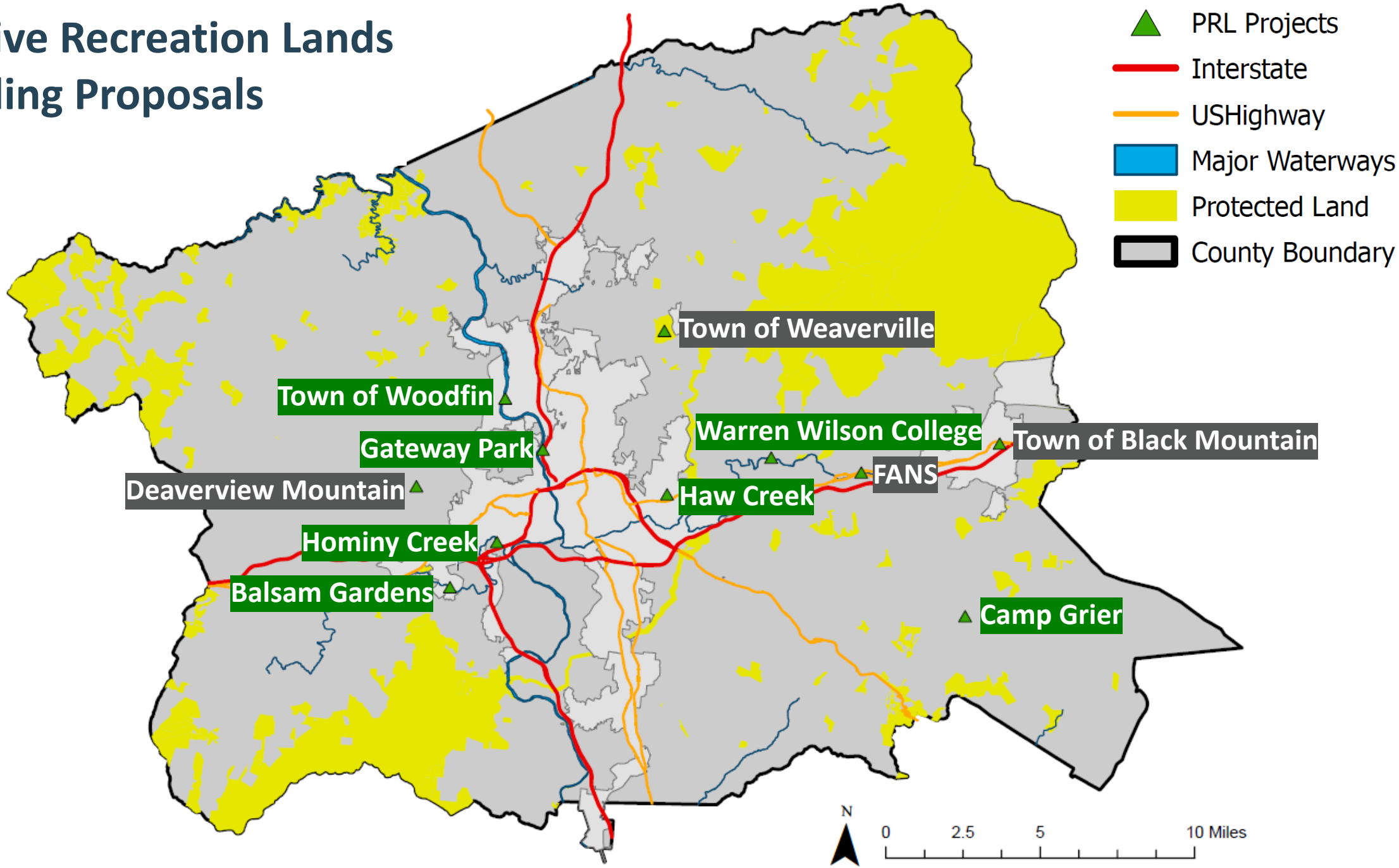
- **11** projects
- **3** requests from local government partners + **8** from private entities
- Total request: **$10,931,182**
- Smallest request: **$102,182**
- Largest request: **$3,368,660**
- Median request: **$756,800**

Evaluation Criteria

- Review of **qualifying criteria**, such as:
  - Project Scheduling/Timeline
  - Proposed Expenses
  - Geographic Location
- Review of **scoring criteria**, such as:
  - Conservation/environmental impact
  - Feasibility
  - Accessibility
  - Long-Term Management and Maintenance
  - Costs and Leveraged Funding

Applicant	Project	Initial Funding Request	2024 Recommended Funding	Updated 2025 Funding Request	2025 Recommended Funding
Balsam Gardens	**33+/- Acres on Sandhill Road**	$1,633,400	$1,090,000	$1,633,400	$750,000
Riverlink	**Gateway Park**	$200,000	$200,000	$200,000	$200,000
Haw Creek Community Association	**Haw Creek Park Greenway**	$102,182	$102,182	$127,784	$127,784
Asheville Greenworks	**Hominy Creek Greenway Trail Improvements**	$312,834	$312,834	$326,174	$326,174
Warren Wilson College	**Improving Public Access & Use of Lands**	$141,580	$141,580	$150,000	$150,000
Town of Woodfin	**Riverside Park**	$3,368,660	$2,195,231	$2,134,804	$2,134,804
Camp Grier	**Worx Community Forest Trail Development**	$756,800	$675,000	$687,500	$687,500
Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy	**Deaverview Mountain**	$1,000,000	$1,000,000	$0	$0
Town of Black Mountain	**Ridgecrest Connector**	$705,000	$575,000	$1,180,938	$0
Town of Weaverville	**Weaverville Watershed Trails and Wildlife Preserve**	$1,072,030	$0	N/A	$0
Friends and Neighbors of Swannanoa (FANS)	**Woodmen Trailhead and Educational Park**	$1,638,950	$0	N/A	$0
		$10,931,436	**$6,291,827**	**$6,440,660**	**$4,376,262**

Passive Recreation Lands Funding Proposals



Not Recommended

Deaverview Mountain

Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy

Recommended Funding: $0

The original request was for $1,000,000 SAHC to put toward the purchase of the 345 acre Deaverview Mountain property.

The project was awarded Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program grant to support purchase costs, so **this request has been withdrawn.**

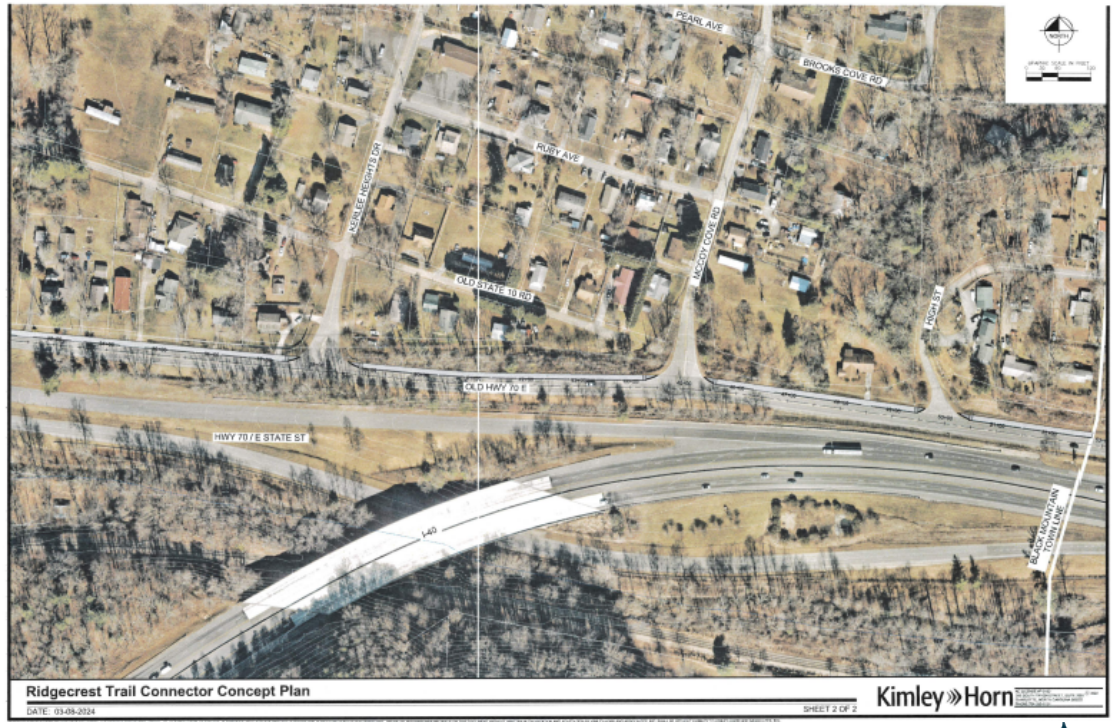


Not Recommended

Ridgecrest Connector
Town of Black Mountain

Recommended Funding: $0 at this time

The Ridgecrest Connector is a multi-use path that will serve as a critical connection for the Fonta Flora State Trail (FSST). The requested bond funding would pay for ¾ mile of path construction. **This project is not ready to proceed.** The current focus is securing funding for design & engineering.



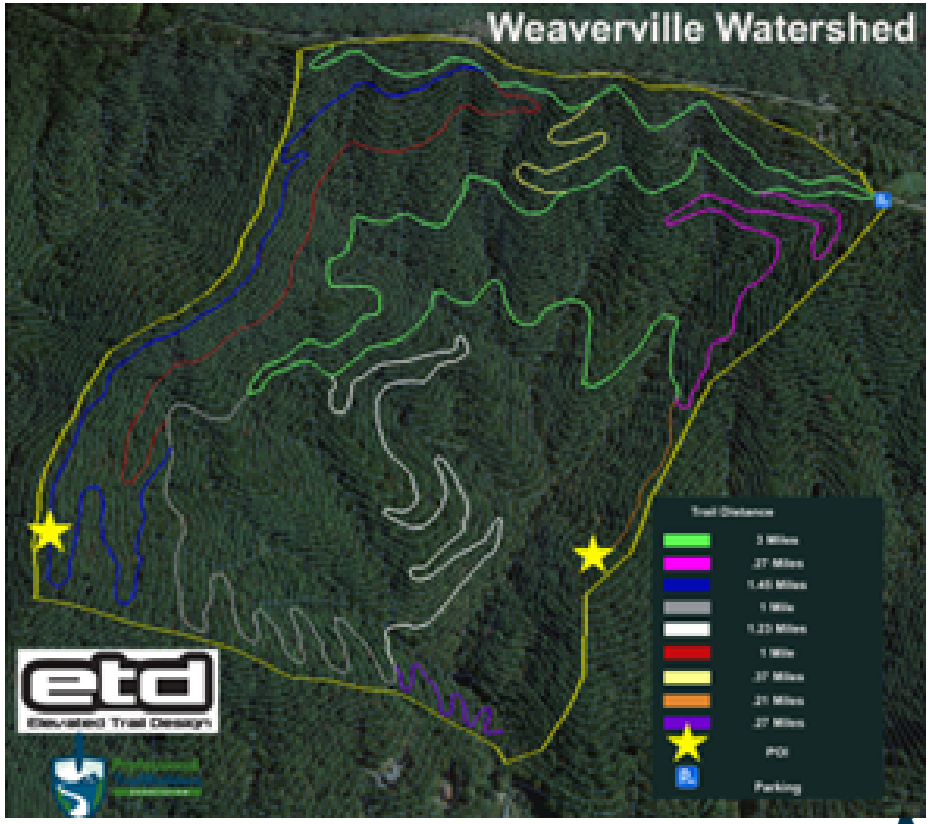
Not Recommended

Weaverville Watershed Trails & Wildlife Preserve

Town of Weaverville

Recommended Funding: $0 at this time

The Town of Weaverville owns a 309 acre watershed along Elk Mountain Scenic Highway that is protected under a conservation easement with the NC Land and Water Fund. The requested funding would pay for the construction of over 9 miles of trails. Design is not yet complete. **This project is not ready to proceed.** The current focus is post-Helene wildfire fuel load management for this site.



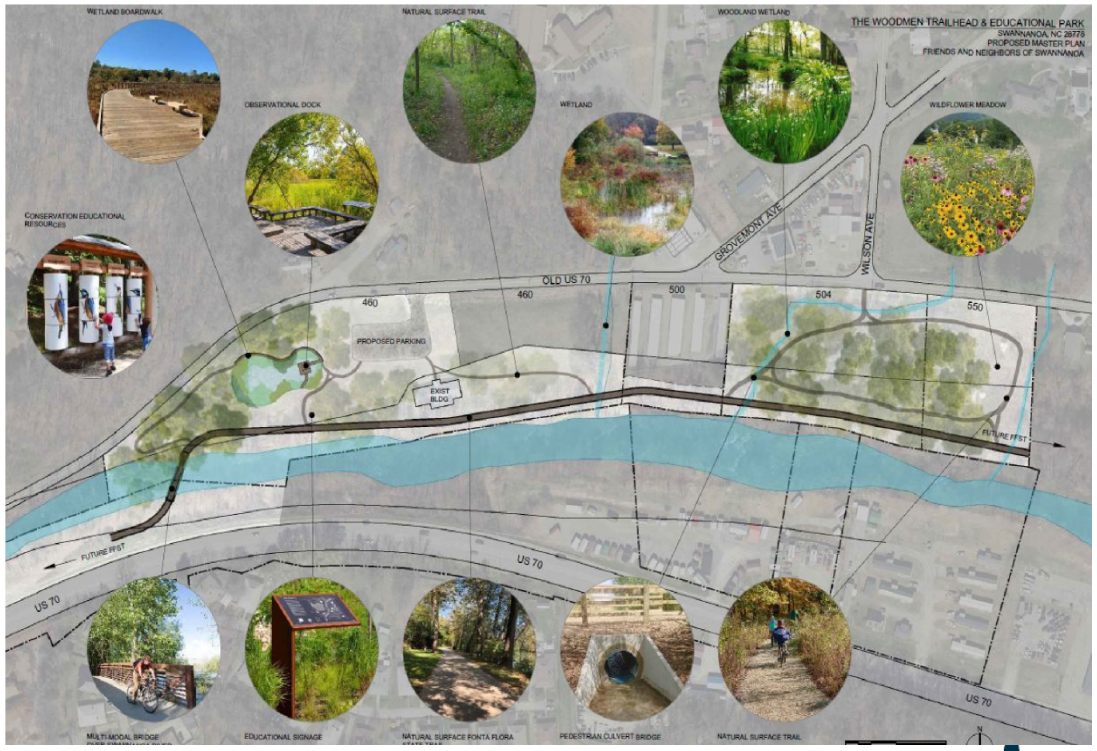
Not Recommended

Woodmen Trailhead & Educational Park

Friends and Neighbors of Swannanoa

Recommended Funding: $0 at this time

This funding would be used to for the County to purchase land and/or easements along the proposed future route of the Fonta Flora State Trail (FFST) in close proximity to Grovemont Park and the newly announced Beacon Village project. **This project is not yet ready to proceed.** The current focus is on feasibility study to inform potential future conservation easement requests.



Recommended

33 +/- acres on Sandhill Road

Balsam Gardens, LLC

Recommended Funding: Up to $750,000

This project proposes the County acquire 33 acres of riparian land consisting of approx. a mile of creek frontage along Hominy Creek. The acquisition of the property or an easement would preserve the land as open space, protect sensitive watershed, and provide safe and easy access to nature. The property could be used for an extension of the Enka Heritage Trail.



Recommended

Haw Creek Park Greenway

Haw Creek Community Association

Recommended Funding: $127,784

This funding will support the development of a 585-ft nature path in the Haw Creek valley. The path will link the East Asheville Public Library, Haw Creek Park, and the local commercial area with neighborhoods and schools. A private landowner is donating a conservation easement for the extension of the path.

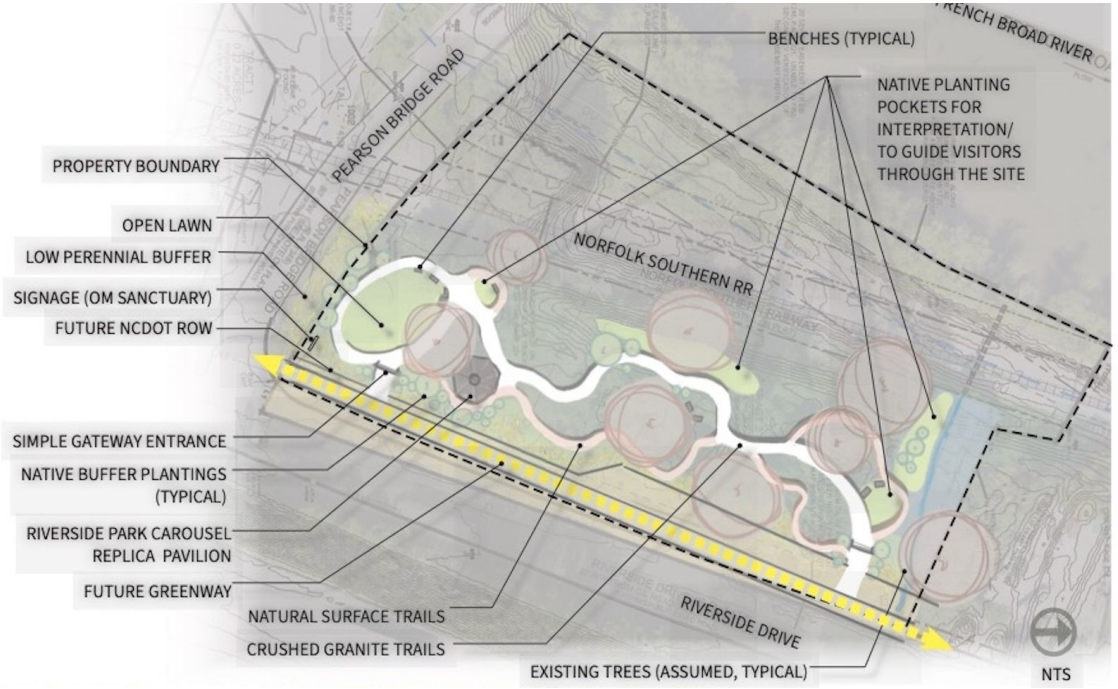


Recommended

Gateway Park
RiverLink

Recommended Funding: $200,000

This funding will support the creation of partially wooded park in the French Broad River corridor. The park will provide public greenspace along the 2.5 mi. corridor between the River Arts District and Silver-Line Park, prioritizing natural resource protection, habitat preservation, and ecosystem services.



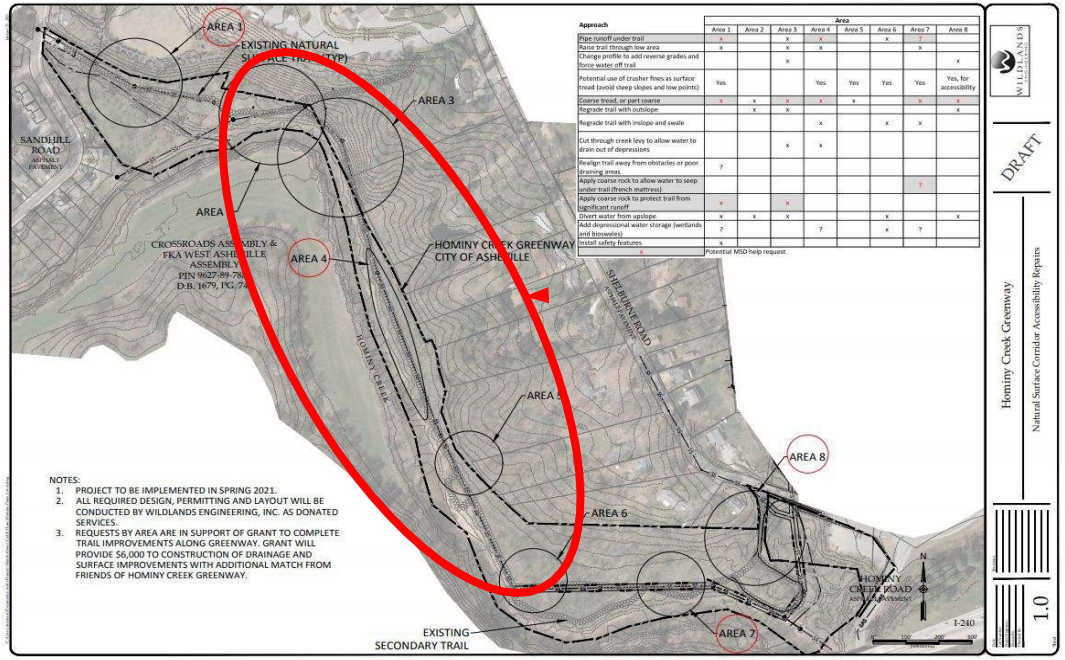
Recommended

Hominy Creek Greenway

Asheville Greenworks/Friends of Hominy Creek

Recommended Funding: $326,174

This funding will support the restoration of .4 miles of a sustainable natural surface trail and the ongoing ecological restoration and maintenance of the 12-acre green space known as the Hominy Creek Greenway, a City of Asheville park. The project will link two recently completed trail projects, expanding access to residents.



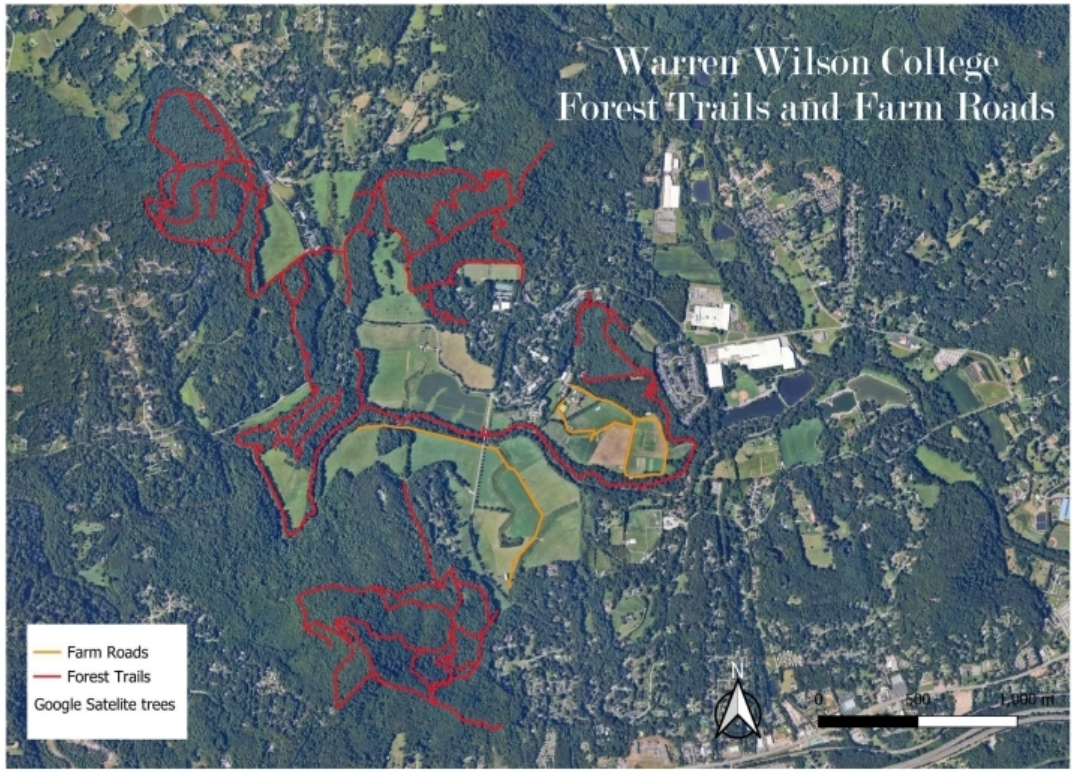
Recommended

Improving Public Access & Use of Lands

Warren Wilson College

Recommended Funding: $150,000

This funding will be used to upgrade and improve the river trail infrastructure extensively by the public for passive recreation. This work will address storm damage and improve user safety, access and quality of experience for County residents using College lands for passive recreation activities.

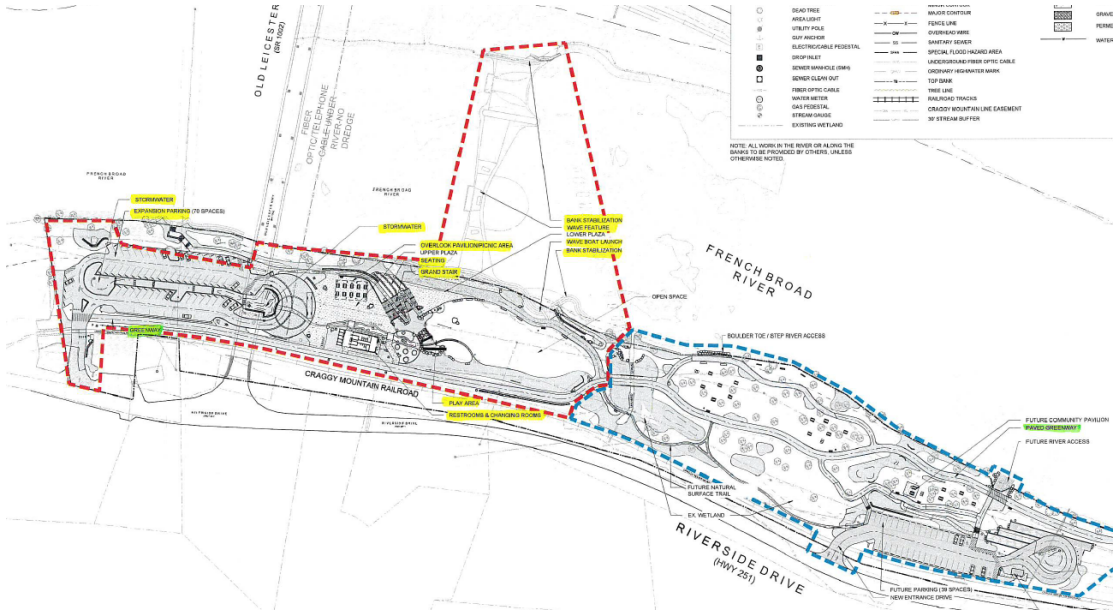


Recommended

Riverside Park
Town of Woodfin

Recommended Funding: $2,134,804

Riverside Park is the centerpiece of the Woodfin Greenway & Blueway, which will establish a regional outdoor recreation destination. This funding would support the improvement of passive recreation infrastructure through the existing park as well as measures to control flooding, preserve water quality and restore native flora.



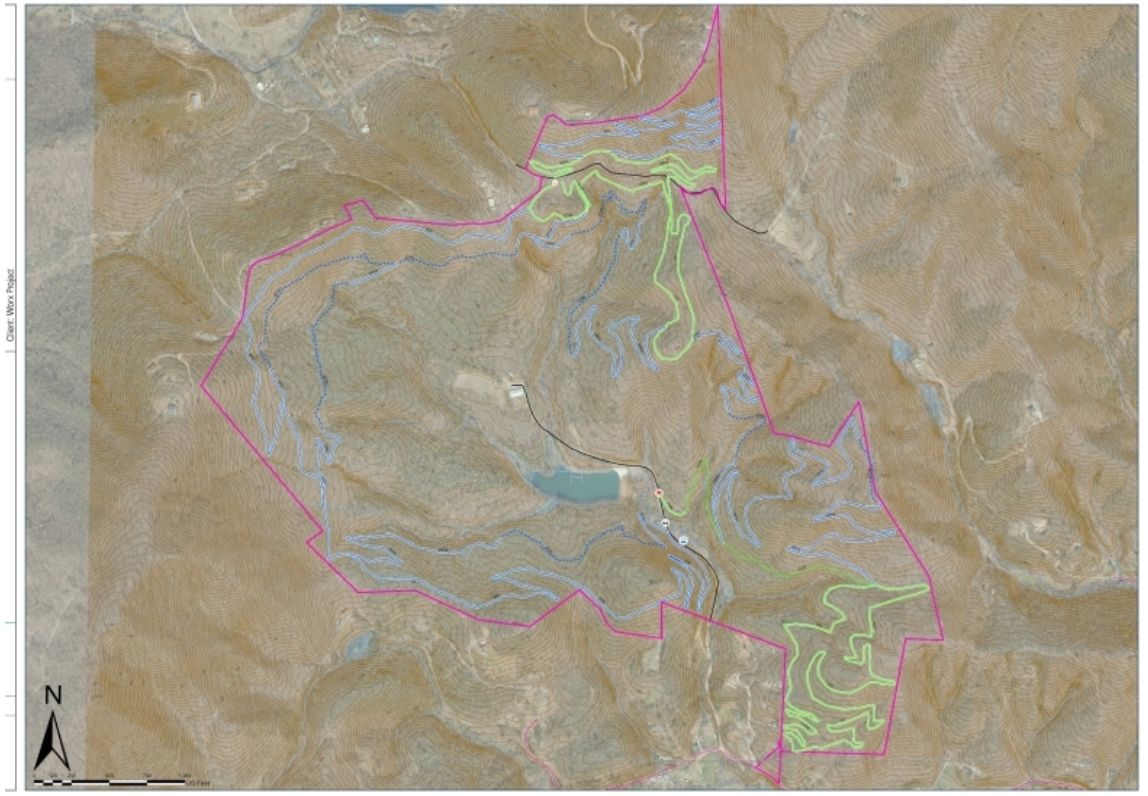
Recommended

Worx Community Forest Trail Development

Camp Grier

Recommended Funding: $687,500

The Worx Community Forest is a 225-acre conservation project surrounding a 35-acre learning campus. This funding would be used to develop 8 miles of multi-use natural surface trails designed for a beginner and intermediate hiking and mountain biking user experience.



Funding Recommendations

These **7** projects are recommended for a total of **$4,376,262** which would leverage the following impacts:

254 Acres newly open to the public

33 Acres newly conserved

14 Miles of trails/multi-use path supported

Open Space Bond Funds

Open Space Bond Total	$30,000,000
- Total Committed	$17,533,670
- Anticipated Conservation Easements	$2,531,900
- Recommended Passive Recreation Lands Awards	$4,376,262
Remainder	$5,558,168

Bond Fund Commitments as of October 2025

Item	Amount	Status	Primary Type
Administrative Fees	$ 937,213	Committed	Administration
Agricultural Growth Zone Match	$ 2,345,443	Committed	Conservation Easements
Battle Forest	$ 375,500	Committed	Conservation Easements
Deaverview Mountain	$ 7,671,764	Committed	Open Space
Ferry Road Open Space	$ 3,000,000	Committed	Open Space
Kestrel Herb Farm	$ 259,000	Committed	Conservation Easements
Lake Eden Preserve	$ 250,000	Committed	Conservation Easements
Okoboji Farm	$ 511,500	Committed	Conservation Easements
Parham-Fortner Farm	$ 150,000	Committed	Conservation Easements
Sandy Hollar Farm	$ 760,000	Committed	Conservation Easements
Woodfin Greenway: Beaverdam Creek	$ 997,355	Committed	Greenways
Woodfin Greenway: Hwy 251	$ 275,895	Committed	Greenways
Pending Conservation Easements	$ 2,531,900	Anticipated	Conservation Easements
Pending Open Space	$ 4,376,262	Anticipated	Open Space

Total Open Space Bond	**$30,000,000**
Total Committed	$17,533,670
Total Anticipated	$6,908,162
Remainder	**$5,558,168**

Future Funding

The Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee voted to recommend that Commissioners hold the remainder of funds for future Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee funding cycle(s).

Potential future investments include:

- Funding for the projects that need additional planning/design before they are ready for an award
- Funding for other community-led projects
- Funding for county-led projects, such as those coming out of the Parks & Recreation Master Plan or Hazard Mitigation acquisitions

Next Steps

PRL Subcommittee representative(s) will present the details of their recommendations to the Board of Commissioners on November 18, 2025:

- Approve the funding recommendations as proposed
- Reserve the remaining balance for future committee/subcommittee recommendations