



## Northern Peaks State Trail Plan: 2022-2027

### *Blue Ridge Conservancy*

- **Planned Length:** 40 miles
- **Miles Designated:** 0
- **Complete the Trails Funds:** \$286,943
- **Capacity Funds:** \$49,500

#### **Capacity Building Funds:**

Blue Ridge Conservancy (BRC) will increase staff capacity to plan, design, construct and maintain the Northern Peaks State Trail (NPST). A new staff position will be created by leveraging additional funds with the capacity building grant. This staff position will be the main contact for the NPST and will partner with N.C. State Parks, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, N.C. Plant Conservation Program, Ashe County, Watauga County, West Jefferson, Jefferson, Boone and private landowners to create the NPST. The biological study, general trail alignment and one new section of trail will be completed with the funds.

#### **Project Coordinator Deliverables:**

- Meet with land management agencies to discuss trail alignment, parking, and timeframes: N.C. State Parks, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, and N.C. Plant Conservation Program
- Meet with local government to garner support for trail construction and management: Ashe County, West Jefferson, Watauga County, and Boone
- Outreach to private landowners within the proposed trail corridor
- Assist with the completion of the biological survey conducted by N.C. Natural Heritage Program
- Work with Mountain Region Trails Specialist on trail layout as land becomes available
- Construct a section of trail in Elk Knob State Park

#### **Trail Development**

- Complete the biological survey of NPST planning corridor. BRC will contract with the N.C. Natural Heritage Program to inventory rare species and natural areas within the NPST planning corridor. The study will guide the final trail location to minimize the impact on the natural heritage qualities of the corridor.
- Locate the trail after completion of the biological survey. BRC will work with partner agencies to locate the trail route within the corridor surveyed by the Natural Heritage Program. This trail route will be used to secure cost estimates from trail builders.
- Construct trail segments at Elk Knob State Park, Three Top Mountain Game Land and Paddy Mountain. Contract with private trail builders to construct NPST at locations agreed upon by land managing entities. Construction includes the trail, parking areas, restrooms and other facilities needed for the trail.
- Recruit trail volunteers for each segment of the trail that has been constructed. Once the trail is constructed there will be a need for continuous management and maintenance. BRC will organize a 'Friends' group to help land managers with this task.
- Acquire additional land along the trail corridor. BRC and its partners will acquire land from willing sellers to construct the trail and protect the trail's conservation values.

#### **Elk Knob and Snake Mountain (14 miles)**

- **Biological Study:** Complete the biological study along the proposed trail corridor on lands owned by Elk Knob State Park and willing public and private landowners.
- **Land Acquisitions:** Complete acquisitions from willing sellers to connect and expand public land for inclusion in Elk Knob State Park.
- Construct the trail along the most appropriate route as determined by the biological study and State Parks.
- Create a Friends group and recruit trail volunteers to help maintain sections of trail at Elk Knob State Park.

#### **Three Top Mountain Game Land and The Peak (14 miles)**

- **Biological Study:** Complete the biological study along the proposed trail corridor on lands owned by Elk Knob State Park and NC Wildlife Resources Commission.
- **Land Acquisitions:** Complete acquisitions from willing sellers to connect and expand public land at Elk Knob State Park and Three Top Mountain Game Land.
- Construct the trail along the most appropriate route as determined by the biological study and land managers.
- Create a Friends group and recruit trail volunteers to help maintain sections of trail on Three Top Mountain.

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### West Jefferson and Mount Jefferson State Natural Area (12 miles)

- **Biological Study:** Complete the biological study along the proposed trail corridor on lands owned by Mount Jefferson State Natural Area and willing private landowners.
- Determine trail corridor through the downtown of West Jefferson to link BRC land on Paddy Mountain to Mount Jefferson State Natural Area.
- **Land Acquisitions:** Complete acquisitions from willing sellers to create a corridor between Paddy Mountain and Mount Jefferson State Natural Area.
- Construct the trail along the most appropriate route.
- Create a Friends group and recruit trail volunteers to help maintain sections of trail in this section.

### Complete the Trail (CTF) Projects:

- Construct 4 miles of new trail and rehabilitate 2 miles existing trail at Elk Knob State Park and construct one new parking area. Estimated total cost \$1.1 million CTF funds will be leveraged to help with trail construction and parking facilities.
- Construct 8 miles of new trail at Three Top Mountain Game Land, upgrade two existing parking areas and construct one new parking area. Estimated total cost \$1.4 million CTF funds will be leveraged to help with trail construction and parking facilities.
- Land acquisition along the proposed trail corridor from Snake Mountain to Mount Jefferson. Estimated cost \$3.7 million CTF funds will be leveraged to help with land acquisitions.

### 2023 Year of the Trail Celebrations Planned/Anticipated:

- Celebrate the start of trail construction at Elk Knob State Park or Three Top Mountain Game Land.

### Needed technical/other assistance needed from State Parks:

- Assistance with the planning and layout of the trail corridor along the proposed route from willing land managers.
- Assistance with parking area design standards to create a common theme throughout the NPST.