



Wilderness Gateway State Trail Plan: 2022-2027

Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina

- **Planned Length:** 170 miles
- **Complete the Trails Funds:** \$1,219,506
- **Miles Designated:** 0
- **Capacity Funds:** \$49,500

Capacity Building Funds:

Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina will utilize capacity building funds to meet operational and programmatic needs for WGST projects including trail planning, alignment and construction project management, land acquisition, volunteer coordination, marketing and advertising, and trail stewardship and maintenance.

Deliverables:

- Hire full-time WGST trail program manager by 4th quarter 2022 to oversee trail planning, alignment and construction projects
- FCNC Volunteer Program Growth
 - Recruit 1 volunteer per mile of trail built
 - Host monthly volunteer workdays to maintain the trail starting in 2023
 - Train lead volunteers
- FCNC Conservation/Stewardship Program Staff Growth
 - Hired new staff in May 2022 who will assist with parcel prioritization, trail alignment mapping, GIS data management
- Develop and maintain relationships and partnerships with stakeholder and volunteers/volunteer groups
- Assist with communications strategy to amplify public knowledge of WGST
- Support land acquisition and transfers
- Construct 70 miles of trail by 2027

Trail Development:

Segment 1: HGST to McDowell County Line (6 miles)

- **Land Acquisition:** Evaluate land purchases to connect Hickorynut Mountain to Weed Patch Mountain.
- **Planning:** Evaluate areas of land and trail connections between WGST and Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail
- **Partners:** Conserving Carolina, Rutherford County Trails Collaborative, private landowners; Rutherford Outdoor Coalition
- **Trail Construction:** Potential for trail construction project between HNGST and Hickorynut Mountain via WGST dependent on land corridor/connectivity being established within 5 years
- **Trail Maintenance:** Future need, FCNC, Conserving Carolina, and Partner Volunteers

Segment 2: Rutherford County Line to US 221 (40 +/- miles)

- **Land Acquisition:**
 - Pinnacle Mountains East (960 acres) – completed April 2022, owned by FCNC. Potential transfer to N.C. State Parks within 5 years
 - Pinnacle Mountains West (1,560 acres) – pending FCNC acquisition date Q1 2023. Potential transfer to N.C. State Parks within 5 years
- **Planning:**
 - Completion of trail planning and alignment on Pinnacle Mountains East and West
 - Pursue and complete trail planning and alignment on Hickorynut Mountain if landowner permission is granted; initiate trail construction within 5 years if landowner permission is granted
 - Public trailhead access areas along US 221 and other public roadways
- **Partners:** Rutherford County Trails Collaborative, private landowner; Rutherford Outdoor Coalition; McDowell Tech; McDowell County/EMS; G5; People on the Move; Eagle Market Street
- **Trail Construction:** Completion of WGST loop and linear trails on Pinnacle Mountains East and West
- **Promotion:** FCNC WGST Website and Interactive Map; N.C. Foothills Experience website (through WPCOG); press releases; FCNC print and social media
- **Volunteer Recruitment:** FCNC, G5, McDowell Tech (Trails Program); Rutherford Outdoor Coalition
- **Trail Maintenance:** Future need, FCNC and Partner Volunteers

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Segment 3: US-221 to US-64 (40 +/- miles)

- **Land Acquisition:**
 - › Bobs Creek State Natural Area Phase 3 completed February 2022
 - › Potential small parcel acquisition to connect Pinnacle Mountains East east and across US 221 to Bobs Creek SNA and Box Creek Wilderness
- **Planning:**
 - › 40 miles of WGST trail alignment complete on Box Creek Wilderness (and a portion of Bobs Creek SNA)
 - › Additional trail planning and alignment on Bobs Creek SNA with NC State Parks approval
 - › Section 106 archeology evaluation on Box Creek Wilderness (USFWS conservation easement)
 - › Public trailhead access along Vein Mountain Road, Brackett Town Road, Rhom Town Road, US 64
- **Partners:** N.C. State Parks, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, private landowner; McDowell Tech; McDowell County/EMS; G5; People on the Move; Eagle Market Street
- **Trail Construction:**
 - › 14-mile Wolfpen Loop on Bobs Creek SNA and Box Creek
 - › 15 +/- linear trail segment through Box Creek to US 64
 - › Additional trail construction on Bobs Creek SNA with NC State Parks approval and partnership
- **Promotion:** FCNC WGST Website and Interactive Map; NC Foothills Experience website (through WPCOG); press releases; FCNC print and social media; partner social media
- **Volunteer Recruitment:** FCNC, G5, McDowell Tech (Trails Program); Rutherford Outdoor Coalition
- **Trail Maintenance:** Future need, FCNC and Partner Volunteers

Segment 4: US-64 to South Mountains State Park (4 miles in WGST plan; possibly 8 mile on the ground)

- **Land Acquisition:** Acquisition opportunities in Cane Creek Battlefield Area – co-located with OVNHT
- **Planning:**
 - › Trail alignment on NC WRC and FCNC property along Cane Creek
 - › Trail access along US-64
- **Partners:** NC WRC; OVTA; National Park Service; Burke County; G5; People on the Move; Eagle Market Street
- **Trail Construction:**
 - › Trail access area along US-64
 - › Trail segment on NC WRC
- **Promotion:** FCNC WGST Website and Interactive Map; NC Foothills Experience website (through WPCOG); press releases; FCNC print and social media; partner social media
- **Trail Maintenance:** Future need, FCNC, OVTA, and Partner Volunteers

Segment 5: South Mountains State Park (12 miles)

- **Land Acquisition:** None (complete)
- **Planning:** Trail alignment utilizing existing SOMO State Park trails and newly planned trail segments
- **Partners:** N.C. State Parks
- **Trail Construction:** TBD by N.C. State Parks
- **Promotion:** FCNC WGST Website and Interactive Map; N.C. Foothills Experience website (through WPCOG); N.C. State Parks website?; press releases; FCNC print and social media
- **Trail Maintenance:** Future need, FCNC, State Parks Friends Group, and Partner Volunteers

Segment 6: South Mountains State Park to Cambarus Loop, North (21 miles)

- **Land Acquisition:**
 - › 6-acre parcel in Valdese adjoining Children's Park
 - › Parcel acquisition to connect FCNC's Smiths Cliffs/Henry Fork River Preserve to FCNC South Mountains Headwaters Preserve (which adjoins SOMO State Park)
 - › Property acquisition to connect FCNC preserve lands and link Old NC-18 to NC-18
 - › Parcel acquisition to connect FCNC Smiths Cliffs/Henry Fork River Preserve (NC-18) to FCNC Mineral Springs Mountain
 - › Parcel acquisition along Mineral Springs Mountain to
 - › Mineral Springs Mountain to U.S. I-40
- **Planning:**
 - › Parcel prioritization to connect FCNC lands along NC-18 to FCNC lands along Mineral Springs Mountain
 - › Parcel prioritization to connect FCNC lands on Mineral Springs Mountain northerly toward Children's Park in Valdese
 - › Trail easement parcel prioritization from I-40 to Children's Park in Valdese
 - › Trail easement parcel prioritization from Children's Park to Valdese Lakeside Park

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- › Trail alignment on FCNC Smiths Cliffs/Henry Fork River Preserve lands
- › Trail alignment on FCNC South Mountains Headwaters Preserve to connect with SOMO State Park
- **Partners:** Town of Valdese; NC State Parks; private landowners
- **Trail Construction:**
 - › Loop and linear trails on FCNC Smiths Cliffs/Henry Fork River Preserve (Old NC-18 to NC-18)
 - › Trail segment on FCNC South Mountains Headwaters Preserve
 - › Trail segment on Mineral Springs Mountain
 - › Valdese Lakeside Park
- **Promotion:** FCNC WGST Website and Interactive Map; N.C. Foothills Experience website (through WPCOG); Town of Valdese; press releases; FCNC print and social media
- **Trail Maintenance:** Future need, FCNC and Partner Volunteers; Friends of Valdese Rec.

Segment 7: South Mountains State Park to Cambarus Loop, South (22 miles)

- **Land Acquisition:** as opportunities arise
- **Planning:** Engage in trail corridor study with City of Hickory, Catawba County, Western Piedmont Council of Governments, Carolina Thread Trail
- **Partners:** City of Hickory, Catawba County, Western Piedmont Council of Governments, Carolina Thread Trail
- **Trail Construction:** as opportunities arise
- **Promotion:** FCNC WGST Website and Interactive Map; N.C. Foothills Experience website (through WPCOG); press releases; FCNC print and social media
- **Volunteer Recruitment:** as opportunity arises
- **Trail Maintenance:** Future Need

Segment 8: Cambarus Loop Blueway (34 miles)

- **Land Acquisition:**
 - › Henry Fork River blueway put-in / take-out parcels
 - › Jacob Fork River blueway put-in / take out parcel
 - › Transfer FCNC Jacob Fork River parcels to NC State Parks
 - › Help facilitate land donation from City of Hickory to N.C. State Parks adjoining N.C. State Parks' Henry Fork River parkland
- **Planning:**
 - › N.C. State Parks blueway access areas along Jacob Fork and Henry Fork River lands that are currently (or pending) owned by N.C. State Parks
 - › WGST trail loop on N.C. State Parks' Henry Fork River parklands
- **Partners:** N.C. State Parks; City of Hickory; private landowners; Catawba County, Western Piedmont Council of Governments
- **Trail Construction:**
 - › Blueway Put-Ins/Take-Outs on Henry Fork River and Jacob Fork River
 - › WGST trail loop on N.C. State Parks' Henry Fork River parklands
- **Promotion:** FCNC WGST Website and Interactive Map; N.C. Foothills Experience website (through WPCOG); N.C. State Parks website; press releases; FCNC print and social media

Segment 9: Cambarus Loop (21 miles)

- **Land Acquisition:**
 - › Help facilitate land donation from City of Hickory to N.C. State Parks adjoining N.C. State Parks' Henry Fork River parkland
 - › Acquisition and trail easement opportunities for the following connections:
 - Jacob Fork River State Park lands to Bakers Mountain Park
 - Bakers Mountain Park to Henry River Park
 - Henry Fork River Park to City of Hickory
 - Additional lands around Henry Fork River State Park lands
- **Planning:**
 - › Parcel prioritization plan:
 - Jacob Fork River State Park lands to Bakers Mountain Park
 - Bakers Mountain Park to Henry River Park
 - Henry Fork River State Park to City of Hickory

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- **Partners:** N.C. State Parks; City of Hickory; Carolina Thread Trail; private landowners; Catawba County, Western Piedmont Council of Governments
- **Trail Construction:**
 - WGST trail loop on N.C. State Parks' Henry Fork River parklands
 - Other opportunities in partnership with Carolina Thread Trail
- **Promotion:** FCNC WGST Website and Interactive Map; N.C. Foothills Experience website (through WPCOG); N.C. State Parks website; press releases; FCNC print and social media; CTT website

Segment 10: Catawba County Loop (29 miles)

- **Land Acquisition:** as opportunities arise
- **Planning:** Engage in trail corridor study with City of Hickory, Catawba County, Western Piedmont Council of Governments, Carolina Thread Trail
- **Partners:** City of Hickory, Catawba County, Western Piedmont Council of Governments, Carolina Thread Trail
- **Trail Construction:** as opportunities arise
- **Promotion:** FCNC WGST Website and Interactive Map; N.C. Foothills Experience website (through WPCOG); City of Hickory; press releases; FCNC print and social media; CTT website?
- **Volunteer Recruitment:** Future Need
- **Trail Maintenance:** Future Need

Complete the Trail (CTF) Projects:

1. **Segment 2:** Land acquisition – Pinnacle Mountains West = \$300,000; Other funds: NC Land and Water Fund; donated land value
2. **Segment 6:** Land acquisition – Prospect Ridge property = \$775,000; Other funds: donated land value; (possibly NC LWF)
3. **Segment 6:** Trail planning and alignment – FCNC Henry Fork River Preserve = \$20,000
4. **Segment 6:** Trail construction – 8+/- miles of trail on FCNC Smiths Cliffs / Henry Fork River Preserve = \$300,000; Other funds: RTP; private funds
5. **Segment 2:** Trail planning and alignment Pinnacles East and West = \$40,000; Other Funds: Rutherford County Trails Collaborative
6. **Segment 2:** Trail construction Pinnacles East and West – 20 +/- miles = \$1,000,000; Other funds: Recreational Trails Program Grant; large foundation grant (e.g. Dogwood Health)
7. **Segment 3:** Trail construction, Bobs Creek SNA and Box Creek Wilderness – 25 +/- miles = \$1.2M; Other funds: Recreational Trails Program = \$243,700 (secured)
8. **Segment 6:** Land prioritization from FCNC Henry Fork to Mineral Springs Mountain, and Mineral Springs Mountain toward Valdese Lakeside Park = \$25,000
9. **Segment 3:** Planning – additional trail alignment on Bobs Creek SNA = \$30,000; Other funds: large foundation grant (e.g. Dogwood Health)
10. **Segment 3:** Land acquisition to connect Pinnacle Mountains to Bobs Creek and Box Creek = \$500,000; Other funds: Private Funds; N.C. State Parks; NC LWF; foundation grants
11. **Segment 6: Land Acquisition** – FCNC Henry Fork Preserve to FCNC South Mountains Preserve = \$1,000,000; Other funds: Private Funds; NC LWF
12. **Segment 8:** Land acquisition – Blueway Accesses and State Park expansions on Jacob Fork and Henry Fork in Catawba County = \$1,500,000; Other funds: Private funds; NC LWF; State Parks / PARTF / Federal LWCF
13. **Segment 5 and 6:** Trail planning/alignment and construction – FCNC South Mountains Headwaters Preserve– 12 +/- miles = \$750,000; Other funds: NC RTP
14. **Segment 2:** Trail planning and alignment Hickorynut Mountain = \$50,000; Other Funds: Rutherford County Trails Collaborative
15. **Segment 2:** Trail construction Hickorynut Mountain – 25 +/- miles = \$1,500,000; Other funds: Recreational Trails Program Grant; large foundation grant (e.g. Dogwood Health); private funds
16. **Segments 9 and 10:** Parcel prioritization and trail corridor planning = \$100,000; Other funds: Carolina Thread Trail match / grant; City of Hickory; Catawba Co; planning grants
17. **Segment 1:** Trail corridor planning and alignment (HGST connection; HGST to Hickorynut Mountain) = \$50,000; Other funds: Rutherford County Trails Collaborative; Conserving Carolina match
18. **Segment 4:** Trail lanning and alignment on N.C. WRC Game Land, co-located with OVST = \$25,000
19. **Segment 4:** Land acquisition along US-64 / Cane Creek Battlefield (if needed) = \$1,000,000; Other funds: American

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Battlefield Protection Program

2023 Year of the Trail Celebrations Planned/Anticipated:

- Groundbreaking on Segment 3
- Groundbreaking and ribbon cutting on Segment 6
- Groundbreaking on Segment 2
- Promote WGST through FCNC media outlets (and partner media) including: website and interactive, print such as annual magazine (Taproot), monthly e-news, social media, and local news sources, press releases
- Host Volunteer Workdays on Segment 2, 3, and 6
- Host guided outings on Segments 3 and 6

Technical/other assistance needed from State Parks:

- **Planning:** Trail alignment for Segments 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
- **Trail Construction:** Segment 6 (South Mountains State Park)
- Blueway Trail infrastructure and trail planning/design and construction on State Park Lands in Catawba County – Segments 8, 9