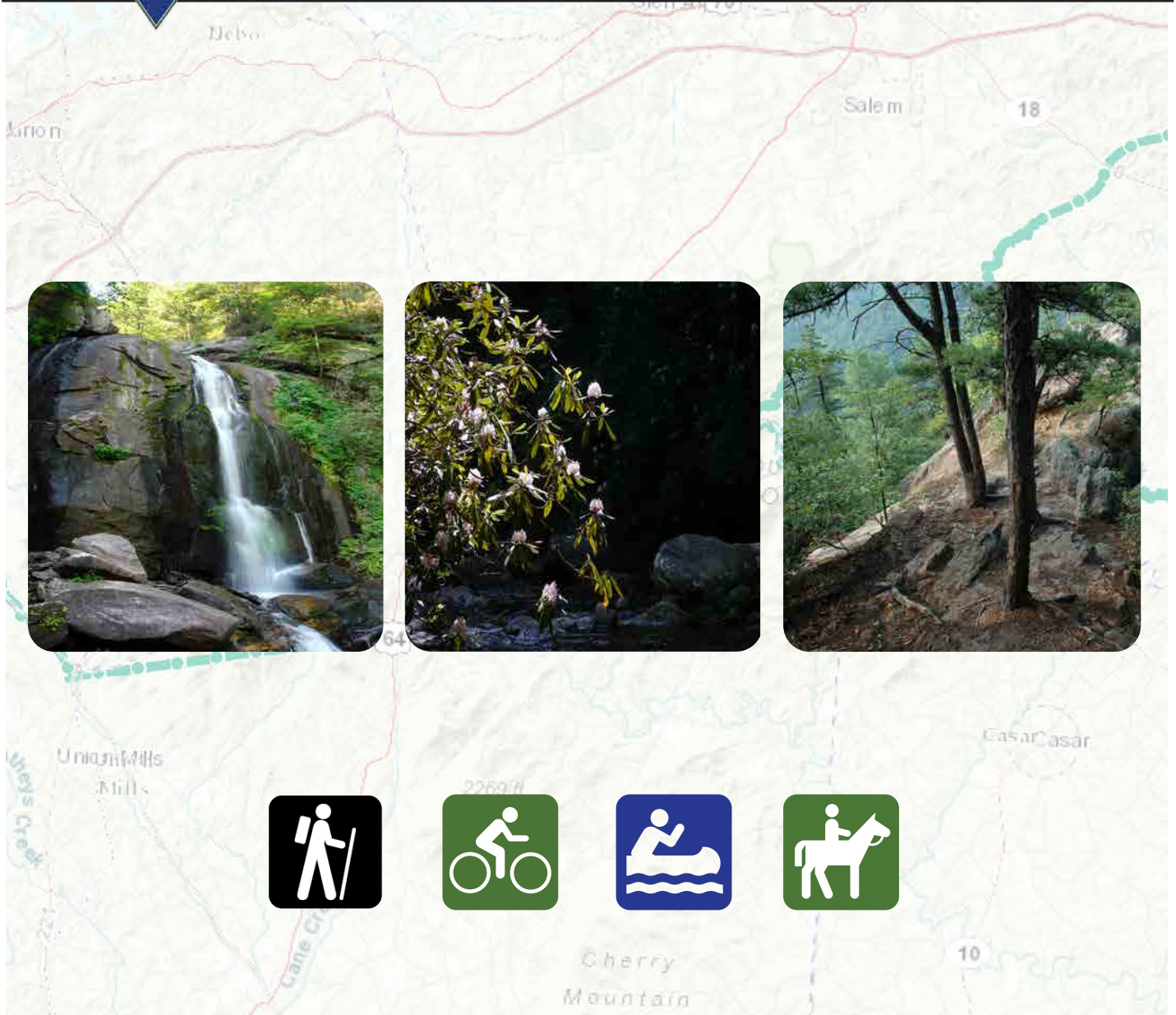




# Wilderness Gateway State Trail Plan



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## INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the General Assembly authorized the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources to add the Wilderness Gateway State Trail to the State Parks System. During the same session the General Assembly directed the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation (Division) to conduct a feasibility study of connecting the trail with various natural areas, trails and communities in the four counties of the trail proposed corridor.

The vision for the Wilderness Gateway State Trail entails three primary purposes: conservation, recreation and tourism.

By protecting and conserving riparian corridors and other important habitats the trail corridors serve as ecological connectors between larger tracts of natural lands enabling the migration of wildlife and ensuring the genetic viability of wildlife and plant populations. In this way, the trail is part of a statewide conservation strategy to ensure the future health and beauty of North Carolina's natural resources.

By creating pathways, enhancing walkable downtowns areas and building urban greenways in areas where North Carolina residents live and work, the trail will provide safe and pleasant recreation and exercise opportunities. This offers easy and enjoyable ways for people to improve their health with more physical activity.

Finally, by creating recreational opportunities with access to scenic wilderness areas and connections to multiple downtowns, all easily accessible from I-40, the trail will attract visitors from North Carolina as well as other states.

Division staff visited the trail corridor and met with potential stakeholders to explain the state trail concept. Staff listened to input, begun recruiting segment managers and begun resolving issues. Finally, staff conducted a GIS analysis to determine a potential corridor for the Wilderness Gateway State Trail, within which segment managers will be able to construct and manage trail segments for inclusion in the State Trail.



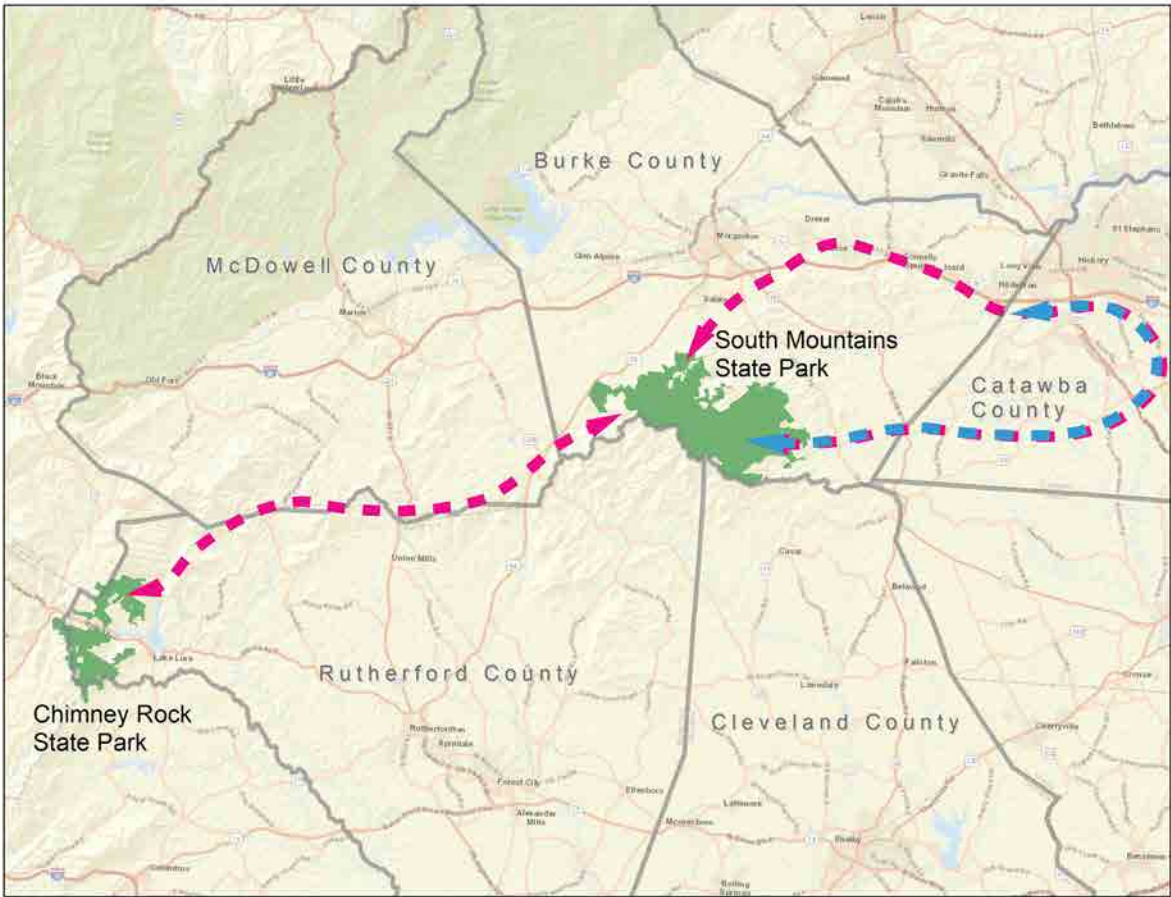
*Stakeholder meetings were held.*



**PLANNING AREA**

The legislation that created the Wilderness Gateway State Trail states:  
*"The Division of Parks and Recreation of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources shall study the feasibility of connecting the Town of Valdese, the City of Hickory, the Overmountain Victory State Trail, natural areas located within Burke and Catawba counties, as well as other communities and places of interest to the Wilderness Gateway State Trail. In conducting this study, the Division shall specifically consider improving access across and from Interstate 40 to the northeastern and western portions of South Mountains State Park."*

Using this direction, the planning area for the Wilderness Gateway State Trail encompasses Catawba, Burke, McDowell and Rutherford Counties. Meetings with officials from each of the counties and major towns within the planning area were held to help refine the planning corridor. Foothills Conservancy of NC and Conserving Carolinas Land Conservancy were also included in this planning effort.



*Initial trail concept as outlined by the NC General Assembly.*



The Wilderness Gateway State Trail will connect with the Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail (near Chimney Rock State Park) and will meander along the boundary of Rutherford and McDowell counties to connect to South Mountains State Park. From South Mountains State Park, the trail will travel through Burke and Catawba Counties, with connections to Valdese and Hickory. Much of the trail corridor in Catawba County will be developed in conjunction with the Carolina Thread Trail. Part of the initial development of the State Trail will be a blueway (paddle trail) on the Jacob Fork and Henry Fork Rivers. In the future, trails along the banks of these rivers and connecting to Bakers Mountain are envisioned.

## LOCATION

This proposed corridor will intersect with locations of signature events in North Carolina history including Native American settlements, Spanish exploration, the Overmountain Victory men, textile and furniture industries, music and moonshine.

**Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail**, in Rutherford County, will be the western terminus of the Wilderness Gateway State Trail. Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail connects Chimney Rock State Park, Lake Lure, Bat Cave and Bearwallow Mountain. Some of North Carolina's most dramatic mountain scenery is found at Chimney Rock State Park, with the signature 315-foot spire overlooking Hickory Nut Gorge and Lake Lure.

**Rutherford County** was formed in 1779 and named after the Revolutionary War general and member of the North Carolina Provincial Congress, Griffith Rutherford. The county seat is Rutherfordton. The economy of Rutherford County includes tourism, Christmas trees, and textiles. The county is 564 square miles and is in the Broad River basin. In 2016 the population was estimated to be 66,421.



*Lakeside Park in Valdese is one local park that will be connected by the Wilderness Gateway State Trail.*



*South Mountains State Park and the adjacent gamelands provide ample outdoor recreational opportunities.*

**McDowell County** was formed from Rutherford and Burke Counties in 1842. It is named after Joseph McDowell, a general in the Revolutionary War. Originally Cherokee and Catawba Indian territory, today Marion is the county seat. The economy revolves around Christmas tree production, furniture and pharmaceuticals. It is 440 square miles, with approximately 75% of the land forested. Located in the Broad and Catawba River basins, McDowell County had an estimated population of 45,075 in 2016.

The **Overmountain Victory Trail** is a National Historic Trail that stretches for 330 miles through four states (Virginia, Tennessee, North and South Carolina). In 2019 the North Carolina portion was made a North Carolina State Trail by the state General Assembly. The Overmountain Victory Trail traces the route used by patriot militia during the pivotal Kings Mountain campaign of 1780. Thomas Jefferson called the victory of American patriots over British Major Patrick Ferguson’s army at King’s Mountain in October 1780, the battle that “turned the tide of success” in the Revolutionary War.

The trail follows the path that these citizen soldiers followed as they mustered to fight at Kings Mountain. Research done by the National Park Service has identified a narrow corridor for the trail. While there is a commemorative motor trail, users of the State Trail will be protected from vehicular traffic, following the alignment identified by the National Park Service. The Wilderness Gateway and Overmountain Victory State Trails will be co-located in portions of McDowell and Burke Counties.

**South Mountains Game Lands** offers over 22,000 acres for public hunting, fishing, trapping, wildlife viewing, and other wildlife-based recreational activities. The game land also provides other public outdoor recreational opportunities to the extent that these uses are compatible with the conservation and management of wildlife resources and do not displace primary users. The most popular activities



*Both Valdese and Hickory have walkable downtown districts which will dovetail nicely with the Wilderness Gateway trail.*





besides hunting/fishing are hiking, horseback riding, and photography. Additional activities such as mountain biking and geocaching occur at lower levels. Horseback riding on a 13.7-mile designated trail is currently allowed from May 15 to August 31.

**South Mountains State Park**, the largest North Carolina State Park at just over 22,000 acres, is an important part of the Wilderness Gateway State Trail corridor. Opportunities for camping, mountain biking and horseback riding, trout fishing, and spectacular scenery will enhance the trail experience. A visitor center offers museum-quality exhibits on the cultural and natural history of the South Mountains. The Catawba Valley and the gaps across the mountain ranges to the west were once major travel routes. The South Mountains served as a buffer zone between the Cherokee and the Catawba Indians, and the first European settlers in the area farmed the fertile land along the Catawba River.

Together, South Mountains State Park and South Mountains Game Lands serve as an important reservoir for endangered, threatened, or rare species including the white irisette, bog turtle, and small whorled pogonia. An additional 33 species are considered significantly rare, endemic, or species of special concern at the state level. Many common species of both flora and fauna occur through out both areas.

**Burke County** was formed in 1777 and named for Thomas Burke, NC governor and delegate to the Continental Congress. Morganton is the county seat. The county has the highest proportion of state government employees, outside of Raleigh, due to the North Carolina School for the Deaf, Broughton Hospital, Western Carolina Hospital and Western Correctional Center. The economy includes forest products, chemicals, and tourism. The county takes up 507 square miles and is in the Catawba River basin. In 2016 the population was estimated to be 88,851.

**Valdese** will provide an interesting cultural component for trail users. This town was founded by the Waldensians, Italian immigrants in the late 19th century. Their history is on display throughout Valdese including museums, Trail of Faith and the Waldensian Heritage Winery.

**Catawba County** was formed from Lincoln County in 1842 and is named for the Catawba Indians who once inhabited the land. Newton is the county seat, although Hickory is the largest city. Furniture, telecommunications equipment, and agriculture comprise a diversified economy. Located in the Catawba River basin, it occupies 398 square miles. The Carolina Thread Trail network runs throughout Catawba County. Some of the planned Carolina Thread Trails will be co-located with the Wilderness Gateway State Trail, thus boosting both trail efforts.

**Hickory** is best known for furniture production. At one time, it is estimated that 60% of all furniture made in the USA was made within a 200-mile radius of Hickory. In addition to furniture, Hickory hosts several colleges and universities and a minor league baseball team.



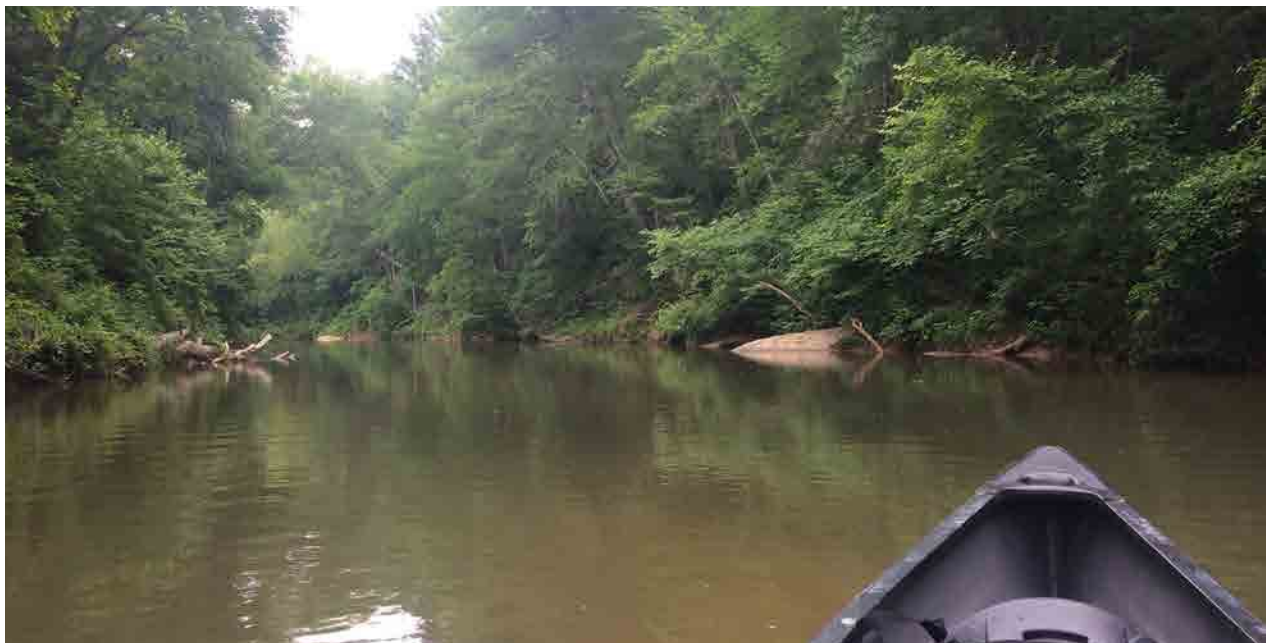


## Results

To determine the feasibility for specific planned segments of the Wilderness Gateway State Trail, Division staff met with public officials, land conservancies, state agencies and private conservationists to evaluate local public support for the general concept of a public trail and the availability of trail volunteers; presence of viable section sponsors committed to the design, construction, maintenance and management of the trail; and a corridor that offers environmental and economic sustainability. The results of those meetings are summarized in the following tables.

Meeting participants indicated universal public support for the trail. Segment managers were identified for many of the proposed segments and efforts are continuing to recruit managers for the remaining segments. Support was also vocalized for connecting the trail to downtown areas of nearby towns, as well as the potential to co-locate the Wilderness Gateway trail with other planned and existing trails in the region.

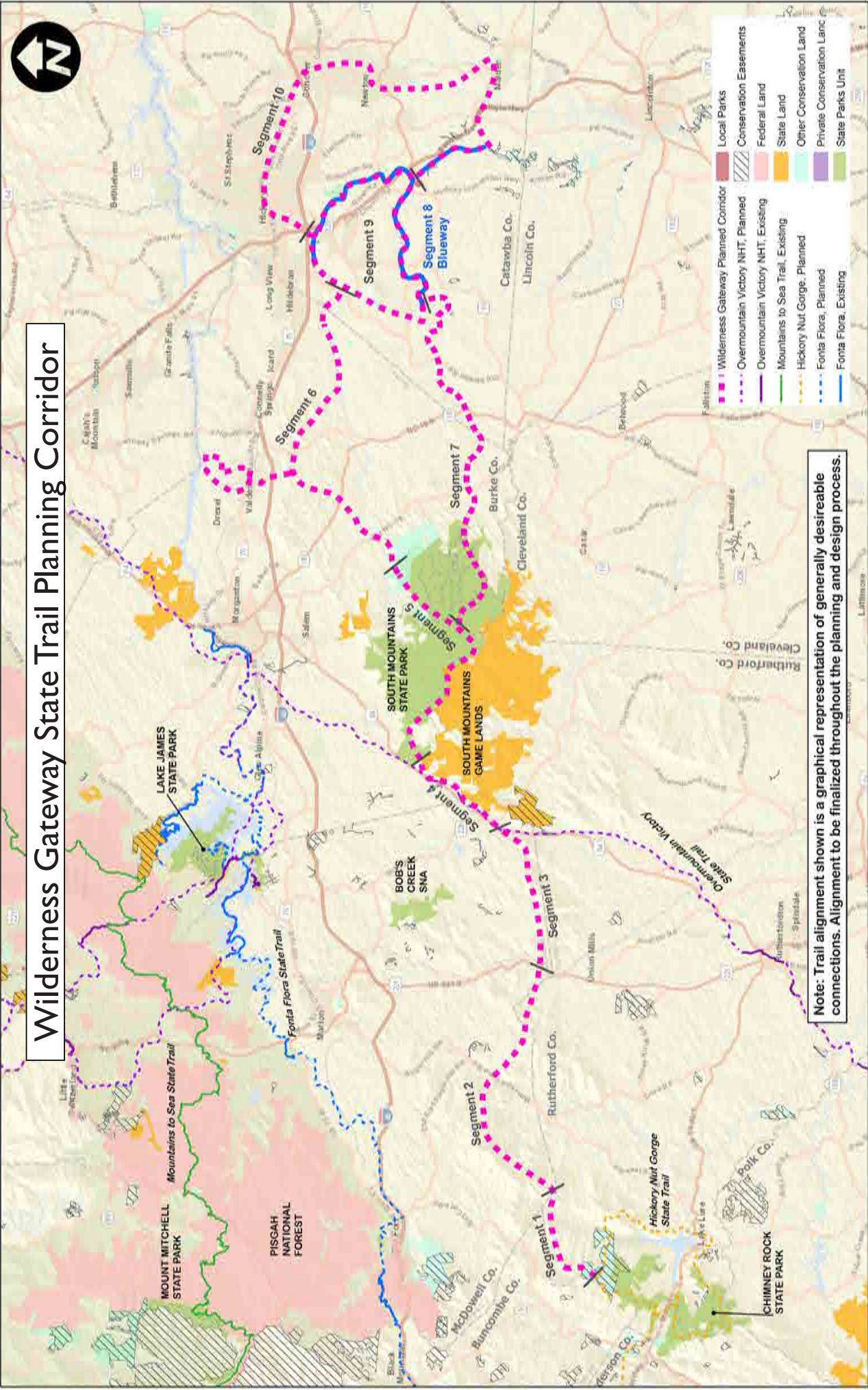
As segment managers begin to plan the trail's physical route and determine permitted trail users, care will need to be taken to identify a sustainable alignment for trail construction given the challenging topography of the region. However, this is entirely possible, especially with the services of professional trail builders and designers.



*A paddle trail along parts of the Jacob and Henry Fork rivers increases the recreational opportunities along the Wilderness Gateway trail.*



# Wilderness Gateway State Trail Planning Corridor

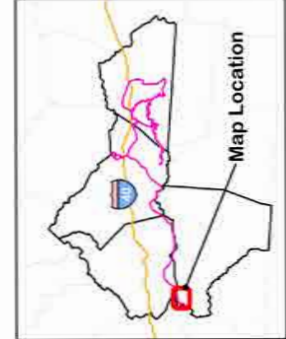
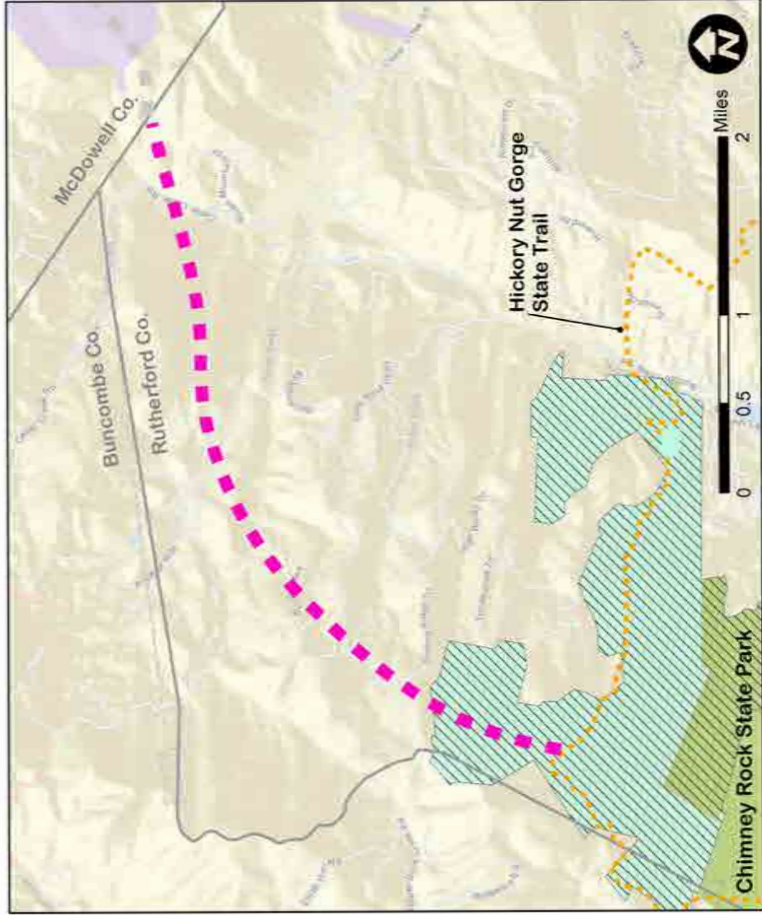


Note: Trail alignment shown is a graphical representation of generally desirable connections. Alignment to be finalized throughout the planning and design process.





# SEGMENT 1: Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail to Rutherford County Line



- Wilderness Gateway, Segment 1
- Wilderness Gateway Planned Corridor
- Hickory Nut Gorge, Planned
- Conservation Easements
- Federal Land
- State Land
- Other Conservation Land
- State Parks Unit
- Private Conservation Lands

**Note:** Trail alignment shown is a graphical representation of generally desirable connections. Alignment to be finalized throughout the planning and design process.

**Description:**

This segment of the trail will connect Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail to trail built on private conservation land in McDowell County.

**Planning Strategies:**

The priority for this segment is to identify a segment manager. Once that is accomplished, then land will have to be acquired for the trail corridor.

**Projected Timeframe:** long-term

**Opportunities:**

Public support	Local planning	Large landholdings
Funding	Stream/river corridors	Land conservancy support
Land acquisition	Floodplain/wetlands	Private support
Public land	Staff resources	Sidewalk/bicycle network

**Challenges:**

Funding	Major roadway crossing	Lack of local planning
Land acquisition	Coordinating easements	Floodplain/wetlands
Stream/river crossings	Urbanized corridor	Local opposition
Needs detailed alignment	Topography	Long-term management

**Segment Details:**

**Constructed trail:** 0 miles of constructed trail

**Route alignment:** The corridor will generally follow the Buncombe County line in order to take advantage of larger parcels of land. This alignment may change depending on the willingness of the area landowners to sell or grant permanent easements on their property for the trail.

**Approximate planned length:** 6 miles

**Section sponsors:** TBD

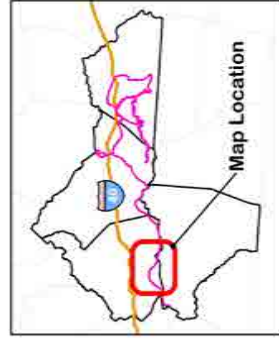
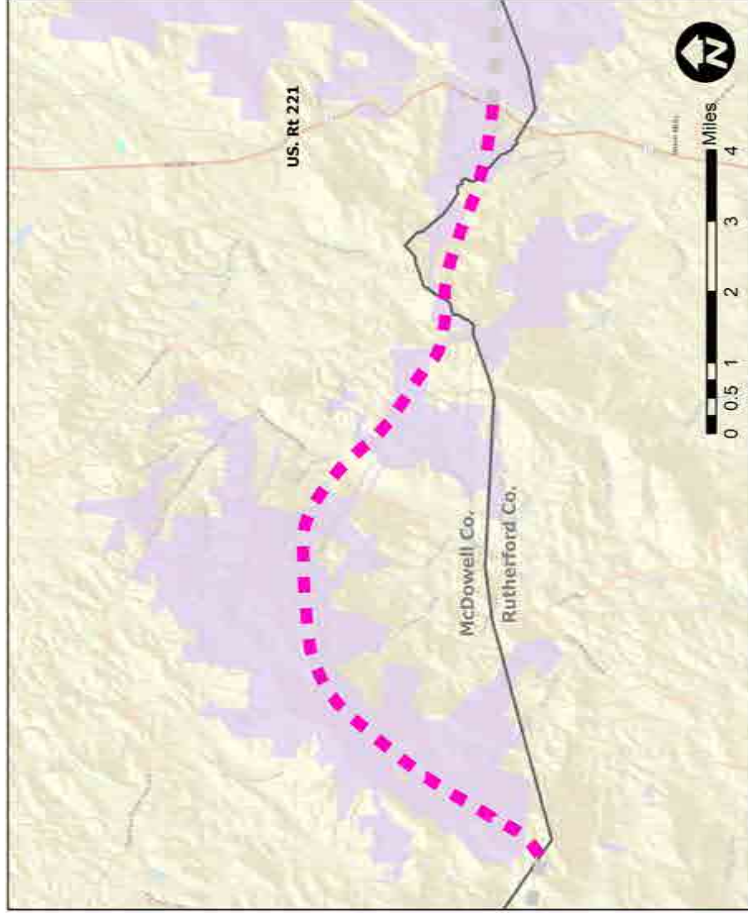
**Planning stakeholders:** Rutherford Outdoor Coalition, Conserving Carolinas Land Conservancy, Foothills Conservancy of NC, Rutherford County, NC State Parks

**Next Steps:**

- o Identify segment manager
- o Acquire land from willing sellers



# SEGMENT 2: Rutherford County Line to US 221



- - - - Wilderness Gateway, Segment 2
- - - - Wilderness Gateway Planned Corridor
- Private Conservation Lands

**Note:** Trail alignment shown is a graphical representation of generally desirable connections. Alignment to be finalized throughout the planning and design process.

**Description:**

The trail will be contained on private conservation land that will be managed by Foothills Land Conservancy.

**Planning Strategies:**

Land is still being acquired in this section. At the request of Foothills Conservancy of NC and the private conservator, planning and construction of the trail in this section will occur after all the land is acquired.

**Projected Timeframe:** mid-term

**Opportunities:**

• Public support	Local planning	• Large landholdings
• Funding	Stream/river corridors	• Land conservancy support
• Land acquisition	Floodplain/wetlands	• Private support
• Public land	Staff resources	Sidewalk/bicycle network

**Challenges:**

• Funding		Major roadway crossing	Lack of local planning
• Land acquisition		Coordinating easements	Floodplain/wetlands
• Stream/river crossings		Urbanized corridor	Local opposition
• Needs detailed alignment	• Topography		Long-term management

**Segment Details:**

**Constructed trails:** 0 miles of constructed trails

**Route alignment:** Rutherford/McDowell County line

**Approximate planned length:** 13 miles

**Section sponsor:** Foothills Conservancy of NC

**Planning stakeholders:** Rutherford County, McDowell County, NC State Parks

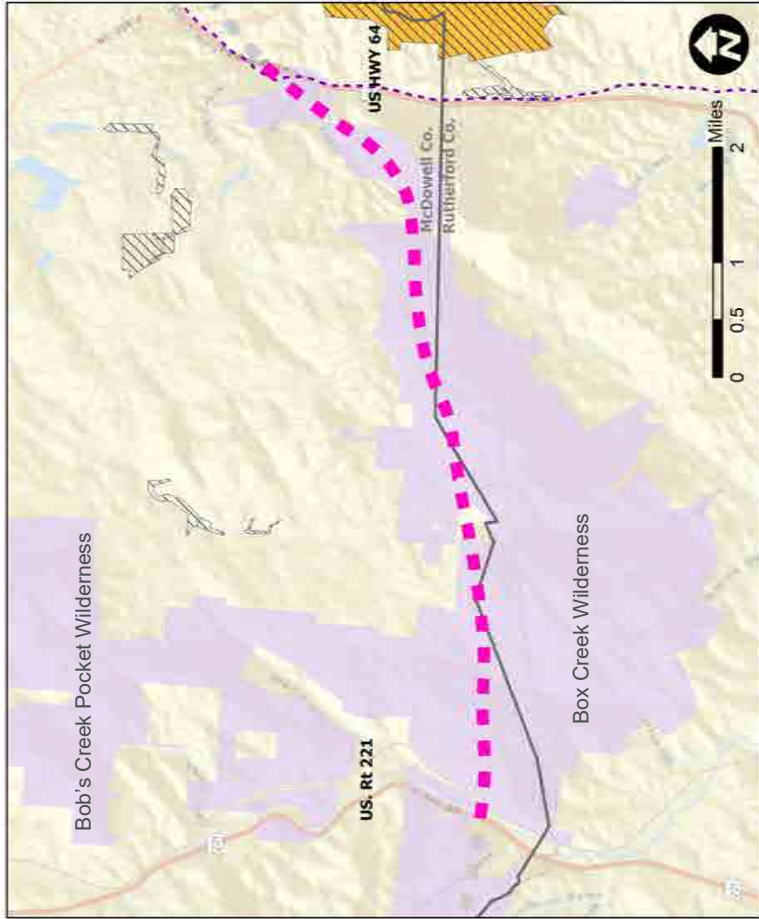
**Next Steps:**

- o Acquire land from willing sellers
- o Design sustainable trail alignment
- o Acquire permanent trail easement





# SEGMENT 3: US 221 to US 64



- Wilderness Gateway, Segment 3
- Wilderness Gateway Planned Corridor
- Overmountain Victory NHT, Planned
- Conservation Easements
- State Land
- Private Conservation Lands

**Note:** Trail alignment shown is a graphical representation of generally desirable connections. Alignment to be finalized throughout the planning and design process.

**Description:**

The trail will be located on private conservation land that is managed by Foothills Conservancy of NC. There is a complete, protected corridor between US 221 and US 64. A trailhead can be located where the trail intersects with US64.

**Planning Strategies:**

Trail construction can start once a detailed, sustainable trail design is completed. There is potential and support for a connection to the Fonta Flora State Trail through the Box Creek Wilderness. This connection might also serve to connect the Thermalbelt Rail Trail (Rutherford County) with the Peavine Rail Trail (McDowell County), a local priority.

**Projected Timeframe:** near-term

**Opportunities:**

• Public support	Local planning	• Large landholdings
• Funding	Stream/river corridors	• Land conservancy support
• Land acquisition	Floodplain/wetlands	• Private support
• Public land	Staff resources	• Sidewalk/bicycle network

**Challenges:**

• Funding	• Major roadway crossing	Lack of local planning
• Land acquisition	• Coordinating easements	Floodplain/wetlands
• Stream/river crossings	• Urbanized corridor	Local opposition
• Needs detailed alignment	• Topography	Long-term management

**Segment Details:**

**Constructed trail:** 0 miles constructed trail

**Route alignment:** Roughly parallels the Rutherford/McDowell County line

**Approximate planned length:** 8 miles

**Section sponsor:** Foothills Conservancy of NC

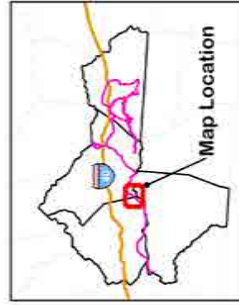
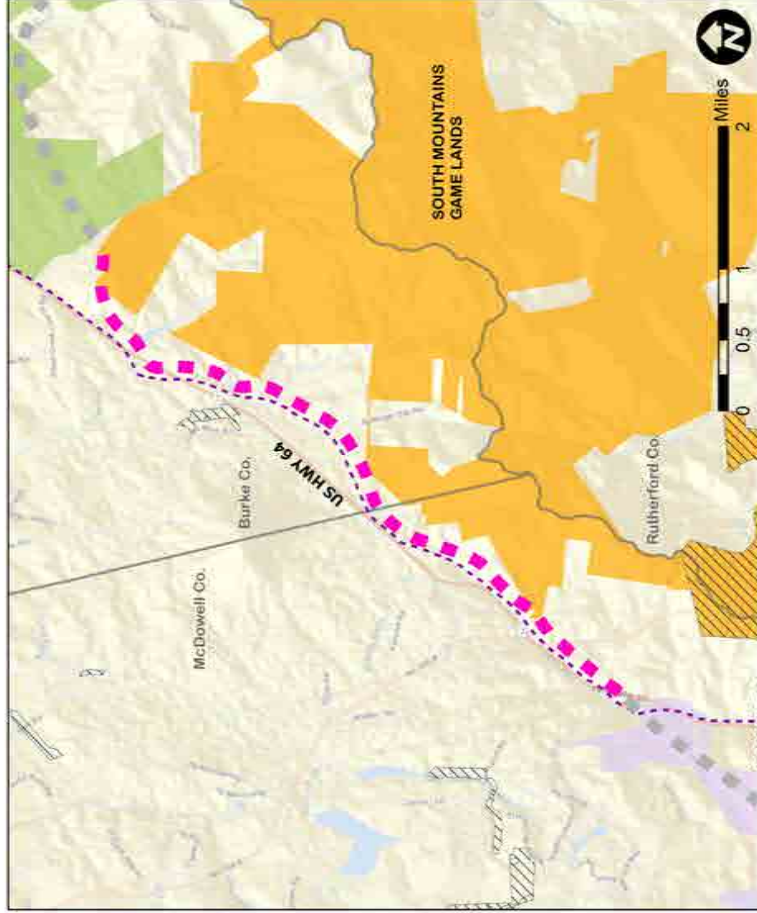
**Planning stakeholders:** McDowell County, Rutherford County, National Park Service, NC State Parks

**Next Steps:**

- o Develop a design-build proposal for sustainable trail construction
- o Acquire permanent trail easement



# SEGMENT 4: US 64 to South Mountains State Park



- - - Wilderness Gateway, Segment 4
- - - Wilderness Gateway Planned Corridor
- - - Overmountain Victory NHT, Planned
- Conservation Easements
- State Land
- State Parks Unit
- Private Conservation Lands

**Note:** Trail alignment shown is a graphical representation of generally desirable connections. Alignment to be finalized throughout the planning and design process.

**Description:**

This segment will connect trail constructed on private conservation land with South Mountains State Park. It will be co-located with the Overmountain Victory State Trail.

**Planning Strategies:**

This segment of trail will be co-located with the Overmountain Victory State Trail until it enters the state park. The trail alignment must be coordinated with the National Park Service to ensure that it occurs within their planned corridor for the Overmountain Victory Trail footpath.

**Projected Timeframe:** midterm

**Opportunities:**

Public support	Local planning	Large landholdings
Funding	Stream/river corridors	Land conservancy support
Land acquisition	Floodplain/wetlands	Private support
Public land	Staff resources	Sidewalk/bicycle network

**Challenges:**

Funding	Major roadway crossing	Lack of local planning
Land acquisition	Coordinating easements	Floodplain/wetlands
Stream/river crossings	Urbanized corridor	Local opposition
Needs detailed alignment	Topography	Long-term management

**Segment Details:**

**Constructed trail:** 0 miles of constructed trail

**Route alignment:** Co-locate with Overmountain Victory State Trail

**Approximate planned length:** 4 miles

**Section sponsor:** Burke County

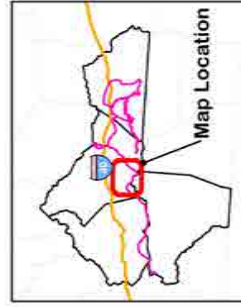
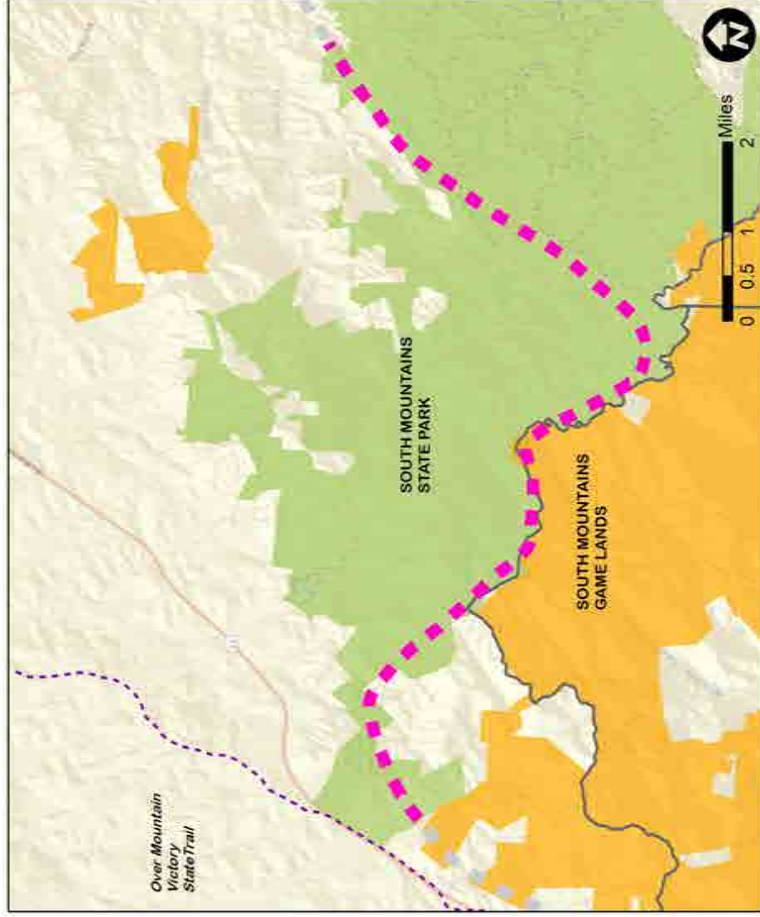
**Planning stakeholders:** National Park Service, Overmountain Victory Trail Association, South Mountains State Park, NC Wildlife Resources (South Mountains Gamelands), NC State Parks

**Next Steps:**

- o Acquire land from willing sellers
- o Coordinate with National Park Service to co-locate with Overmountain Victory State Trail
- o Coordinate planning and development with Burke and McDowell Counties
- o Coordinate with Wildlife Resources Commission (Gamelands)
- o Coordinate with South Mountains State Park



# SEGMENT 5: South Mountains State Park



- Wilderness Gateway, Segment 5
- ... Wilderness Gateway Planned Corridor
- ... Overmountain Victory NHT, Planned
- State Land
- State Parks Unit

**Note:** Trail alignment shown is a graphical representation of generally desirable connections. Alignment to be finalized throughout the planning and design process.



**Description:**

This trail segment will connect to the existing trail network in the eastern part of the park.

**Planning Strategies:**

North Carolina State Parks should hire a trail designer to design and build this segment, since the topography in the western part of the park is especially challenging. There is an opportunity to route the trail onto the game lands that are managed by the Wildlife Resources Commission.

**Opportunities:**

Public support	Local planning	Large landholdings
Funding	Stream/river corridors	Land conservancy support
Land acquisition	Floodplain/wetlands	Private support
Public land	Staff resources	Sidewalk/bicycle network

**Challenges:**

Funding	Major roadway crossing	Lack of local planning
Land acquisition	Coordinating easements	Floodplain/wetlands
Stream/river crossings	Urbanized corridor	Local opposition
Needs detailed alignment	Topography	Long-term management

**Segment Details:**

**Constructed trail:** South Mountains State Park has over 40 miles of constructed trails in the eastern part of the park. The alignment of the new trail in the western part of the park will determine which trails will be co-located with the Wilderness Gateway State Trail.

**Route alignment:** The interim route will be located on WRC's gravel access road. The permanent route will connect the western boundary of the park with the existing, sustainable trails in the eastern part.

**Approximate planned length:** 12 miles

**Section sponsors:** NC State Parks, NC Wildlife Resources Commission

**Planning stakeholders:** National Park Service, Friends of South Mtns State Park, Foothills Land Conservancy of NC, South Mountains State Park, NC Wildlife Resource Commission

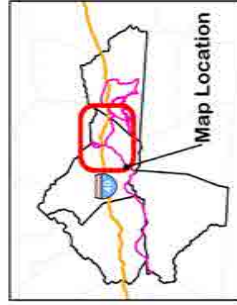
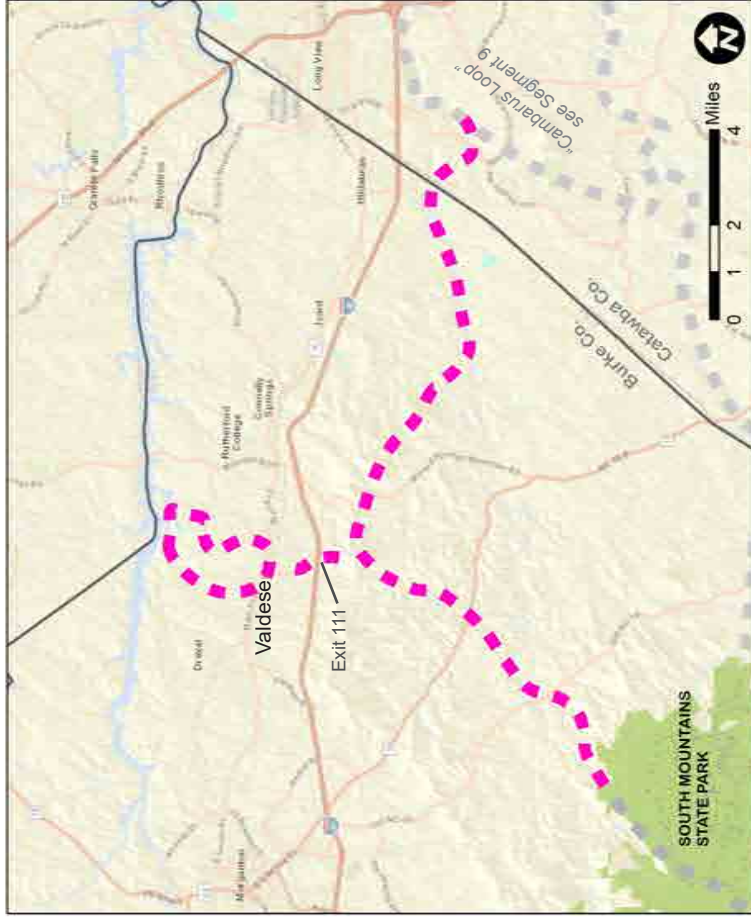
**Next Steps:**

- o Acquire land from willing sellers if needed





# SEGMENT 6: South Mountains State Park to Cambarus Loop, North



- - - Wilderness Gateway, Segment 6
- - - Wilderness Gateway Planned Corridor
- State Parks Unit
- Other Conservation Lands

**Note:** Trail alignment shown is a graphical representation of generally desirable connections. Alignment to be finalized throughout the planning and design process.

**Description:**

This segment will connect South Mountains State Park to Valdese and the north end of the Cambarus Loop.

**Planning Strategies:**

Much of this segment will be dependent on land acquisition. One of the major obstacles of this segment—crossing I-40 near Valdese—has been resolved with the NCDOT’s willingness to include bike/pedestrian access at Exit 111 when the overpass is replaced. Locating the segment south of I-40, with a connection to Valdese, takes advantage of larger tracts of undeveloped land.

**Projected Timeframe:** Long term

**Opportunities:**

Public support	Local planning	Large landholdings
Funding	Stream/river corridors	Land conservancy support
Land acquisition	Floodplain/wetlands	Private support
Public land	Staff resources	Sidewalk/bicycle network

**Challenges:**

Funding	Major roadway crossing	Lack of local planning
Land acquisition	Coordinating easements	Floodplain/wetlands
Stream/river crossings	Urbanized corridor	Local opposition
Needs detailed alignment	Topography	Long-term management

**Segment Details:**

**Constructed trail:** 0 miles of constructed trail

**Route alignment:** The route will be primarily south of I-40, other than the connections with Valdese, to take advantage of the less urbanized landscape and the partnership with Foothills Conservancy of NC.

**Approximate planned length:** 2.1 miles

**Potential segment sponsors:** TBD

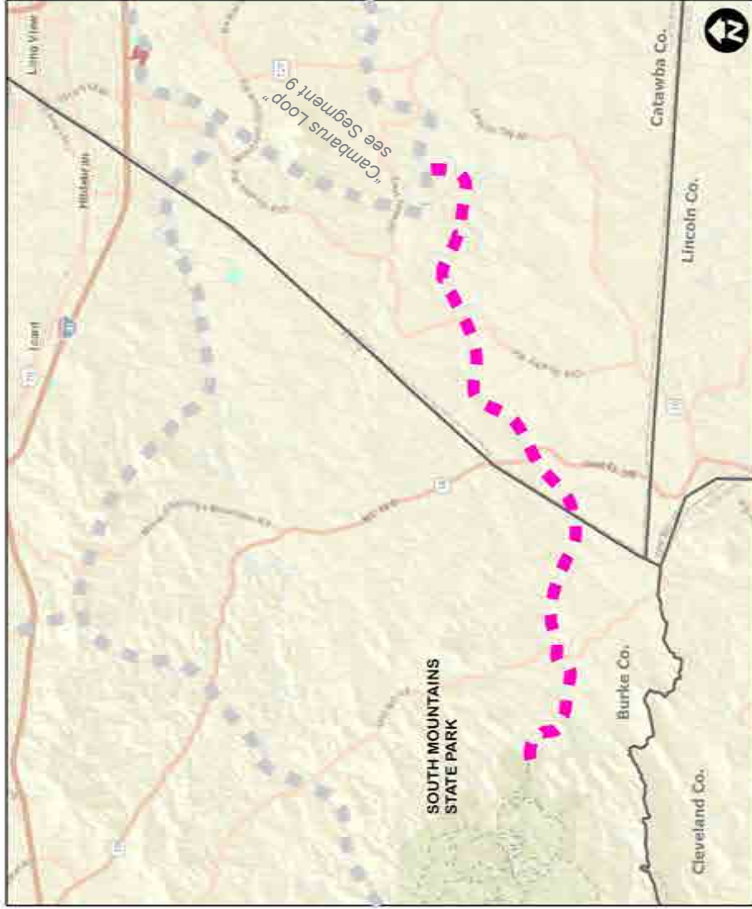
**Planning stakeholders:** Friends of Valdese Parks, Foothills Conservancy of NC, Town of Valdese, Burke County, Catawba County, NC State Parks

**Next Steps:**

- o Identify segment sponsor
- o Acquire land from willing sellers



# SEGMENT 7: South Mountains State Park to Cambarus Loop, South



**Note:** Trail alignment shown is a graphical representation of generally desirable connections. Alignment to be finalized throughout the planning and design process.

**Description:**

This segment will connect South Mountains State Park to the south end of Cambarus Loop via the Jacob Fork.

**Planning Strategies:**

Much of this segment will be dependent on land acquisition.

**Projected Timeframe:** Long term

**Opportunities:**

Public support	Local planning	Large landholdings
Funding	Stream/river corridors	Land conservancy support
Land acquisition	Floodplain/wetlands	Private support
Public land	Staff resources	Sidewalk/bicycle network

**Challenges:**

Funding	Major roadway crossing	Lack of local planning
Land acquisition	Coordinating easements	Floodplain/wetlands
Stream/river crossings	Urbanized corridor	Local opposition
Needs detailed alignment	Topography	Long-term management

**Segment Details:**

**Constructed trail:** 0 miles of constructed trail

**Route alignment:** This route will follow the Jacob Fork river east from South Mountains State park, following the riparian buffer.

**Approximate planned length:** 22 miles

**Potential segment sponsors:** TBD

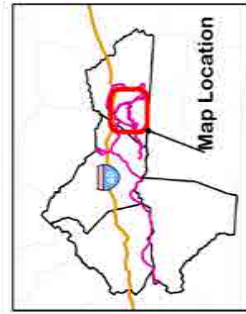
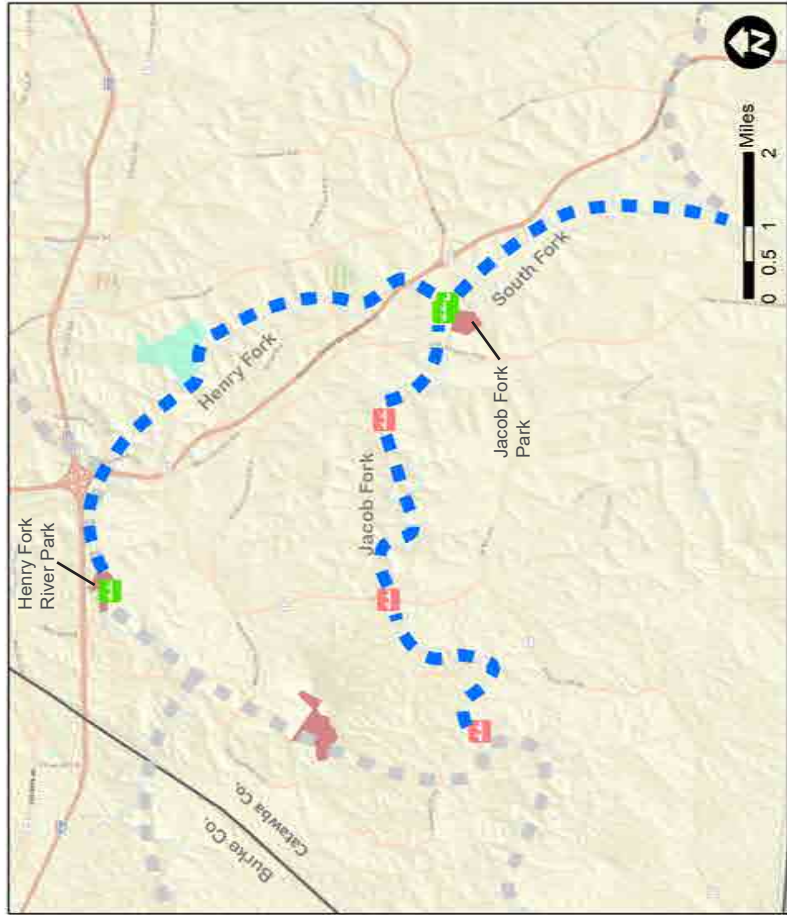
**Planning stakeholders:** Friends of Valdeese Parks, Foothills Conservancy of NC, Burke County, Catawba County, NC State Parks

**Next Steps:**

- o Identify segment sponsor
- o Acquire land from willing sellers



# SEGMENT 8: Cambarus Loop Blueway



- Wilderness Gateway, Segment 8
- Wilderness Gateway Planned Corridor
- Local Parks
- Other Conservation Lands
- Official Access point
- Unofficial Access Point

**Note:** Trail alignment shown is a graphical representation of generally desirable connections. Alignment to be finalized throughout the planning and design process.

## Description:

This segment of the trail will be a blueway, which is a paddle trail, along the Jacob Fork, Henry Fork and South Fork Catawba Rivers. It is named for an endemic crayfish species recently discovered in the area. Access points are currently available at Jacob Fork Park and Henry Fork River Park.

## Planning Strategies:

Developing a blueway encompasses acquiring and developing paddle access sites along the waterways. Parking, restrooms, access to the river and signage are all required.

## Projected Timeframe:

near-term

## Opportunities:

Public support	Local planning	Large landholdings
Funding	Stream/river corridors	Land conservancy support
Land acquisition	Floodplain/wetlands	Private support
Public land	Staff resources	Sidewalk/bicycle network

## Challenges:

Funding	Major roadway crossing	Lack of local planning
Land acquisition	Coordinating easements	Floodplain/wetlands
Stream/river crossings	Urbanized corridor	Local opposition
Needs detailed alignment	Topography	Long-term management

## Segment Details:

**Constructed trail:** 0 miles of constructed trail

**Route alignment:** The Cambarus Loop Blueway will follow the Henry Fork and Jacob Fork and continue past the confluence on South Fork Catawba River.

**Approximate planned length:** 34 miles in total (Jacob Fork-13, Henry Fork-14, South Fork-7)

**Segment sponsors:** NC State Parks, Town of Newton

**Planning stakeholders:** Foothills Conservancy of NC, Hickory, Catawba County, Town of Newton, NC State Parks

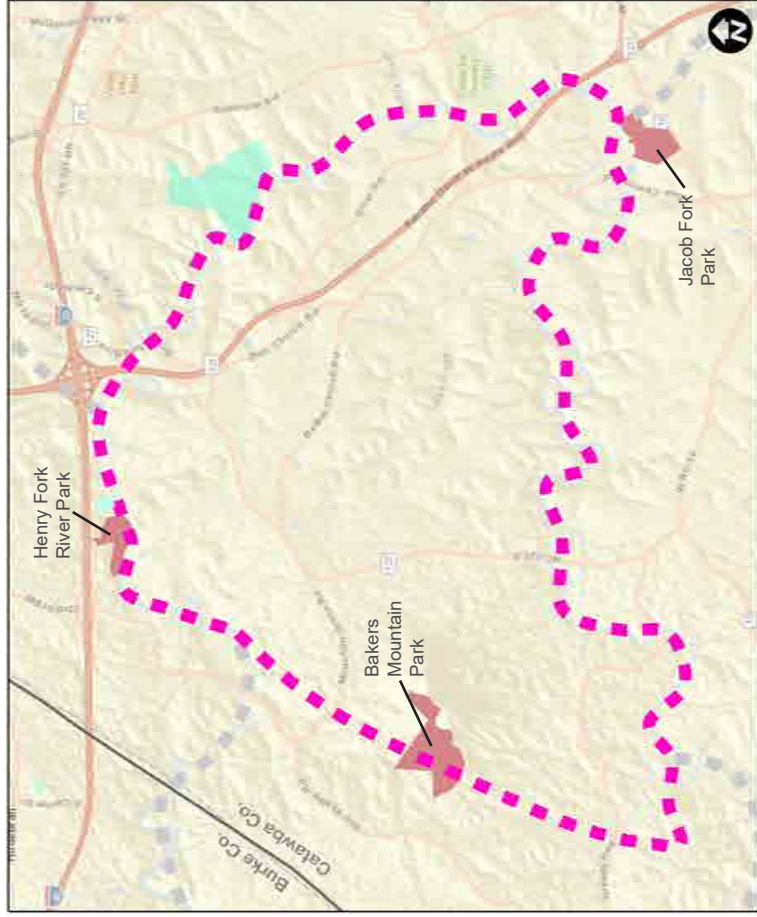
## Next Steps:

- o Acquire land from willing sellers
- o Paddle access development—river access, parking and restrooms





# SEGMENT 9: Cambarus Loop



**Note:** Trail alignment shown is a graphical representation of generally desirable connections. Alignment to be finalized throughout the planning and design process.

**Description:**

This segment of the trail will incorporate Bakers Mountain Park, a destination of interest for Catawba County, and creates a loop along the banks of Henry's Fork and Jacob's Fork. The Cambarus loop is named for an endemic crayfish species recently discovered in the area.

**Planning Strategies:**

As land is acquired, the trail will be developed.

**Projected Timeframe:** Long term

**Opportunities:**

Public support	Local planning	Large landholdings
Funding	Stream/river corridors	Land conservancy support
Land acquisition	Floodplain/wetlands	Private support
Public land	Staff resources	Sidewalk/bicycle network

**Challenges:**

Funding	Major roadway crossing	Lack of local planning
Land acquisition	Coordinating easements	Floodplain/wetlands
Stream/river crossings	Urbanized corridor	Local opposition
Needs detailed alignment	Topography	Long-term management

**Segment Details:**

**Constructed trails:** 0 miles of constructed trails

**Route alignment:** Follows the eastern segments of the Jacob and Henry Forks to their confluence at Jacob Fork Park. It will connect these segments via Bakers Mountain Park.

**Approximate planned length:** 21 miles

**Potential section sponsors:** TBD

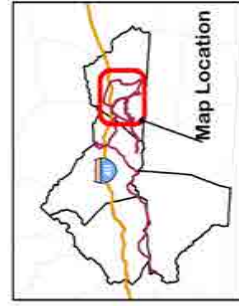
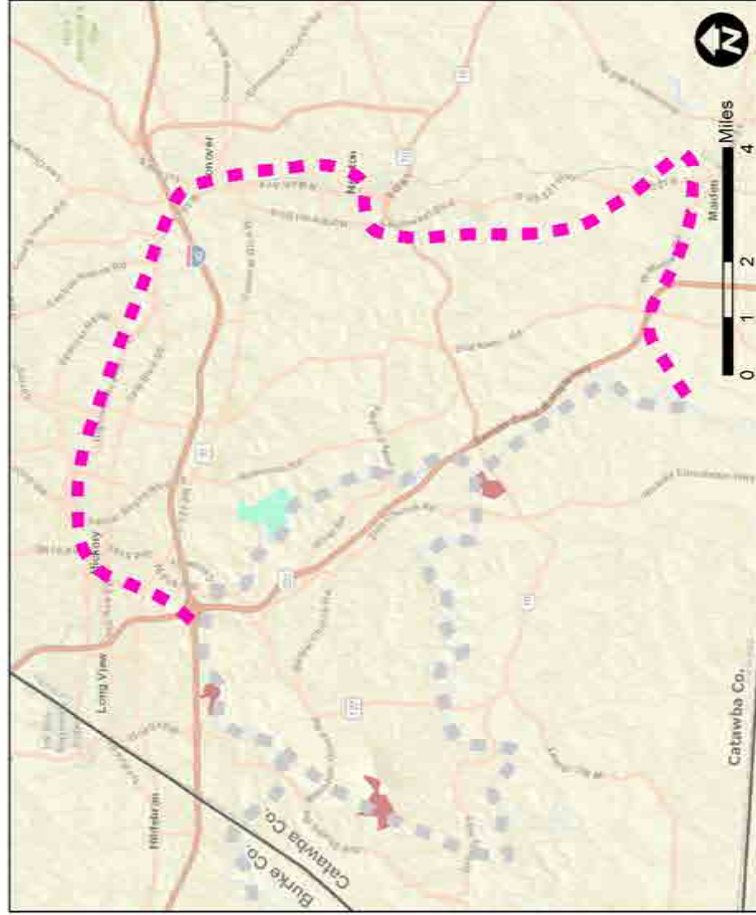
**Planning stakeholders:** Foothills Conservancy of NC, Catawba County, NC State Parks, Hickory, Newton

**Next Steps:**

- o Identify segment sponsor
- o Acquire land from willing sellers



# SEGMENT 10: Catawba County Loop



**Note:** Trail alignment shown is a graphical representation of generally desirable connections. Alignment to be finalized throughout the planning and design process.

**Description:**

The loop through Catawba County will be co-located with part of their Carolina Thread Trail network.

**Planning Strategies:**

Incorporate the planned Carolina Thread Trail route and greenway plans of Hickory and Newton.

**Projected Timeframe:** Long term

**Opportunities:**

Public support	Local planning	Large landholdings
Funding	Stream/river corridors	Land conservancy support
Land acquisition	Floodplain/wetlands	Private support
Public land	Staff resources	Sidewalk/bicycle network

**Challenges:**

Funding	Major roadway crossing	Lack of local planning
Land acquisition	Coordinating easements	Floodplain/wetlands
Stream/river crossings	Urbanized corridor	Local opposition
Needs detailed alignment	Topography	Long-term management

**Segment Details:**

**Constructed trail:** 10.02 miles

**Route alignment:** The route will be co-located with the Carolina Thread Trail system that is planned in Hickory and Conover.

**Approximate planned length:** 29 miles

**Potential section sponsors:** TBD

**Planning stakeholders:** Carolina Thread Trail, Catawba County, Hickory, Newton, NC State Parks, Foothills Conservancy of NC

**Next Steps:**

- o Identify segment sponsor
- o Acquire land/easements from willing sellers
- o Coordinate activities with Catawba County, Hickory, and Carolina Thread Trail





## CONCLUSIONS

The development of the Wilderness Gateway State Trail will provide an unparalleled regional recreational resource. Evaluation of the proposed corridor shows that the trail:

### **1. Provides significant natural, cultural, scenic and recreational value.**

- Numerous plant and animal species, including those of special concern, will benefit from the preserved trail corridor.
- The corridor intersects with locations that are integral to North Carolina history including Native American settlements, Spanish exploration, Revolutionary War battles, music, moonshine, textiles and furniture.
- Breath-taking vistas and opportunities to walk through a variety of North Carolina ecosystems.
- Multi-day hiking and camping trips.

### **2. Enough length and beauty to attract varied and significant use from regions outside the local area.**

- The planning corridor for the Wilderness Gateway State Trail is approximately 150 miles long. As the trail is constructed, that distance will increase as a result of accommodating topography and other factors.
- As the Wilderness Gateway State Trail is developed with options for camping, it will attract users from far outside the region.

### **3. Minimal and surmountable incompatible features such as roads, intrusive development or large water bodies.**

- The primary barrier for the Wilderness Gateway State Trail proved to be I-40, which could prevent connecting the trail to Valdese and Hickory. However, Hickory already has a pedestrian connection across the interstate and NCDOT is partnering to provide a pedestrian connection when the overpass at Valdese (Exit 111) is replaced.

### **4. Local public support for the general concept of a public trail and the availability of trail volunteers.**

- Without exception, every stakeholder that we met with was enthusiastic about the potential of the Wilderness Gateway State Trail.







**5. There are viable section sponsors committed to the design, construction, maintenance and management of the trail.**

- Most of the segments already have segment sponsors who have committed to the design, construction and maintenance of that portion of the trail.
- State Parks is continuing to identify segment sponsors for the remaining portions.

**6. The trail alignment can be sustainable.**

- There are sustainable design parameters which must be observed in order to prevent erosion, trail and environmental degradation or unsafe conditions.
- Each segment sponsor should seek the services of a professional trail builder, who has been trained in sustainable trail design. There are a number of trail builders in the planning area for the Wilderness Gateway State Trail.
- Trail design will be dependent on the proposed usergroup as determined by the segment sponsor.
- NC State Parks has a trails program which can provide technical assistance to the segment sponsors as they finalize their trail alignments to ensure that the planned alignment and construction techniques will be sustainable.

**7. Public review of trail corridor:** The corridor was presented to the public in open meetings in McDowell/Rutherford County, Burke County and Catawba County. We also collected comments on our website for people unable to attend any of the scheduled meetings. Comments were collected and are included as an appendix to this plan.

**8. Sustainable design and construction toolbox:** The Division assembled a "toolbox" of sustainable trail design techniques. These techniques are included in the appendix in a series of fact sheets.





## NEXT STEPS

Although this study has established that it is feasible for the Wilderness Gateway State Trail to connect natural areas, trail and communities within Catawba, Burke, McDowell and Rutherford Counties, there are further actions that must be taken in order to make this trail a reality.

### Planning:

- **Coordination:** The Division will continue to coordinate planning efforts with established Segment Sponsors and recruit additional Sponsors.
- **Branding:** The Division will develop a branding package for the Wilderness Gateway State Trail. This will include logos, blaze design and placement, and best practices for trail signage. When the branding package is completed, it will be added to this plan.

### Funding:

- **Additional funding** to supplement federal funding would facilitate and expedite completion of the Wilderness Gateway State Trail. The NC Trails Program more than twice as many applications for trail and greenway funding as Recreational Trails Program grants were able to fund.
- **Land Acquisition:** Ongoing funding will be needed to acquire land, from willing sellers, throughout the trail corridor.
- **Trail Construction:** Once the land is acquired, the segment sponsors will need funding to design and construct the trail to sustainable criteria for their trail users.
- **Ongoing maintenance and management** of the trail is critical to its success.
- **Funding for blueway infrastructure** is needed to design and construct river access, parking lots, and restroom facilities.





## Designation of Completed Segments

A State Trail as authorized by the NC General Assembly is very broad in definition and scope. To officially be recognized as a part of the State Trail, constructed trail within the planned corridor must be designated by the Secretary of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. Section sponsors may apply for designation once a trail segment is completed. Criteria for designation include public access, sustainable design and construction, developing and emergency management plan, outlining facilities provided to the public and inspection by a regional trails specialist. Once a trail has been designated it can then display a state trails sign and blazing.

## Economic Impact:

Numerous national studies have shown the positive economic impact regional trails have on the communities with which they connect. North Carolina State Parks should partner with local universities and the Department of Commerce to measure the economic impact of the Wilderness Gateway State Trail to the region and state.





## Appendix 1: State Trail Design and construction Toolbox

# HOW IS A STATE TRAIL CREATED?

A new state trail is authorized by the General Assembly—ideally after a feasibility analysis.

This analysis includes:

1. Statewide significant natural, cultural, scenic and recreation value
2. Enough potential length and beauty to attract varied and significant use from regions outside the local area.
3. Minimal and surmountable incompatible features such as roads, intrusive development or large water bodies.

If a potential State Trail meets these basic requirements, then the feasibility of inclusion as a State Trail is based on:

1. Local public support for the general concept of a public trail and the availability of trail volunteers
2. Presence of viable section sponsors committed to the design, construction, maintenance and management of the trail.
3. Environmental and economic sustainability of the trail route.

The law that creates a state trail may place some restrictions on the trail, such as specific counties where it must be located, but gives few other details on the trail location. To move beyond this concept, detailed planning is required.

NC State Parks plans the general corridor where the trail will be located. The planning process includes meeting with stakeholders, potential segment sponsors and holding public informational meetings. Usually, the planned corridor is 5-10 miles wide to permit for segment sponsors to take advantage of available land and advantageous topography.

Segment sponsors design and construct trail within the NC State Parks planned trail corridor. This should be done in coordination with NC State Parks to ensure that the segments will connect; sustainable standards are met so that the segment can be authorized as an official part of the state trail; and resources can be leveraged.

After the trail is constructed, the segment sponsor applies for state trail designation through NC State Parks. This process involves the approvals of the State Trails Planner, North Carolina Trails Committee and the Secretary of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. Criteria for designation include public access, an emergency management plan, detailing available amenities and inspection by a regional trails specialist.



Please contact the state trails program if you have any questions about state trails.



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# STATE TRAILS IN NORTH CAROLINA

## What is a State Trail?

A State Trail is a linear corridor on land or water, protected from vehicular traffic, providing public access for non-motorized recreation or transportation. All State Trails must be authorized by the General Assembly.

## Where are the State Trails?

Currently, there are nine State Trails in North Carolina:

- **Deep River State Trail** from Jamestown to Moncure 
- **Fonta Flora State Trail** from Morganton to Asheville, circling Lake James on the way 
- **French Broad River State Trail** in Transylvania, Henderson, Buncombe and Madison Counties 
- **Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail** in Henderson, Rutherford, and Buncombe Counties 
- **Mountains-to-Sea State Trail** stretching from Clingman's Dome to Jockey's Ridge State Park 
- **Northern Peaks State Trail** will connect Boone to West Jefferson along a series of mountain peaks, including Elk Knob State Park and Mount Jefferson State Natural Area. 
- **Overmountain Victory State Trail** traces the route used by patriot militia in North Carolina during the Kings Mountain campaign of 1780. 
- **Wilderness Gateway State Trail** connects Chimney Rock State Park and the Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail to South Mountains State Park, Valdese and Hickory. 
- **Yadkin River State Trail** in Wilkes, Surry, Yadkin, Forsyth, Davidson, Rowan and Davie Counties 

Not all sections of a state trail are open to bicycle or equestrian use. Please check with the land manager before you go.

These trails share legal status as components of the State Parks System. This distinguishes them from other regional and local trails and pathways. These trails offer opportunities for regional connectivity and public access to some of North Carolina's most significant and scenic landscapes.

## Who manages State Trails?

State Trails epitomize partnerships. While a State Park is operated and managed by the Division of Parks and Recreation, a State Trail is comprised of multiple connected sections and each section of the trail is sponsored by a state or federal agency, local government or private landowner.

Section sponsors build, maintain and manage their section of the trail. This includes location, design, surface, permitted uses and amenities. Section sponsors retain authority on lands under their jurisdiction. They are encouraged to showcase places of natural, scenic, historic and cultural significance; to feature the diversity of the natural communities and landscapes in the state; to consider the needs of both long and short distance hikers; and to employ recognized standards of sustainable trail design and construction. Often, and ideally, section sponsors are supported by dedicated volunteers.

The overall trail corridor planning and coordination are the responsibility of the Division of Parks and Recreation. The Division will provide guidance, coordination and assistance for the multiple section sponsors whose individual and diverse sections link together to form the State Trail. Working together on connecting sections of a State Trail is a way for communities to leverage their investments in trails to maximize the value for their citizens.

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# STATE TRAIL VOLUNTEERS

A State Trail moves from concept to reality through partnership. Since State Trails are units of the State Parks system, North Carolina State Parks plans the overall route of the State Trail. Various Segment Sponsors coordinate the construction, management and maintenance of the trails on the property that they manage. The true backbone of the effort to make a State Trail a reality are the volunteers. Volunteers construct and maintain segments of each of our State Trails in cooperation with the Segment Sponsor. This effort takes thousands of volunteers. So, each of the State Trails has an organization that is dedicated to supporting volunteer efforts. If you would like to volunteer—and we hope you do—please contact one of these organizations.

## Deep River State Trail

### Randolph County Trails Advisory Council

✉ [maryjoan.pugh@randolphcountync.gov](mailto:maryjoan.pugh@randolphcountync.gov)  
☎ (336) 963-2715

## French Broad State Trail

### Riverlink

🌐 <https://riverlink.org/get-involved/volunteer/>  
✉ [volunteer@riverlink.org](mailto:volunteer@riverlink.org)  
☎ (828) 252-8474 x112

## Fonta Flora State Trail

### Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail

✉ [friendsoffontaflora@gmail.com](mailto:friendsoffontaflora@gmail.com)  
☎ (828) 652-7121 x1333

## Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail

### Conserving Carolina

🌐 <https://conservingcarolina.org/get-involved/volunteer-with-us/>  
✉ [peter@conservingcarolina.org](mailto:peter@conservingcarolina.org)  
☎ (828) 697-5777

## Mountains-to-Sea State Trail (MST)

### Friends of the MST

🌐 <https://mountainstoseatrail.org/get-involved/volunteer/>  
✉ [bbrown@mountainstoseatrail.org](mailto:bbrown@mountainstoseatrail.org)  
☎ (919) 825-0297

## Northern Peaks State Trail

### Blue Ridge Conservancy

🌐 [www.blueridgeconservancy.org](http://www.blueridgeconservancy.org)  
✉ [info@blueridgeconservancy.org](mailto:info@blueridgeconservancy.org)  
☎ (828) 264-2511

## Overmountain Victory State Trail

### Overmountain Victory Trail Association

🌐 <https://www.ovta.org/>  
✉ [tpvaughan@aol.com](mailto:tpvaughan@aol.com)  
☎ (423) 366-8639

## Wilderness Gateway State Trail

### Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina

🌐 <https://www.foothillsconservancy.org/volunteer>  
☎ (828) 437-9930

## Yadkin River State Trail

### Yadkin Riverkeeper

🌐 <https://www.yadkinriverkeeper.org/volunteer>  
✉ [info@yadkinriverkeeper.org](mailto:info@yadkinriverkeeper.org)  
☎ (336) 722-4949



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# STATE TRAILS AND PRIVATE LANDOWNERS

Before a state trail can cross private property, either NC State Parks or the segment sponsor must negotiate an easement or fee simple purchase of the trail corridor from a willing landowner. The landowner can donate the land or the easement and benefit from any applicable tax advantages.

A trail easement is a situation where the landowner makes their land available for a public trail without having to subdivide the land or lose ownership of the land. The easement goes with the land, so even if the landowner moves away, the trail will be permanently protected.

In either case, easement or purchase, NC State Parks only works with willing landowners.

1. A willing landowner lets State Parks know that they will consider selling land for a trail on their property.
2. If the landowner intends to sell the easement or fee simple, State Parks will arrange for an appraisal of the property. The appraiser will contact the landowner for permission to appraise the property in order to determine its fair market value. The State pays the cost of the appraisal.

*Note: If the landowner intends to donate some or all the value of the fee or easement, and also intends to claim some tax donation, it is the landowners' responsibility to obtain their own appraisal.*

3. Once the appraisal is completed, the State Property Office will contact the landowner with an offer. The landowner can accept or reject this offer.
4. If the offer is accepted, the State Property Office will prepare an option agreement. This legal contract sets a date for the State to complete formalizing the sale or easement. The landowner must reserve the right for the easement to the State until the end date on the option agreement.
5. A formal survey of the proposed property is completed after the option agreement has been signed by the landowner. This survey identifies the exact property that will be conveyed for the trail. The State pays the cost of the appraisal and the survey.
6. North Carolina law requires that all conveyance of real estate to the State, whether fee or easement, must be approved by the Council of State. The State Property Office will handle this.
7. In the case of selling property, the State will arrange with a local attorney to draft the deed to the State, to obtain the necessary signatures from both the State and the landowner, to transfer any funds from the State to the landowner at closing, and to have documents recorded with the county's Register of Deeds.
8. In the case of selling an easement (conveying an easement), the State will have an easement document drafted, which will outline any restrictions on the property. Generally, this includes logging and hunting on the actual property covered by the easement. All easements will permit public access to the trail on the property.
9. Once terms of the easement are final, the State will arrange with a local attorney to obtain the necessary signatures from both the State and the landowner, to transfer any funds from the State to the landowner, and to have documents recorded with the county's Register of Deeds. The easement is permanent, and noted on the title to the land, so it will go with the land even if the land is sold. This will protect the trail for future generations.
10. If the landowner decides that a donation of property is preferable because of potential tax advantages or personal preference, State Parks will pay for the survey and closing costs, but not an appraisal.

*\*This process can take a year to complete.*

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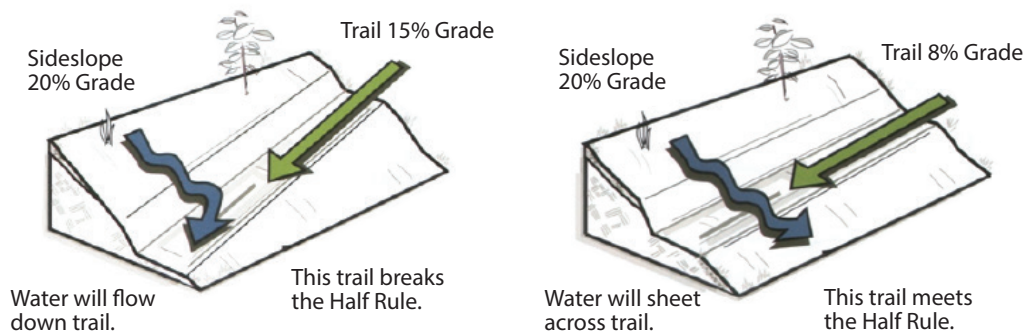
# SUSTAINABLE TRAIL DESIGN

Properly designing trails is both an art and a science. Sustainable trail design reduces environmental impact; increases visitor safety; and is more aesthetically pleasing. The goal is to keep water off the trail. In almost every instance, the sustainable trail needs follow the contours of the land.

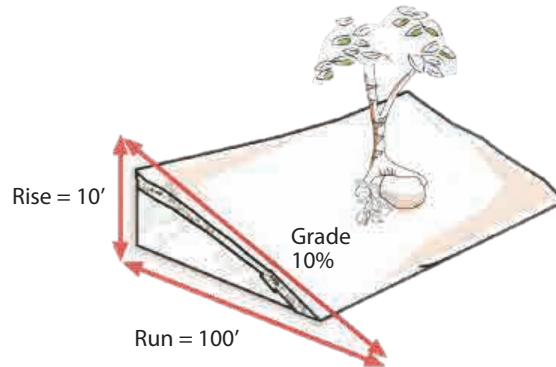
NC State Parks strongly recommends that segment sponsors use a professional trail builder to lead the design and construction of trails. Technical assistance in trail design is available from the State Trails Program. Please see the website, <https://trails.nc.gov/> for contact information.

The five essential elements of sustainable trails: (adapted from Trail Solutions)

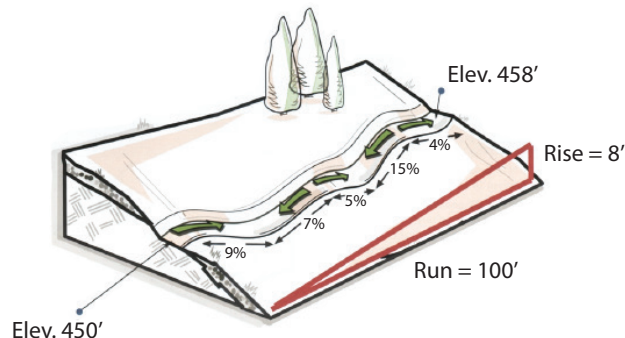
- 1. Half Rule:** The trail needs to move across the landscape so that the slope of the trail is less than half of the slope of the land on either side of the trail. Otherwise, water will run down the trail causing a myriad of issues including erosion and reduced user safety and experience. Surprisingly, this is most commonly an issue in gently sloping terrain.



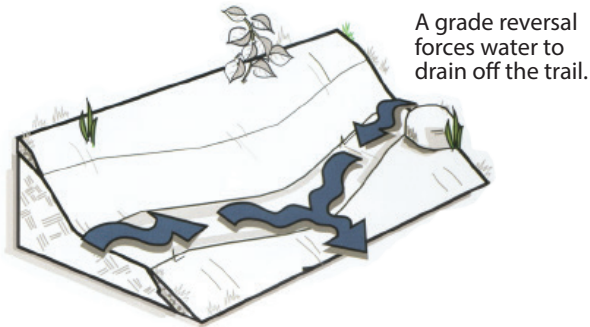
- 2. Ten Percent Average Guideline:** The average overall grade of the entire trail should be 10% or less to be sustainable. This applies to most soil types, minimizes erosion, allows design flexibility, and accommodates undulations.



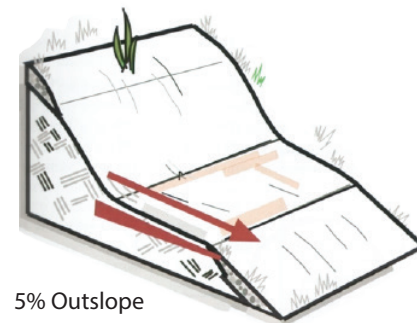
- 3. Maximum Sustainable Trail Grade:** While 10% is the maximum average trail grade, sections of trail can exceed 10% depending on a host of factors including soil type, sideslope, annual rainfall, grade reversals, type of users and the number of users. A trail professional is best equipped to help you decide the maximum grade of your trail.



**4. Grade Reversals:** This is a location on a trail where the grade changes direction. If the trail is going uphill, there need to be points, about every 20'-50' where the trail levels out and goes downhill gradually for 10'-50'. It is primarily a way to use gravity to ensure that water gets off the trail surface. It also is a reward for the user, allowing them to use different muscles and resting a little during an extended climb.



**5. Outslope:** The outer (downhill) edge of a trail should be sloped approximately 3-5% downhill. This is yet another construction technique that helps to keep water off the surface of a trail.



**Recommended Resources:**

[Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Building Sweet Singletrack.](#) International Mountain Bicycling Association, Boulder, CO, 2004.  
[Equestrian Design Guidebook for Trails, Trailheads, and Campgrounds.](#) USDA Forest Service, Missoula, MT, 2007  
America Trails — [www.americatrails.org](http://www.americatrails.org)

All images are from [Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Building Sweet Singletrack](#)

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# TRAILS AS HABITATS

The news about the state of the natural world is grim. Over 8,500 species in North America are at risk of extinction. 95% of the United States has been logged, tilled, drained, grazed, paved or otherwise developed<sup>1</sup>. Climate change is upon us. Many people do not feel any connection to the natural world. Habitat fragmentation makes even large plant and animal populations small and isolated from each other, which increases the risk for local extinctions.

There is good news. Trails can provide vital biological corridors that enable species to move between habitats. Additionally, with thoughtful management, trails become vital habitats, especially in urban and suburban areas.

Once you have designed and constructed a sustainable trail, you can create quality habitat utilizing the following steps:

1. Remove invasive plant species. Invasive plants truly limit an ecosystem's ability to function. If you need help determining which plants along the trail are invasive, go to <http://nc-ipc.weebly.com/nc-invasive-plants.html>. This is the website for the NC Invasive Plant Council and is an excellent resource. You will notice that some of the worst invasives are still being sold in nurseries.
2. Plant keystone species. Research has shown that a few genera of native plants undergird most local ecosystems. These species include native oaks, cherries, willows, goldenrods and asters. To get a specific list for your area, consult the National Wildlife Federation's Native Plant Finder at <https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder>.
3. Plant for specialist pollinators. While the Monarch butterfly is probably the best known specialist pollinator, many bees, butterflies and other native insects pollinate only one plant, or plant group. North Carolina Cooperative Extension offers resources for planting for specialist pollinators at <https://growingmallfarms.ces.ncsu.edu/growingmallfarms-pollinatorconservation/>.
4. Plant more plants. Be generous with your plantings and be sure to consider increasing the diversity of your plants, along with the abundance. Think about vertical layers when planning your plantings.
5. Don't use turfgrass to edge your trail. Use a native groundcover and reduce your maintenance—and make the edge habitat far more inviting for a host of species.



## Resources:

Tallamy, Douglas. *Nature's Best Hope*. Timber Press, Portland, OR, 2019

<sup>1</sup> *Nature's Best Hope* by Douglas Tallamy

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# INVASIVE PLANTS FOUND IN THE MOUNTAINS OF NORTH CAROLINA

## Trees

Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*)  
Mimosa (*Albizia julibrissin*)  
Princess Tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*)  
Bradford Pear (*Pyrus calleryana*)

## Shrubs

Leatherleaf Mahonia (*Berberis bealei*)  
Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*)  
Butterfly bush (*Buddleja davidii*)  
Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*)  
Thorny olive (*Elaeagnus pungens*)  
Autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*)  
Burning bush (*Euonymus alata*)  
Chinese privet (*Ligustrum sinense*)  
Sacred bamboo (*Nandina domestica*)  
Trifoliolate orange (*Poncirus trifoliata*)\*\*\*  
Multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*)  
Japanese spirea (*Spiraea japonica* var. *fortune*)

## Vines

Chocolate vine (*Akebia quinata*)\*\*\*  
Porcelain berry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*)  
Bushkiller (*Cayratia japonica*)\*\*\*  
Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*)  
Sweet Autumn Virgin Bower (*Clematis terniflora*)  
Air potato (*Dioscorea bulbifera*)\*\*\*  
Winter creeper (*Euonymus fortunei* var. *radicans*)  
English ivy (*Hedera helix*)  
Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*)  
Bush honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii*)  
Mile-a-minute vine (*Persicaria perfoliate*)\*\*\*  
Kudzu (*Pueraria montana*)  
Japanese wisteria (*Wisteria floribunda*)  
Chinese wisteria (*Wisteria sinensis*)

## Herbaceous Plants

Garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolate*)  
Small carpetgrass (*Arthraxon hispidus*)  
Giant reed (*Arundo donax*)\*\*\*  
Canada Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*)  
Fig buttercup (*Ficaria verna*)  
Ground ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*)  
Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)\*\*\*  
Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*)\*\*\*  
Yellowflag iris (*Iris pseudacorus*)  
Bicolor/shrub lespedeza (*Lespedeza bicolor*)  
Chinese lespedeza (*Lespedeza cuneate*)  
Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*)\*\*\*  
Japanese stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*)  
Chinese silvergrass (*Miscanthus sinensis*)  
Marsh Dewflower (*Murdannia keisak*)  
Reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*)  
Golden bamboo (*Phyllostachys aurea*)  
Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*)  
Wineberry (*Rubus phoenicolasius*)  
Johnson grass (*Sorghum halepense*)  
Purple Crownvetch (*Securigera varia*)  
Coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*)

This list of invasive species was prepared with information from the NC Invasive Plant Council (<http://nc-ipc.weebly.com/>) and EDDMapS (<https://www.eddmaps.org/>). These organizations are excellent resources for invasive species.

\*\*\* denotes invasive species that are a future threat or have only been found in a few occurrences in the NC mountains. If you find a plant that you suspect is invasive, please report it to NC Dept. of Agriculture by calling 1-800-206-9333 or by email: [newpest@ncagr.gov](mailto:newpest@ncagr.gov).

Please contact the state trails program if you have any questions about state trails.



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division of parks and recreation  
**NC TRAILS**

# FUNDING SOURCES FOR TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

Funding Source	Agency/ Organization	Notes
<b>Federal</b>		
Recreational Trails Program (RTP)	Funding from FHWA, administered by NC State Parks	<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> government agencies and non-profit organizations <b>Eligible Projects:</b> trail construction/maintenance; trail facilities <b>Match:</b> 25% (cash, in-kind and volunteer hours)
Land and Water Conservation Fund	NC State Parks	<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> State and local governments <b>Eligible Projects:</b> outdoor recreation and land acquisition <b>Match:</b> 50/50
NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance	National Park Service	<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> Project applicants may be state and local agencies, tribes, nonprofit organizations, or citizen groups. National Parks and other Federal agencies may apply in partnership with other local organizations. <b>Eligible Projects:</b> Technical assistance for projects demonstrating tangible conservation and recreational results in the near future. Assistance qualifies for in-kind match for many grants. <b>Match:</b>
Better Utilizing Investment to Leverage Development (BUILD)	U.S. Department of Transportation	<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> State, local or tribal governments <b>Eligible Projects:</b> Transportation projects—historically 6% go to bike/ped projects. Applications require cost/benefit analysis. Min project size \$1M in rural areas and \$5M in urban areas <b>Match:</b> 20% nonfederal match, but can be less in Tier 2 and 3 counties
<b>State</b>		
Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF)	NC State Parks/NCSU Recreation Resource Services	<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> local government <b>Eligible Projects:</b> Land acquisition and construction of parks and recreation projects, including trails <b>Match:</b> 50/50 (cash or land)
Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF)	Division of Land and Water Stewardship NC DNCR	<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> government agencies and NPO's <b>Eligible Projects:</b> land acquisition, stream restoration, planning, stormwater treatment technology <b>Match:</b> Strongly encouraged
Safe Routes to School Program	Integrated Mobility Division NC Department of Transportation	<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> local and regional entities <b>Eligible Projects:</b> Planning, development and implementation of projects that enable and encourage children to walk to school. Sidewalks, shared use paths and intersection improvements are all eligible. <b>Match:</b> 20% local match
Strategic Transportation Investments	North Department of Transportation	<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> Local governments <b>Eligible Projects:</b> Bicycle and pedestrian and public transportation facilities that appear in a state, regional or locally adopted transportation plan will be included in proposed roadway projects. Your first point of contact should be your Metropolitan or Rural Planning Organization (MPO/RPO) <b>Match:</b> 20% non-state funds
<b>Private</b>		
Made in North Carolina	Various private foundations	<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> Varies, but tends to include NPO's and government agencies <b>Eligible Projects:</b> Varies—several include specific counties and/or healthy outcomes <b>Match:</b> Varies
Duke Energy	Duke Energy Foundation	<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> NPO or governmental agency that serves an area served by Duke Power <b>Eligible Projects:</b> Conservation, access to nature, habitat and forest restoration and conservation <b>Match:</b>
Black Mtn Endowment	Community Foundation of Western North Carolina	<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> NPOs, governmental, educational and religious organizations serving Black Mountain and the Swannanoa Valley (Owen School District) <b>Eligible Projects:</b> The Fund's intent is to support innovative projects and programs in the Swannanoa Valley. Grants of \$2,500 to \$10,000 are made for charitable purposes, including programmatic needs, equipment and technology, and capital needs. At its discretion, the Black Mountain-Swannanoa Valley Endowment Fund Advisory Board may also consider grant requests for greater or lesser amounts. Generally, requests for continued support for a grant funded in the prior year or for general operating support will be given a lower priority. <b>Match:</b> Varies



Funding Source	Agency/ Organization	Notes
McDowell County Endowment	Community Foundation of Western North Carolina	<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> Grants are made to qualified 501(c)(3), governmental, educational, and religious organizations serving McDowell County. <b>Eligible Projects:</b> The McDowell Endowment provides grants between \$2,500 - \$5,000 for charitable purposes. At its discretion, The McDowell Endowment Advisory Board may also consider grant requests for greater or lesser amounts. Requests that exhibit the greatest community benefit will be given the highest consideration. <b>Match:</b> Varies
Rutherford County Endowment	Community Foundation of Western North Carolina	<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> Grants are made to qualified 501(c)(3), governmental, educational, and religious organizations serving Rutherford County. <b>Eligible Projects:</b> Grants of \$2,500 to \$10,000 will be made to nonprofit organizations and public agencies for charitable purposes, including programmatic and capital needs. Requests that exhibit the greatest community benefit (including requests addressing education; early childhood development; health and wellness; assisting people in need; arts, culture and natural resources; or the environment) will be given the highest consideration. <b>Match:</b> Varies
Community Foundation of NC	Community Foundation of North Carolina	<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> Grants are made to nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations and public agencies serving the following 18 counties: Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania and Yancey and including the Qualla Boundary. <b>Eligible Projects:</b> Varies — see website for details <b>Match:</b> Varies
Golden Leaf		<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> NPOs and governmental agencies <b>Eligible Projects:</b> Grants in this program are not expected to exceed \$200,000. Since requests are likely to far exceed funds available, the Foundation will be looking for projects in the following focus areas of Economic Investment and Job Creation, Workforce Preparedness and Education, Agriculture, and Community Vitality. <b>Match:</b>
Bank of America Charitable Foundation	Bank of America Charitable Foundation, Inc	<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> Must be tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and not classified as a private foundation. <b>Eligible Projects:</b> Projects strengthen communities by investing in affordable housing, revitalization, the arts, and the environment. <b>Match:</b>
Z Smith Reynolds	Z Smith Reynolds Foundation	<b>Eligible Applicants:</b> charitable, tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organizations, colleges/universities, religious entities and government units. <b>Eligible Projects:</b> The Collaborative Problem-Solving approach is intended to support a limited number of community proposals that use inclusive, collaborative and resourceful processes to authentically engage the community to tackle challenges and create solutions. In particular, we seek to fund efforts that work across sectors (public, private, nonprofit) and/or geographic lines (municipal, county, etc.), are built on existing community assets, use a racial equity lens, and/or bring people together across identity or ideology. <b>Match:</b>

Please contact the state trails program if you have any questions about state trails.



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# BENEFITS OF TRAILS

## Increased property values

- Trails are the most desired community amenity that homeowners seek when buying a home.  
– Robert Charles Lesser and Co, 2018
- Homes closer to a regional trail/greenway are valued 5-9% more than similar homes that are farther away (ITRE 2018)

## Promote healthy living

- One study has shown that for every \$1 spent on trail development, \$3 are saved in healthcare costs (American Heart Association, 2011)
- There is a direct and measurable correlation between how close (up to 2.5 miles) people live to biking and walking infrastructure and how much exercise they get. Those living within 1 mile of a trail get an average of 45 minutes/week more exercise than they did before a trail was available. (American Journal of Public Health, 2014)

## Protect the environment

- Vegetated trail corridors provide safe passage to wildlife traveling in increasingly urbanized environments
- The vegetation protected within a trail corridor traps sediments and slows water in riparian habitats, which increases water quality
- Trails help air quality both by reducing motor vehicle use and by maintaining trees which absorb pollutants
- Provide habitat for native species

## Provide recreational opportunities

- Hiking and walking are consistently ranked as the #1 outdoor activity across age groups (Adventure Travel Trade Association, 2017)

## Encourage economic development

- Retail shops, restaurants, accommodations and other industries in local and regional economies can experience notable economic benefits when in proximity to a shared use path (ITRE, 2018)
- The American Tobacco Trail (22+ mile trail in Triangle area) contributes \$6.1M to the local economy annually; supports 78 jobs and generates \$2.2M annually in labor income (ITRE, 2018)
- Contribute to a community's identity
- The Town of Elkin is a prime example. Since promoting the MST, they have seen new trail-based businesses rejuvenate an economy that was formerly dependent on the textile industry
- Provide alternative transportation opportunities
- Reduces motor vehicle emissions and the amount of traffic on roads as commuters take advantage of alternative ways to get to work and school.

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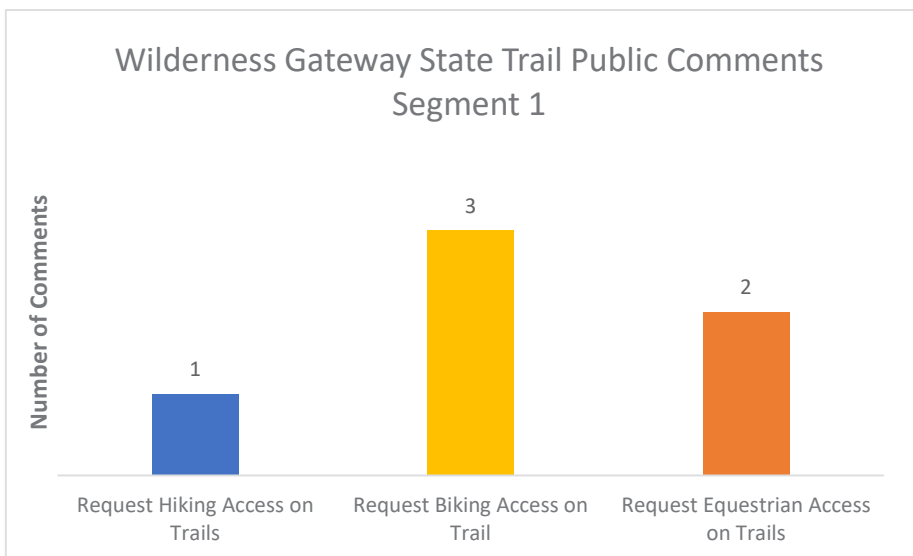
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**NCTRAILS**

## Appendix 2: Public Comments on the Wilderness Gateway State Trail Plan

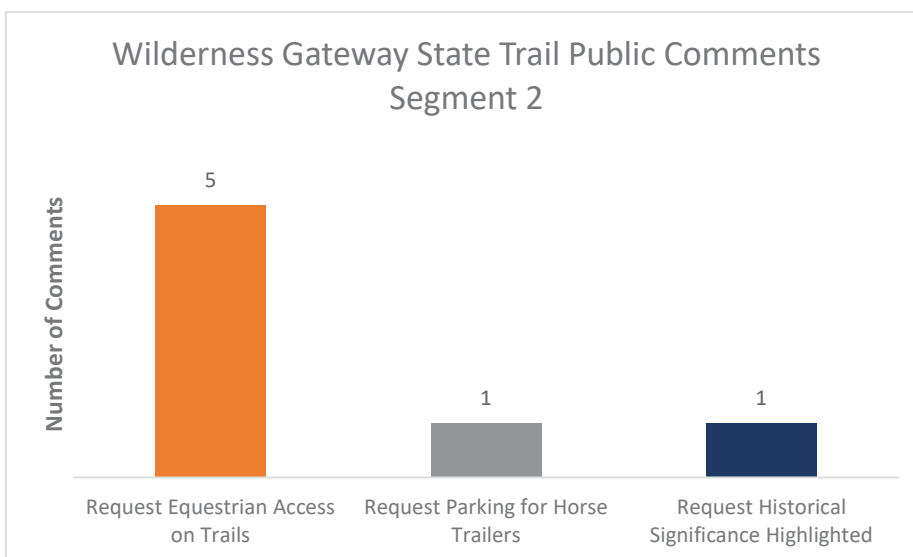
### WILDERNESS GATEWAY STATE TRAIL PUBLIC COMMENTS

#### Segment 1: Hickory Nut Gorge State Trail to Rutherford County Line



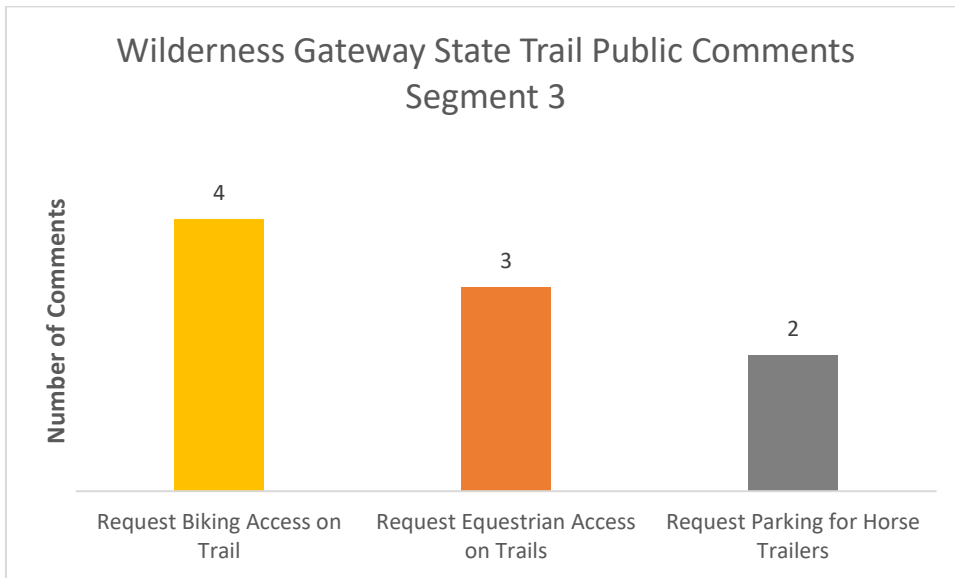
Additional Details: None

#### Segment 2: Rutherford County Line to US 221



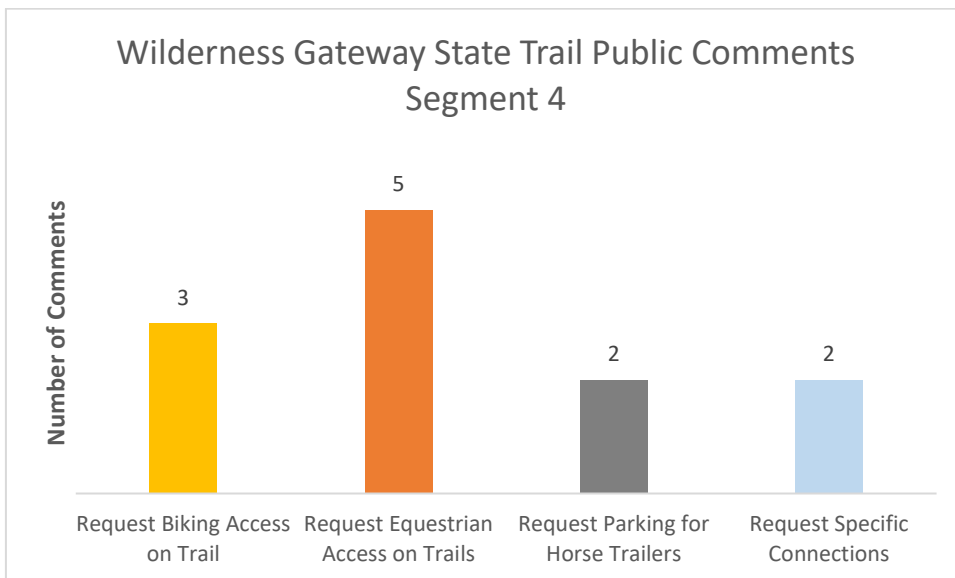
Additional Details: Spring House Farm (1826) has an old growth forest and historical significance.

### Segment 3: US 221 to US 64



Additional Details: None

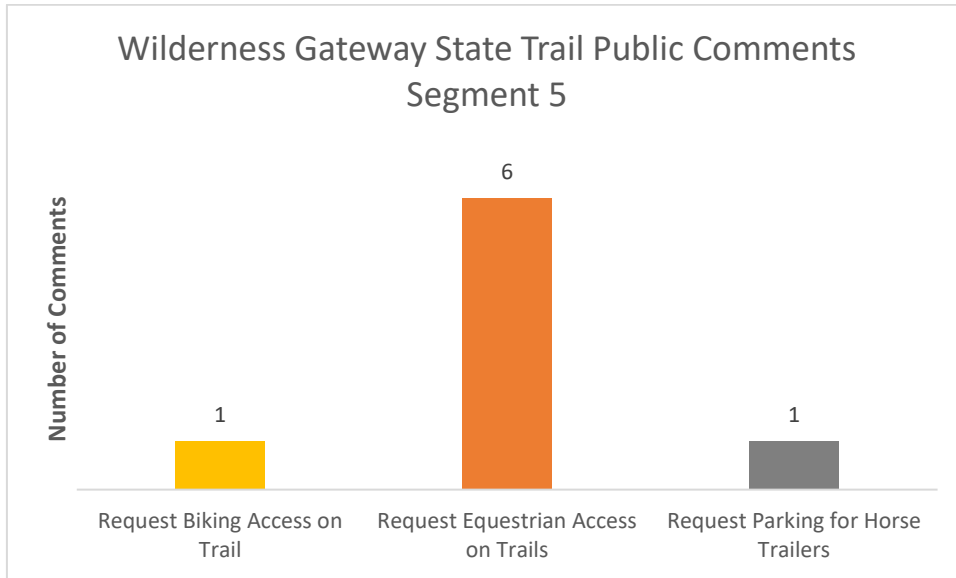
### Segment 4: US 64 to South Mountains State Park



Additional Details: Connections requested for Burkemunt Mountain Road, and to connect Clear Creek to South Mountain State Park Trails.

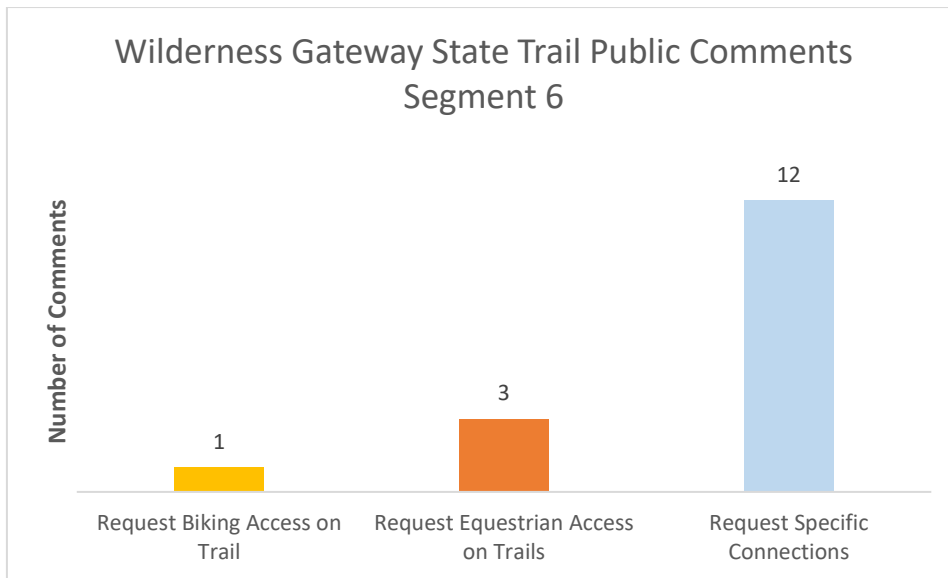


## Segment 5: South Mountains State Park



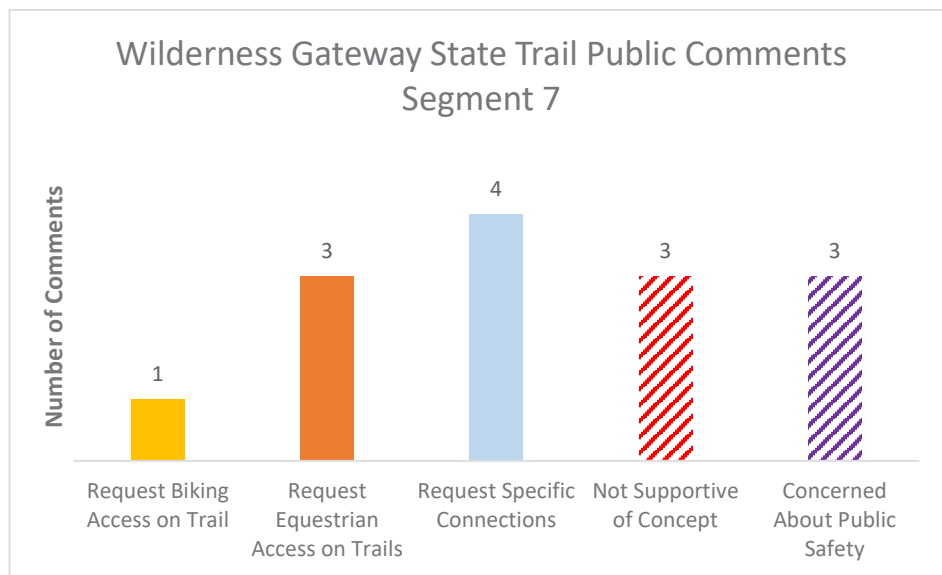
*Additional Details: None.*

## Segment 6: South Mountains State Park to Cambarus Loop, North



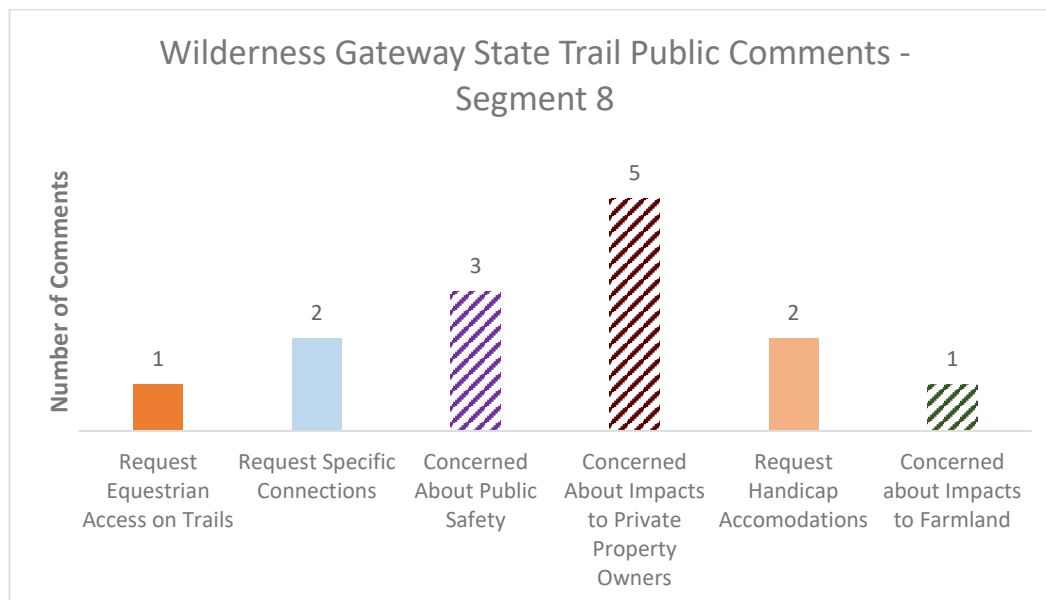
*Additional Details: Trails to Valdese was requested 7 times, a connection to Lakeside Park was requested 2 times. It was mentioned that a property behind 5253 Mineral Springs Mountain Ave is available for sale and has a great view.*

## Segment 7: South Mountains State Park to Cambarus Loop, South



*Additional Details: Specific connection requests include Maiden, Rocky River and Plateau, Carolina Thread, and Lyle Creek. Safety concerns include crime, liability, and hunters shooting trail users accidentally.*

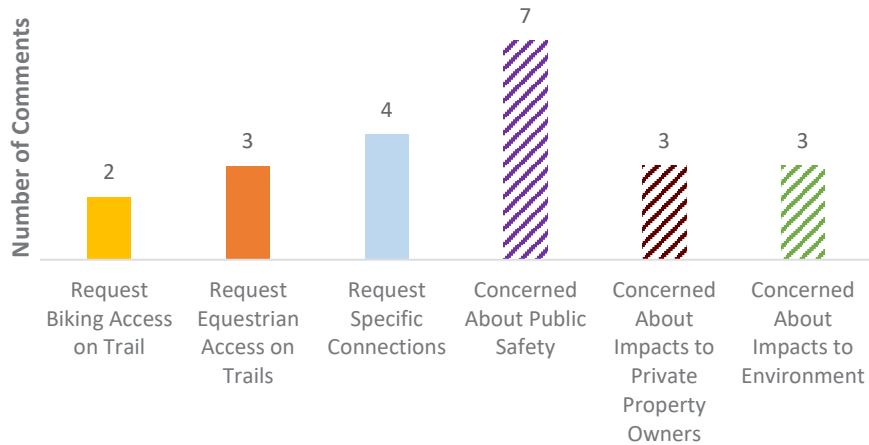
## Segment 8: Cambarus Loop Blueway



*Additional Details: Specific connection requests include a paddle trail extending to Old Shelby Road. Safety concerns include drug use, trespassing, and general crime. One person requested additional trainings for EMS and Fire.*

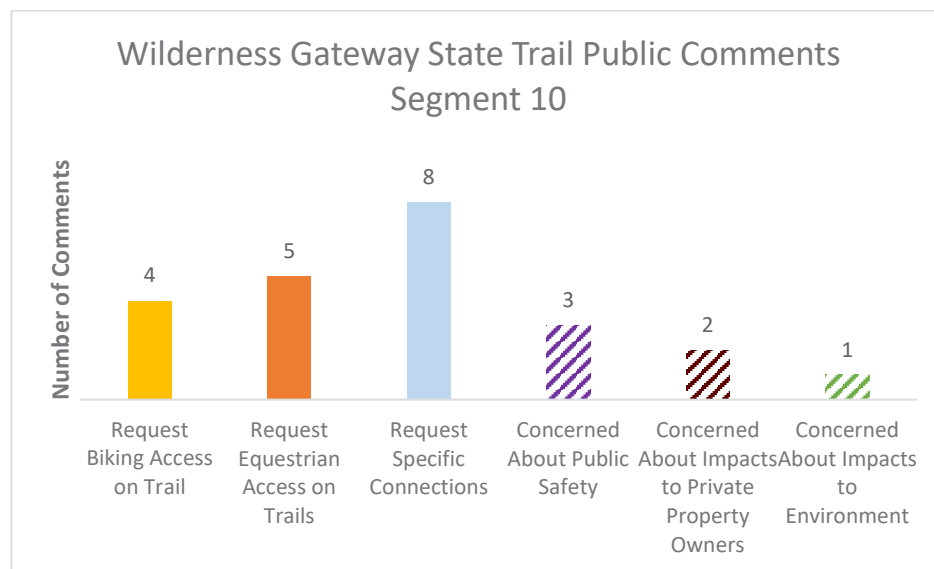
## Segment 9: Cambarus Loop

Wilderness Gateway State Trail Public Comments  
Segment 9



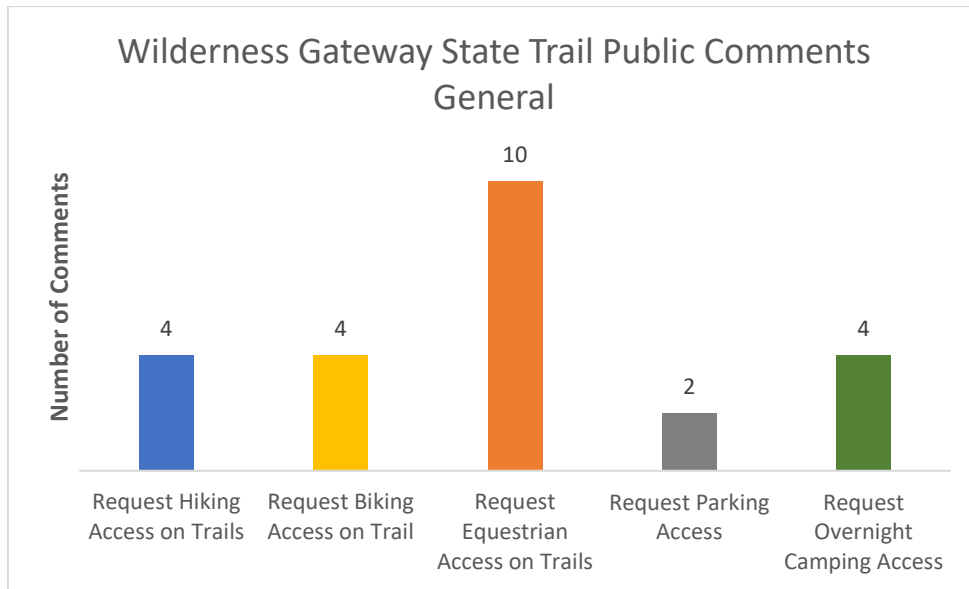
*Additional Details: Specific connection requests include Hart Square, and Hog Hill along rocky river, South Fork River, Lyle Creek, and Jacobs Fork to Carolina Thread to Lincoln County. Safety concerns include crime, liability, hunting accidents and flooding. Private land concerns include specifically access points on Sand Pit Road. Environmental Concerns include the rocky and "non-geographically sound" landscape, as well as bridges over tributaries.*

## Segment 10: Catawba County Loop



*Additional Details: Specific connection requests include connecting the HI, JF, and SF rivers, following the unused railroad from Maiden to Newton, the Lyle Creek to Hickory, Conover, and Bunker Hill, and connecting to the Bunker Hill covered bridge. Safety concerns include staying away from roads.*

## General Comments



*Additional Details: Horseback riders are requesting loops as it produces less trail damage.*



# Overview of Public Comments for the Entire Wilderness Gateway State Trail

Wilderness Gateway State Trail Public Comments - Overall

