



Meeting Minutes for Transylvania County Natural Resource Council

Regular Meeting

November 15th, 2019

Welcome

The meeting was started at approximately 11:00 am by Lee McMinn. The speaker was introduced by Mark Tooley and the presentation began at 11:04.

Roll Call:

Members present:

RK Young	Elizabeth Reshower	Woody Nolan
Kent Wilcox	Lee McMinn	Stephanie Adams
Jennifer Kafsky	Alyssa Coburn (representing Gorges SP)	
Jeff Parker	David Whitmire	Jason Guidry
Dave Casey		

Staff:

Bart Renner	Samantha Trueman	Kate Hays
Mike Owen	Joann McCall	Kenn Webb

In addition, approximately 10 members of the public were present.

Speaker Series:

Program consisted of a presentation by David Brown, U.S.A. Corps of Engineers, Regulatory Specialist/ Geologist, "U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Regulatory Program- Permitting Authority and Jurisdictional Areas" and Terry Fox, Risk Management Specialist, "Floodplain Management Regulations: From a Ground Level Perspective."

Approval of agenda: Unanimously approved

Approval of minutes from October 11, 2019 Minutes for October 2019 were amended as follows:

Take Fred Weed off the council for roll call

DuPont State Park → Dupont State Recreational Forest

Headwaters State Park → Headwaters State Forest

Future Programs:

December 13th 2019- Mitch Woodward, NCSU, Storm Water Management

January 10th 2020- Asheville Greenworks, Plastic Reduction Task Force

February 14th 2020- River Keepers, "What do they do?" (Jennifer Kafsky)

March 13th 2020- (Tentative) Kudzu and Other Invasives (David Whitmire, Torry Negart, and other)

April 10th 2020- (Tentative) Forest Plan Revision (Dave Casey and David Whitmire)

May 8th 2020- Maria Wise, Director at Mills River Partnership: Monetizing Riparian Zones (Foster Creek Project at Living Web Farm) (Meet at Cooperative Extension, 9:30 am. Carpool or use our transport)

September 11th 2020- (Tentative) Cedar Mountain Small Area Plan Treatment of Natural Resources (Bart & Kate)

New Business:

We welcome new members Elizabeth Reshower and Stephanie Adams from Blue Ridge Community College.

Updates from subcommittees:

Natural Areas Inventory

We would like to recruit an intern from Brevard College to do a feasibility study using GIS.

Shape files are available through the tax office and it is a simple process to overlay them

onto the county map. We are interested in the Natural Heritage, Voluntary Ag District, Present Use Value and Landslides shapefiles, more to come.

Updates from public land managers:

David Casey- Pisgah NF

- About to approve a 30 ft arch culvert
- Natalie Lester is new volunteer coordinator

Jason Guidry- DuPont SRF

- Timber harvest planned in vicinity of Fawn Lake Access. Don't plan to close Reasonover Creek Trail due to timber harvest
- Looking to relocate historic Hooker Falls trail in an area out of the flood zone
- Hosted DuPont rescue experience this past weekend, 400 attendees exciting to have a place to train rescue squads and fire departments

Alyssa Coburn- Gorges SP

- Getting a bid on new campground Nov 17th - provides a lot more public access to the park hopefully up and running within the next few years
- Major landslide on Augerhole Trail- working on finding a reroute

RK Young motioned to adjourn and Kent Wilcox seconded, approved unanimously

Meeting was adjourned at 12:08

Respectfully submitted by Samantha Trueman and Bart Renner

Transylvania County Agenda Memo

Agenda Item:

Meeting Date:

From: Lee McMinn, Chair, TNRC

Date: December 13, 2019

Subject: Developing hiking/biking opportunities: Ecusta Trail

Department: Civilian Advisory Councils

Public Hearing: Yes

Contact Information: Lee McMinn 828-674-0318 or Leemcminn@comporium.net

Attachments: (1) An Abbreviated Fact Sheet: The Ecusta Trail

(2) Letters of Support/Endorsements from

Purpose: To express support for the expansion of recreational opportunities within the County and to provide monetary support to assist in procurement of significant grant funds from NC DOT to support that expansion

Background: A rail line running between Hendersonville and Brevard has been unused for more than 17-years and shows no signs of being reactivated as a rail line due to its deteriorated condition and the unlikelihood of sufficient demand to cause the lines owner, WATCO Companies, LLC), to consider the investment worthwhile at this time. This line is available for rail banking, a process to place out-of-service rail rights of way into public use by converting them into publicly accessible trails.

Converting unused rail lines into such trail has many public benefits as detailed in the attached Fact Sheet. Among the accrued benefits will be higher land values, increases in collected taxes, public health improvements as outdoor recreation becomes accessible, and public health saving due to improvements in physical fitness. Communities along the trail (Blantyre, Penrose, Pisgah Forest, and Brevard) will see economic benefits in the emergence of entrepreneurial opportunities to serve trail hikers and bicycle riders.

Grant funds of \$6.4-million are available from NC DOT to construct the trail if the nonprofit agent, Conserving Carolina and Friends of the Ecusta Trail, can raise matching funds of \$1.6-million, making the total funds available of \$8-million which will be used to acquire lands along the right of way to secure the trail, thus conserving and protecting extensive swaths of land along this "linear park".

Financial Impact: \$100,000 is suggested as a meaningful gesture of support

Strategic Plan Goal & Strategy: Goal 1: All strategies. Goal 4: Strategy 4A. Goal 5: Strategies 5A & C.

Recommendations:

1. Join the Land of Sky Regional Council, the NC Department of Transportation, the City of Brevard, and our neighbors in endorsing the concept of the Ecusta Trail.
2. Assure affected land owners that their property rights will be respected as plans are made and land is purchased to complete the trail.
3. Join Conserving Carolina in providing a sum (\$100,000 from the \$26-million available fund balance is recommended) toward matching funds for the NC DOT grant.
4. Discuss these recommendations in open forum to allow public comment.

Enclosure (1) An Abbreviated Fact Sheet: The Ecusta Trail

(2) Letters of Support

Enclosure 1: An Abbreviated Fact Sheet: The Ecusta Trail

An unused trail line, last used more than 17 years ago, lies between Hendersonville and Brevard and has become overgrown and deteriorated so as to be unusable.

The likelihood of a demand high enough for resumption of rail service along this line is remote due to nature of our economic make-up (i.e. small businesses, outdoor recreation, education and health services, and tourism) and the costs of renovating the line.

The National Trail Systems Act, adopted by Congress in 1983, provides a statute for converting rail corridors to trails through a process known as railbanking. Railbanking is a voluntary agreement between a railroad company and a trail agency, in this case Conserving Carolina and the Friends of the Ecusta Trail, to use out-of-service rail corridors as trails until the railroad operator chooses to reactivate rail service. The rail operator does not give up the right to reactivate the line.

According to a USDA 2015 report, Transylvania County is identified as having a “recreation economy” based on earnings from entertainment, recreation and accommodations, employment trends and the amount of seasonal housing (2025 Comprehensive Plan, cited on pg. 11)

North Carolina Department of Transportation Walk Bike Program, referenced in an action step under Objective 2, page 14 of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan, incorporates **walking** and **bicycling** into daily life, promoting safe access to destinations, physical activity opportunities for improved health, increased mobility for better transportation efficiency, retention and attraction of economic development, and resource conservation for better stewardship of our environment.

Transylvania County’s recent induction into Blue Zone will encourage improvements in community health by optimizing such things as public parks and safe walking paths.

There is a grassroots effort to convert this unused rail line to a multiuse path, the Ecusta Trail mentioned on page 13 of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan, that will connect Brevard with Hendersonville, thereby providing safe, easily accessible, greenspace for exercise, family outings, and stress relief meeting several goals of the Blue Zone Project.

The regional bike plan created by the Land of Sky Regional Council identifies a connection such as the Ecusta Trail as one of its top five projects (Blue Ridge Bike Plan 2013).

NC House Representative Chuck McGrady identified a grant opportunity for the Ecusta Trail offered by NC DOT and notified the citizen group, Friends of the Ecusta Trail who asked Conserving Carolina, a non-profit environmental group whose purpose is to protect and steward land and water resources vital to our natural heritage and quality of life and to foster appreciation and understanding of the natural world, to take the lead in acquiring these funds and managing potential land acquisitions necessary for trail development.

Conserving Carolina was successful in winning the \$6.4-million grant but must raise matching funds of \$1.6-million to complete the grant.

Development of the Ecusta Trail has been endorsed by Hendersonville, where the trail would start, Henderson County, Mills River, and Brevard. All the local government sectors the trail will affect except Transylvania County have endorsed the project.

The Ecusta Rail Trail Planning Study and Economic Impact Analysis, prepared by the City of Hendersonville and published in 2012, projects the following:

By investing the direct costs of construction for this amenity, residents and local government can expect to see an estimated \$42 million one-time return.

Annually, a \$9.4 million return can be estimated on tax revenues, visitor spending, health care cost savings, property value increases, and direct use value.

An estimated \$20-million to construct the trail will create 180 temporary jobs.

An estimated gain of 4% in property values along the trail will result in increased tax revenues of \$160,000 per year from properties located within one-quarter mile of the trail.

A direct use impact (savings to users who choose the free trail over other forms of recreation that have associated costs) of \$2.2-million will accrue to users of the trail.

Health care savings due to increased opportunities for exercise will result in improved health care outcomes, reduced costs, increases in worker productivity, reductions in chronic illnesses and other, short-term health care needs of approximately \$5-million per year.

Economic benefits would accrue to all land owners and businesses along the proposed trail, affecting the communities of Blantyre, Penrose, Pisgah Forest, and Brevard.

Completing the Ecusta Trail as proposed would fulfill the following goals of the County's 2025 Comprehensive Plan and the Strategic Plan, adopted in 2016:

Comprehensive Plan:

Diverse and vibrant economic base supported by exceptional infrastructure (pg. 13), action items l and k.

Maintain and enhance infrastructure (pg. 19): items b and c.

Preserve, conserve, protect, enhance and utilize ...environmental resources to provide access for outdoor experiences while increasing recreational and economic development opportunities (page 24): items a, e, and g.

Healthy communities that have access to recreational resources (page 39): all of objective 1.

Promote health and wellbeing of citizens (page 40): items a, b, c, e, and f.

Strategic Plan 2016-2021:

Goal 1. Quality of life and environment: All strategies

Goal 4, Natural Resources: Strategy 4A

Goal 5, Promote health, transportation connectivity, and sense of place: Strategies 5A & C

The Transylvania Natural Resources Council recommends the County Commissioners

1. Join the Land of Sky Regional Council, the NC Department of Transportation, the City of Brevard, and our neighbors in endorsing the concept of the Ecusta Trail.
2. Assure affected land owners that their property rights will be respected as plans are made and land is purchased to complete the trail.
3. Join Conserving Carolina in providing a sum (\$100,000 from the \$26-million available fund balance is recommended) toward matching funds for the NC DOT grant.
4. Discuss these recommendations in open forum to allow public comment.

References

<https://www.hendersonvillenc.gov/ecusta-rail-trail-planning-study-economic-impact-analysis>

http://transylvaniacounty.org/sites/default/files/departments/planning/docs/170328_Final-2025-Plan.pdf (2025 Comprehensive Plan)

<https://conservingcarolina.org/who-we-are/>

<https://www.bluezones.com/services/blue-zones-project/#section-5>

Transylvania County Strategic Plan 2016-2021

Enclosure 2. Letters of Support/ Endorsements From:

The Friends of The Ecusta Trail are very appreciative for the resolutions, endorsements and statements of support from the following (please click each to view the official documents). Transylvania organizations are in **boldface**.

[Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy \(now Conserving Carolina\)](#)

[Brevard/Transylvania County Chamber of Commerce](#)

[Cradle of Forestry in America Interpretive Association](#)

[City of Brevard](#)

[City of Hendersonville](#)

[City of Fletcher](#)

[Village of Flat Rock](#)

[Town of Laurel Park](#)

[Henderson County Commissioners](#)

[Henderson County \(Greenways Master Plan\)](#)

[Henderson County Chamber of Commerce](#)

[Henderson County Tourism Development Authority](#)

[Hendersonville Family YMCA](#)

[League of Women Voters of Henderson County](#)

[Oskar Blues Brewery](#)

[NC-Rail Trails](#)

[Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority](#)

[Resolution by City of Hendersonville to Add the Ecusta Trail to the Metropolitan Transportation Plan](#)

<https://www.ecustatrail.org/statement-of-support/resolutions-statements-of-support.html>