



Deaerview Mountain

Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization

The mission of the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy is to conserve the unique plant and animal habitat, clean water, farmland, scenic beauty, and places for all people to enjoy outdoor recreation in the mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee, enduring for future generations. We achieve this through long-term conservation

JEDI Efforts and Impact

SAHC has a 5-year strategic plan to integrate equity, diversity, and inclusion in the organization. In the past year, SAHC has protected land in low-income communities, enhancing ecosystem services and boosting local economies. We conserved farmland, promoting food security and supporting livelihoods of family farmers facing financial

relationships with private landowners and public agencies and owning and managing land. We are committed to creating and supporting equitable, healthy and thriving communities for everyone in our region.

challenges. Our outreach program engages with marginalized populations and provides equitable access to nature. We are currently working on a land acquisition, in partnership with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, to protect and maintain access to natural resources essential to Native American culture and history.

Prioritizing equity, diversity, and inclusion has earned SAHC's trust as a reliable and safe organization. We receive inquiries from people of all backgrounds for outings, volunteering, and conservation. Our nondiscriminatory approach engenders an equitable future where all people can benefit from preserving the Southern Appalachians.

Final Success

Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC) is partnering with Buncombe County to purchase the 342-acre Deaverview Mountain property and create the county's largest passive recreation public park, which will provide hiking trails, protect wildlife habitat and water resources, feature unique panoramic scenic views, and improve recreation access to the surrounding low-income community.

Location Details

Deaverview Mountain was a popular local hiking destination for decades, providing a place to hike to stunning scenic views in Asheville, NC. In 2023 the mountain was listed for sale for \$10 million. At that price, the only viable purchaser would have been a developer, which not only would have irreparably damaged the natural resources but also gentrified a disadvantaged community. As a leading land trust in the region, SAHC was contacted by multiple organizations and individuals to save the mountain. We enlisted the support of a conservation-minded buyer, who purchased the property to take it off the market, and is holding it until SAHC can purchase it, transfer it to Buncombe County, and transform it into a public park. The property will become the county's largest park, and the only public immersive nature opportunity of its kind for nearby communities. Deaverview Mountain's 3,118-foot peak is visible throughout Asheville, and is located only five miles from the city center. The property contains significant natural resources, including priority waterways and intact native forests. In addition, the purchase and protection of the property will allow land management that will enhance and restore the resources onsite. There are three miles of streams that originate on and flow through the property. The property already contains a network of existing trails, with a central doubletrack trail leading to a summit clearing that provides a stunning 180-degree view of the city and surrounding mountain ranges. This new park will provide passive outdoor recreation opportunities including hiking, nature viewing, and picnicking. The property's urban location will serve low-income populations that have limited or no access to hiking or panoramic scenic views of this quality. With the nearest bus stop only ¼ mile away, and the potential to extend the bus line to the property entrance, this project will

increase equitable access for people with limited or no personal transportation. Deaverview Mountain is the last large undeveloped tract in West Asheville. Its protection will have a significant impact on the climate resilience, recreation and economy of the surrounding region. This TCA grant will help SAHC and Buncombe County acquire the property and save it from development, protect wildlife habitat and water quality, and create a significant county park in a location that is absent public recreation opportunities of this scale.

Biodiversity in Project Area

This land acquisition will protect biodiversity and climate resilience on a large intact forested property located minutes from downtown Asheville. Although it is not connected to other protected lands, it is large enough to maintain ecological integrity on its own. It is one half mile east of a tract SAHC is in the process of protecting, with some potential to connect the two in the future. Most of the property ranks moderately high on the Biodiversity and Wildlife Habitat Assessment. The NC Natural Heritage Program assessed it in 2023 and created the Deaverview Mountain Natural Area (with a rank of Very High). Approximately 337 acres of the property is forested, and approximately 6.5 acres consist of two open areas providing long-range scenic views. The forest communities onsite are dominated by a mixture of mature oak forest that includes Montane Oak-Hickory Forests, Low Montane Red Oak Forest, and Chestnut Oak Forests, with several small patches of Rich Cove Forest in the lower elevation drainages. This diversity of forest types supports a variety of plant and animal species, as well as ecosystem services, which are crucial to the health of the forest and help mitigate the impacts of climate change.

The property contains some nonnative invasive species, including a large patch of kudzu at the scenic overlooks. The invasive plants are being managed to restore native habitat and further support biodiversity. The purchase and protection of this property will allow invasive species management to continue, enhancing the natural communities onsite.

Sixteen headwater streams originate on property. These streams feed three main tributaries of the French Broad River, which is one of the oldest rivers in the world and a major watershed in Western North Carolina. One of the headwater streams is Smith Mill Creek, which is on the 303(d) list of Impaired waterbodies. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the State of North Carolina

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

The area around Deaverview Mountain is economically disadvantaged, with poverty higher than national, statewide and county-wide levels. Residents in the Deaverview community lack access to parks and recreation. This acquisition will create a new public park in the heart of their community. The closest bus stop is ¼ mile from the property, and Buncombe County may extend the bus line to stop at the park, enabling people without personal transportation to access the park. The local economy will benefit from increased public visitation by bringing visitors to the area. A local economic boost is especially important now, following the compounding economic challenges of the COVID pandemic, and the recent devastation from Hurricane Helene. The hurricane severely impacted Asheville's economy, leading to a drastic reduction in tourism, as well as job losses and business closures. Creating a park here will bring a needed boost to the region.

Recreation amenities being considered for the new park include multimodal trails to accommodate hiking and biking, a modest picnic area and shelter, observation platform(s), a children's play area, interpretation of natural and cultural resources, and restroom facilities. Two scenic overlooks provide long-range views of mountain ranges, recognizable peaks, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and historic sites in the city such as the Biltmore Estate and the Grove Park Inn. This viewshed is not publicly available anywhere in Asheville, and there are no publicly accessible views at this elevation close to the city.

Spending time in nature will also engender mental health benefits. The world experienced a mental health crisis through the COVID pandemic. Western North Carolina has suffered significant trauma from Hurricane Helene. Access to nature helps treat psychological conditions, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

prioritize protecting Impaired streams.

Last September, our region experienced the devastating impacts of Hurricane Helene, a 1,000-year flood, bringing a painful reality of climate change to the forefront of our lives. If Deaverview Mountain was developed, the destruction of surrounding homes (most of which are low income) and infrastructure would have been far worse. Protecting these streams and forest ecosystems will mitigate the impacts of climate change and reduce effects from future natural disasters.

Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

The immediate success for this project is to purchase the property from the current owner, who is holding the land until either SAHC or Buncombe County can buy it. SAHC is under contract to purchase the property on or before March 2026. However, the current owner must recover their investment in buying and holding the property. If we are not able to raise the funds to acquire the land, the owner has prepared a limited subdivision plan to be made whole on their investment. Their desire is to sell the property to SAHC and reinvest those funds in other worthy conservation projects.

Our strategy to achieve success is for SAHC to purchase the property using public and private funds, and then transfer the land to Buncombe County to own and manage as a public park. The primary project goal at this stage is to raise an estimated \$8 million to accomplish the land acquisition. Following that success, the subsequent goal will be to transfer the land to Buncombe County and design and implement the park improvements. The two main objectives to achieve the primary goal of purchasing the property are: (1) completing all of the necessary due diligence, and (2) administering the grants awarded for the purchase. SAHC is close to completing the due diligence items, which include two appraisals, a boundary survey, a title commitment and memo, and an environmental site assessment. In order to secure clear title, SAHC has resolved a large number of boundary overlaps and encroachments. These unexpected survey and title issues have led to an overage in the project budget; we hope to cover these costs through a grant from The Conservation Alliance.

SAHC and Buncombe County are working together to achieve the second objective. SAHC is administering a grant from the North Carolina Land and Water Fund (NCLWF) and a private philanthropic gift, and Buncombe County is administering a grant from the U.S.

Asheville needs an urban public park now more than ever.

Key Decision Makers

Key decision makers, described below, are Buncombe County as the future owner of the park; public and private funders supporting the acquisition; and the local community.

In April 2023, the Buncombe County commissioners passed a resolution declaring their intent to create a public park on Deaverview Mountain in partnership with SAHC. SAHC and Buncombe County have been working closely to accomplish the goals and objectives outlined above.

The North Carolina Land and Water Fund grant has been awarded, and grant administration is in progress. The U.S. Land and Water Conservation Fund's Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) grant approval was announced in news outlets. Since the new administration took office, a grant agreement has not been delivered. The National Park Service, which administers ORLP grants, is working to disburse these grant funds as quickly as possible.

Many local community members have offered positive feedback and support for the project. Buncombe County has a plan to seek input from the community on the park's features. SAHC established a relationship with Johnston Elementary School and several property neighbors. Other community engagement is ongoing.

The business community could help with public education about the project, and seeking input from future park users. Due to its history of hiking access, there is a great deal of trespass on the property today. Although this is largely benign in its impact, motorized dirt bikes are causing some significant damage to the mountain. Local businesses could be an asset to help educate the community about these impacts and dissuade damaging activities. Businesses can also help enlist volunteers for habitat management, advocate for policies that support conservation and land stewardship, and leverage funding.



Land and Water Conservation Fund's Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP). These grants will cover the purchase price of the property, as well as the majority of the transaction costs. SAHC intended to apply for a grant from the Buncombe County Land Conservation Advisory Board (LCAB) to cover the remainder of the transaction costs. However, after Hurricane Helene hit our region, Buncombe County resources have been diverted to address recovery needs. As a result, the LCAB funding has been temporarily suspended. This TCA grant is being requested by SAHC in place of the LCAB funding to cover a shortfall in our transaction costs.

A second goal of the project, following its purchase from the current owner, is the design and implementation of the public park. Buncombe County has begun the design and permitting process for the park and will continue a multi-phase design process. Phase 1 of the park's design will include a two-lane entry road, a parking lot, a contact station with park staff offices, two vault toilets, viewing platforms, a maintenance structure, and park wayfinding and signage. Construction is expected to begin in January 2028 and is expected to take 15 months to complete. Phase 2 of the park design will include a parkwide trail assessment. The existing trail network will be assessed and unsustainable trails will be rerouted so that the entire network of trails in the park will be sustainable. Existing eroded paths will be rehabilitated with appropriate erosion control measures and vegetation to prevent further environmental damage. New trail routes may be added to provide a sustainable trail network for multiple levels of hiking intensity. The trail network would be systematically converted to sustainable trails with funds from applicable grants and volunteer efforts over approximately five years. If our efforts to buy and protect Deaverview Mountain is successful, the park is expected to be open to the public in March 2029.

SAHC has an existing partnership with New Belgium Brewing, a TCA member, who is one of several businesses that has offered to support SAHC with this project.

Elevate Voices

Buncombe County has developed a Communication and Public Engagement Plan for the Deaverview Mountain Park Project. They also developed a survey to gauge support for making the Deaverview property a public park and distributed it at the Deaverview Community Engagement Markets, a food support program for public housing residents. In addition, SAHC has engaged with Johnston Elementary School, a public school located less than two miles from the property. 99% of Johnston Elementary students are enrolled in the free or reduced lunch

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

With this project being a straight land acquisition, the measurable on-the-ground outcomes comprise a short list. Over the next year, our top outcomes are:

- 1) Close on the acquisition of the Deaverview Mountain property. This is expected to occur by the end of 2025, depending on the timing of grant disbursement.
- 2) Transfer the property to Buncombe County. A portion of the acquisition's private funds are being treated as a bridge loan. SAHC will bargain-sell the land to Buncombe County, using the

program, far exceeding the state average of 61%. SAHC and Johnston Elementary are working together to create an outdoors club that will use Deaverview Mountain as its neighborhood hiking and exploring destination. In addition, SAHC's Community Engagement & Education Manager works with Muddy Sneakers (The Joy of Learning Outdoors), Pathways to Parks, and Color My Outdoors. All of these nonprofit organizations focus on bringing underrepresented groups into nature, and they have already visited the Deaverview Mountain property. We look forward to continuing these partnerships to bring all members of the public to the park to connect with nature and each other, and elevate their missions to inspire others to do the same. SAHC and Buncombe County are assessing the needs and amenities that would enhance visitation opportunities for differently abled members of the community. Buncombe County's Communication and Public Engagement Plan will engage not only with Deaverview community neighborhoods, but will also work with stakeholders such as the Deaverview Housing Development, nearby religious organizations, and other nonprofits such as the Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association (SORBA) as they plan for park amenities. Buncombe County and SAHC will continue outreach efforts to the local community to help guide planning and access for the future Deaverview Mountain park.

proceeds to repay the loan plus interest and holding costs.

3) Begin implementing the initial park safety and improvement measures. The immediate needs include improving safe and equitable access to the park, and restoring areas damaged by trespass and Hurricane Helene.



TCA Funding Plan

This grant from TCA will cover a gap in the due diligence costs required to purchase the property. The need for additional transaction costs is due to the complicated legal and survey needs. This 342-acre property lies adjacent a large number of private residential tracts. Prior to the ongoing due diligence, there was no boundary survey for the property. SAHC's new boundary survey uncovered many issues that needed to be corrected to ensure clear title and maintain our high standards and practices for land acquisition. These included eight boundary overlaps and four encroachments from adjoining landowners. SAHC has successfully corrected all of these issues, however doing so incurred an additional \$31,000 in legal and survey costs. If approved, TCA's support will enable SAHC to purchase the Deaverview Mountain property from the current landowner and secure its permanent protection and conversion to a public park.

How long it took to complete application

12 hours

Confidential Items

Deaverview Mountain has been a prominent and beloved location for the Asheville community for decades. As a result of its prominence and the public

Other Relevant Application Details

Thank you for the opportunity to apply for this grant.

funds sought to accomplish the purchase, this project has been extremely high-profile. The intended use and public funding of the project have been reported in local newspapers. The details shared in this grant application may be shared with member companies. The private donors wish for their names and level of financial support to remain anonymous.

