



Bone Camp



Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization

Trust for Public Land (TPL) creates parks and protects land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come. We believe access to the outdoors is a fundamental human need and essential to our health and well-being. We're committed to creating more greenspaces and making them available and welcoming to everyone, everywhere. We put communities first by

JEDI Efforts and Impact

As a leader in equitable access to the outdoors, we're partnering with communities to solve wide-ranging challenges with innovative approaches and solutions to close the country's outdoor equity gap. Millions of people in the U.S. don't have a quality park close to home. What's more, parks located in communities of color are half the size of parks in predominantly white

investing in their visions to ensure equitable access to nature's healing power. Quality parks and green spaces are fundamental to sustaining equitable, resilient communities. Access to nature and the outdoors in the cities and communities where people live, is a matter of health, equity, and justice. That's why we work alongside communities across the country to create, protect, and steward the nature-rich places that are vital to human well-being. We're driven by four commitments: equity, health, climate, and community.

neighborhoods and serve five times more people per acre. We're working to change that reality. From reconnecting Tribes and Indigenous communities to their ancestral lands to preserving the cultural sites tied to Black American history, we're dedicated to building a more equitable and inclusive future—starting with the outdoors. Since 1972, TPL has protected more than 4 million acres of public land, created more than 5,504 parks, trails, schoolyards, and iconic outdoor places, raised \$110 billion in public funding for parks and public lands, and connected nearly 9.7 million people to the outdoors.

Final Success

TPL will facilitate the expansion of the Bailey Mountain Preserve by permanently conserving an adjacent 137-acre forested tract, furthering ongoing conservation and cultural heritage preservation efforts, resulting in the expansion of a critical wildlife corridor, improving recreational access, and extending community benefits such as ecosystem services such as flood mitigation, ecological education, and nature-based economic development in a low-income region.

Location Details

The Bone Camp conservation acquisition project furthers ongoing local land conservation and cultural heritage preservation efforts centered on the iconic Bailey Mountain within the community of Mars Hill, Madison County, North Carolina. The Town and community organizations have been conserving lands to protect this viewshed, the natural resources, and its agricultural and rural heritage. These activities reflect the County and Town efforts to capitalize on these resources for rural tourism development and long-term ecological and economic resilience. This project phase is focused on the acquisition of a publicly listed 137-acre tract on Bailey Mountain to enhance these local initiatives.

Bailey Mountain dominates the landscape of the town of Mars Hill. Photographs of Mars Hill College, now University, show the mountain looming over the Town. Historic photographs of the school also tell the story of the mountain during these years, as its percentage of tree cover decreased due to farming and logging, then increased again more recently. There is evidence of a long human presence on Bailey Mountain, which was part of ancestral Cherokee hunting and gathering lands. Pottery shards, stone tools, and soapstone fragments bear testament to the site's use extending back thousands of years. Beginning with white settler Levi Bailey, Sr. in 1797, generations have farmed this mountain. It has captured the hearts of Mars Hill students for many years and been a destination for hikes, including the tradition of first year students making a pilgrimage to the top.

The property will enhance the adjacent 250 acres of conserved lands – improving wildlife habitat, offering public access to passive recreational opportunities, providing opportunities for culture heritage education, and creating a compelling eco-tourism destination for a rural economy. The project aligns with

Biodiversity in Project Area

The Nature Conservancy has determined the entire property includes an area of significant climate resilience, high flow, and biodiversity. Protection of the property's natural resources will enhance the same resources on the adjacent and contiguous 250-acre Bailey Mountain Preserve. This acquisition would take a significant step toward the conservation of all of Bailey Mountain for various benefits. Contiguous protected areas maintain habitat connectivity, allowing wildlife to move freely, support genetic diversity, and enhance ecosystem and climate resilience. Protecting the Bone Camp property creates a vital link between existing conservation areas, forming a larger, interconnected habitat that fosters ecological resilience.

The Bone Camp property is mostly oak-hickory forest and includes two springs and numerous tributaries to the Ivy River. Protecting this property will help preserve biodiversity, mitigate erosion, and sustain water quality in the region's watersheds. Within a 5-mile radius of the property, seven rare species—including a salamander, two butterflies, and three rare plants—have been documented by the NC Natural Heritage Program (E. Schwartzman). Downstream, Ivy Creek supports aquatic species of concern, such as the freshwater catfish, Stonecat (*Noturus flavus*), and the Hellbender salamander (*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis*). The adjacent Bailey Mountain Preserve already provides critical habitat for wildlife, including the rare southern zigzag salamander (*Plethodon ventralis*). Forested riparian buffers would also be protected, ensuring intact aquatic ecosystems and enhancing water quality.

This property encompasses two intact ridgelines that provide exceptional ecological value. They serve as habitats for diverse flora and fauna and play a vital role in water filtration and biodiversity conservation. The recent decision by the Madison County Planning Board to support removal of the 50-foot setback requirement from the Mountain Ridge Protection Ordinance heightens the risk of development on these sensitive areas, potentially leading to increased natural disasters like landslides and wildfires due to deforestation and soil disturbance.

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

TCA's priority areas and goals, including:

- Establishing long-term protection for land and water
- Creating public access
- Ecological education
- Economic development
- Engagement with low-income communities

Madison County was impacted by flooding and wind hazards of Hurricane Helene, which caused the unemployment rate to spike in October 2024 to over 10%. While Mars Hill was spared the worst storm effects the other towns in the County, their downtown commercial districts underwater. The County economy is severely affected and will take an unknown amount of time to recover.

The addition of the property into the adjacent Bailey Mountain Preserve will provide superior public access to the outdoors and to Bailey Mountain that will appeal to a wider audience of explorers and learners. Creating a more accessible property and additional property to the Preserve will create a more attractive and marketable eco-tourism and cultural heritage destination. Sustainable management of the forest resources will assure longevity of this rural economic driver.

Mars Hill University faculty, who already conduct field studies on the adjacent Bailey Mountain Preserve are eager to have access to the Bone Camp property for ecological and resilience studies, particularly because the property's location on the opposite side of the ridge creates a different ecology resulting from the differing sunlight and moisture characteristics. Bailey Mountain Preserve also includes inventoried Mars Hills Township barns by the Appalachian Barn Alliance open for public viewing and learning Madison County/Town of Mars Hill agricultural heritage. These varied and complementary uses plus the larger size of the conserved lands create a compelling outdoor recreation and educational destination promoting rural tourism and local economic resilience.

Acquiring the Bone Camp Creek property is now one of the most effective strategies to ensure the long-term protection of these ridgelines, safeguarding their aesthetic, ecological, and economic value for future generations.

**Strategy & Timeline
For Final Success**

TPL's strategic approach to this project started with research and community engagement. Longtime TPL staff member and Southeast Land Protection Director, Doug Hattaway is a resident of Western North Carolina and has had the opportunity to build a relationship and strategic approach to this project alongside local leaders. TPL's goal is to facilitate the permanent conservation of the property and its natural resources. To accomplish this, TPL has already placed the listed property under contract, taking it temporarily off the market. As the property lies within a small community with limited expertise and capacity, TPL will manage all due diligence to enable its purchase of the property from the current owner and then convey it to the Town of Mars Hill as an addition to the adjacent Bailey Mountain Preserve. During the purchase contract term, TPL is working with local citizen leaders to raise public awareness and support as well as the funding necessary for the public acquisition and management of the property.

Project timeline

- January 2025: Purchase Agreement is executed between the landowner and TPL
- January 2025: Received market data analysis validating purchase price
- March 2025: Titlework
- April 2025: Appraisal report
- November 2025: TPL and Mars Hill, NC enter into agreement for transfer of property
- November 2025: Boundary Survey
- January 2026: Phase 1 environmental site assessment
- March 2026: Purchase of property and conveyance into permanent public ownership

Elevate Voices

Particularly advantageous about the Bone Camp property is its existing internal trail system and roads/driveways. These improvements will not only provide the opportunity to open the property soon after acquisition for public use, but also the distinctive ability to provide access to those with mental and physical limitations, a commonly overlooked population. The road provides access to the ridgeline and various parts of the property. Trails throughout the property exist due to the previous use of the property and are easily converted to walking trails. Increased access for a more diverse

Key Decision Makers

The Bone Camp project enjoys the support of the Town of Mars Hill Chamber of Commerce, Madison County Conservancy, Friends of Bailey Mountain and the Board of Alderman of Mars Hill. It is critical, though, that funding is secured for its acquisition and minimal management responsibilities for the Town to be able to assume the responsibility of ownership and management.

Mars Hill is a small Town of 2,100 people with an annual budget of \$3.2M (2024/25). It is unable to fund the property's conservation on its own. Madison County Conservancy is developing a co-management agreement to present to the Town Aldermen to leverage resources and alleviate the burdens (joys) of management.

The diversity of supports of this project reflects the recognized multitude of benefits it offers: habitat protection, heritage preservation, outdoor recreation and local business development (eco-tourism).

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

- Adequate funding for the acquisition of the property.
- A co-management agreement between Madison County Conservancy, Friends of Bailey Mountain and Town of Mars Hill.
- Compiled due diligence to facilitate acquisition of the property.
- Significantly increased public awareness and support for the protection of the property.

population will also allow for the same ecology education offered for those that don't need access assistance.

In February 2025, the local community held a public meeting where TPL and partners attended to listen to community interests and feedback. This meeting and future public gatherings with all interest groups are expected to be held in the coming months. These meetings are vital to increase public awareness with all community members, as well as keep TPL informed on the community's interest and support for the project.

TCA Funding Plan

Currently, TPL is prospecting multiple public and private funding opportunities. As of today, we have an estimated total budget of \$1,632,900. TPL, an accredited land trust, will manage all aspects of the acquisition. Due diligence will occur sequentially with the most costly items to be incurred once adequate acquisition funding is secured from private and public sources. We anticipate a purchase in the first quarter of 2026. TPL intends to be the interim owner of the property with the intent to convey the property into public ownership. TPL is contributing matching funds toward the cost of acquiring the property by covering its own travel and operation expenses and is seeking additional private funding, which is not reflected in this current budget. Funding from TCA will support land acquisition and conservation of the property. The funding will be used to match and leverage other public and private funding to acquire and improve the property for public access.

How long it took to complete application

Confidential Items

Other Relevant Application Details

Not at this time.

