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The Knob Boulders & Nature Preserve

Applying Organization	Blue Ridge Conservancy	Application Date	5/7/2026
Applying Contact	Jordan Sellers	Status	Submitted
Record Type	Member Collective	Created By	Jordan Sellers, 5/4/2026, 3:35 PM
		Create Account	<input type="checkbox"/>

Project Overview

Project Name	The Knob Boulders & Nature Preserve	Requested Amount	\$50,000.00
Project/Campaign Name	The Knob Boulders & Nature Preserve		
Type of Project	Acquisition	Project Multiple Locations	
Project Location (State or Territory)	NC	Longitude	36°13'51.6"N
Latitude	36°13'51.6"N		

Organization Details

Organization Name	Blue Ridge Conservancy	Primary address for organization	PO Box 568 Boone, North Carolina 28607 United States
Contact Name	Jordan Sellers	Contact Title	Northern Peaks State Trail Director
Contact Email Address	jordan@blueridgeconservancy.org		
Annual Operating Budget	\$1,313,823.00	Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Staff Size	10	Main Phone	8282642511
Total Membership		Organization Website/Social Media Feed	https://blueridgeconservancy.org/
BIPOC-led	No	C-Suite Staff	

Grant Details

Awarded Amount		Awarded Date	
Funding Program			
Primary Project Type		Secondary Project Type	
Term Start Date		Term End Date	

Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization	Blue Ridge Conservancy partners with landowners and local communities to permanently protect natural resources with agricultural, cultural, recreational, ecological and scenic value in northwest	Location Details	Howard Knob is located directly above downtown Boone, NC. It is the southernmost Amphibolite Mountain and one of the most unique, high-conservation-priority landscapes in the
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North Carolina.

Mission: Blue Ridge Conservancy (BRC) partners with landowners and local communities to permanently protect natural resources with agricultural, cultural, recreational, ecological and scenic value in northwest North Carolina.

BRC is the result of two land trusts, Blue Ridge Rural Land Trust and High Country Conservancy, merging in 2010. High Country Conservancy was founded in 1993 with the goal of saving Howard Knob. After more than thirty years and over 26,000 acres saved, BRC accomplished that founding mission. BRC is the non-profit partner of the Northern Peaks State Trail and the Middle Fork Greenway.

Southeast. According to the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program, the Amphibolite Mountains Macrosite is "the most important in the state for northern disjunct species" and is recognized for an extraordinary degree of landscape connectivity, which exponentially increases the conservation value of protecting Howard Knob. The mountain is covered by a high-quality northern oak forest, and due to its ecological composition and high elevation, it is positioned to serve as an important climate refugia as temperatures rise across the region.

Despite being privately owned, Howard Knob was open to public recreation until approximately 1990 and was considered one of the best bouldering sites in the country. After closing to the public, it has remained largely undisturbed. BRC has been working to save the mountain for over 30 years.

The Knob sits at the heart of a growing network of protected lands. The property surrounds a 5-acre county park and adjoins a 46-acre conservation property owned and operated by Boone United Methodist Church. To the south, Rivers Park serves as the southern terminus of the Northern Peaks State Trail, a 50-mile trail concept connecting Boone to West Jefferson and Jefferson along the Amphibolite Mountains. BRC is actively planning the trail connection between Rivers Park and The Knob, making this property the critical link between downtown Boone and the broader NPST corridor.

Final Success

Our goal is to finish what the High Country's visionary community members, advocates, and leaders started in 1993: save Howard Knob, protect 74 acres of northern oak forest, restore public access to one of the country's finest bouldering sites featuring nearly 25 climbable boulders, and create a nature preserve with trails and passive recreation opportunities for the public.

Impact on Climate and Bioersity

The Amphibolite Mountains are among the most biodiverse places in the Southeast. These high-elevation, nutrient-rich sites serve as climate refugia for countless rare and endangered fauna and flora found throughout the Macrosite. Protecting this ecologically significant mountaintop from logging or development directly supports climate resiliency in Boone and Watauga County. The critical value of forested land for flood resilience was made clear during Hurricane Helene in 2024.

Howard Knob's elevation at 4,396 feet, ecological composition, and position within the Amphibolite Mountains Macrosite make it particularly significant for long-term climate mitigation. As temperatures rise across the region, high-elevation sites like The Knob provide cooler, stable microclimates that allow species to persist and shift their ranges upslope rather than disappear entirely. Protecting The Knob preserves this refugia function not just for species currently present, but for those that will

depend on it as the climate continues to change.

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

The Knob Boulders & Nature Preserve is a quintessential outdoor recreation destination for the High Country of North Carolina. The property can accommodate easy hiking trails, moderate trail running, downtown Boone's only cross-country skiing, a natural progression of bouldering opportunities from beginner to advanced, and excellent wildlife viewing. The Knob is a five minute drive, and will eventually be accessible by foot, to downtown Boone. This is the closest recreational site to the High Country's population center and Appalachian State University.

Based on an Appalachian State University benefit-cost analysis of Paddy Mountain Park, a comparable property BRC opened in the region, the economic benefit to Watauga County could easily exceed \$400,000 annually

Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

Blue Ridge Conservancy purchased the property in December 2025 and owns it in fee simple. The total purchase price and transaction costs were \$1,699,000. BRC has secured \$1,524,000 to date and is continuing to fundraise for the remaining \$175,000, after which we will shift our focus to raising funds for the recreational infrastructure needed to provide a high-quality visitor experience. BRC is actively applying for grants for the recreational infrastructure and is partnering with the local Tourism Development Authority as well.

BRC has a professional trail layout in-hand and is engaging with a civil engineer and a landscape architect for the parking/trail head development. If our fundraising efforts are successful, we hope to open The Knob by 2027.

Key Decision Makers

Working With Business Community

Blue Ridge Conservancy has had strong engagement from the local business community. Footsloggers Outdoor and Travel Gear, Misty Mountain Threadworks, Center 45 Climbing Gym, Blue Ridge Energy, LifeStore Bank, Mast General Store, and Holton Mountain Rentals all made leadership-level gifts toward the property purchase. A total of 141 businesses and individuals made contributions towards the purchase. Continued engagement with local businesses and outdoor recreation oriented businesses across the country could help BRC steward the property and achieve the best possible environmental and recreational outcomes.

Elevate Voices

Blue Ridge Conservancy is deeply connected to the local communities surrounding The Knob. Engagement efforts have included intentional outreach to the neighborhood adjacent to the property, partnership with the Carolina Climbers Coalition, a collaborative and mutual-gains approach with Watauga County government (owners of the adjacent Howard Knob County Park), partnership with Boone United Methodist Church, and ongoing communication with the Junaluska neighborhood, Boone's only historically Black neighborhood, which is situated between downtown Boone and The Knob. The Northern Peaks State Trail aims to eventually connect the Junaluska neighborhood to The Knob and downtown Boone with a pedestrian path.

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

1. Complete the remaining \$175,000 in fundraising to fully retire The Knob acquisition debt
2. Construct 2-3 miles of sustainable trail at The Knob
3. Construct one trailhead with parking
4. Host at least 6 volunteer work and climb days to complete bouldering access trails

TCA Funding Plan

TCA's support will allow Blue Ridge Conservancy to focus on the next chapter in the history of The Knob: creating the best possible experience for the public to enjoy the mountain's natural

Confidential Items

treasures while protecting and stewarding the flora, fauna, and geological features that make Howard Knob so special.

Other Relevant Application Details

Blue Ridge Conservancy is grateful for the support of Wes Carter at Atlantic Packaging Corp. and Nick Pence at Bedrock Sandals, whose recommendations allowed us the opportunity to apply for this grant. We are also pleased to share that BRC received the Access Fund's 2025 Land Conservation Award and a \$5,000 Climbing Conservation Grant from the Access Fund in support of this project.


