

Content for Public Hearings – RTP and PARTF grant opportunities for 2018 – 2/13/18

In 2016, Blue Ridge Conservancy purchased Peak Mountain, a 260-acre tract in Watauga & Avery Counties. The mountain has a well-defined ridge line, & is entirely forested. Elevations range from 3,680 to 4,760 feet. The property is highly visible from Seven Devils, the NC Hwy 105 corridor, Grandfather Mountain & other locations. Its proximity to other protected lands, such as Grandfather Mountain, Bear Paw State Natural Area, & the Otter Falls Trails, adds to its conservation significance. Peak Mountain lies within a NC Natural Heritage Program-designated significant natural area. Recently, the Town of Seven Devils, with funding from PARTF, purchased a bordering tract of land containing Otter Falls on Valley Creek, which forms the boundary between the two properties. After acquisition, the Town constructed a trail that provides basic access to the waterfall. This trail has become highly popular & heavily used. An additional PARTF grant funded more trails in the park. These trails give hikers panoramic views of Grandfather Mountain, access to the base of an impressive sheer rock cliff, & streamside access to various waterfall observation points. After Blue Ridge Conservancy acquired Peak Mountain, the Town became interested in extending the Otter Falls Park trail network into the conserved property, which is the aim of this project. The 2.5 - 3-mile-long x 3' wide Peak Mountain Trail will be accessed from the Otter Falls Park trails that begin at a parking lot in Town. The trail will extend along Valley Creek &, after a number of switchbacks to reach a higher elevation, most of the trail will run along the ridge; a relatively level route. As a result, trail construction will not be difficult. Views along the way are spectacular- Grandfather Mountain, Hanging Rock, & Four Diamond Ridge, as well as long distant views of Elk Knob, Snake Mountain, & the Roan Highlands. The trail will terminate at the opposite end of the elongated tract where a dirt road is located. Space is available at this site for a parking lot. Design will be contracted with the construction, which can begin immediately after award & completed within two years. Maintenance will be shared by Blue Ridge Conservancy & Seven Devils. The Blue Ridge Conservancy will grant a long-term easement encompassing the trail to the Town of Seven Devils. The Blue Ridge Conservancy plans to own the Peak Mountain tract indefinitely, although transfer to state parks or other public entity is possible in the future. With any change in ownership, however, Blue Ridge Conservancy would want to ensure that the trail will remain in place, be maintained, & open to the public. Seven Devils residents are excited about the prospect of extending their Otter Falls Trails, and the Peak Mountain Trail will also be of regional significance due to the views and its proximity to other hiking trails in the area.