

**MORGANTON, N.C.** — Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina received a \$100,000 grant from the North Carolina Division of Parks & Recreation Recreational Trails Program to build 3.5 miles of mountain biking trail at the Catawba River Greenway in Morganton.

The proposed trail falls within the planned corridor for the future Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail and will connect to the city's current greenway system.

An assessment of the project area and a digital route has been prepared by Terra Tek Trails, LLC, a professional trail contracting company headquartered in Boone. The RTP grant will help pay for on-site trail design and construction. The trail construction is scheduled to be completed by January 2022.

While the new trail will fall under city ownership as part of the Catawba River Greenway, FCNC will play an active role in its management. The conservancy has committed its volunteer program to assist with basic trail maintenance after the construction is complete. Volunteers will help by removing fallen trees, trimming vegetation, removing litter and trail tread upkeep.

"Even a sustainably built trail requires occasional maintenance," said Brittany Watkins, special projects coordinator for the conservancy. "Sometimes the best people to perform this maintenance are those who utilize the trails. Our volunteers use trails for a variety of reasons, and we tackle projects from trail upkeep to building steps. I am particularly excited about volunteer events on this trail and for the opportunity to go on post-work trail rides."

Throughout the trail construction process, FCNC staff and volunteers will work closely with Michael Lowther, owner of Overmountain Cycles in Morganton.

"First, hats off to Foothills Conservancy for submitting this grant application," Lowther said. "They are helping make a dream come true, and it's been a pleasure working with them. This grant will not only establish mountain bike trails in town, but it will also enrich the recreation Morganton has to offer for its citizens and tourists."

"I am beyond excited," Lowther continued, speaking of his personal connection to the project. "Developing mountain bike trails in town has been a goal for years and being able to share this with the community is even better. As a kid, I grew up being able to mountain bike from my front door. It's wonderful knowing that my kids, the neighborhood kids and anyone throughout town has a place to ride and explore that is close to home. Trail ratings will range from beginner to intermediate, and we hope to have some skills features too. Morganton is a wonderful town, and I am thrilled to see these trails make it more playful."

Shane Prisby, operations manager for Burke County's Community Development program, added his own thoughts about the new trail: "We are thrilled to hear that Foothills was awarded the RTP grant for this project," he said. "Having local trails that are readily accessible is important for every community. By creating connections within our smaller local trails, we are contributing to a larger mission of increased access to regional trail networks like the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail and Fonta Flora State Trail."

City of Morganton Director of Development and Design Services Phillip Lookadoo also shared: "I am excited to hear that Foothills Conservancy was successful in its application for a trails grant. This will allow for a partnership between the conservancy and the city to provide yet another outdoor recreational opportunity in the City of Morganton and Burke County. This one has the added bonus, much like that of our other facilities, to host competitions bringing participants and spectators into our community from other parts of the state.

"This trail pairs perfectly with the downtown greenway connector, which is currently under construction," Lookadoo continued, speaking of the increased accessibility to downtown amenities. "Upon completion of both projects, people from all over will be able to leave downtown on a bicycle, ride to Catawba Meadows Park, enjoy mountain biking and other park and greenway amenities and return to downtown for shopping, and/or a visit to a local brewery or restaurant. For a patron of the new downtown Fairfield Inn, this could all happen without ever having to get into a vehicle."

Individuals interested in being involved with trail maintenance can fill out a volunteer application on Foothills Conservancy's website at [foothillsconservancy.org/volunteer](http://foothillsconservancy.org/volunteer).

#### **About the Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina:**

The Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina is a nationally accredited regional land trust that inspires conservation in Western North Carolina by permanently protecting land and water for the benefit of people and all living things. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Foothills Conservancy serves eight counties: Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cleveland, Lincoln, McDowell, and Rutherford, in three major river basins: the Broad, Catawba, and Yadkin. Information about Foothills Conservancy, including ways to support its work, can be found online at [www.foothillsconservancy.org](http://www.foothillsconservancy.org) or by calling 828-437-9930.

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