

Walter Clark
Executive Director
NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund
121 W Jones Street
Raleigh, NC 27603

Dear Mr. Clark,

Three Burke County public schools, Freedom High School (FHS), Oak Hill Elementary School (OHES), and Table Rock Middle School (TRMS), are located less than 2 miles from an access point to the 660-acre tract of land in the Oak Hill community of Burke County that Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina hopes to acquire for a community park and forest. With three schools surrounding the property, all ages of students would have access to and benefit from this acquisition. The park and forest would increase students' opportunities to interact extracurricularly with the outdoors and, with more than 2,000 children enrolled in these schools, there are many possible uses for local students.

Physical Education courses could also be conducted on the property to advocate for physical fitness in outdoor settings and healthy lifestyles in addition to providing easy access for students to observe and interact with this unique natural environment. The parkland would create an annex for athletic programs and could easily be used by cross country teams, allowing students to integrate trail running into their practice sessions. The Burke Bearcats, Burke County's composite mountain bike team made up of middle and high school students from schools across Burke County, competes in the NC Interscholastic Cycling League and is coached by a FHS teacher. The closest practice area for the team is twenty-five minutes away from Morganton at the Fonta Flora State Trail around Lake James and the existing trails on the parkland property would allow students to spend less time traveling to practices and more time on their bikes.

Through Foothills Conservancy's volunteer program, students can sign up for volunteer events or create their own, learning how to become stewards and taking ownership of their natural environment in a recognizable and meaningful location. Students will be able to take part in trail building, clean ups, and other conservation projects. The park and forest could be a space for volunteer and service opportunities and school-based Environmental Clubs would have access to a vast, unspoiled tract of land.

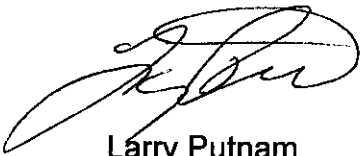
All schools (but especially the three in close vicinity) will use the park and forest for educational purposes. Outdoor classrooms offer a number of benefits for young students, including making learning more engaging and relevant, nurturing creativity,

and developing interest in the environment. Science teachers could conduct outdoor classes and natural resource studies and research projects. Students can study water samples from Canoe Creek, study botany, ecology, wildlife biology, and natural resource management, and learn about the importance of plant and animal biodiversity, relevant to our region.

Burke County students travel to Tuttle Educational State Forest in Caldwell County for natural resource learning in the fields of forestry, soil science and biology. This site is much closer and would allow for deeper learning and more frequent environmental education experiences.

This community park and forest would provide the citizens of Morganton open space with diverse opportunities for education, recreation, agriculture, and conservation. We offer our strong support for Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina's funding application to the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund to acquire the 660-acre tract for Oak Hill Community Park and Forest.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Larry Putnam', written in a cursive style.

Larry Putnam
Burke County Schools, Superintendent