



North Carolina General Assembly
House of Representatives

REPRESENTATIVE HUGH BLACKWELL
86TH DISTRICT, BURKE COUNTY

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August 15, 2019

Mr. Walter Clark
Executive Director
NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund
1651 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1651

Dear Mr. Clark:

Foothills Conservancy of NC has entered into a purchase option with Caldwell Timber Partners, LLC to acquire 660 acres of undeveloped land for conservation as a future community park and forest for watershed protection of Canoe Creek (303d impaired stream), public recreation, outdoor education, community agriculture, archeological study and other public uses for the citizens of Morganton and Burke County, with a total project cost of \$3.1 million.

The citizens of Morganton and Burke County have expressed strong support for the protection of the property for a future public park and forest. Their support reflects broad recognition of the project's multiple public benefits, extending to both present and future generations. Foothills Conservancy has secured \$600,000 in private pledges toward the acquisition of the property and has applied for \$1.2 million from the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund. The conservancy is seeking matching acquisition funds from state and federal grant programs, and private foundations, individuals and corporations.

The project will protect over three miles of surface waters, including over one mile of Canoe Creek – an impaired stream on the NC DWG 303d list (as previously noted) and a direct tributary of the Catawba River. As I am sure you well understand, riparian buffer conservation is an important strategy that can protect both Canoe Creek and Catawba River watersheds from further degradation.





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Adjoining the property on its eastern boundary is NC Highway 126, part of the Overmountain Victory National & State Historic Trail and commemorative auto route, and the beginning point west of the historic colonial era "Yellow Mountain Road." In addition, one of the most distinctive and positive attributes of the chosen site is both its close proximity to the fairly recently discovered Joara settlement by the Spanish (prior to Jamestown and the first permanent English settlement in North America) and the very high potential for native American artifacts and archeological significance in the area of Canoe Creek. This highly significant existing and potential archeological character is outlined in greater detail by the lead archeologist for the Joara site, a professor at Warren Wilson College, who has written you a supportive letter discussing these very points. I hope that you will be sure to take note of his letter. If by chance it should go astray and not make it to you, please let me know. It would be a true shame for you not to have the benefit of his expert opinion on the archeological merits.

Foothills Conservancy's acquisition of the property for such purposes is specifically endorsed by not only the City of Morganton and Burke County, but also by Warren Wilson College, Burke County Public Schools and Burke County Soil & Water Conservation District. They all are advocates for the preservation of natural recreational space, for the health and wellbeing of citizens of the area, the health of the Canoe Creek watershed, the benefits of enhanced tourism opportunities, future archeological exploration and the future development of the property as a community park and forest.

Obviously, you will be aware that I represent Burke County in the legislature and would be expected to support their application. Even so, it seems to me that an impartial evaluation will recognize unique, positive qualities in this project that may well distinguish it from the average proposal. I hope that you will agree and that the needed funding can be authorized. Do not hesitate to call on me if I might facilitate clarification or supplemental information that would be helpful to you, though I know that the folks at Foothills Conservancy are experts in all this and quite skilled with such applications.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hugh A. Blackwell".

Hugh Blackwell

bcc: Andrew Kota

