

July 23, 2015

Mr. Bill Lane
Atlanta Federal Center
National Park Service – RTCA Program
100 Alabama Street, SW- 1924 Building
Atlanta, GA 30303

Dear Mr. Lane,

Founded in 1954, American Whitewater is a national non-profit organization with a mission "to conserve and restore America's whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely." American Whitewater is a 6,000 person membership organization representing a broad diversity of individual whitewater enthusiasts, river conservationists, and more than 100 local paddling club affiliates across America. Our organization is the primary advocate for the preservation and protection of whitewater rivers throughout the United States, and connects the interests of human-powered recreational river users with ecological and science-based data to achieve the goals within its mission. American Whitewater's River Stewardship Program has developed nationally recognized expertise in river management, restoration of rivers impacted by dams, and conservation of free flowing rivers.

I am writing to share American Whitewater's support for the Smoky Mountain Host organization's grant application for technical assistance from the National Park Service. The Technical Assistance Program would be critical in the coordination and designation of the Smoky Mountain Blueways as a National Water Trail. In addition, your assistance is critical in helping them develop a "wayfinding signage program" and developing a strong conservation education component for the regional effort.

The five rivers in the system all flow into Lake Fontana and provide some of the nations most treasured waterways. The region is also home to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, 60% in this region of North Carolina, and the Blue Ridge Parkway, America's favorite scenic drive. In addition, our region is an integral part of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, the 24th. in America.

The entire Southwest Region of North Carolina will benefit economically from this designation and your assistance will solidify the extensive work that has already been done by the Advisory Council and their many collaborative partners in the Little Tennessee Watershed.

Travel and tourism is the engine that drives our economy. The water sports industry is leading the way to further economic development through its supply chain. We believe if we can foster conservation of our natural resources through public education while marketing our "competitive advantage" it will serve our residents as well as our visitors.

Smoky Mountain Host has a long history of partnering with public and private organizations to carry out initiatives such as the Smoky Mountain Blueways. They operate the Smoky Mountain Visitor's Center through a long-standing agreement with the NC Department of Transportation that is located near the border of Georgia. They conduct regional co-op marketing since their inception in 1987. They also work closely with the Southwestern Commission, the region's Council of Governments in various community and economic development initiatives such as this one that provides connectivity between towns, counties, private industry and local governments.

We believe that the designation of the Smoky Mountain Blueways by the National Park Service as a National Blueways Trail System will be a huge step in securing our place in the global market and making our regions natural resources stronger through collaboration and conservation.

Sincerely,



Mark Singleton
Executive Director