



July 29, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Lane,

The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership is pleased to support the Smoky Mountain Host organization's grant application for technical assistance from the National Park Service. The Technical Assistance Program will be critical to 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 nation's 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, the Smoky Mountain Host region is an integral part of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, the 24th Heritage Area approved and one of the largest in the national system. 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 its many collaborative partners in the Little Tennessee Watershed.

Travel and tourism is the engine that drives the Smoky Mountain Host region's economy. A recent study by the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership showed that natural and cultural heritage tourism in Western North Carolina contributes \$2.39 billion annually to our regional economy, generating \$176.5 million in state and local taxes and supporting 30,000 jobs. And now, the water sports industry is leading the way to further economic development through its supply chain. By fostering conservation and education of our natural resources, while marketing our natural resources as a vital "competitive advantage" this industry will serve residents and visitors alike.

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, which is located near the border of Georgia, through a long-standing agreement with the NC Department of Transportation. They have conducted regional co-op marketing since their inception in 1987 and have served as an important long-term partner with the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area in promoting our region. The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Board of Directors supported Smoky Mountain Host with a grant to help finance guide maps and a companion website for the Smoky Mountain Blueways. 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 Western North Carolina's place in the global market and making the Smoky Mountain region's natural resources stronger through collaboration and conservation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angie Chandler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Angie Chandler
Executive Director

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