

# SOUTHWESTERN COMMISSION

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## Cherokee County

Andrews  
Murphy

## Clay County

Hayesville

## Graham County

Fontana Dam  
Robbinsville  
Lake Santeetlah

## Haywood County

Canton  
Clyde  
Maggie Valley  
Waynesville

## Jackson County

Dillsboro  
Forest Hills  
Sylva  
Webster

## Macon County

Franklin  
Highlands

## Swain County

Bryson City

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

Dear Mr. Lane,

The Southwestern Commission Regional Council of Governments is pleased to support 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 Smoky Mountain Blueways is a system of five rivers that 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 24<sup>th</sup> in America.

Travel and tourism are essential economic drivers in our region, and the water sports industry is an important asset in our economy. For that reason, this designation and your assistance will economically benefit the entire Southwest Region of North Carolina. In addition, 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.

This work ties into other initiatives that the Southwestern Commission has been coordinating as an Economic Development District with the Economic Development Administration. This designation will solidify the extensive work that has already been done by the Advisory Council and their many collaborative partners in the Little Tennessee Watershed. As a key member of the council, we have conducted the resource and geographic inventories, and provided mapping support. We also specialize in convenings for the region and have provided meeting space for the partners to collaborate.

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 our organization 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,

Ryan Sherby,  
Executive Director, Southwestern Commission

Appalachian Development District      Area Agency on Aging      Economic Development District  
Rural Planning Organization      Regional Revolving Loan Fund  
Workforce Investment Act