



The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

Principal Chief Richard G. Sneed

Vice Chief Alan B. Ensley

Adam Wachacha
Chairman
Snowbird &
Cherokee Co. Township

David Wolfe
Vice-Chairman
Yellowhill Township

Tribal Council Members

Tom Wahnetah
Yellowhill Township

Bucky Brown
Snowbird &
Cherokee Co. Township

Richard French
Big Cove Township

Perry Shell
Big Cove Township

Bo Crowe
Wolfstown Township

Chelsea Saunooke
Wolfstown Township

Tommye Saunooke
Painttown Township

Dike Sneed
Painttown Township

Albert D. Rose
Birdtown Township

Boyd Owle
Birdtown Township

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20590

RE: FY2022 NSFLTP Grant Application – Ecusta Rail Trail: A Multimodal Gateway to the Pisgah National Forest and the Blue Ridge Parkway

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians is writing in support of the Ecusta Rail Trail application for a Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects Program (NSFLTP) Grant. The Ecusta Rail Trail will provide an active transportation and recreation corridor that improves access to jobs, public resources, opportunities for low-income communities, and connections to the Pisgah National Forest and the Blue Ridge Parkway. As part of a statewide and regional greenway spine identified in the NCDOT Great Trails State Plan, this project will connect to the recreational hiking and mountain biking trails of the Pisgah National Forest, bringing economic development, tourism, and equitable access to the region and its residents.

The Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians is committed to developing outdoor recreation opportunities as a means of improving the physical and mental health of our citizens, fostering economic vitality, and protecting our natural resources. The Ecusta Rail Trail will be a valuable addition to the expanding network of outdoor recreation assets in western North Carolina that will further drive visitation and economic input to the land of the Cherokee, including those on the present-day Qualla boundary.

By funding the Ecusta Rail Trail, USDOT can showcase a project that aligns closely with the Biden Administration's objectives, creating jobs and economic opportunity in an area where the local paper mill industry has declined, repurposing an abandoned and recently acquired rail corridor, and transitioning to a more environmentally conscience network that prioritizes non-motorized users and supports active transportation.

On behalf of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians, I offer my strong support of this project and hope that you will consider funding the Ecusta Rail Trail with the NSFLTP Program.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Hyatt
Secretary of Operations
Office of the Principal Chief
Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians