



BURKE

RIVER TRAIL

ASSOCIATION



MORE THAN JUST A **TRAIL**

Burke River Trail Association has three focus areas:

CONNECTIONS

Physically get trail on the ground to connect Burke County **communities** with 40 miles of trail via a mix of natural surface, crushed cinder and sidewalk.

COMMUNITIES

Build stronger **communities** through economic development and civic engagement by bringing the trail to all nine towns.

CONSERVATION

Educate **communities** about the environment, wildlife and recreating responsibility through events and volunteering.

CONNECTIONS

WILDCAT WAY



RIBBON CUTTING

The first section of trail built specifically as Burke River Trail opened in August. The new 0.6 mile trail is on Burke County Public Schools property and the trail easement is held by Town of Valdese.

Valdese Mayor Pro Tem Gary Ogle welcomed the crowd of forty hikers, volunteers, elected officials and municipal staff. Dr. Karen Auton, BCPS Deputy Superintendent, shared the school system was pleased to be a part of this effort and that it would be a benefit to the students.



Town of Rutherford College Staff and Elected Officials were part of the celebration as this section moves one step closer to connecting Valdese to Rutherford College.



TRAIL ON THE GROUND

TRAIL TIMELINE

Getting trail on the ground can take years, even with willing landowners

- **June 2020** - Initial Meeting held with all Stakeholders
- **January-March 2022** - Specific Meetings and Presentations with Burke County, School Board & Town of Valdese
- **September 2022** - Permission to design, build and survey trail
- **March 2023** - Survey complete and start on final easement language
- **June 2024** - Easement agreement filed
- **August 2024** - Trail open to public

Wildcat Way was one of the first targeted sections of Burke River Trail during initial discussion back in 2020 when work started in earnest on Rep Blackwell's vision for a trail along the river. As Beth Heile was exploring potential routes for the trail, she reached out to the developer on the east side of DHS and upon sharing the vision, Larry Bragg saw the benefit of having the trail in his development. At that time, the "Valdese Greenway" was still grass and there was no McGalliard Creek Bridge. When completed, McGalliard Falls to the eastern side of the development will be about a 4 mile section.



Burke County Public Schools Meeting

WILDCAT WAY VOLUNTEERS



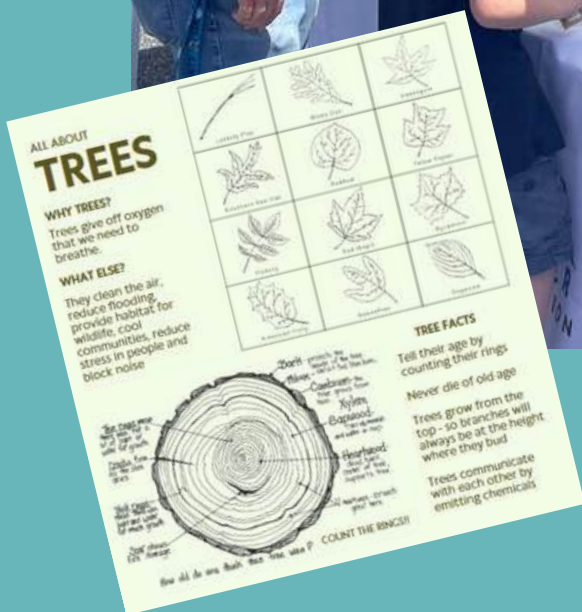
Thanks to the following for their time, talents and/or resources in building the trail:

Sam Fitzwater, Johnny Poteat, Wes Presnell, Tim Johnson Eric, Beth & Zakk Heile, Evija Kleshnika, Erika, Arianna & Santis Limezs, Cassidy Cooper, Friends of the Valdese Rec, Foothills Mulch & Stone, Department of Adult Corrections Trainees

CONSERVATION

BRTA set up at six area festivals in 2024 to provide free crafts for kids while sharing the details of Burke River Trail. Since we are encouraging people to get outside to hike, bike, and paddle, we feel it our responsibility to **educate kids about being good stewards** of the Earth and recreating responsibility.

We created an educational sheet on pollinators and have kids plant wildflowers. We also have a sheet about trees and offer a log slice to color. A grant from **Burke Women's Fund** assists in this program.



BRTA BOARD



President: Val Scott

Treasurer: Christa Pearson

Business Board Members:

Copper Penny Grill: Shelly Gref

Overmountain Cycles: Michael Lowther

Area Board Members:

Glen Alpine: *open*

Morganton: (Christa)

Drexel: Margaret Bumgarner

Valdese: (Val)

Rutherford College: Carroll Hoyle

Connelly Springs: Melinda Wallrichs

Rhodhiss: Rick Justice

Long View: *open*

Hildebran: Diane Speigle

The BRTA board meets online quarterly, and as needed.

NEW BRAND



The BRTA Design Committee worked with Destination by Design to confirm the trail name, logo and branding package, along with trailhead signage. We are thrilled with the results.



COMMUNITY

GLEN ALPINE



GATHERING TOGETHER

BRTA started working with the Town of Glen Alpine Aldermen in January 2024 in starting a grant application for a downtown gathering space. Some aldermen expressed a desire for a volunteer organization that would focus on the town.

After the April 11 Park Public Input Meeting, BRTA lead a organizational meeting of Glen Alpine volunteers. After some discussion, attendees decided they wanted to do more to bring people downtown. BRTA continued to meet with the group for several weeks and handle d finances. On June 1, around 125 people took part in the Glen Alpine in the Street Committee's first event - Pickin' in the Streets.

Thanks to Foxhole Pizza And Subs and Glen Alpine PTO for offering food and drinks, plus sponsors Teresa & Dave Reep and James & Linda Glick. Another thanks to the Pickers who provided the entertainment.

The committee continued to meet during 2024 to plan additional Pickin's and participate in other town events.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & DOWNTOWN BOOST

DOWNTOWN GATHERING SPACE

Located at the intersection of Bridge Street and Linville Street, the new gathering space will spur downtown revitalization with an event lawn for festivals, a picnic shelter, and restroom. The 1.3 acre site is town owned property and is the western terminus of the Burke River Trail. Surveying was completed in December and the grading plan is being developed. The plan shown is being adapted in phases. Concerts and festivals can take place on the lawn without having to close Linville St.

Thanks to these park donors:

- **Patsy & Reid Scott \$2000**
- **Case Farms \$1000**
- **GA United Methodist Church \$1000**
- **Tea Tree \$200**
- **Glen Alpine Ruritan Club \$120**
- **Gary & Debbie Meise \$100**
- **Beth Heile \$100**
- **Mimi Phifer \$100**
- **Waiting for the Trail \$100**
- **WNC Real Estate Inc \$100**
- **Graham Anderson \$100**

Donations are still being accepted with donors \$100 plus being listed at the park.

rivertrail.betterburke.com/donate



Special thanks to Alderman Reid Scott and wife Patsy for attending all park public input and planning meetings. Their devotion to Glen Alpine is unparalleled.



CONSERVATION

AND COMMUNITY



TAKE OUT THE TRASH!

BRTA first caught the “litter bug” during, the Burke County Chamber of Commerce Litter Sweep in March. We committed to holding a trash pickup in each our our Trail Towns. That’s nine times events in one week. Once we completed that week, BRTA decided to host a Trail Town Trash Pickup everyone month. **The events cover two of our focus areas -**

- **Community Engagement** - Bringing together volunteers who care enough to work to make their area more inviting
- **Conservation** - Trash left on the side of the road or along the water line, can leach harmful chemicals into the soil and waterways and endangers wildlife through ingestion, entanglement and cuts.

Thanks to a grant, gloves, snacks and waters were provided by Burke River Trail Association. BRTA Board Member Melinda Wallrichs applied for and was awarded a **Thrivent Action Team Grant**. The grants are available to organizations wanting to make an impact on their communities.

65 different volunteers participate in at least one event. We want to give a special shout out to those who attended two or more trash pickups:

Val Scott, Marti Sundell, Linda Grandle, Jim Glick, Reid & Patsy Scott, Stanley Benedict, Christa Pearson, Greg Kapuscinski, Richard Ericson, Karin Diehm, Dan Hoyle, Melinda Wallrichs. HUGE thanks to **Pam Deloach** for often taking our bags to the Dump!!



TRAIL TOWN TRASH



18 EVENTS



129 BAGS OF TRASH



CONNECTIONS

RHODHISS



CREATING A DOWNTOWN

What Old Glory Mill can be for Town of Rhodhiss

- The town center
- Market rate rentals – exploring some mixed-income development
- Restaurant/Food Hall/Coffee Shop – at least 2 options
- Burke River Trail along water for recreation and safe transportation
- Rhodhiss Town Hall, Community Board Room, Co-working space
- History along Halls
- Public Parking
- 2-3 small retail spaces
- Outfitter Business for kayak/bike rentals and sales
- Kayak launch, picnic areas, viewing platforms

Above rendering: Thanks to a grant from Mountain BizWorks based on a presentation by Beth Heile, on the advice of Robert Dunn, BRTA was able to work with David Harmon Architecture on renderings of Old Glory Mill and the Burke River Trail along water for recreation and safe transportation. Showing “what could be” has been a huge boost for the project to help others see the vision.



COMMUNITY & CONSERVATION



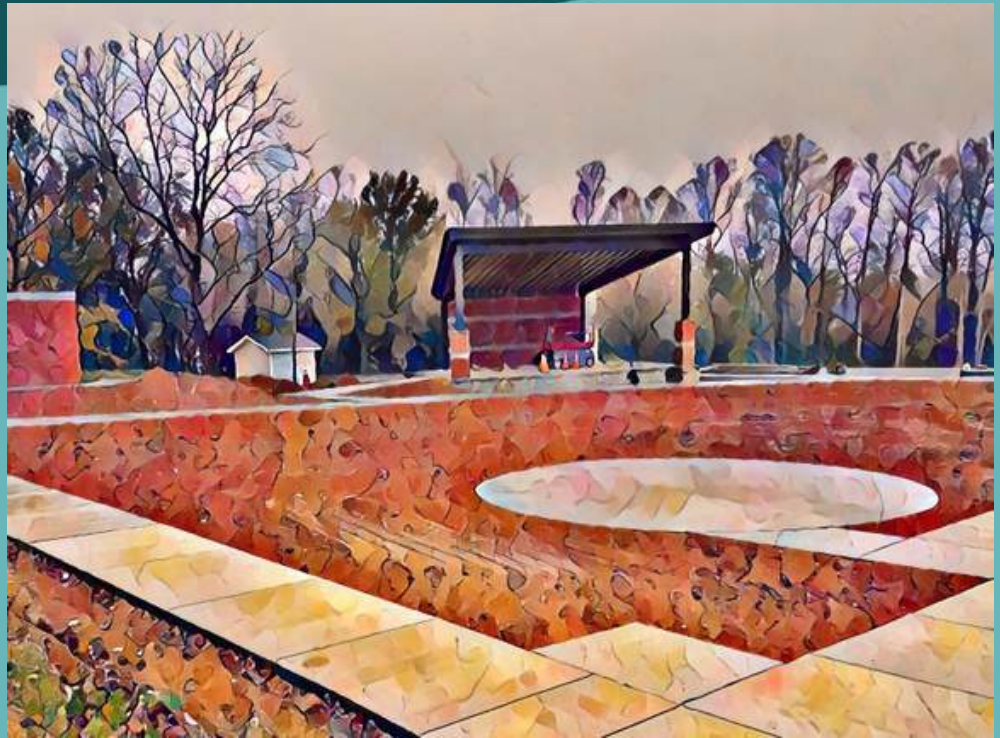
Burke River Trail Association was awarded a \$70,000 grant for technical assistance for the Old Glory Mill project. Vita Nouva has been gathering information on the area and working on project layout and funding. With Rhodhiss owning property north of the River, this has become a much larger project - which is a good thing.



BRTA

CONNECTIONS

HILDEBRAN



Royal Park will be the eastern terminus of Burke River Trail.

Located in downtown Hildebran, Royal Park will include a covered stage, splash pad, 1/4 mile walking track, new concession building with restrooms, and inclusive play equipment.

There are lots of daily destinations and attractions from the center of Hildebran - grocery, restaurants, senior center and library, shopping, larger community park, jobs, an auditorium and museum

DOWNTOWN GATHERING

As construction costs remain elevated, the Town of Hildebran is seeking donations to close the gap in park funding. BRTA is handling the contributions for the town.

rivertrail.betterburke.com/donate



ROYAL PARK DONORS

AMENITY SPONSORS

- 4 Playground Feature \$500 each - In Memory of Brian F. Miller (2) and In Memory of Randy L. Smith (2)
- 1 Inclusive Playground \$3600 - **Tex's Fish Camp**
- 1 Walking Trail \$5000 - **Burke River Trail Association**
- 1 Concession Building \$10,000 - *available*
- 1 Splash Pad \$10,000 - *available*
- 1 Amphitheater \$15,000 - **Wayne Davis - The Legend**

TRADITIONAL DONORS

Donors of \$100+ will be listed at park

- **Pepsi Cola Bottling of Hickory** - \$2500
- **Beth Heile** \$100
- **Luz María López Ramirez** \$30

BENCH SPONSORS

- **SynergyLabs** *\$300 - all benches sponsored*
- In Memory of **Jerry and Judy Martin**
- **J.C. Keller and Madeline Howard Keller Family** - Joe Keller, Helen Keller Triplett Price, Tom Keller, Douglas Keller and Sharon Keller Barlow Elliot
- **Bob & Bonnie Townsend** - with Love from their Children, Grandchildren, and Family
- In memory of **John Calvin Deaton & Irene Berry Deaton**
- In honor of **Bobbie Honeycutt** & in memory of **Bernard Honeycutt**
- In remembrance of **Mayor Albert L. Parkhurst**
- **Hildebran High School Class of 1944**

*BRTA, as a 501c3, is accepting
the donations for Royal Park*



BRT

HISTORY

REP HUGH BLACKWELL *trail visionary*

In late 2018, Rep Blackwell talked to Beth Heile during a Valdese Rotary Pancake Breakfast regarding **his idea for a trail along the river**. The goal of trail was to bring **economic development** opportunities and **health** for Burke towns and residents.



An earnest effort started on the “trail along the river” in January, 2020. Rep Blackwell and Heile met with Scott Carpenter and Shane Prisby of the Burke County Community Development Department. The county did not have time to work on this new trail. However, Prisby did put together some ideas of how where the trail could run as proof of concept.

From there, Heile started contacting large land owners about the possibility of hosting trail and the positive response from Natural Land Alliance started a huge wave. The foundation was laid for a 4-mile section with Town of Valdese, Burke County Public Schools, and the developer.

For the rest of 2020, Rep Blackwell and Heile traveled to all Burke County’s local governments and large landowners to gather support for the trail. From that support, progress continues.

Other Trail Support/Recognition

- Sponsored legislation for **2023 NC Year of the Trail**
- Sponsored bills for **three State Trails** – Fonta Flora State Trail, Wilderness Gateway State Trail & Overmountain Victory State Trail
- **Public Lands Conservationist of the Year** by NC Wildlife Federation
- **Legislative Champion Award** by Great Trails State Coalition



BRT TRAIL TALK



HOUSING

Contacting large landowners to discuss trail on their property is a first step in developing a long-distance trail. During outreach, BRTA has been fortunate to encounter several owners who understand the benefits of allowing public trail on their land. Trail is an attractive, desired amenity a developer can offer to homeowners.

The recent housing study commissioned by Burke County shows the county has an overall housing gap of almost 5,000 units for rental and for-sale at all price points. With development opportunities being uncovered while exploring the trail corridor, Beth Heile and Rep Blackwell organized a “housing opportunity tour” for Burke County Manager Brian Epley. The goal was to visit municipal managers and developers on site to learn more about the available options and the obstacles from those working directly on housing and mixed-use projects.

Burke River Trail is a path to housing.

TRAIL TALK



Long View Manager James Cozart & Hildebran Manager Logan Shook

LONG VIEW TO HILDEBRAN

In February 2023, the NCDOT Integrated Mobility Division announced a \$62,825 Feasibility Study grant to find the best pedestrian route between the towns. With the study complete, the towns will be in a better position to apply for grant funding for a sidepath or sidewalk.

BRT is about safe transportation. In this area, walking and biking paths will be very beneficial to connecting residents to jobs, shopping and classes. Long View will be a connection to the App State Hickory Campus and Catawba Valley Community College's Workforce Innovation Center.



Open Hearts Place is working on housing on Tenth Street which is along the route designated by the feasibility study. Thanks to BRT, efforts, these 40 homes will have safe transportation to daily needs.

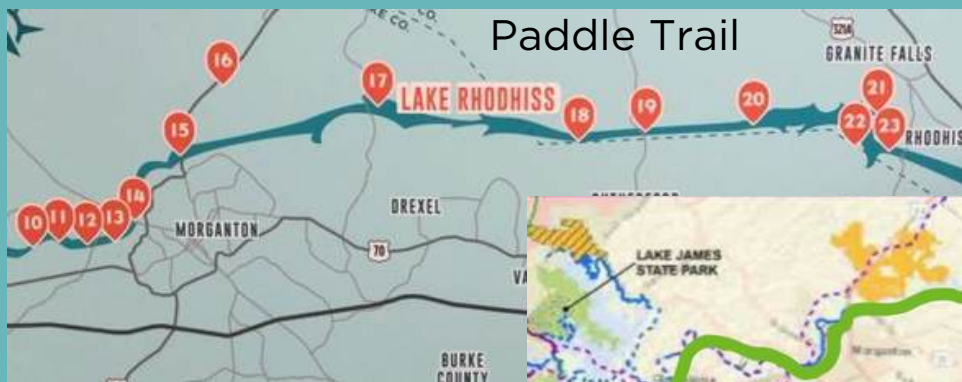
TRAIL TALK



Burke River Trail Corridor

BRT CONNECTIONS TO OTHER TRAILS

- **Fonta Flora State Trail and Overmountain Victory State Trail** - co-location Morganton Greenway, possible section in Glen Alpine
- **Wilderness Gateway State Trail** - co-located on Valdese Greenway and combined trailhead at Henry River Mill Village
- **Hickory Trail** - connection to Aviation Walk at Hickory Airport
- **Upper Catawba River Paddle Trail** - 6 access points on BRT
- **Valdese Lakeside Park** and **Oak Hill Park & Forest** - will pass through each large park



FFST (purple dash west to Lake James), the WGST (large pink dot SMSP to Valdese) and the OVST (pink/purple dash). Huge loop opportunity!



TRAIL BRIEFS

STATE AWARDS

At the NC Great Trails State Conference, awards were presented to

**Beth Heile -
Year of the Trail Spirit Award**

**Rep Blackwell -
Legislative Champion**



WPCC

Outdoor Rec & Fire/Swiftwater/Rescue Training Combined!! Great planning by WPCC. That is the Burke River Trail along the bright green line.



RIVER CAUSES

BRTA often meets with Catawba Riverkeeper to discuss trails, creek restoration, river cleanups, bridges, dams, policy matters and more. Pic: Rep Blackwell and Ryan Carter.



TRAIL BRIEFS



TRAINS & TRAILS?

YES!! BRTA has enjoyed our partnership with Waiting For the Train: Bringing Passenger Rail Back to Burke County, NC. Train Stations should be Trailheads -- maybe that is Trail Stations or Trainheads!!
Pic: WFTT Founder Mimi Phifer and BRTA Founder Beth Heile

ONE VOICE

BRTA does not support the GTSC just because Beth Heile is a founding member! We believe in the Coalition's work to speak to legislators & state agencies with one voice to move trails forward for all of NC.



HENRY RIVER?

Yes!! Not only is Burke River Trail along the Catawba River, it will also have a trailhead on the Henry Fork as a combined hike/bike/paddle site. Henry River Mill Village is willing to host the trailhead as FCNC will bring a paddle section of WGST and we will bring BRT to the site



TRAIL BRIEFS

VULCAN



Vulcan is excited about having the trail come across their property along the river east of Morganton. They have plans for educational signage to teach trail users about their operations. We have enjoyed working with Denise Hallett, Manager, Community and Government Relations & all the Vulcan staff.

DREXEL

From having plans for BRT through the industrial site on the railroad to the energized Grow with Drexel community group, exciting projects are happening in Drexel as we work toward a walkable community.



T-SHIRTS

Long sleeve and short sleeve - show your support for Burke River Trail!! Just a \$20 donation.



TRAIL BRIEFS



HICKORY

Aviation Walk Ribbon Cutting with Burke County Commissioner Randy Burns. BRT will connect to Aviation Walk north of the airport at Goat Farm Street.

CALDWELL

BRTA met with Caldwell Pathways Caldwell Pathways to find ways to work together on connections. Burke & Caldwell connect at Rutherford College's Castle Bridge, the Rhodhiss Burke-Caldwell St Bridge & there are some Overmountain Victory State Trail Connections.



BURKE

BRTA organized a meeting of all trail organizations in the county for better collaboration. Partnerships are key in trail work.



TRAIL BRIEFS



MORGANTON

BRTA was pleased to write a letter of support for Morganton's Great Trails State Fund Grant application to extend the Greenway east of Rocky Ford. We have been meeting since 2020 and hosting activities at Rocky Ford access to get ready for this extension

TOURISM

Trails are a huge part of Nature's Playground. BRTA was excited to a presentation by Katherine with Discover Burke County sharing details of tourism in Burke County and got a Burke County hiking guide hot off the press!!



OAK HILL

The plan is for BRT to cross along Oak Hill Park at Hwy 126 between Morganton & Glen Alpine. Trail partners gathered at the Oak Hill Park Ribbon Cutting for mountain bike trails. Pic: Bryant Lindsey, Overmountain Victory Trail, Tom Kenney, FCNC and Beth.



TRAIL BRIEFS

GREAT TRAILS

BRTA President Val Scott and Executive Director Beth Heile attended the NC Great Trails State Conference help in September. The three day event offered plenty of sessions on trail building, programming, partnerships and more. Beth also led a session on the economic impact of trails.



BRIDGES

Bridges need to be bike and pedestrian friendly. That is not always the first thought for NCDOT. BRTA stays on top of bridge planning - working to get this Rhodhiss bridge updated for pedestrians as well as the I-40 Exit 119 bridge.



NEWSMAKER

BRTA and Beth Heile - One of the four Top 2024 Newsmakers according to The News Herald. Thankful that our local newspaper recognizes the importance of what outdoor recreation brings to our community - Health, Economic Impact, Active Transportation, Preserving Green Space.

Beth Heile helps outdoor recreation expand



MEMBERS



Burke River Trail Association is grateful for our members. Annual fees cover postage, office supplies, tax filings and all that boring stuff that has to be done to keep a nonprofit legal! rivertrail.betterburke.com/join

LIFETIME \$500

Black Diamond Trail Designs - Joseph Litaker

CORPORATE/CIVIC \$120

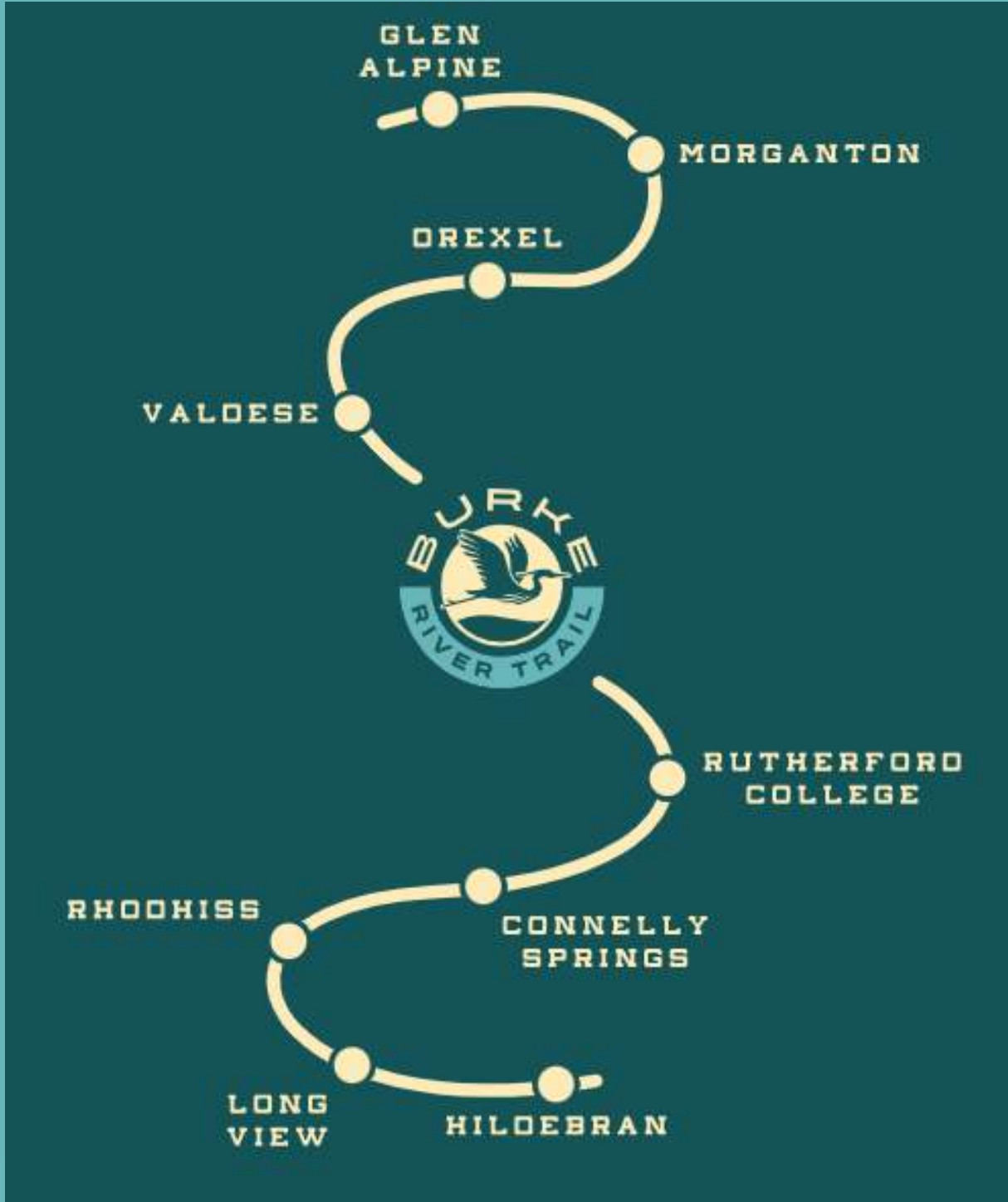
- Friends of the Valdese Rec
- Waiting For the Train

INDIVIDUAL \$20

- Beth Heile
- Val Scott
- Wes Presnell
- Melinda Wallrichs
- Christa Pearson
- Jean McMullin
- Carroll Hoyle
- Leslie Ramseur
- Barb and Jerry Ryan
- Thomas Miller
- Ashley Bunner
- Scott Bruner
- Ron Wyant
- Jennifer Wood
- Tim Tunstill
- Aaron Smith
- Palmer McIntyre
- Margaret Sundell
- James Glick
- Linda Glick
- April Nelson
- Mary Charlotte Safford
- Rob Lynam
- Barbara Lynam
- Tim Johnson
- Stanley Benedict
- Patricia Zimmerman
- Melissa Darling
- Mike Darling
- Evija Kleshnika
- Dr. Shawn Hamm
- Linda Grandle
- Dori Barron
- Helena Jolanta



TRAIL TOWNS



BRTA



“ *Just the discussion of a regional trail has sparked incredible opportunities.*

”

BETH HEILE

founder and executive director

After years of volunteering as a trail advocate, my passion has naturally evolved into championing the growth of rural communities in North Carolina, especially Burke County. Trails are at the heart of this movement, serving as the vital link to many of the things rural NC desperately needs – improved quality of life, housing, business growth, tourism, new residents, transportation, and jobs.

Working on the Burke River Trail has been an amazing journey. It's the perfect combination of parks, trails, and rural revitalization – all causes I care deeply about, particularly the rejuvenation of small-town life. When I first began acquiring easements along the trail corridor, I thought it would take years before we'd see the full economic impact and downtown revitalization that trails bring.

To my surprise, even just the discussion of a regional trail has sparked incredible opportunities. Thanks to visionary landowners, forward-thinking town leaders, and elected officials, we're already seeing downtown development, new housing projects and new businesses take shape. The energy and momentum are truly inspiring. This is exactly the vision that Rep. Blackwell had for the towns along the trail.

With this renewed energy, the focus of the Burke River Trail Association has shifted. What began as an effort to simply establish a trail is now about fostering connections, strengthening community ties, and preserving our natural resources. As I always say, parks and trails are not just nice-to-haves—they are essential infrastructure for our health, our quality of life, and for driving economic development.

If you take away one thing from this report, let it be this:

BURKE RIVER TRAIL IS SO MUCH MORE THAN JUST A TRAIL.



BRT

MORE THAN A TRAIL

Along the trail, there will be locations, views, kiosks, structures and markers highlighting the Burke County area's ...



PEOPLE



HISTORY



INDUSTRY



ART



BEAUTY



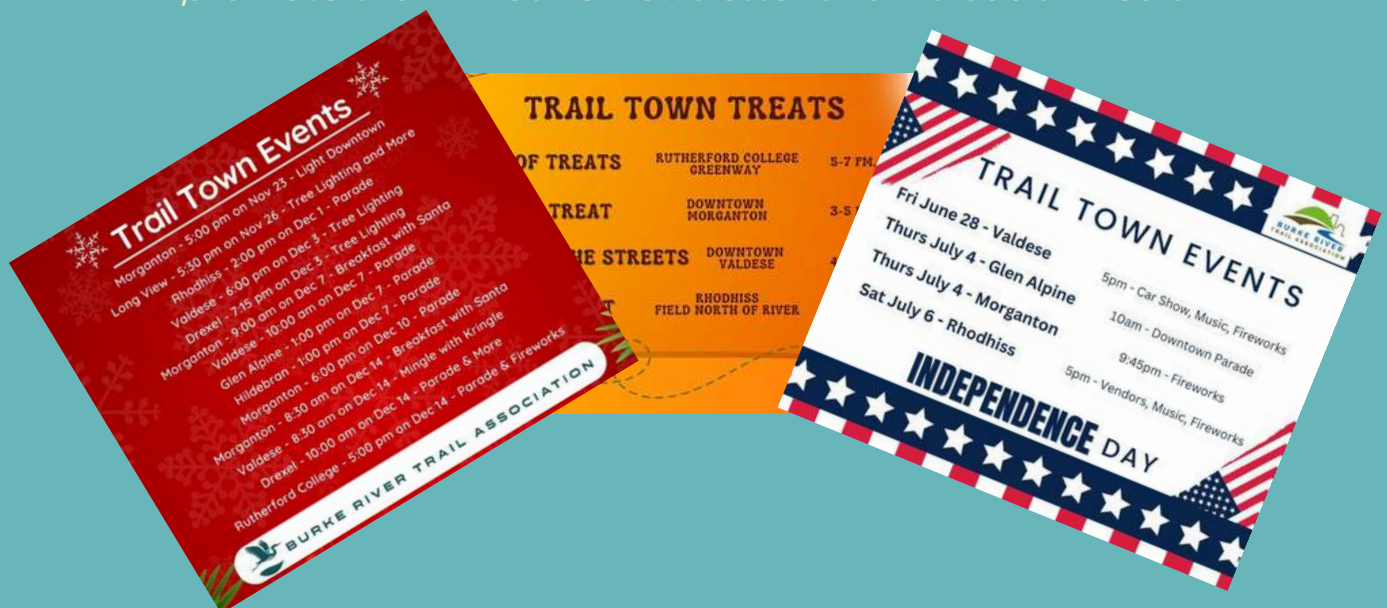
2025 TRAIL TOWN TOURS

- January 23 at Rutherford College Town Hall
- February 27 at Hildebran Community Park, Depot Rm
- March 27 Rhodhiss at Copper Penny Restaurant

rivertrail.betterburke.com/calendar

Each month, learn about a Trail Town along the Burke River Trail. We will **meet for lunch at Noon** to hear updates from town officials and get tips on exploring the town. We will also walk the trails or sidewalks in the host town! The schedule will continue all year - check the calendar for updates. The free lunch events are open to the **first 20 folks who RSVP to BurkeTrails@gmail.com** for each date.

We promote significant events held by our Trail Towns and promote them in our e-newsletter and via social media.



DONATE-JOIN

BRTA is a 501c3, donations are tax deductible.

DONATE

- \$ _____ **General Fund** Events, programming and more
- \$ _____ **Trail on the Ground** Trail/trailhead design & construction
- \$ _____ **Glen Alpine Downtown Park** Donors \$100+ listed at the Park
- \$ _____ **Hildebran Royal Park** Donors \$100+ listed at the Park

JOIN

Joining is a type of donation, too. Annual membership dues pay boring stuff like insurance and stamps. But this is critical to help keep the organization running so we can fulfill our mission.

___ **Individual** \$20 ___ **Corporate/Civic** \$120 ___ **Lifetime** \$500

Name

Address:

Email:

Phone:

Mail check to:

Burke River Trail Association
Company 204 E Main Street
Valdese, NC 28690

You can also donate online

RiverTrail.BetterBurke.com

2024

BY THE NUMBERS

18

TRAIL TOWN TRASH
PICKUP EVENTS

5

TRAIL
WORKDAYS

6

CRAFT
TENT EVENTS

16

PRESENTATIONS
& PUBLIC INPUT

4

GROUP
HIKES

1

RIBBON
CUTTING

260

ATTENDEES
AT EVENTS

136

VOLUNTEER
HOURS

rivertrail.betterburke.com



BURKE
RIVER TRAIL
ASSOCIATION

204 E Main Street
Valdese, NC 29690