



2025 Western North Carolina Conservation Priorities

Support the recovery of our mountain rivers – and the jobs and businesses that they sustain.

Mountain rivers and streams are big business. A recent report conducted by economists at Western Carolina University found the total economic impact of the French Broad River is \$3.8 billion annually, and river-reliant businesses create or maintain 38,554 jobs each year. Similarly, each dollar anglers spend to fish for mountain trout in Western North Carolina returns \$1.93 to our economy and results in a \$1.38 billion impact, according to new data from the NC Wildlife Resources Commission. Clean water is also critical to our health and wellbeing.

Unfortunately, Hurricane Helene ravaged western North Carolina with unprecedented floodwaters, destruction of our forests, and the loss of lives, homes, and livelihoods. Costs of recovery are estimated to approach \$60 billion, and the damage has put the brakes on this economic engine by making our waters unsafe for thousands of recreational users and unsuitable habitat for a thriving fishery.

To support clean waters, our health, and recovery of the local economy in the wake of Hurricane Helene, MountainTrue recommends the following:

- **Septic Repairs and Replacement Grants** - Provide a first installment of funds to start addressing the need for repairs and replacement of 30,000 septic systems. **\$4,000,000 to DEQ Division of Waste Management** (Governor's Helene response recommendations at D6)
- **Fire Season Preparation and Wildfire Risk Reduction** - Provide funds to prepare for the upcoming wildfire season and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. **\$19,423,500 to NC Forest Service in DACS** (Governor's Helene response recommendations at E4 and E5)
- **Help property owners reduce stormwater pollution** - The NC Community Conservation Assistance Program (CCAP) allows local soil and water districts to help property owners reduce stormwater pollution. Unfortunately, demand for CCAP far outstrips its funding. **\$500,000 nonrecurring for CCAP program in the French Broad River watershed** will significantly reduce stormwater pollution in an area that is heavily used for recreation.
- **Expand Real-time E. coli Monitoring in the French Broad River** - Recently, NCDEQ launched the first real-time sensor in the French Broad River in Buncombe County to give river users an up-to-date picture of bacteria levels. Three more sites in Madison, Henderson and Transylvania Counties are needed to automate bacteria monitoring across the watershed. **Legislators can help by providing \$225,000 nonrecurring to DEQ for modeling and equipment to expand this service.**

WNC Public Access, Restoration, and Recreation Investments:

- **State Trail Authorization for Two State Paddle Trails** - The First Broad River (Rutherford and Cleveland County) and Watauga River (Watauga County) are popular paddling and fishing destinations with opportunities to expand access. State Trail authorization will accelerate development of paddle trails on these rivers and boost recreational and economic opportunities for local communities.
- **Expand the [Blue Ridge Snorkel Trail](#)** to include at least one site in each WNC county and promotional materials (\$150,000 nonrecurring to Mainspring Conservation Trust). *All WNC Districts*
- **Build a new First Broad River access** in Cleveland County at Metcalf Road (\$150,000 nonrecurring to Foothills Conservancy, matching \$50,000 from Albemarle Corporation). *Sen. Alexander/Rep. Hastings*
- **Expand the River Walk in downtown Murphy** by extending the path from the high school to an affordable housing development (\$350,000 nonrecurring to the Town of Murphy). *Sen. Corbin/Rep. Gillespie*
- **Improve public access to the Watauga River Paddle Trail** by purchasing an additional access point in Watauga County (\$500,000 nonrecurring to Watauga County). *Sen. Hise/Rep. Pickett*
- **Develop a new public access point and riverwalk in Polk County** (\$250,000 nonrecurring to Polk County Community Foundation, providing \$250,000 match). *Sen. Moffitt/Rep. Johnson*
- **Complete the Wave and Riverside Park** addition to the \$32 million Woodfin Greenway and Blueway (\$500,000 nonrecurring to the Town of Woodfin). *Sen. Mayfield/Rep. Rudow*

Other policy and funding initiatives that MountainTrue supports:

- **Dam Removal Funding** - Hurricane Helene caused significant damage to over 40 dams in WNC, some failing completely, and many others are antiquated and in disrepair. We support substantial ongoing funding for dam removal projects for public safety and ecological benefits. .
- **Abundant Housing Legislation** - Opportunities for dense housing located close to jobs reduces energy demand and transportation emissions. Reintroduce the language of 2023 [H409](#) / [S374](#), which would allow homeowners more freedom to build accessory dwelling units and create much needed, new housing.
- **Parking Lot Reform Legislation** - We support legislation to restrict minimum parking requirements, ban the use of coal tar pavement sealants, and improve stormwater requirements for redevelopment sites.
- **Restore local authority to regulate single use plastic** - Repeal NCGA § 153A-145.11(a) and (c) and § 160A-205.6(a) and (c) to restore local government authority to regulate waste for the benefit of their communities.