

**Blue Ridge National Heritage Area**  
**Fact Sheet for America's Great Outdoors Listening Session**  
**Asheville, NC - July 15, 2010**

1. The mission of the BRNHA includes preserving and protecting the natural and agricultural heritage of the 25 westernmost counties of North Carolina and the Cherokee Qualla Boundary. These are two of five facets of the region's heritage that Congress recognized as being uniquely important to America's landscape and history. Congress - honored the region with a National Heritage Area designation in 2003.
2. The BRNHA is blessed with an abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities, including hiking, camping, picnicking, mountain biking, horseback riding, rock climbing, fishing, boating, swimming, and skiing. The BRNHA contains:
  - The two most visited National Park units in the country -- the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway
  - Two major national forests (Pisgah and Nantahala)
  - The highest peak in the eastern US - Mount Mitchell
  - The highest waterfall east of the Rockies (Whitewater Falls)
  - The deepest gorge east of the Grand Canyon (Linville Gorge)
  - Nine State Parks, two State Forests and the Green River Game Lands which protect spectacular natural landmarks and provide outstanding recreational opportunities
  - Numerous rivers renowned for their whitewater rafting, kayaking, and canoeing opportunities
  - The Appalachian Trail, Bartram Trail, and hundreds of miles of other hiking trails
  - Ski slopes in Cataloochee and the High County which provide a variety of opportunities for outdoor recreation in the winter months
3. Per Sec. 2, b, of the Presidential Memorandum, the BRNHA is an "existing resource" that is already on the ground and is actively engaged with its partners in projects and initiatives that are directly aligned with the goals of the President's Great Outdoors agenda. Some recent regional initiatives include support for:
  - **Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project:** A program to provide new tools and best practice training for the promotion of agri-tourism and local farms & foods in Western North Carolina.
  - **Blue Ridge Parkway 75, Inc.:** Lead sponsorship of signature events organized by Blue Ridge Parkway 75, Inc. to celebrate the Blue Ridge Parkway's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Parkway is a special opportunity to engage local communities and the nation in efforts to sustain a healthy Blue Ridge Parkway for future generations.
  - **Blue Ridge Forever:** A regional farmland preservation initiative consisting of a public awareness campaign, research on the latest farmland protection trends, and the cultivation of donated professional services.
  - **Councils of Government Smart Growth Initiatives:** The Southwestern Commission's award-winning Mountain Landscapes Initiative toolkit and Land-of-Sky's Linking Lands and Communities project.

4. The BRNHA Management Plan includes a comprehensive inventory of the region's natural assets, including:
  - Prominent geological features
  - Major rivers, lakes, outstanding resource waters, trout waters, and waterfalls
  - National parks and forests, recreational areas, and campgrounds
  - State parks, forests and natural areas
  - Significant natural areas
  - Critical habitat and species of conservation importance
  - Public fishing and gamelands
  - Trails
  - Scenic byways
  - Farmers markets
  - Agricultural communities
  - Historic and century farms
5. BRNHA matching grants have provided funding for numerous projects that support outdoor recreation and land conservation. In fact, since its inception, BRNHA has awarded nearly \$1.2 million in grants, awards that have leveraged nearly \$2.2 million in non-federal matches. Every federal dollar BRNHA has awarded in grants has leveraged another \$1.83 in state, local, or private contributions.
6. BRNHA supports the preservation of local farms and the development of farmers' markets, tailgate markets, and local food products. Other projects and partnerships have supported land conservation, greenways, mountain bike trails, hiking trails, and other "Great Outdoors" assets throughout the region.
7. The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area and its partners have mobilized grassroots community groups to develop local plans for the conservation of heritage assets. These volunteer groups work to support conservation efforts and to stimulate heritage-based economic activity in their communities through heritage tourism and recreation.
8. The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area has developed a strong partnership with the Blue Ridge Parkway. In addition to supporting Parkway outreach activities, the heritage area partners with the Parkway in the operation of the Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center providing visitors with information about cultural and natural heritage sites and communities within the 25-county region.