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Federal funds will boost scenic byways in Macon, Cherokee counties

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Two Western North Carolina projects will receive \$1.6 million from federal funds designated for the nation's scenic byways.

The U.S. Forest Service restoration project at scenic Dry Falls in Macon County will receive \$512,000, which will go to complete improvements to the parking area and access walkways, including a new pedestrian bridge.

The Nantahala Byway, a scenic, 43-mile highway that meanders through parts of Jackson, Swain, Macon and Cherokee counties will get a \$1,098,500 boost. The money will allow the Land Trust for the Little Tennessee to enter into a conservation easement with the Wood family farm owners that will protect 400 acres in Cherokee County.

"That is so amazing. That is just great, great news," said Sharon Fouts Taylor, deputy director of the land trust, when she heard the news. "We weren't sure they would fund us at all. Most of the land conservation easements are done out West."

The Nantahala Byway, or U.S. 19/74, runs right through the Wood family farm, a "beautiful stretch of traveling between Murphy and Andrews," as Taylor puts it. The land trust will have to raise funds for a match to the federal grant, but the Federal Highway Administration award "gives us a great jump start toward meeting the needs of that family as well as conserving the farmland."

The FHA announced Friday that communities in 43 states will receive \$40.7 million for 160 projects to improve and promote highways designated as scenic byways. The grants are part of the National Scenic Byways Program, which recognizes and provides funding for roads designated either locally or nationally as having outstanding scenic, historic, cultural, natural, recreational and archaeological qualities.

Linda Harbuck, executive director of the Franklin Chamber of Commerce in Macon County, said the Dry Falls award is great news. The U.S. Forest Service has been overhauling the overlook and parking area at Dry Falls, a large waterfall on the Cullasaja River that visitors can walk behind.

"Waterfalls are one of our biggest requested attractions, and Dry Falls is always one of the most scenic and requested of those," she said.

The improvements will include a new pedestrian bridge across the road and expanded parking in a safer location to accommodate a high traffic load and rapid turnover of visitors. The falls are off N.C. 28.

Additional Facts

Take the byway

Since 1992, the National Scenic Byways Program has awarded almost \$388 million in funding for more than 2,832 state, tribal and nationally designated byway projects in 50 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia.
