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Date: March 14, 2017

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**Subject: Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership Announces Grant Awards for 2017**

The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership (BRNHA) announced the award of 21 grants totaling \$180,000 to help support projects across the North Carolina mountains and foothills, focusing on craft, music, natural heritage, Cherokee culture, and agricultural traditions. These five facets of the region's heritage earned the 25 counties of Western North Carolina a Congressional designation as the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area in 2003.

"These grant awards will support community projects across Western North Carolina," said Angie Chandler, Executive Director of BRNHA. "By spotlighting our cultural traditions and natural wonders, we help sustain these assets, build community pride, draw more visitors, and grow the regional economy."

The 21 grant awards include:

- **Altapass Foundation:** \$5,500 to develop a Cherokee history exhibit for the Historic Orchard at Altapass
- **Asheville Museum of Science:** \$7,000 to develop an immersive video exhibit showcasing the region's geologic and natural history
- **Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation:** \$16,000 to develop a vision plan to increase recreation opportunities while protecting natural resources at the recently expanded Waterrock Knob property on the Blue Ridge Parkway
- **Clay County Communities Revitalization Association:** \$2,850 for a music heritage sculpture in downtown Hayesville
- **Cowee School Arts & Heritage Center:** \$6,600 for an outdoor stage at the historic Cowee School to expand the capacity to present traditional music concerts
- **Friends of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park:** \$5,000 to construct a historic "snake" style fence for the park's Mountain Farm Museum
- **Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation:** \$4,000 for interpretive trail signs highlighting forest ecology, resources, and wildlife
- **Jackson County:** \$10,000 to develop interpretive wayside exhibits along the new Jackson County Greenway
- **Madison County Arts Council:** \$5,000 for a portable sound system to support traditional music events around the county
- **Mainspring Conservation Trust:** \$9,890 to develop interpretive signage and improve trail access for a Cherokee-themed cultural corridor along NC Highway 28 in Macon County
- **The North Carolina Arboretum Society:** \$8,000 for an outdoor forest heritage exhibit at the North Carolina Arboretum

- **One Dozen Who Care, Inc.:** \$5,000 to develop exhibits on the music traditions of African American communities in partnership with Western Carolina University
- **Peacock Performing Arts Center:** \$2,225 for a new sound system to support music performances
- **Penland School of Crafts:** \$7,850 for a new historic timeline exhibit and improved visitor signage
- **Southern Highland Craft Guild:** \$16,000 to develop new e-commerce capability to market and sell the work of guild artists
- **Southern Highlands Reserve:** \$16,000 for a project to restore red spruce to endangered spruce-fir forest habitat in the Great Balsam Mountains
- **Surry Arts Council:** \$8,000 to expand and improve backstage space for musicians performing at the Historic Earle Theatre in downtown Mount Airy
- **Toe River Arts Council:** \$12,000 for interactive informational kiosks directing visitors to craft galleries, studios, and festivals in Mitchell and Yancey counties
- **Western North Carolina Historical Association:** \$8,085 to support a music heritage exhibit and related educational programs at the Smith-McDowell House Museum
- **Wilkes Heritage Museum:** \$10,000 to expand the museum’s Blue Ridge Music Hall of Fame exhibit and event space
- **Will & Deni McIntyre Foundation:** \$15,000 to support the national broadcast of *David Holt’s State of Music* series which showcases Western North Carolina’s bluegrass, old-time, and gospel traditions

All of the grant awards will be matched with state or local funding and donated services.

Because the Wilkes Heritage Museum project involves renovations to the old Wilkes Courthouse, the grant is undergoing additional consultation by the State Historic Preservation Office.

Since its inception in 2003, the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership has awarded 154 grants totaling over \$2.1 million and leveraging another \$4.5 million in matching contributions from local governments and the private sector. These grants have funded projects in all 25 counties of Western North Carolina.

The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership received a total of 44 applications in this grant cycle.

The BRNHA Partnership is the nonprofit organization charged with preserving, interpreting, developing, and celebrating the rich and unique natural and cultural heritage in the 25-county Blue Ridge National Heritage Area.

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*The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, designated by Congress and the President in November, 2003, works to protect, preserve, interpret, and develop the unique natural, historical, and cultural resources of Western North Carolina for the benefit of present and future generations, and in so doing to stimulate improved economic opportunity in the region. National Heritage Areas are locally-governed institutions that encourage residents, non-profit groups, government agencies, and private partners to work together in planning and implementing programs that preserve and celebrate America’s defining landscapes.*

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