

Panthertown Valley Enhancement Project

Jason Kimenker

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| Submission Date | Dec 12, 2023 8:44 PM |
| Name of Initiative | Panthertown Valley Enhancement Project |
| Contact Person | Jason Kimenker |
| Title | Executive Director |
| Address | PO Box 51 |
| City | Cashiers |
| State | NC |
| Zip Code | 28717 |
| Primary Phone Number | 8282694453 |
| Email | friends@panthertown.org |
| Organization Type | Non-Profit |
| Organization Tax ID | 27-3758868 |
| Time of Year of Initiative | Off Peak (Dec - March) preferred |

Describe the timing of the initiative in as much detail as possible (please list key project dates, milestones, timeframes, etc.)

This essential initiative will begin immediately upon funding. Trail counter equipment will be purchased in January 2024 to be installed in February and March in anticipation for busy spring, summer, and fall outdoor recreation seasons.

Trail maintenance and trail improvements will be ongoing throughout 2024 with public trail work days and conservation projects scheduled on the first Tuesday and third Saturday each month, plus additional work days and projects by invitation for groups and individuals.

Resource assessments and management of the project will be ongoing.

Quarterly updates will be provided to JCTDA. We expect to share our visitation data collected from the new trail counters for the quarterly periods of June 30, September 30, and December 31, 2024.

Public kiosk plans will be submitted to the County for approval before construction. A licensed contractor will be hired to perform the work. Depending on when approval is received, we expect to complete construction within 6 months, or as soon as logistically possible.

Describe your initiative

The purpose of the Panthertown Valley Enhancement Project is to support trail maintenance and improvements to the 30 mile public Panthertown Valley Trail System, support Phase 2 of the Panthertown Valley Visitor Data Collection Program, support continued natural resource assessments and monitoring, and support analysis of assessment data and trail counter data, all of which will aid in informing management decisions for Friends of Panthertown and the U.S. Forest Service Nantahala District.

Friends of Panthertown has installed and continues to maintain trail counters throughout the Panthertown Valley Trail System. This initiative will enable us to continue to manage, maintain, and improve this important program, all while aiding in enhancing the visitor experience.

Visitors to Jackson County will also benefit from a public information kiosk located at 116 Central Street in downtown Sylva which will provide maps, Leave No Trace information, and public notices concerning Panthertown and other trail systems in Jackson County.

Describe what previous experience applicant has in successful execution of similar endeavors

Friends of Panthertown staff assess, maintain, and improve more than 30 miles of public trails in Panthertown Valley for the benefit of all who visit, and for the surrounding community and our tourists to have access to the natural resource.

We coordinate contracted trail work plus hundreds of volunteers each year, including in 2022 a total of 254 participants who generously contributed 1,767 hours on the ground, over 54 work days, with a combined in-kind value of over \$74,000. So far in 2023 we have coordinated and trained 232 volunteers who have contributed 1,616 hours at an in-kind value of \$48,480.

In response to the significant increase in visitation during the pandemic, Friends of Panthertown created a visitor data collection program and received a \$10,000 grant from JCTDA in 2021 to purchase and install 17 strategically placed trail counters in Panthertown.

With over a year of visitation data collected, we now have a much better understanding of Panthertown Valley's trail usage, visitation trends, and conservation needs related to the trail system.

We have worked in partnership with JCTDA for public benefit for many years and we look forward to continuing our partnership.

Through donations and grants, Friends of Panthertown provides funding for resource protection and conservation projects throughout Panthertown. Our organization enables trail construction, maintenance, and recreational improvements along the 30-mile Panthertown Valley Trail System, and within its recreational corridors, and teaches Leave No Trace and Bear Wise education in Panthertown, and in the surrounding community. We provide public stewardship opportunities, trainings, and the coordination of hundreds of volunteers and citizen scientists each year who have contributed thousands of hours to protect the natural resources and improve the recreational opportunities in Panthertown for the benefit of the public. We collaborate with our partners, including the U.S. Forest Service, to conserve Panthertown, engage its stakeholders, and educate the community. We have strong public support and cooperative partnerships that help us to sustain the important conservation work needed in Panthertown.

Website

www.panthertown.org

Social Media Channels - paste URLs below

Facebook.com/panthertown Instagram.com/panthertownvalley
YouTube.com/@Panthertown X.com/panthertown
TikTok.com/@panthertown <https://www.linkedin.com/company/friends-of-panthertown/>

Amount of Funds Requested?

\$40,000

Date Funds Needed

Dec 31, 2023

Give a narrative description of how this project will increase tourism and visitation in Jackson County

Visitors to Jackson County will benefit from a public information kiosk to be constructed with grant funds at 116 Central Street in downtown Sylva which will provide maps, Leave No Trace information, volunteer opportunities, event listings, and official public notices concerning Panthertown and other trail systems in Jackson County. This outdoor recreation kiosk will be available 24 hours a day as a public service and amenity.

Maintained and improved trails will benefit all visitors to Panthertown and will increase tourism and visitation as the visitor experience is maintained and improved. Trail experience review websites such as AllTrails, combined with visitor posts on social media, will see an increase in likes, comments, and shares related to Panthertown which will result in an increase in outdoor recreation tourism and visitation in Jackson County. This will in turn lead to increased investment in our community, and in particular economic enhancement for local lodging, retailers, restaurants, and other hospitality businesses.

Visitors will experience immediate benefits from trail improvements. Families, students, outdoor enthusiasts, and various user groups such as hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians, kayakers, rock climbers, birders, anglers, and backpackers will all enjoy the advantages of well-maintained backcountry trails and trailheads. These individuals rely on the public trails in Panthertown Valley to engage in recreational activities, improve their physical health, enhance their vitality, and nurture their mental well-being. By providing a positive and inclusive outdoor experience, our goal is to inspire these visitors to continue to return to Jackson County while engaging with their public lands as good stewards and responsible recreation users.

If this initiative has occurred before, what is new that differentiates it from prior years?

After receiving funding in 2021 for \$10,000 to go towards Phase 1 of our trail counter program, we began purchasing the system and installing the counters in Panthertown. With more than one year of visitation data in hand, and after managing and maintaining the trail counter system, we are able to see where additional counters are needed, the amount of time and resources required to manage the program, and how we can improve this program significantly with the addition of strategically placed counters purchased and installed.

What is your advertising and marketing plan for your initiative?

We will utilize our website, email list, social media channels, public events, and traditional media to reach the community and herald the initiative. Press releases in the local newspapers, radio stations, and social media groups will enable us to reach a wide audience. An announcement of the grant will be sent out in January and regular updates will occur throughout the initiative. Once a public kiosk is built this will become an additional channel to market the initiative.

Do you agree to acknowledge the 'Jackson County TDA' in materials as required? Any releases or ad placements should have a statement that "the event was made possible, in part, by the Jackson County TDA." Print ad placements, where/when possible should include the JCTDA logo.

Yes

Total anticipated cost of initiative

60000

| | |
|---|---|
| Total funds your organization will provide toward total cost? | 20000 |
| Detail funds requested from other sources and note commitments or anticipated receipt of funds from other sources | National Forest Foundation (\$5,000), National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance (\$5,000), Panthertown Resource Assessment Fund (\$3,000), The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina Cashiers Community Fund (\$2,000), Cedar Creek Club Donor Advised Fund (\$1,000), Cullasaja Women's Outreach (\$1,000), Wade Hampton Golf Club Donor Advised Fund (\$1,000), Panthertown Stewardship Fund (\$1,000), Local Business Community Donations (\$1,000). |
| Anticipated Attendees from Jackson County: | 30,000 |
| Anticipated Attendees from outside Jackson County: | 35,000 |
| Anticipated overnight stays generated: | 1,000 |
| How did you determine audience/attendance numbers and where do they come from? | <p>We anticipate an estimated 65,000 annual visitors and 250 or more volunteers to work with us in 2024, based on past years' data, and we use trail counter data, U.S. Forest Service data, Stava Metro data, AllTrails data, and visual counts to determine the visitation in Panthertown.</p> <p>Based on visual observation of vehicle license plates in the parking lots on busy weekends, entrance and exit surveys, and qualitative data generated by visitor comments, we anticipate more than 65,000 visitors to Panthertown Valley in 2024, with more visitors expected from outside of Jackson County than from within.</p> |
| How will you measure success of your initiative? | <p>We will measure the success of the Panthertown Valley Enhancement Project by surveying our visitors, monitoring public comments about their visitor experience, keeping track of visitation data, assessing and analyzing natural resource data, recording the dates and number of scheduled work days coordinated by our staff, the number of participants that attend each work day the number of volunteers trained to participate in the work, and the number of hours dedicated by our staff to coordinate the project and associated work.</p> <p>After each work day we will survey our participants to find out what they learned, how we can improve our program, and if they would like to return again to work with Friends of Panthertown on these and other conservation and stewardship projects in Panthertown.</p> <p>We will recognize and provide regular reports of these measurements to JCTDA during the grant period and beyond, as a partner in this initiative, along with the U.S. Forest Service and Friends of Panthertown.</p> |
| Is there anything else you'd like to add? | Thank you for the opportunity to apply for funding for this essential initiative. We appreciate your time and efforts in benefitting Jackson County. We are honored to be stewards of this treasured backcountry recreation area, and we are grateful to work with our partners and volunteers to protect and maintain Panthertown Valley for public benefit. |

Signature:

dason kiment

PROGRAM/PROJECT BUDGET

APPLICANTS SEEKING PROGRAM/PROJECT FUNDING MUST COMPLETE THIS FORM. NO OTHER BUDGET FORMS WILL BE ACCEPTED.

| | | | |
|--|-------------------------|--|--|
| Enter your organization's name here: | Friends of Panthertown | | |
| Total Cost of Program/Project: | \$60,000.00 | | |
| Total Amount Requested from JCTDA: | \$40,000.00 | | |
| Timeframe during which grant funds will be spent: | 01/01/2024 - 12/31/2024 | | |
| Please enter below the income and expenses related to the total program/project. | | | |

INCOME

| Funding Sources for this Program/Project | Total Amount | Explanatory Notes |
|--|--------------------|---|
| Jackson County Tourism Development Authority | \$40,000.00 | Anticipated award. |
| National Forest Foundation | \$5,000.00 | Award from NFF applied to this project. |
| National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance | \$5,000.00 | Award from NWSA applied to this project. |
| Panthertown Resource Assessment Fund (Individual Donors) | \$3,000.00 | Individual donations to our Resource Assessment Fund. |
| CFWNC Cashiers Community Fund | \$2,000.00 | Award from Cashiers Community Fund applied to project. |
| Cedar Creek Club Donor Advised Fund | \$1,000.00 | Award from Cedar Creek applied to project. |
| Cullasaja Women's Outreach | \$1,000.00 | Award from CWO applied to project. |
| Wade Hampton Golf Club Donor Advised Fund | \$1,000.00 | Award from Wade Hampton applied to project. |
| Panthertown Stewardship Fund (Individual Donors) | \$1,000.00 | Individual donations to our Panthertown Stewardship Fund. |
| Local Business Community Donations | \$1,000.00 | Estimated business donations in 2024 applied to project |
| Total Income | \$60,000.00 | |

EXPENSES

| Item | Total Cost | Amount of JCTDA Grant to be used for this item | Explanatory Notes |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--|---|
| Trail Counter Hardware (Phase 2) | \$10,000.00 | \$10,000.00 | Purchase of 15 new TRAFx trail counters and accessories. |
| Trail Counter Management | \$15,000.00 | \$10,000.00 | Staff compensation to install, maintain, and manage counters. |
| Resource Assessments & Data Analysis | \$15,000.00 | \$10,000.00 | Staff compensation for resource assessment and data analysis. |
| Trail Stewardship Coordination | \$15,000.00 | \$5,000.00 | Staff compensation for trail maintenance and improvements. |
| Public Information Kiosk | \$5,000.00 | \$5,000.00 | Estimated cost for design, materials, construction, labor. |
| | | | Does not include admin, insurance, rent, postage, etc. |
| Total Expenses | \$60,000.00 | \$40,000.00 | |



Photo by Thomas Mabry

2022-2027



STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Friends of Panthertown, Inc.
Strategic Plan Summary



OUR MISSION

The mission of Friends of Panthertown is to work in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service to conserve Panthertown as a backcountry natural resource and to enable sustainable recreation.



CONSERVE | PANTHERTOWN

The conservation of Panthertown is our primary objective and has been since we formed initially in 2005 as an unincorporated group.

Panthertown is considered to be backcountry by the U.S. Forest Service, and it is our responsibility to maintain that condition to the best of our ability, while attempting to satisfy the needs of visitors to Panthertown.

ENGAGE | PANTHERTOWN STAKEHOLDERS

We will establish and maintain appropriate connections with our constituencies and develop a deliberate outreach plan to these groups.

EDUCATE | OUR COMMUNITY

We will educate our constituencies and the broader community, including youth and adults, about the importance of conservation and stewardship of Panthertown.

DEVELOP | OUR ORGANIZATION

We will enhance the capabilities of the Friends of Panthertown, Inc. Board and Staff to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization

SUSTAIN | OUR FUNDING

We will sustain the organization's financial health and stability, obtain the financial resources sufficient to support Friends of Panthertown, Inc. mission, and manage those resources responsibly.



panthertown.org



Friends of Panthertown NEEDS YOUR HELP

Our mission is to work in partnership with the U.S. Forest service to conserve Panthertown as a backcountry natural resource and to enable sustainable recreation.



VOLUNTEER

Sign-up to volunteer on our Stew Crew as a trail steward or Panthertown ambassador.



- Everyone is welcome!
- Volunteer as available.
- No experience required.
- Lots of opportunities.
- Tools/training provided.
- Sign-up today!

Scan to Donate

Panthertown Stewardship Fund



- 501(c)3 non-profit
- FEIN 27-3758868
- All donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

YOU can help support conservation, education, stewardship, and trail maintenance in Panthertown.

4 easy ways to contribute to the Panthertown Stewardship Fund

- Open your phone's camera app. Point camera at QR code above. Click donation link on screen.
- Text PANTHERTOWN to 44-321
- Make a donation online: panthertown.org/give
- Mail a check to our address.

CONTACT

Friends of Panthertown, Inc.
PO Box 51 Cashiers, NC 28717
(828) 269-HIKE (4453)
friends@panthertown.org
www.panthertown.org

Financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the State Solicitation Licensing Branch at 919-814-5400. The license is not an endorsement by the State.



PROTECT PANTHERTOWN

Backcountry Recreation Area

YOU can help protect this special place

www.panthertown.org

DOWNLOAD 
Download Free
Visitor's Guide

Know before you go.
Public notices on web.



Friends of Panthertown
maintains and improves
trails, trailheads, structures,
and campsites in Panthertown.



Panthertown Valley

Panthertown Vally is a rugged,
wild, and undeveloped public
6,311 acre backcountry recreation
area in western North Carolina's
Nantahala National Forest.

Friends of Panthertown
maintains 30 miles of its public
non-motorized mixed-use trails.

It is easy to get lost here.
Bring a map and be prepared
for a backcountry adventure.

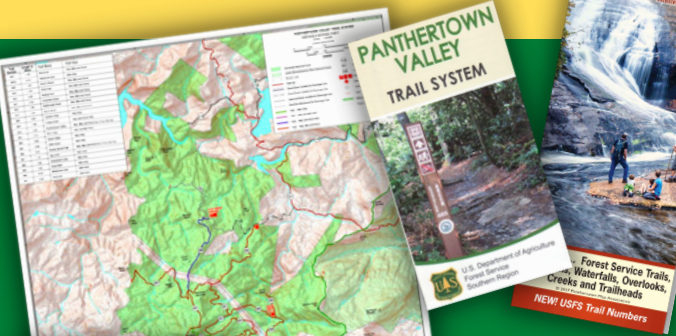
Popular activities include:
hiking, mountain biking, equestrian,
backpacking, camping, swimming,
fly fishing, rock climbing, scouting,
exploring, photography, and more.

The Leave No Trace Seven Principles

- Plan Ahead and Prepare
- Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
- Dispose of Waste Properly
- Leave What You Find
- Minimize Campfire Impacts
- Respect Wildlife
- Be Considerate of Other Visitors



© Leave No Trace www.LNT.org



MAPS



DIRECTIONS



panthertown.org

More Info
Online!

Give Today
to support the 2023
PantherTown
Stewardship
Fund

Scan To Donate



TRAIL & STEWARDSHIP REPORT

2022 RESULTS

FRIENDS OF PANTHERTOWN

VOLUNTEERS



1,767
Total Hours

Workdays

54

\$74K+

Value In-Kind

Participants

254



PROJECTS

MACHINE WORK

96 Trail features in 7 miles
16 Hours on Dozer
5 Multi-Use Trails



DATA

Inventory of Use
and Impacts of
Trails & Campsites



Recreation
Management in
Partnership with
U.S. Forest Service

- Historic Shelter Repair
- Hazard Trees Removed
- Great Wall Step Replacement
- Adopt-A-Trail Program
- Sustainable Trails Training Course with 15 Participants @ 25 Hours
- Environmental Enhancement Projects for Popular Areas
- Water Quality Monitoring
- Fire Pits & Campsites Cleaned
- Guided Hikes & Info Booths

WWW.PANTHERTOWN.ORG



Volunteers are at the core of our partnership with the U.S. Forest Service to support conservation projects in PantherTown and maintain 30 miles of multi-use public trails. Look what we have accomplished together!