

NEWS

\$250K secured to support Saluda Grade Trail in North Carolina

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The Saluda Grade Trail project has received its first major grant toward the purchase of the trail corridor and development in North Carolina.

The Polk County Community Foundation has pledged \$250,000 toward the project, which is a proposed 31-mile trail stretching from South Carolina to North Carolina.

A coalition of three nonprofits — Conserving Carolina; PAL: Play, Advocate, Live Well; and Upstate Forever — are currently in negotiations to purchase the historic Saluda Grade. While the South Carolina legislature has appropriated funding toward the trail in that state, this grant is the first major step toward funding land acquisition, trail development, and related costs on the North Carolina side, according to Conserving Carolina.

The Saluda Grade Trail would begin in Inman, South Carolina and pass through Campobello, Landrum, Tryon and Saluda before reaching Zirconia in Henderson County. This route features “scenic rural landscapes, charming small towns, historic landmarks, unique nature preserves, and gorgeous lakes and waterfalls,” said Conserving Carolina.

The proposed route includes about 16 miles in South Carolina and 15 miles in North Carolina. Donations toward the North Carolina section of the trail can be made through Conserving Carolina. The organizations says the trail would provide a corridor for wildlife to travel, helping to connect natural areas like the Greenville Watershed, Chestnut Ridge Heritage Preserve, Green River Game Lands, Lake Summit, Norman Wilder Forest, Melrose Falls and Pearsons Falls.

Spartanburg: \$9.5M in Spartanburg earmarks target West Main Street corridor, Saluda Grade Trail project

“The mission of the Polk County Community Foundation is to improve the quality of life for all of our citizens, and we believe this project will do just that, for generations,” said Polk County Community Foundation Board Chair Sherry Carter. “Our board voted unanimously to support the trail, which has game-changing potential for building a stronger, healthier, more connected community.”

The proposed project has been compared to the popular Prisma Health Swamp Rabbit Trail or Virginia Creeper Trail. The Saluda Grade rail line is a historic landmark, as the steepest standard gauge mainline railroad ever built in the United States. The railroad required inventive feats of engineering to climb the Blue Ridge Escarpment, according to Conserving Carolina's website.

“The foundation prioritizes funding programs, events, and spaces that bring community members together and help form connections among neighbors,” Carter said. “In addition to all of the known health and economic benefits, we see this project as a tangible way to connect our community. That comes from neighbors interacting with each other while enjoying the trail and from the physical connection it will create between Saluda, Tryon, Landrum, and the whole of Polk County. It is, inherently, building community.”

The grant builds on earlier support for project planning. Last year, Conserving Carolina received a \$200,000 appropriation from the State of NC's Complete the Trails Fund to explore the feasibility of the Saluda Grade Rail Trail.

“We are deeply moved by the foundation's leadership in providing such meaningful support at the very start of our campaign to create the Saluda Grade Trail,” said Conserving Carolina Executive Director Kieran Roe. “This is not only an important financial contribution, but a testament to the value that this trail will provide for our local community.”

Conserving Carolina says the trail would strengthen the local economy, expand opportunities for outdoor recreation, and improve public health. More information about the trail can be found at conservingcarolina.org/saluda-grade.

