

Blue Ridge Parkway

North Carolina, Virginia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Linville Falls Planning Process 2026 Newsletter

Dear Friends,

The National Park Service is seeking your feedback on early ideas for redeveloping the Linville Falls area.

Hurricane Helene caused extensive damage across the Blue Ridge Parkway in September 2024, including major impacts on the Linville Falls visitor access area, campground, picnic grounds, and trails. These facilities supported one of the most iconic and heavily visited destinations on the parkway, but some areas remain closed or without essential services, significantly affecting parkway visitors and nearby gateway communities.

The National Park Service is now developing a site plan that will guide the redevelopment of Linville Falls.

Your participation is essential as we plan for a safer and more resilient future for this special place. This newsletter outlines the purpose of the planning effort, early concepts under consideration, and opportunities to engage with the project team.

We look forward to hearing your ideas and greatly appreciate your involvement in shaping the future of Linville Falls.

Sincerely,

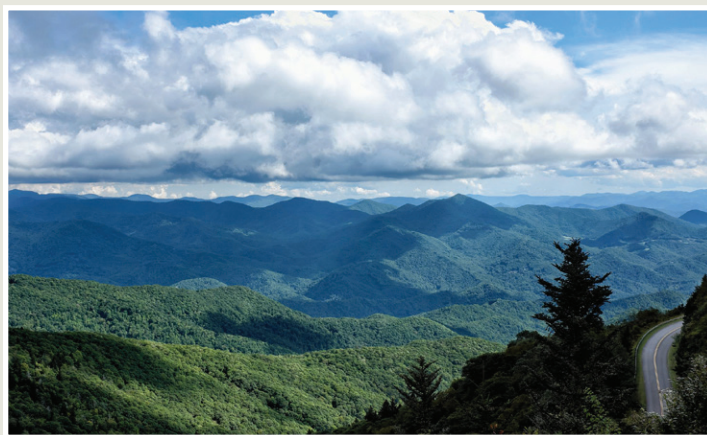
Tracy Swartout
Superintendent, Blue Ridge Parkway

Park Overview

The Blue Ridge Parkway is a 469-mile scenic corridor traversing the Appalachian Highlands of North Carolina and Virginia, linking Shenandoah National Park to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Renowned for its sweeping mountain views, rich biodiversity, and cultural heritage, the parkway is one of the most visited units of the National Park System, welcoming more than 16.7 million visitors each year. It supports a wide range of recreational opportunities, from hiking and picnicking to wildlife viewing and scenic driving, and contributes significantly to local and regional economies.

Within this larger landscape, Linville Falls stands out as one of the parkway's most iconic and heavily visited destinations. Known for its dramatic series of waterfalls plunging into Linville Gorge, the area offers a variety of experiences for visitors of all ages and abilities. The site features short accessible trails leading to popular overlooks, longer routes that descend toward the gorge, wooded picnic areas, a family-friendly campground, and access to the Linville Gorge Wilderness. These amenities make Linville Falls a natural gathering place for hikers, sightseers, photographers, anglers, families, and local residents alike.

In September 2024, Hurricane Helene brought historic rainfall, high winds, landslides, and debris flows across the region. The storm caused widespread impacts to parkway infrastructure, with Linville Falls among the areas most severely affected. Core facilities—including the visitor center, campground, restrooms, picnic shelters, parking areas, and portions



of the Linville Gorge Trail system—suffered extensive damage from flooding, erosion, and debris. Several park residences and maintenance structures were also impacted, reducing operating capacity for on-site staff.

Thanks to a coordinated recovery effort between the National Park Service and the US Forest Service, the Linville Falls trail system reopened in 2025. Visitors can once again reach the falls and many of the area's signature viewpoints. However, major visitor facilities remain closed, including the campground, the visitor center, and the primary picnic area. Limited services, damaged infrastructure, and ongoing road restoration south of Linville Falls continue to affect visitor access and require long-term planning to address.

The Linville Falls Recovery Project aims to restore and improve these essential facilities, enhance visitor experience, and ensure that this treasured destination is better prepared for future storms and changing environmental conditions.



Background on the Planning Process

Planning for the Linville Falls Recovery Project began in 2025 with coordination across Blue Ridge Parkway staff, resource specialists, engineers, and planners. The effort builds on earlier parkway plans, including the 2013 General Management Plan, and takes into account visitor use patterns, aging infrastructure, and evolving environmental challenges.

In 2024 and 2025, park staff conducted on-site assessments, evaluated facility damage, and identified long-term vulnerabilities, particularly related to flooding. Additional input came from maintenance personnel, interpretive staff, local communities, and land management partners such as the US Forest Service.

The Linville Falls Site Plan will guide four disaster recovery investments totaling approximately \$46.1 million. These investments include:

- visitor access area improvements
- campground rehabilitation and water and wastewater systems replacement
- picnic area facility repairs and site restoration
- Linville Gorge Trail repairs

This newsletter marks an early step in engaging the public, which will continue at key project milestones throughout the plan's development.

Site Plan Purpose and Need

The purpose of this plan is to restore access to safe, high-quality recreational experiences at the Linville Falls site, supported by resilient infrastructure that complements the parkway and its surrounding natural environment. This plan will guide the repair and enhancement of visitor and administrative facilities damaged by Hurricane Helene and address long-standing infrastructure deficiencies, while protecting the parkway's cultural, natural, and scenic resources within a National Historic Landmark landscape. Additionally, the plan aims to strengthen recreational connectivity with adjacent US Forest Service lands and to revitalize an important destination that contributes to the economic vitality of surrounding gateway communities.

The plan is needed to:

- Repair extensive damage resulting from Hurricane Helene in September 2024 and improve aging facilities to restore and enhance recreational access and support safe, resilient infrastructure.
- Repair storm-damaged campground, picnic, and visitor amenities with consideration for current visitor expectations, accessibility standards, and evolving patterns of recreation and use.
- Improve the resilience of infrastructure in flood-prone areas by reducing exposure to erosion, landslides, and other natural hazards to maintain reliable recreation and administrative access.

- Enhance emergency response capabilities by improving radio communication coverage to better support incident management and visitor safety.
- Provide reliable visitor information and services by identifying solutions that support wayfinding, orientation, and safe circulation when facilities are unstaffed.
- Enhance coordination with the US Forest Service to support shared stewardship, recreational connectivity, and partnership opportunities through coordinated access, services, emergency response, and resource protection across adjoining public lands.
- Protect cultural, natural, and scenic resources through targeted investments that preserve and reinforce the integrity of the Blue Ridge Parkway as a National Historic Landmark.



These draft concepts are early ideas under evaluation and do not represent final decisions. The National Park Service invites public feedback on these initial concepts, which will help guide the development of alternatives. An additional opportunity to comment on a draft site plan will occur in 2027.

- Site-Wide**
- » Establish a multi-use (pedestrian and bike) trail that connects all area destinations, from the picnic area to the trailhead area.
 - » Develop site-wide wayfinding and visitor orientation with interpretive media that withstands extreme weather and flooding.
 - » Improve emergency communications infrastructure across all areas.
 - » Monitor and manage invasive plant species.

- Picnic Area**
- » Construct a new picnic shelter and toilet facility outside the floodplain.
 - » Improve the existing pedestrian trail from the elevated parking area to the picnic area.
 - » Improve and formalize an existing river access point.
 - » Maintain and replace fixed grills and picnic tables.
 - » Restore wetland and floodplain areas along the Linville River shoreline.

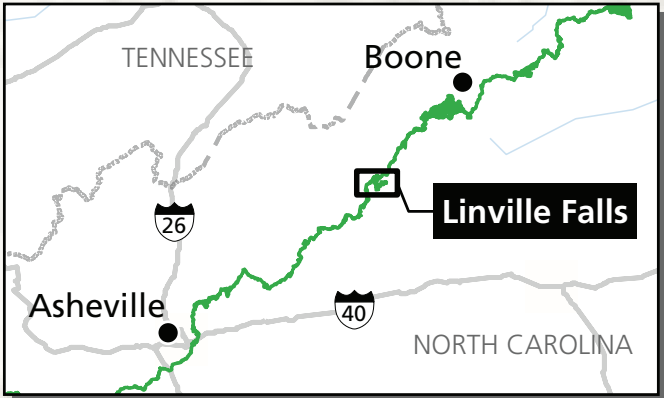
— Blue Ridge Parkway
— Park Road
— Highway
- - - Trails
— Linville River
█ Parkway Boundary

North
0 0.5 1 Kilometers
0 0.25 0.5 Miles

- Trail Corridor to Linville Falls**
- » Improve the existing trail on the western side of Linville River to provide accessible opportunities to view the upper falls.
 - » Enhance sustainability of the trail corridor through trail hardening, drainage improvements, erosion management, and potential trail realignments.
 - » Evaluate existing infrastructure within the trail corridor for restoration or removal.
 - » Evaluate and address existing unauthorized social trails.
 - » Add and improve wayfinding and interpretive signage.

- Trailhead Area**
- » Replace the former visitor center within the floodplain with a trailhead shade structure containing orientation maps, interpretive panels, benches, and a small, enclosed storage area for emergency supplies.
 - » Designate one primary visitor use trail to Linville Falls loop to enhance ease of navigation.
 - » Improve Duggar's Creek Trail to provide accessible opportunities to view the falls.
 - » Reestablish buffer and stabilization vegetation that filter runoff and hold soil in place to reduce erosion and build long-term storm resilience.

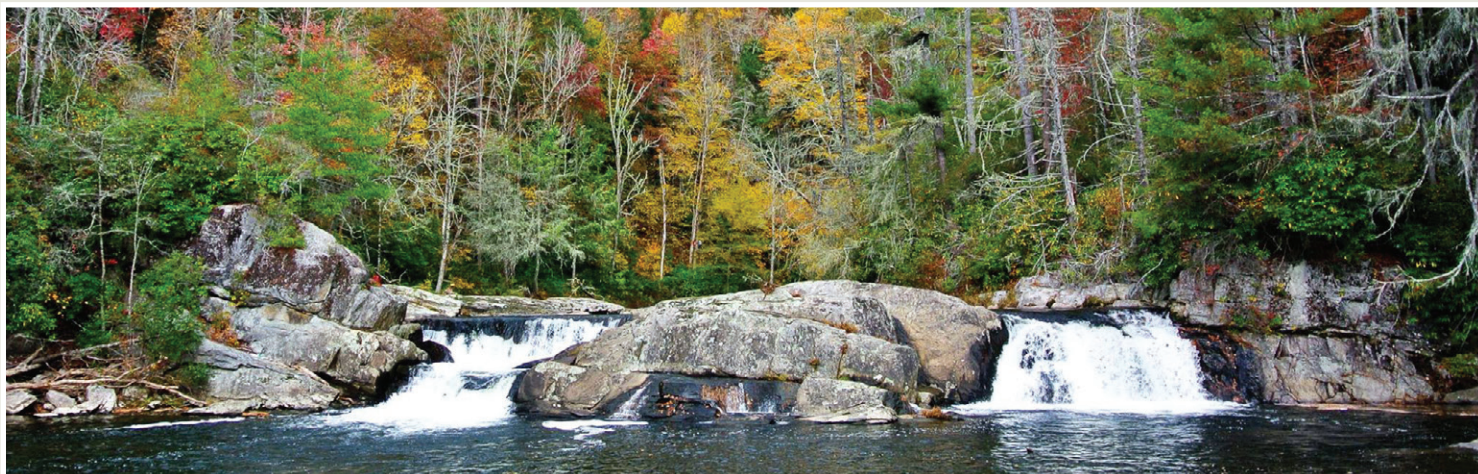
- Proposed Visitor Arrival and Orientation Area**
- » Develop a new visitor center at the site of the existing maintenance facility to serve as the primary arrival and orientation hub for the area.
- Maintenance Facility**
- » Construct a new maintenance complex adjacent to the visitor center with space for National Park Service offices and emergency equipment.
 - » Establish RV pads for volunteers assisting with operations and programming.
- Riverbend Overlook**
- » Formalize the existing river access point for anglers.
 - » Install interpretive wayside about the geology of the landscape.
 - » Establish a geological fault line interpretive trail using the path of an existing roadbed where possible.
- Campground Loop A**
- » Maintain primitive park-and-walk and hike-in campsites.
 - » Reconstruct Campfire Circle in previous footprint.
 - » Expand the camping season from its current May through October window to begin April 1, coinciding with the start of fishing season.
 - » Implement habitat improvements.
- Campground Loop B**
- » Enhance amenities to support a more fully serviced campground experience.



Goals for Planning at Linville Falls

The following goals describe what this planning effort aspires to achieve and maintain for visitor experience, resources, facilities, and services at Linville Falls:

- **Visitor Safety and Emergency Response:** Visitors have reliable ways to access help and communicate during an emergency throughout Linville Falls.
- **A Staffed, Partner-Supported Presence:** Visitors are welcomed by consistent National Park Service staff and partners working together to provide a range of services available to them.
- **Strong Partnerships:** Visitors experience Linville Falls as one seamless destination, with the National Park Service, US Forest Service, and other partner organizations coordinating trails, access, and care across the site's shared boundaries.
- **Tribal Significance:** The significance of Linville Falls to Tribal Nations guides how the site is planned and cared for, now and into the future.
- **Information and Orientation, Anytime:** Visitors have access to essential orientation, wayfinding, and safety information at Linville Falls at any time, day or night.
- **Building Outside the Floodplain:** New facilities at Linville Falls are located outside the floodplain, keeping visitors and infrastructure safer from the kind of flooding caused by Hurricane Helene.
- **Expanding Accessibility:** Accessibility is built into improvements at Linville Falls wherever possible, expanding opportunities for visitors of all abilities to enjoy the site.
- **Honoring Historic Character:** The historic character and features that make the Blue Ridge Parkway a National Historic Landmark are preserved throughout Linville Falls.
- **A Place for Every Kind of Visitor:** Visitors of all kinds—hikers, anglers, campers, picnickers, and more—all find a place suited to how they want to experience Linville Falls.
- **Protecting and Growing Visitor Opportunities:** Visitors continue to enjoy a wide variety of high-quality experiences at Linville Falls, from easy river access to backcountry hiking.
- **Visitor-Friendly Retail:** Visitors have access to convenient retail options, such as maps, field guides, and outdoor gear, in appropriate areas of the site.
- **A Protected Linville River:** The Linville River's outstanding natural, scenic, and recreational qualities are protected, reflecting its eligibility for Wild and Scenic River designation.
- **Built to Last:** Linville Falls is planned and managed to be resilient to changing conditions over time, including flooding, wildfire, and severe weather.
- **Working Within the Land:** Linville Falls is a compact site, bounded by the Linville River, North Carolina Highway 183, and the parkway itself; new facilities thoughtfully fit within the landscape.



Flooding Risk at Linville Falls

The visitor experience at Linville Falls is closely connected to the water resources the area showcases, but recent storms revealed that some park facilities are vulnerable during major flood events. Over the last 30 years, the visitor center at Linville Falls, which was originally constructed within the floodplain, has been destroyed twice due to flood damage.



Recent field assessments indicate that actual flood risk in several areas is likely less extensive than shown here, due to the resolution and age of the data used to produce this flood map. The National Park Service is acquiring higher-resolution flood data and will incorporate new information into the final alternatives developed.

As we plan for the future of the Linville Falls developed area, the National Park Service seeks to locate reconstructed facilities in areas that are less likely to be damaged by floodwaters. This will reduce flood risk, minimize wasted financial resources, and allow visitors to enjoy Linville Falls for years to come.



Schedule

2025	Trail system reopened; early planning commenced
2026	Concept development, early public outreach, and early schematic designs
2027	Draft plan released; second public comment period; detailed design and contract development; compliance
2027	Construction anticipated to begin

Please note the project schedule is subject to change.

We'd Love To Hear From You

Your perspectives play an important part in shaping the future of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Share your thoughts on what activities, experiences, and facilities are most important to you online, by mail, or at a public meeting in September 2026. There will be another opportunity to provide comments on a draft site plan in 2027.

Submit Comments by September 30, 2026

- online at www.parkplanning.nps.gov/LinvilleFalls
- by mail addressed to
Blue Ridge Parkway
Attn: Linville Falls Recovery Project
199 Hemphill Knob Rd.
Asheville, NC 28803



Project Website
QR Code

Attend a Public Meeting

- Wednesday, September 9, 5:30-7:30 p.m. ET
Morganton Community House
120 N King Street
Morganton, NC 28655
- Thursday, September 10, 5:30-7:30 p.m. ET
Sam Center Auditorium
Mayland Community College
200 Mayland Drive
Spruce Pine, NC 28777

Please note that comments submitted, including personal information, may be made publicly available. Requests to withhold personal information cannot be guaranteed.

