

Foothills Regional Commission

REQUEST for LETTERS of INTEREST (RFLOI)

TITLE: Peavine to Thermal Belt Rail-Trail Connector Planning

ISSUE DATE: March 9, 2026

SUBMITTAL DEADLINE: April 10, 2026

ISSUING AGENCY: Foothills Regional Commission

SYNOPSIS

SUBCONSULTANTS ARE PERMITTED UNDER THIS CONTRACT.

This contract will be funded through the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR), Division of Parks and Recreation, through the Great Trails State Program. The solicitation, selection, and negotiation of a contract shall be conducted in accordance with all applicable state procurement requirements and any program requirements associated with this funding.

The primary and/or subconsultant firm(s) (*if Subconsultants are allowed under this RFLOI*) shall be pre-qualified by the Department to perform ALL of the work codes listed below for the Foothills Regional Commission. Work Codes required are:

- 00141-MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING
- 00171-Public Involvement

WORK CODES for each primary and/or subconsultant firm(s) (*if Subconsultants are allowed under this RFLOI*) SHALL be listed on the respective RS-2 FORMS (see section 'SUBMISSION ORGANIZATION AND INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS').

This RFLOI is to solicit responses (LETTERS of INTEREST, or LOIs) from qualified firms to provide professional consulting services to:

The proposed study will evaluate the feasibility of connecting the Thermal Belt Rail Trail in Rutherford County to the Peavine Trail in McDowell County. The goal of the study is to identify and evaluate potential trail corridors between the existing trail termini in Gilkey and Marion and develop recommendations for a continuous multi-use trail connection..

Electronic LOIs should be submitted in .pdf format using software such as Adobe, CutePDF PDF Writer, Docudesk deskPDF, etc.

LOIs SHALL be received ELECTRONICALLY, BY MAIL, OR HAND-DELIVERY no later than APRIL 10, 2026.

The address for electronic deliveries is: *mlong@frcnc.gov*

**The address for mailings is:
Foothills Regional Commission
P.O. Box 841, Rutherfordton, NC 28139**

**The address for hand-deliveries is:
Foothills Regional Commission
P.O. Box 841, Rutherfordton, NC 28139**

LOIs received after this deadline will not be considered.

Except as provided below any firm wishing to be considered must be properly registered with the Office of the Secretary of State and with the North Carolina Board of Examiners for Engineers and Surveyors. Any firm proposing to use corporate subsidiaries or subcontractors must include a statement that these companies are properly registered with the North Carolina Board of Examiners for Engineers and Surveyors and/or the NC Board for Licensing of Geologists. The Engineers performing the work and in responsible charge of the work must be registered Professional Engineers in the State of North Carolina and must have a good ethical and professional standing. It will be the responsibility of the selected private firm to verify the registration of any corporate subsidiary or subcontractor prior to submitting a Letter of Interest. Firms which are not providing engineering services need not be registered with the North Carolina Board of Examiners for Engineers and Surveyors. Some of the services being solicited may not require a license. It is the responsibility of each firm to adhere to all laws of the State of North Carolina.

The firm must have the financial ability to undertake the work and assume the liability. The selected firm(s) will be required to furnish proof of Professional Liability insurance coverage in the minimum amount of \$1,000,000.00. The firm(s) must have an adequate accounting system to identify costs chargeable to the project.

SCOPE OF WORK

The **Foothills Regional Commission** is soliciting proposals for the services of a firm/team for the following contract scope of work.

The Foothills Regional Commission, in partnership with Rutherford County and McDowell County, seeks to retain a qualified consultant to evaluate the feasibility of connecting the Thermal Belt Rail Trail in Rutherford County to the Peavine Trail in McDowell County.

The Thermal Belt Rail Trail currently terminates in the Gilkey community near Oak Springs Road in Rutherford County. The Peavine Trail currently terminates near Ford Way, in proximity to Business US-221 and Glenwood Avenue in Marion, North Carolina. While both trails have been developed as important recreational and economic development assets for their respective communities, they currently operate as independent facilities. Establishing a connection between these two trail systems has the potential to create a longer regional trail corridor that supports recreation, tourism, active transportation, and economic development across county boundaries.

A feasibility study completed in 2020 explored opportunities for this connection; however, due to disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, landowner outreach and a robust public engagement process were not completed. This project will build upon that prior effort, with a focus on advancing stakeholder coordination, conducting landowner outreach, and confirming corridor feasibility, including ownership and access considerations.

The selected consultant will evaluate potential opportunities to connect the two trail systems by assessing existing conditions, identifying potential trail corridors or alignments, evaluating opportunities and constraints, and conducting a planning-level feasibility analysis. The study will include stakeholder and public engagement, with an emphasis on landowner coordination, and may include evaluation of corridor ownership and legal considerations. If budget allows, the study may also include ground survey of select railroad right-of-way segments where landowner willingness has been established.

The final deliverable will be a feasibility study that identifies potential alignment alternatives, evaluates the feasibility of those alternatives, and provides recommendations and implementation considerations to guide future planning, funding, and project development efforts.

The selected consultant will assist Foothills Regional Commission and project partners with completing a feasibility study to evaluate potential opportunities for connecting the Thermal Belt Rail Trail in Rutherford County with the Peavine Trail in McDowell County. The scope of work is anticipated to include, but is not limited to, the following tasks.

Proposed Scope of Work

- **Project Coordination and Meetings**

- o Kickoff meeting with Foothills Regional Commission and project partners
- o Coordination with Rutherford County, McDowell County, and relevant stakeholders
- o Regular project updates and coordination meetings as needed

- **Existing Conditions Analysis**

- o Field review of the study area and potential corridors
- o Review of existing plans, mapping, and relevant studies
- o Analysis of transportation infrastructure, topography, waterways, land use patterns, and property ownership
- o Identification of opportunities and constraints that may influence trail development

- **Alignment Identification and Feasibility Analysis**

- o Identification and mapping of potential trail corridors or alignment alternatives

- o Evaluation of opportunities and constraints associated with each alignment
- o Analysis of major crossings and barriers such as highways, waterways, or other infrastructure
- o Development of planning-level cost estimates and identification of major infrastructure needs
- Public and Stakeholder Engagement
 - o Coordination with local governments, agencies, and key stakeholders
 - o Public engagement activities such as a public meeting, open house, survey, or other engagement tools
 - o Summary of stakeholder and public input to inform study recommendations
- Conceptual Trail Planning
 - o Development of conceptual trail alignments and mapping
 - o Conceptual trail typologies or cross sections illustrating potential trail configurations
 - o Identification of a recommended alignment or preferred corridor
- Draft and Final Feasibility Study
 - o Existing conditions summary
 - o Alignment alternatives and evaluation
 - o Recommended alignment and conceptual mapping
 - o Planning-level cost estimates and implementation considerations
 - o Potential funding strategies and next steps
 - o Draft and final study report and presentation to project partners
- Mapping and Data Deliverables
 - o Preparation of maps and graphics to support study findings
 - o Provision of GIS data and mapping files developed during the study in a usable format for the Foothills Regional Commission.

The Foothills Regional Commission has budgeted \$125,000 for this study.

PROPOSED CONTRACT TIME: 1 year with an extension if needed.

PROPOSED CONTRACT PAYMENT TYPE: LUMP SUM

SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

All LOIs are limited to **twenty (20)** pages (RS-2 forms are not included in the page count) inclusive of the cover sheet, and shall be typed on 8-1/2" x 11" sheets, single-spaced, one-sided.

Fold out pages are not allowed. In order to reduce costs and to facilitate recycling; binders, dividers, tabs, etc. are prohibited. One staple in the upper left-hand corner is preferred.

LOIs containing more than twenty (20) pages will not be considered.

One digital copy (PDF) preferred or one mailed (1) total copies of the LOI should be submitted.

Firms submitting LOIs are encouraged to carefully check them for conformance to the requirements stated above. If LOIs do not meet ALL of these requirements they will be disqualified. No exception will be granted.

SELECTION PROCESS

Following is a general description of the selection process:

- The LGA's Selection Committee will review all qualifying LOI submittals.
- For Limited Services Contracts (On-Call type contracts), the LGA's Selection Committee MAY, at the LGA's discretion, choose any number of firms to provide the services being solicited.
- For Project-Specific Contracts (non On-Call type contracts), the LGA's Selection Committee MAY, at the LGA's discretion, shortlist a minimum of three (3) firms to be interviewed. IF APPLICABLE, dates of shortlisting and dates for interviews are shown in the section SUBMISSION SCHEDULE AND KEY DATES at the end of this RFLOI.
- In order to be considered for selection, consultants must submit a complete response to this RFLOI prior to the specified deadlines. Failure to submit all information in a timely manner will result in disqualification.

SMALL PROFESSIONAL SERVICE FIRM (SPSF) PARTICIPATION

The Department encourages the use of Small Professional Services Firms (SPSF). Small businesses determined to be eligible for participation in the SPSF program are those meeting size standards defined by Small Business Administration (SBA) regulations, 13 CFR Part 121 in Sector 54 under the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS). The SPSF program is a race, ethnicity, and gender neutral program designed to increase the availability of contracting opportunities for small businesses on federal, state or locally funded contracts. SPSF participation is not contingent upon the funding source.

The Firm, at the time the Letter of Interest is submitted, shall submit a listing of all known SPSF firms that will participate in the performance of the identified work. The participation shall be submitted on the Department's Subconsultant Form RS-2. RS-2 forms may be accessed on the Department's website at [NCDOT Connect Guidelines & Forms](#).

The SPSF must be qualified with the Department to perform the work for which they are listed.

Real-time information about firms doing business with the Department and firms that are SPSF certified through the Contractual Services Unit is available in the Directory of Transportation Firms. The Directory can be accessed on the Department's website at [Directory of Firms](#) -- Complete listing of certified and prequalified firms.

The listing of an individual firm in the Department's directory shall not be construed as an endorsement of the firm.

PREQUALIFICATION

The Department maintains on file the qualifications and key personnel for each approved discipline, as well as any required samples of work. Each year on the anniversary date of the company, the firm shall renew their prequalified disciplines. If your firm has not renewed its application as required by your anniversary date or if your firm is not currently prequalified, please submit an application to the Department **prior to submittal of your LOI**. An application may be accessed on the Department's website at [Prequalifying Private Consulting Firms](#) -- Learn how to become Prequalified as a Private Consulting Firm with NCDOT. Having this data on file with the Department eliminates the need to resubmit this data with each letter of interest.

Even though specific DBE/MBE/WBE goals are not required for this project, the Department of Transportation is committed to providing opportunity for small and disadvantaged businesses to perform on its contracts through established Department goals. The Firm, subconsultant and subfirm shall not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, age, disability or sex in the performance of this contract.

SELECTION CRITERIA

All prequalified firms who submit responsive letters of interest will be considered.

In selecting a firm/team, the selection committee will take into consideration qualification information including such factors as:

1. **CRITERIA NUMBER 1--20%** = Firm Qualification. Firm/team's experience, knowledge, familiarity and past performance with planning, design and engineering services for the above listed work codes. Previous client satisfaction with similar work will be considered.
2. **CRITERIA NUMBER 2 --30%** = Key personnel qualifications/Team Experience. Key proposed personnel qualifications, experience, knowledge, familiarity and past performance with the desired services, similar on-call contract experiences with local governments.
3. **CRITERIA NUMBER 3--25%** = Creativity of Project Approach. Project approach that demonstrates ability to deliver high quality results on projects.
4. **CRITERIA NUMBER 4--25%** = Relevant Current & Recent Projects. Quantity and relevance of listed projects within the last five (5) years with involvement of the proposed staff, preferably with multiple key members working together. Consideration

will be given to relevant project experience applicable to multiple team members within last ten (10) years.

5. % = .

After reviewing qualifications, if firms are equal on the evaluation review, then those qualified firms with proposed SPSF participation will be given priority consideration.

SUBMISSION ORGANIZATION AND INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS

The LOI should be addressed to **Magnolia Long, Senior Planner, E-mail:mlong@frcnc.gov** and must include the name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address of the prime consultant's contact person for this RFLOI.

The LOI must also include the information outlined below:

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The Introduction should demonstrate the consultant's overall qualifications to fulfill the requirements of the scope of work and should contain the following elements of information:

- Expression of firm's interest in the work;
- Statement of whether firm is on register;
- Date of most recent private engineering firm qualification;
- Statement regarding firm's(') possible conflict of interest for the work; and
- Summation of information contained in the letter of interest.

Chapter 2 - Team Qualifications

This chapter should elaborate on the general information presented in the introduction, to establish the credentials and experience of the consultant to undertake this type of effort. The following must be included:

1. Identify recent, similar projects the firm, acting as the prime contractor, has conducted which demonstrates its ability to conduct and manage the project. Provide a synopsis of each project and include the date completed, and contact person.
2. If subconsultants are involved, provide corresponding information describing their qualifications as requested in bullet number 1 above.

Chapter 3 - Team Experience

This chapter must provide the names, classifications, and location of the firm's North Carolina employees and resources to be assigned to the advertised work; and the professional credentials and experience of the persons assigned to the project, along with any unique qualifications of key personnel. Although standard personnel resumes may be included, identify pertinent team experience to be applied to this project. Specifically, the Department is interested in the experience, expertise, and total quality of the consultant's proposed team. If principals of the firm will not be actively involved in the study/contract/project, do not list them. The submittal shall clearly indicate the Consultant's Project Manager, other key Team Members and

his/her qualifications for the proposed work. Also, include the team's organization chart for the Project / Plan. A Capacity Chart / Graph (available work force) should also be included. Any other pertinent information should also be listed in this section.

Note: If a project team or subconsultant encounters personnel changes, or any other changes of significance dealing with the company, NCDOT should be notified immediately.

Chapter 4 - Technical Approach

The consultant shall provide information on its understanding of, and approach to accomplish, this project, including their envisioned scope for the work and any innovative ideas/approaches, and a schedule to achieve the dates outlined in this RFLOI (if any project-specific dates are outlined below).

APPENDICES-

CONSULTANT CERTIFICATION Form RS-2

Completed Form RS-2 forms SHALL be submitted with the firm's letter of interest. This section is limited to the number of pages required to provide the requested information.

Submit Form RS-2 forms for the following:

- **Prime Consultant firm**
 - Prime Consultant Form RS-2 Rev 1/14/08; and
- **ANY/ALL Subconsultant firms** (*If Subconsultants are allowed under this RFLOI*) to be, or anticipated to be, utilized by your firm.
 - Subconsultant Form RS-2 Rev 1/15/08.
 - In the event the firm has no subconsultant, it is required that this be indicated on the Subconsultant Form RS-2 by entering the word "None" or the number "ZERO" and signing the form.

Complete and sign each Form RS-2 (instructions are listed on the form).

The required forms are available on the Department's website at:

<https://connect.ncdot.gov/business/consultants/Pages/Guidelines-Forms.aspx>

[Prime Consultant Form RS-2](#)

[Subconsultant Form RS-2](#)

All submissions, correspondence, and questions concerning this RFLOI should be directed to **Magnolia Long** at **mlong@frcnc.gov** or call **828-521-1574**.

IF APPLICABLE, questions may be submitted electronically only, to the contact above. Responses will be issued in the form of an addendum available to all interested parties. Interested parties should also send a request, by email only, to the person listed above to be placed on a public correspondence list to ensure future updates regarding the RFLOI or other project information can be conveyed. Questions must be submitted to the person listed above no later than **April 1, 2026**. The last addendum will be issued no later than **April 3, 2025**.

SUBMISSION SCHEDULE AND KEY DATES

RFLOI Release – **March 9, 2026**

Deadline for Questions – **April 1, 2026**

Issue Final Addendum – **April 3, 2026**

Deadline for LOI Submission – **April 10, 2026**

Shortlist Announced * - **April 17, 2026**

Interviews - the week of **April 27, 2026**

Firm Selection and Notification ** - **May 4, 2026**

Anticipated Notice to Proceed – **Early May 2026**

* Notification will **ONLY** be sent to shortlisted firms.

** Notification will **ONLY** be sent to selected firms.