

# Economic Impact of the **FRENCH BROAD RIVER**

*Presented by the French Broad River Partnership*  
[frenchbroadriver.org](http://frenchbroadriver.org)





**First, a little about FBRP**



**The French Broad River Partnership is a consortium of 50+ conservation, governmental, and business entities in the eight WNC county region of the river watershed.**






## Mission

To maintain and improve stream health within the French Broad River Watershed for environmental and economic benefits.

## Vision

That broad-based interests work collaboratively to ensure the French Broad River Watershed serves as a source of drinking water and recreation while supporting biodiversity, sustainable agriculture, forestry, and economic growth.





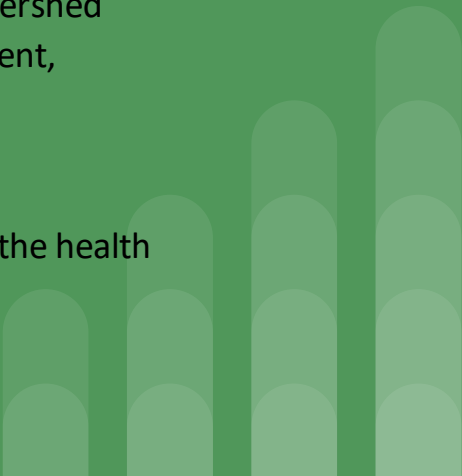
## **Guiding Principles**

We recognize sustainable economic development and the pursuit of improved water quality are mutually beneficial goals.

We work collaboratively, engaging the skills and resources of diverse stakeholders to achieve a greater positive impact.

We operate with integrity and transparency to define challenges to watershed health and resolve them through innovation and stakeholder commitment, resulting in a lasting impact on the river.

We engage communities because knowledge empowers all to consider the health of the river in daily and long-term decisions.





# THE WATERSHED

*RECREATIONAL & ECOLOGICAL RESOURCE*



## *FAST FACTS*

**260-325**

Million Years Old

Flows For

**219 MILES**

Begins Near

**ROSMAN**

Watershed Encompasses

**8 COUNTIES**

**JOINS HOLSTON**

To Create the Tennessee, Ohio, &  
Mississippi Rivers

Basin Encompasses

**2830 MILES<sup>2</sup>**

# *SUB-WATERSHEDS*

## **UPPER FRENCH BROAD RIVER**

Davidson River  
Mills River  
Swannanoa River



## **NOLICHUCKY RIVER**

North Toe River  
South Toe River  
Cane River



## **PIGEON RIVER**

Richland Creek  
Jonathans Creek  
East & West Forks







# RECREATIONAL RESOURCE

MAJORITY OF  
PISGAH NATIONAL  
FOREST



ALL OF  
DUPONT STATE  
FOREST

25% OF THE  
GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS  
NATIONAL PARK



75% OF LAND  
AREA IS FORESTED

# ECOLOGICAL RESOURCE

**MUDPUPPY & HELLBENDER  
SALAMANDERS**



**BOG & EASTERN SPINY  
SOFTSHELL TURTLES**

**PINK BEDS  
MOUNTAIN VALLEY BOG**



**RARE FISH SPECIES &  
ENDANGERED  
FRESHWATER MUSSELS**



# THE STUDY

*DATA COLLECTION & METHODOLOGY*



# *WHY STUDY THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE FRENCH BROAD WATERSHED?*

INCREASE PUBLIC  
UNDERSTANDING



SHOW BENEFITS IN  
QUANTITATIVE TERMS



INCREASE AWARENESS  
AMONG STAKEHOLDERS



HELP COMMUNITY  
PLAN FOR FUTURE





# STUDY DESIGN

- French Broad River Partnership commissioned a study led by Dr. Steve Ha of WCU in 2019
- Funded by the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, Duke Energy, and Ecology Wildlife Foundation Fund
- Surveyed local river users, visitors, and businesses in the eight-county region
- Applied statistical analyses in concert with established economic procedures
- Interviewed key local stakeholders to provide additional qualitative perspectives



# DATA COLLECTION

Spring  
2020

- Identify businesses by NAICS codes in the eight-county region
- Survey visitors/river users at river access points, community spaces, and festivals
- COVID-19 severely limits public events and face-to-face data collection. Switch to online surveys for businesses and river users

Spring  
2021

- COVID-19 protocols relax and some public activities resume
- Survey visitors/river users at festivals & public gatherings, through river-related outfitters, and on Partnership websites and newsletters

Fall  
2021

- End data collection with 453 valid visitor and 111 valid business survey responses

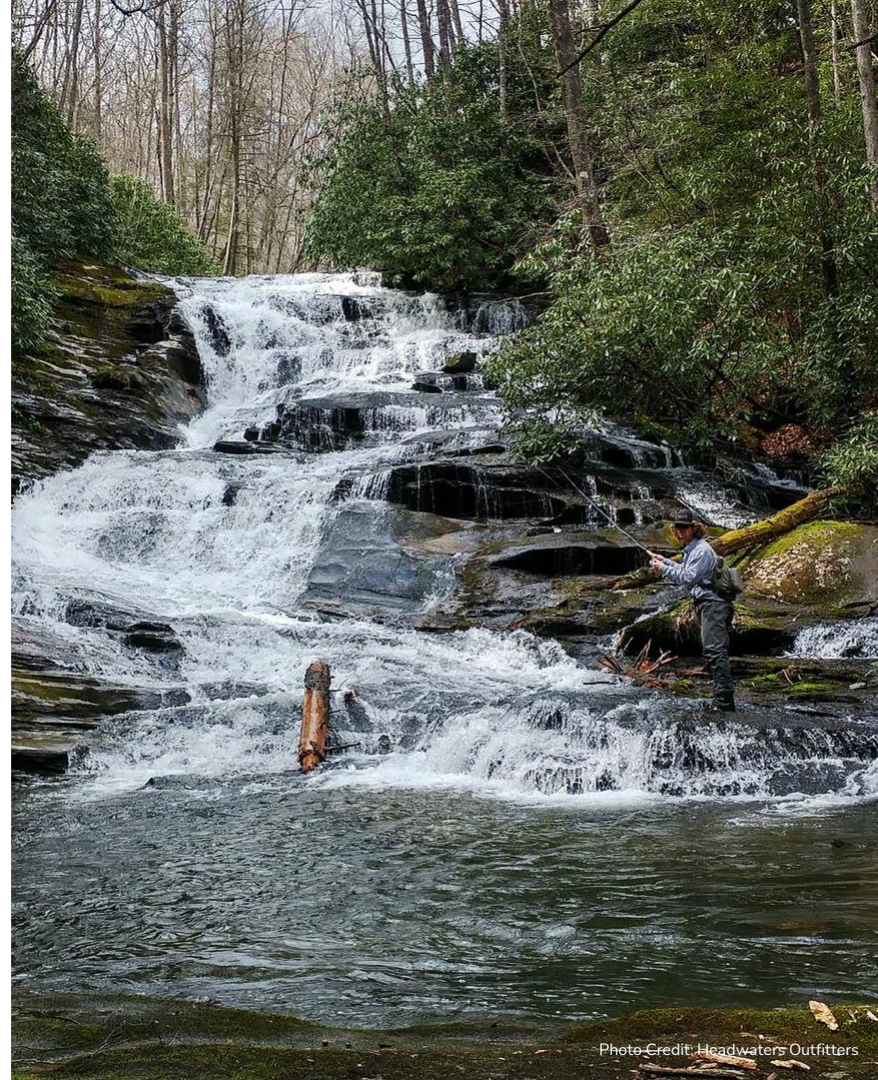
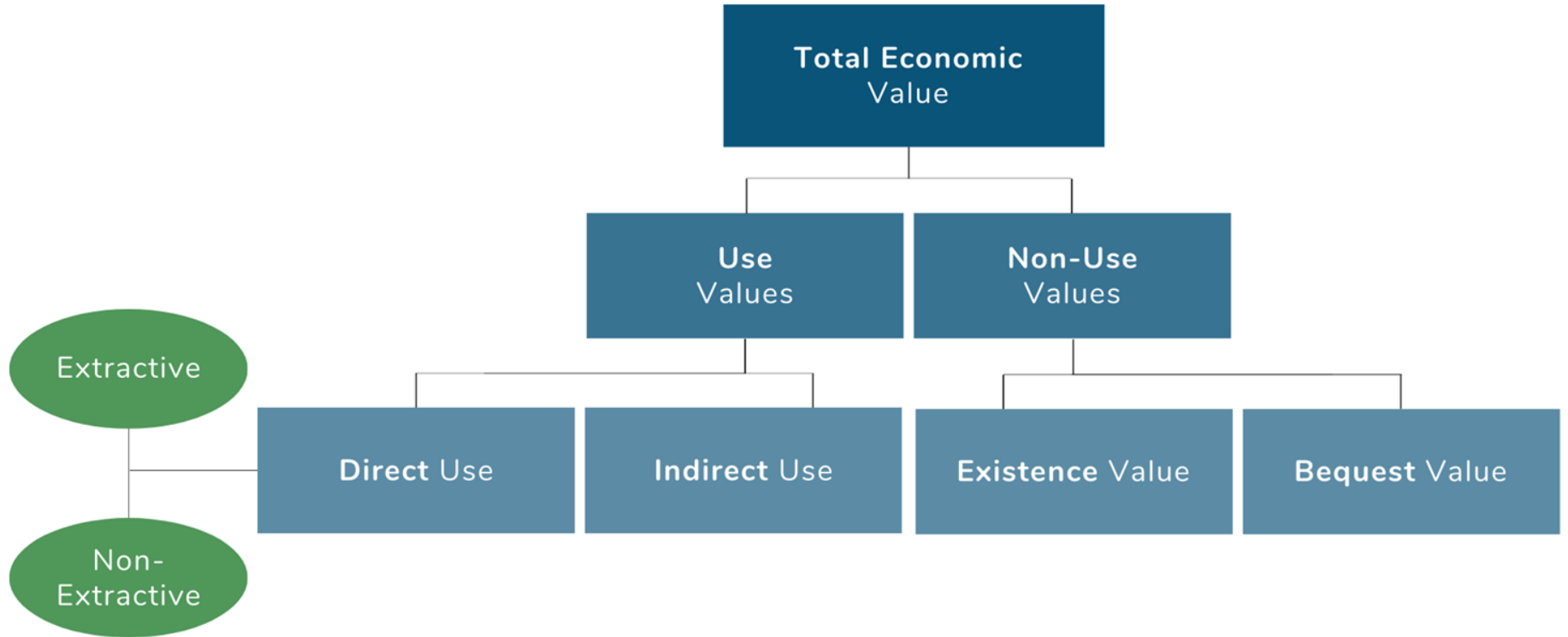


Photo Credit: Headwaters Outfitters

# STUDY METHODOLOGY







# THE FINDINGS

*ECONOMIC IMPACT OF FRENCH BROAD WATERSHED*



# WHAT'S AT RISK

**6.9 MILLION**

River-Influenced Visitors  
Annually

**\$2.7 BILLION**

Annual Visitor  
Spending

**\$3.8 BILLION**

Economic Impact

**\$273 MILLION**

Annual Federal Taxes &  
\$234M State & Local Taxes

*“The River section through Asheville, both on and off the water is recognized as a unique urban outdoor river experience enjoyed by locals and tourists alike. Businesses have recognized this surge and are transforming the river corridor to meet the demand of a growing river-based economy.” -William Irving, Former President and CEO, Nantahala Outdoor Center*

# WHAT'S AT RISK

“We appreciate the river as the defining characteristic of the entire region. It is imminently connected to everything... agriculture and quality of life. It is a very visible connector in our community.” -*Charlie Jackson, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project*

**38,554 JOBS**

Created or Maintained  
Annually

**\$2.4 BILLION**

Existence Value

**\$585 MILLION**

Bequest Value

**\$2.9 BILLION**

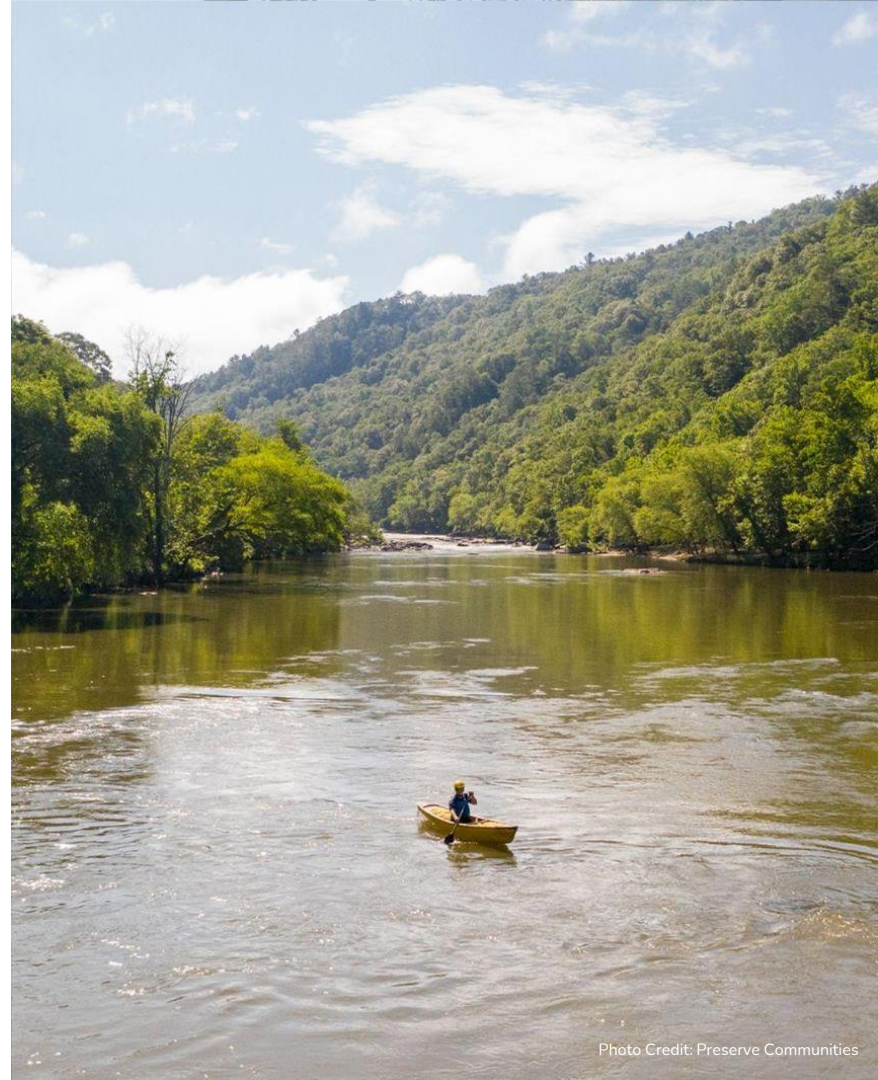
Environmental Value

# WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

“New assets like the Greenway in the River Arts District and the one in development in Woodfin all start with the river as the basis for development and enjoyment of the community. The river draws people. It adds life and energy like no other feature of the area.” -Leah Wong Ashburn, President/CEO, Highland Brewing Company

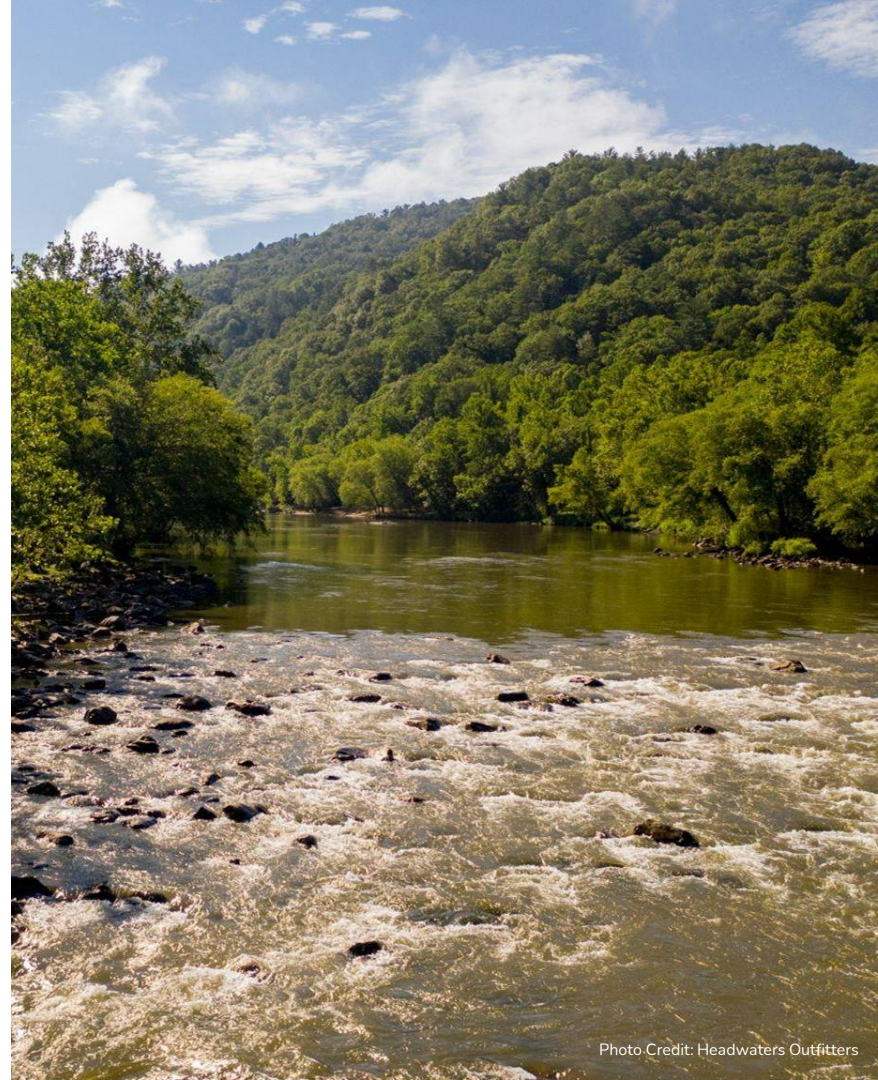
“We make our living off the river and especially the tributaries. It is the first quality trout water in the SE US close to major cities.” -Kevin Howell, Davidson River Outfitters

“The river is the connector to life in Asheville. We come back to the river to relax. Riverfront sites draw people of all backgrounds back to nature.” - Matt Godfrey, Outdoor Gear Builders Association



# NEXT STEPS

- Share findings with river-invested groups & individuals
- Expand awareness among the public about the river's value
- Continue research into other sectors (forestry, agriculture, etc.)
- Define multi-year action plan to address primary pollutants of concern







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# THANK YOU TO...

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Business & Recreation Work Group

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Ecology Wildlife Foundation Fund