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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## Groundbreaking Held for Ecusta Trail

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Hendersonville, NC – October 28, 2023

In an exciting moment for Henderson County, surrounding communities, and local partners, a groundbreaking ceremony was held today, Saturday, October 28, at the Veterans Healing Farm in Hendersonville for the first six-mile stretch of the Ecusta Trail.

“The dream has become a reality,” said Henderson County Board Chairman Rebecca McCall. “To be able to move dirt and start construction on the first phase of the trail is the culmination of many years of hard work by so many people.”

The Ecusta Trail, when fully completed, will be a 19-mile multi-use greenway that connects the communities of Henderson County to the City of Brevard. The first six-mile stretch of the trail will start in downtown Hendersonville, go through the town of Laurel Park, and end at Battle Creek off US 64 in Horse Shoe. The second phase in Henderson County is in the planning stages, and that will take the trail to the Transylvania County line.

“We are so excited to be making this dream real,” said Kieran Roe, Executive Director of Conserving Carolina. “A project of this scale takes a huge amount of effort and investment and could easily seem beyond reach. But our community made it happen—from the grassroots advocates to the dedicated volunteers to the many generous donors. As we celebrate this milestone for the trail, we are celebrating the vision and generosity of this community.”

Friends of the Ecusta Trail, a grassroots volunteer group, has championed the vision of the Ecusta Trail since 2009. In 2021, a subsidiary of Conserving Carolina purchased the rail corridor and then worked with Friends of the Ecusta Trail to raise funds for construction. Local businesses and individuals gave millions of dollars, making it possible to match major grants, including two large federal grants awarded in the summer of 2023. The final phase in fundraising for the trail is to raise money for amenities so the public can access and enjoy the trail. This includes things like trailheads, restrooms, benches, and signage. This fundraising effort is being led by the Friends of the Ecusta Trail.

“Today’s groundbreaking for the first section of the Ecusta Trail is the culmination of nearly 15 years of advocacy by the Friends of Ecusta Trail (FOET), said Mark Tooley, FOET President. “What started as a dream and a vision for repurposing the unused rail corridor as a community asset, has now come to fruition. I want to especially thank past and present FOET board members for their unwavering determination to get us to this historic event today and to all the volunteers and donors who have provided support and encouragement along the way. In the end, the partnership of federal, state, and local governments, nongovernmental organizations, and nonprofits, all striving for the same goal, was the secret sauce that made all of this possible.”

Major funding came from the U.S. Department of Transportation, the State of North Carolina, Henderson County Tourism and Development Authority, Transylvania County Tourism and Development Authority, and private donors. Leading local government partners include Henderson County and the City of Brevard. Major donors are recognized at [conservingcarolina.org/ecusta-trail-donors/](https://conservingcarolina.org/ecusta-trail-donors/)

Construction of the first six-mile stretch is expected to be completed in one year. Completion of the entire trail is expected to take 3-5 years.

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