

Smoky Mountains Wilderness Watch Resolution #1

Principles for Respecting and Supporting Cherokee Treaty Rights and Cherokee Lifeways

On the 1st day of April 2026, the following resolution was proposed and approved by the Leadership of Smoky Mountains Wilderness Watch:

WHEREAS, Smoky Mountains Wilderness Watch is a chapter of the North Carolina Wildlife Federation, a nonprofit organization founded in 1979 that works to protect wild lands and waters within North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, Smoky Mountains Wilderness Watch acknowledges that for thousands of years the Cherokee people have maintained strong connections to sacred lands including forests, mountains, lowlands, waterways, flora, and fauna of what is now referred to as Western North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, Treaties between the Cherokee people and the United States are the supreme law of the land, woven into the United States Constitution and federal statutes and confirmed by numerous high court decisions; and

WHEREAS, since the Cherokee treaties were signed, there has been a significant change in the size and availability of wildlife, plant, and other cultural resources due to logging, mining, development, population growth, recreational overuse, and climate change, threatening the ability of the Cherokee people to exercise their treaty rights and maintain their lifeways; and

WHEREAS, the habitat loss from development and land use has outpaced restoration and conservation efforts over the past century; and

WHEREAS, The Cherokee people have maintained and are currently "rebuilding" their spiritual connectivity to their language, water, land, animals, and plants and are seeking a broad coalition of support with agencies and organizations that acknowledge the past, present, and future

role The Cherokee people have in managing and conserving these resources; and

WHEREAS, Smoky Mountains Wilderness Watch acknowledges the importance of how nonprofits and other organizations can support Cherokee treaty rights and lifeways;

NOW THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED that the Leadership of Smoky Mountains Wilderness Watch will:

Acknowledge that for thousands of years the Cherokee people have lived here in Western North Carolina and still today maintain a strong spiritual relationship with these lands and waterways;

Acknowledge and support the Cherokees' inherent and reserved rights, to fish, hunt, and gather in their treaty-protected usual and accustomed grounds;

Recognize that Cherokee is a sovereign nation rather than simply stakeholders and, as such, require and deserve special consideration by other governments and by non-governmental organizations regarding all issues that affect them;

Recognize that federal and state resource agencies have a responsibility to consult with the Cherokee people whenever a project affects treaty rights or Tribal interests.

Engage the Cherokee people early in organizational efforts and projects that may affect Cherokee treaty rights or Tribal interests;

Solicit, listen to, and respond to the Cherokee peoples' feedback and counsel on potential impacts to cultural uses and areas protected by treaty and other federal law;

Support and help to facilitate Cherokee treaty and cultural use access on our public lands which may include passable roads, recreation management, and forest restoration;

Support policies that protect and restore critical habitat necessary for sustainable populations of fish, wildlife, and plant resources;

Promote public and institutional awareness and understanding on the importance of Cherokee lifeways and stewardship of resources by facilitating education with members, Boards of Directors, staff, other stakeholders, and the general public;

Support the Cherokee peoples' efforts to revitalize their vision on the landscape including sharing their story of these lands; and

Adopt a policy to generally support environmental programs sponsored by or involving the Cherokee, at their request and with their consent. It shall, however, also be the policy of Smoky Mountains Wilderness Watch to avoid any involvement in projects or issues involving intertribal conflict.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ray R. DeVoe", written over a horizontal line.

President

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Teresha Escamilla", written over a horizontal line.

Secretary