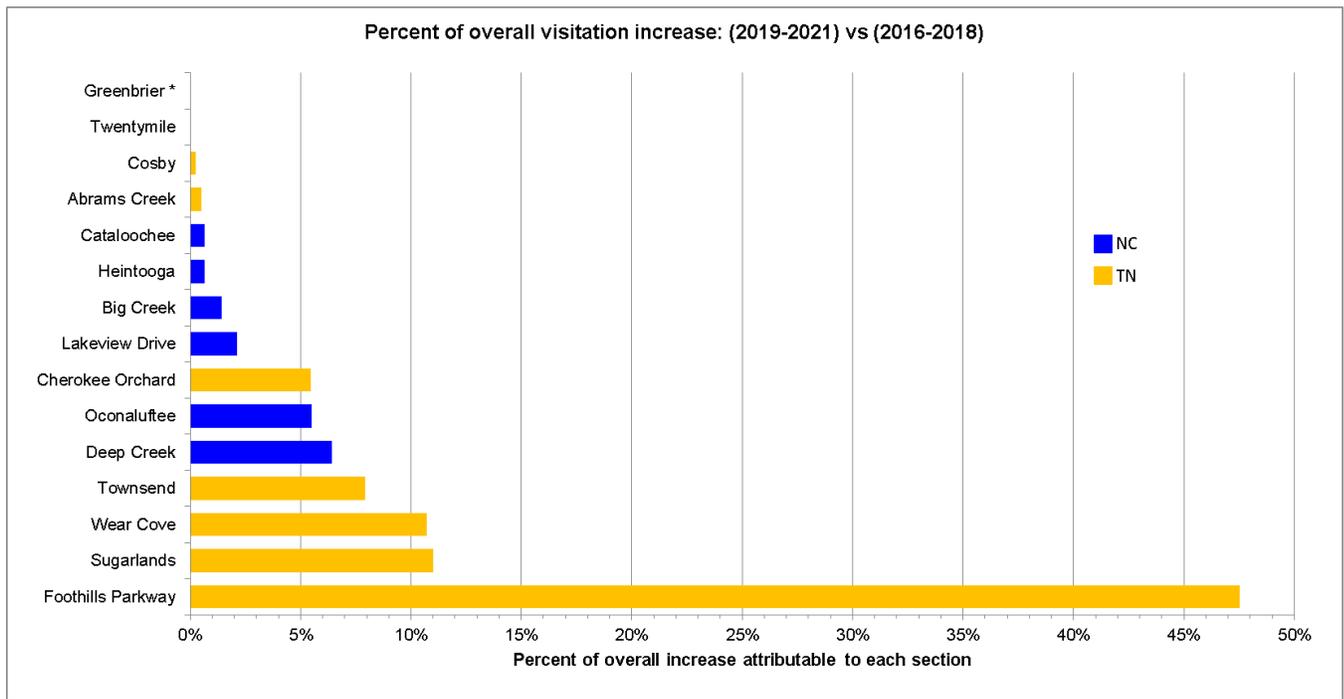


**Friends of the Bryson City Cemetery and Lauada Cemetery Association position paper**  
**April 28, 2022**

Friends of the Bryson City Cemetery (FBCC) and Lauada Cemetery Association (LCA) stand united in our strong opposition to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP) proposal to implement a parking fee with respect to citizens of North Carolina, a state which donated land to the National Park Service (NPS), but particularly those of our home, Swain County, which occupies over 40% of the Park land. We also oppose the proposal to increase the fee for back country camping. We take no position regarding the proposed increase in front country and facility rental fees. Factors underlying our position are listed below.

1. Many buried in the Bryson City and Lauada Cemeteries once called lands now occupied by the Great Smoky Mountain National Park (GSMNP) their home.
2. The FBCC website provides a home for the Park Military Veterans project. FBCC members take the lead role in documentation and validation and assist with Memorial Day remembrances for veterans in numerous GSMNP cemeteries. See: [friendsofthebccemetery.org/files/articles/Park\\_Veterans.pdf](http://friendsofthebccemetery.org/files/articles/Park_Veterans.pdf)
3. Lauada Cemetery's reason for existence is the removal of families and flooding which accompanied construction of Fontana Dam. Neither the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) which built the dam, flooded and isolated cemeteries, nor the GSMNP provided funds for the cemetery. It was acquired, at significant cost, by the removed communities to reinter the remains of loved ones removed from isolated and flooded grounds.
4. Buried in the two cemeteries are multiple individuals and families who actively promoted GSMNP development and donated both land and money to assist in the park's creation.
5. Many on these hallowed grounds did not surrender their homes in the GSMNP willingly but saw their lands condemned by state and federal agencies employing powers of eminent domain. The forced taking was so repugnant in the eyes of some that they refused to accept payment. It is our duty to remember, honor and stand by these forebears.
6. We are delighted that a national park occupies a land which was formerly our front yard and is now our back yard. We embrace it as a place of beauty which promotes restoration of heart and soul and renewal of spirit for all, including those who lost nothing and gave nothing toward its creation.
7. A particularly bitter element of our bittersweet history grows and the sweetness shrivels when GSMNP leadership acknowledges the sacrifice of our forebears in word, yet in deed simultaneously turns its back on their descendants.
8. Swain County lost 23% of the county's tax base when the Park was first formed. That cost to the county grew substantially with the Fontana Project, and is one the county has borne, year after year, for nine decades.
9. In 1934, over 2,000 citizens of Swain County, led by individuals now resting in the Bryson City Cemetery, delivered a petition to the TVA, the President of the United States and the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, expressing the county's strong preference that NP&L be allowed to construct hydropower projects instead of TVA. See: [friendsofthebccemetery.org/files/articles/Swain\\_County\\_petition.pdf](http://friendsofthebccemetery.org/files/articles/Swain_County_petition.pdf)  
That both TVA and the Department of the Interior were included on the petition demonstrates that county leaders feared that property taken by TVA would be transferred to the NPS, further depleting the county's tax base.

10. Our citizen forebears were prescient and the county's fears were realized; the petition was ignored and two federal agencies – the TVA and the NPS – forcibly took away not only that one-sixth of the county's tax base but that associated with homes, lands, and businesses – from a productive copper mine on Eagle Creek to the home of the only African-American family living in the Swain County portion of the Park on Peachtree Creek.
11. All of the waters supplying Fontana Dam flow from and through Swain and Graham County drainages. None of Fontana's power generation is returned to either county; it all flows to Tennessee and beyond. While this has nothing to do with the GSMNP, it has a great deal to do with local perspectives on federal agencies.
12. The transfer of property associated with the Fontana Project and subsequent federal and state acquisitions reduced Swain County's taxable land base to a mere one-fifth of the county area.
13. We acknowledge that Park visitations are a source of local tourism income through meals, lodging, and other purchases made in the immediately surrounding area. However, we reject Park Service claims with respect to the financial benefits which Swain and other communities reap from GSMNP visitation. Other attractions in the area are higher on the agenda for many tourists, including Harrah's Casino, whitewater and other recreation on the Nantahala, the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad and National Forest Service lands where there are no backcountry camping fees.
14. Increased attendance and people burden on the Park is something of which we have first-hand knowledge and *qualitatively* accept. The quantitative data supplied by the GSMNP is another matter altogether. There is abundant evidence that significant portions of the monthly numerical tabulations reported by the GSMNP are not based on measured monthly data. For example, consider the highlighted issues with the Deep Creek and Lakeview Drive vehicle data: [friendsofthebccemetery.org/files/articles/DC\\_Lakeview.pdf](http://friendsofthebccemetery.org/files/articles/DC_Lakeview.pdf). But even if one accepts the GSMNP tabulations, a more detailed analysis reveals that a whopping 83% of the total increased visitation in recent years occurred in Tennessee. Almost half of the total increase (48%) came just from vehicle traffic on the Foothills Parkway segments, including recently completed sections (see accompanying chart). While the Foothills Parkway may technically be a part of the GSMNP, the Parkway use is of an altogether different nature than visitation in the Park core. The very nature of much of the Parkway involves driving, not parking for feet on the ground access. The proposed parking fee is of the least consequence to the single constituency most responsible for the visitation increase – Parkway drivers.



15. We appreciate and are grateful to those who care for trails and backcountry and support the concept of increased funding to address the cost of increased visitation burden on these folks in particular. But equity demands that increased costs should be borne by those most responsible for the increased burden. As indicated in the chart, the dominant increase in visitation has nothing to do with backcountry use.
16. Since the implementation of the \$4 per night fee for backcountry use, there has been no detectable improvement in either backcountry maintenance or patrol. The Park Service asserts the need for more funds, but has provided no public accounting (that we can find) for the use of the monies received over the years since the \$4 fee was imposed.
17. The overwhelming majority of the increase in Park visitation over the last decade clearly does not come from the local community, but from tourism and nearby metropolitan areas. The population of Swain County increased by less than 1% from 2010 to 2020. Neighboring Graham’s population shrank by 9%. In contrast, the populations of Knox County, TN and Buncombe County, NC – the Park’s closest metropolitan areas, increased by 77,879 people. The growth alone was 3.5 times the combined populations of Swain and Graham County. During the same decade, the populations of five counties in the Nashville and Charlotte regions, all within a four hour drive, grew by over 660,000 people. Those ten counties are homes to over 3.7 million people – over one hundred times the combined populations of all five counties which are home to the Park.
18. Citizens of Swain County buffer the peak people burden on the Park. Most local residents completely avoid or severely restrict their use of the Park during periods of high demand. Many of us voluntarily pick up trash left behind by outside visitors during those high use periods.
19. In 1931, Horace Albright, Director of the NPS committed to the North Carolina Park Commission: *“We will do everything within our power to keep the cemeteries intact and that the parties who have bodies buried there may go to and from the cemeteries with all freedom of action and have the right to keep the brush and briars cleaned off. Furthermore, we will assume it as an obligation of the National Park Service to assist in keeping these cemeteries*

*as cleaned up as possible after we have taken them over as part of the park.*” GSMNP leadership continues to cite Albright’s commitment (*Foundation Document, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, October 2016*). The NPS has failed to fulfill that commitment. Care of cemeteries provided by GSMNP is far short of adequate. Collapsed graves in some locations constitute a physical hazard and many cemetery grounds range from bare soil to broom sage and briars. We invite GSMNP personnel to pay a visit the Bryson City and Lauada Cemeteries to see our version of “as cleaned up as possible.” Parking is free.

20. Unlike hordes who pass through, we are not just IN the mountains – we are OF them. We welcome visitors and embrace our neighbors who are not from here, but who have been adopted by these mountains and streams which nurtured us from childhood. Connection to place is part of what defines us. Descendants of those who once made their homes here have strong connections to specific locations. Generations gather at old home places to remember, break bread on the grounds which once provided sustenance, and drink from the rock-ed-in spring built and used by their forebears. Teenagers are submerged and lifted from the cleansing creek waters where great-great grandparents were baptized over a century ago. Like those who come to visit, we love the Park for its natural beauty, but a transcendent linkage and urgently felt call to assemble to place are of an altogether deeper emotional and even spiritual nature. The right to heed that call to peaceably assemble is one guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which explicitly forbids “prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

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