

Twenty years ago, Erin Bronk, then a US Forest Ranger, had a great idea of creating a sky bridge over US 64 down to Dry Falls. Visitors would be rerouted to park in a US Forest Service parking lot just off Paul Walden Way, do a short hike down to the falls, and cross the highway by way of the sky bridge. However, the full plan that Erin and her team developed was never realized.

Parts of the plan were completed, such as improving the railing system, parking lot, and walkways at Dry Falls. An access road was built on the property next to Paul Walden Way, and some limited parking spaces were created. As part of the plan, the old, early pioneer McCall log cabin was relocated to the site. All of this infrastructure is still in place, including the cabin. The landing pad for the sky bridge was even installed near the existing parking lot at Dry Falls.

What happened to the remaining components of the project? Simply put, the Forest Service ran out of money, and other pressing projects became priorities.

Fast forward to 2021 and the pandemic. Dry Falls, like so many of our recreational venues, was inundated with visitors. Dry Falls poses a particularly dangerous problem with serious backups on US 64 of cars waiting to enter the parking area. Several serious accidents have occurred. This access and parking problem continues, and as spring returns, so will many cars and crowds head to Dry Falls.

The solution to this problem is simple: throw money at it and complete the project! The US Forest Service should move forward with the plans. Let's build the parking lot across the road from Dry Falls and construct the sky bridge. The existing parking lot would be a drop-off point and provide handicap parking. The solution and plan have been at hand for 20 years. It may require some updating, but it is a solution to this serious problem.

Also, such a design would serve as a great tourist attraction. The McCall cabin could be a welcome center during the heavy tourist season. The Highlands Historical Society might be able to display in the cabin the old artifacts from settler living. Volunteers could provide interruptive information about the history of the Highlands Plateau. Picnic and camping areas might be possible in addition to ample parking spaces.

Josh Ward and I met with US Forest Service Rangers and representatives from Congressman Chuck Edwards district offices just recently. We visited the site on Paul Walden and Dry Falls. All agreed this proposed project needs to be reinvigorated with funding and support. I am hopeful that with everyone working together, the Dry Fall improvement project will become a reality as soon as possible. A little federal money from Washington will have a great impact on providing a safe and stunning tourist designation for folks coming to Western North Carolina.

I hope folks will let Congressman Edwards know how important it is to fund this Dry Falls improvement project.

<https://edwards.house.gov/contact>

(Add the link to Edwards)