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WASTEWATER PROJECTS

Funding for Waynesville, Bryson City coming

Jacob Biba

Asheville Citizen Times  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Gov. Josh Stein announced July 23 that 27 counties across the state will receive more than \$204 million in funding for 48 drinking water and wastewater infrastructure projects, including two in Western North Carolina.

The awards will improve drinking water and wastewater infrastructure,

address PFAS and other forever chemicals, identify and replace lead pipes, and improve resiliency after future storms, the governor’s office said in a July 23 news release.

The announcement also arrives nearly 10 months after Tropical Storm Helene swept through the region, severely damaging wastewater treatment infrastructure in several towns.

“When you turn on the faucet in your home, you shouldn’t have to worry about whether that water is safe for

your family,” Stein said in a statement. “These investments will help ensure North Carolinians have access to clean drinking water and will help keep people safe when disaster strikes.”

The two Western North Carolina wastewater projects awarded funding are in Bryson City, in Swain County, and Waynesville, in Haywood County.

Bryson City will receive \$9.2 million in Clean Water State Revolving Funds for wastewater treatment plant improvements, according to the release.

Waynesville will receive \$8.2 million from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund for improvements to the Little Champion Gravity Sewer and Pump Station.

“This funding will address aging infrastructure and improve public health for communities large and small,” the state’s Department of Environmental Quality Secretary Reid Wilson said in the statement.

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Claire Stovall hiked to Charlies Bunion three times in search of a clear view like the one Dutch Roth captured but still ended up with a cloud obscuring part of the vista. TOP: DUTCH ROTH/PROVIDED BY GSMNP ARCHIVES; BOTTOM: CLAIRE STOVALL

Artist remakes historic Smoky Mountain photos



Word from the Smokies

Holly Kays  
Guest columnist

When Claire Stovall applied to the Artist-in-Residence program at Great Smoky Mountains National Park, she hoped to use the time to work on the wildlife textile collages she had highlighted in her application. Then she told her family she’d been selected for the program — and that plan spun on a

swivel.

“My grandmother and great-uncle both said, ‘Do you know about Dutch Roth?’” she recalled.

Stovall, 24, had never heard that name before, though she figured he had to be some distant relation — Roth was her grandmother’s maiden name. She was surprised to learn that Albert Gordon “Dutch” Roth, her great-grandfather’s cousin, is a well-known figure in the history of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, considered instrumental in documenting these rugged mountains prior to the park’s creation.

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Powell fact checks President in clash

Trump backs off on calls to fire Fed chair

Joey Garrison  
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – President Donald Trump and Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell clashed as they toured on-going renovations of the Fed’s headquarters, with the chair correcting the president over the scale of cost overruns.

Still, despite past threats to fire Powell over the project, Trump said the July 24 meeting was “very productive” and said he didn’t see enough to warrant the chair’s termination.

“I don’t think it’s necessary,” Trump told reporters shortly after the tour was over.

The rare presidential visit to the Federal Reserve came as Trump has accused Powell of potential fraud related to the ballooning cost of the agency’s renovation of two historic buildings on the National Mall. Trump and several White House advisers requested the tour to inspect the work firsthand.

The original cost of the current renovation was estimated at \$1.9 billion in 2019 before increasing to \$2.5 billion. The Fed said the increase was due to design changes, costs of materials, equipment, labor and other “unforeseen conditions” such as more asbestos than anticipated and toxic contamination in the soil.

But it was Powell pushing back at Trump before the tour got underway, when the president claimed the project’s cost had swelled to \$3.1 billion.

“It went up a little bit – or a lot,” Trump said to Powell, both men wearing white hard hats.

Powell shook his head in disagreement. “I’m not aware of that, Mr. President. I’ve not heard about that from anyone at the Fed.”

The president handed him a sheet of paper. Powell took a glance and then informed the president that his higher figure included the cost of renovating the Martin Federal Building, which was completed in 2020.

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# U.S. Postal Service marks 250 years

Continues delivering despite its challenges

Marc Ramirez  
USA TODAY

America’s Founding Fathers had the foresight to recognize that an efficient postal service would be an essential tool of democracy.

Odds are they didn’t envision mailboxes stuffed with grocery ads, prescription medicines and AARP The Magazine.

On July 26, the U.S. Postal Service marks 250 years of serving a mission regardless of rain, sleet, snow or gloom of night. A key mechanism of an informed citizenry, a building block of U.S. independence and a storied part of American culture, the agency has faithfully delivered letters nationwide, regardless of distance, for the price of a stamp – even as its challenges to do so without delay or a deficit have grown.

“The post office was created a year before the Declaration of Independence and has been there at every step along the American journey,” said Steve Kochersperger, the agency’s postal historian. “It goes everywhere Americans have gone and keeps us united.”

“It was conceived as an expansive public service,” said Cameron Blevins, a professor of history at the University of Colorado Denver. “That dedication to providing a service to American citizens, regardless of where you live, has been there since the beginning.”

To name a small handful of those who have carried mail to U.S. doors: animator Walt Disney, actor Morgan Freeman, bassist Charles Mingus and guitarist Ace Frehley of KISS. President Abraham Lincoln served as a local postmaster; so too did Nobel Prize-winning novelist William Faulkner, though not as effectively.

USPS marked the milestone July 23 with a Forever stamp depicting a mail carrier on her rounds and a modern interpretation of a 5-cent stamp, first issued in 1847, that portrays Benjamin Franklin, the nation’s first postmaster general.

Today, according to its website, the Postal Service serves nearly 169 million addresses with 640,000 workers and almost 258,000 vehicles. In 2024, the agency handled more than 116 billion



**A uniformed driver sits atop a regulation wagon in Boston, circa 1895. Regulation wagons were used to transport mail between post offices, their stations and train stations in large cities from the 1870s to the early 1900s.** PROVIDED BY USPS

pieces of mail, most of it so-called junk mail.

But the Postal Service faces danger and uncertainty that threaten to see it privatized or merged with the Department of Commerce. Such a merger was proposed earlier this year by President Donald Trump, who called USPS “a tremendous loser for this country.”

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, the agency has operated at a deficit for the last 15 years, with a net loss of \$100 billion since 2007. Costs are outpacing revenue as once dependable First-Class Mail has fallen in volume, among other factors.

In spite of its troubles, the Postal Service trails only the National Park Service in terms of public favor, according to a 2024 Pew Research Center survey.

The agency’s new postmaster general, David Steiner, assured employees in a video address earlier in July that he supported keeping the agency in its current form.

“I do not believe that the Postal Service should be privatized or that it

should become an appropriated part of the federal government,” he said.

**From the start**

The agency’s role was crucial from the beginning, Kochersperger said. As the fight for independence began, leaders couldn’t use British postal channels for correspondence that would have been seen as treasonous. So they established a postal service and chose Franklin to lead it.

Franklin, who’d spent nearly four decades as Philadelphia’s postmaster, devised a system in which military correspondence was delivered on foot and horseback.

“The same orders from London would take two months,” Kochersperger said. “The Postal Service was crucial to American independence.”

From there, “democracy needed to have informed voters and the post office was integral in making sure they had the information they needed,” said Christopher Shaw, author of “First Class: The

USPS, Democracy and the Corporate Threat.”

The Postal Service’s mission of ensuring an informed and connected public has not changed: Books, magazines and newspapers continue to enjoy reduced shipping rates; so do mailings by charities and other nonprofit organizations.

“If you look at post-Second World War social movements – the Civil Rights Movement, the environmental movement, all those organizations – the main way they raised money and let supporters know what was happening was through the mail,” Shaw said. “It’s been a bedrock of democracy and getting information.”

The Postal Service was also a vital part of Western expansion. As hundreds of thousands of people streamed West, the Postal Service kept them connected to people back home for the price of an ordinary stamp.

“It did not discriminate on the basis of distance,” Blevins said.

In the 1890s, Postmaster General Jon Wanamaker, the department store founder, pushed to expand free mail delivery to rural areas and conceived of commemorative stamps that people could collect and not necessarily use.

Mail was delivered by stagecoach, steamboat and then railway, sorted on board moving trains. Other modes of delivery have included sled dogs, mules, reindeer and hovercraft, but the agency’s most transformative upgrade occurred in 1918 with the development of air mail when airports were still a budding concept.

“The post office had to build runways, install radios and train its own pilots,” Kochersperger said.

In the 1920s, the Postal Service relied on contractors to provide many of those services, forming the foundations of today’s airline industry as some providers found they could boost profits by carrying mail.

“That really helped kick-start aviation in this country,” Shaw said. “The majority of early revenues, before passengers, came from transporting U.S. mail.”

The post office historically operated at a slight deficit, Shaw said. But in 1970, the department was restructured as an independent federal agency under executive control, with the idea that it would be self-funded.

## Artist

Continued from Page 1A

“Roth, along with his hiking partners Jim Thompson and Carlos Campbell, explored and photographed almost all of the area’s backcountry in the runup to the establishment of the park and provided people with a glimpse of what would be lost without the herculean task of conserving the area for future generations,” said Smokies Librarian-Archivist Michael Aday.

More than 5,000 of Roth’s images remain preserved at the University of Tennessee archives, and Great Smoky Mountains National Park holds about 100 more. However, Roth was never a professional photographer — the Knoxville father of two spent his career as a pipefitter for the Southern Railway. But the mountains were his passion. A founding member of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, Roth was an avid hiker and amateur photographer.

“I had no idea I had this connection prior to applying, so it was really quite a magical series of events that just happened to get put together,” Stovall said.

Stovall is used to stitching pieces of happenstance into something beautiful. Her current artistic focus, textile collages made using camouflage patterns, began after she finished her master’s in consumer and design science and started designing clothing for Realtree, a hunting and camouflage brand. She noticed that most of the fabric swatches her office received ended up getting thrown away.

“My first camouflage collage was just me thinking about how I could use these fabrics in a creative manner to make something for my office,” she said. She ended up with a fabric portrait of a tom turkey and a passion for the puzzle-like process.

Stovall arrived in the Smokies with a new kind of puzzle to solve. Though she grew up just north of Atlanta in Roswell, Georgia, she had never been to the park before. To orient herself to the geography of her family history, she visited Aday at the Collections Preservation Center in Townsend. He pulled up all the Dutch Roth photos the park has in its archives, and Stovall found herself

inspired by the images — and by how diligently Roth had documented the location of each shot in neat cursive writing.

“I thought, ‘I can find all these places,’” she said.

This realization reformed the focus of her month in the park. Instead of working on her textile collages, she sought to replicate as many of Roth’s photos as possible. Aday pulled up a collection of old maps for her to reference, and Stovall became a regular at the park’s backcountry office, embarking on a “crazy scavenger hunt” during which she hiked almost 300 miles to remake 35 of Roth’s nearly 100-year-old photos.

The process gave her a deep appreciation for her ancestor’s stamina and backcountry prowess.

“One of the things that he was known for was images that were difficult to get,” Stovall said. “They claim he used to climb trees or go up on crazy rocks, and the cameras back then were really heavy, so it wasn’t something that was typical for a photographer to be doing.”

During his lifetime, Roth made frequent appearances in the pages of the Knoxville News-Sentinel, and even a cursory glance at these stories reveals that he was a man full of energy and good cheer.

Roth was present on the October 1924 hike to the top of Mount Le Conte that led to the founding of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, and he led the first official hike after the club was formed. Despite the “hard nature” of his work as a pipefitter, he summited Le Conte 20 more times over the next three years, the Knoxville News-Sentinel reported in its Sunday morning issue Sept. 4, 1927. In fact, by that date Roth had reached every other high point in the Smokies except Mount Guyot, climbing many of them multiple times; the story’s headline declared him “champion of Smoky Mountain hikers.”

Meanwhile, Roth’s “habit of photography” resulted in “one of the best collections of amateur pictures of the Smokies yet seen.” The paper quoted one-time SMHC president Brockway Crouch who said Roth’s “genial spirit is an inspiration to the other hikers,” and “not only does he carry the heaviest load of all, but he always seems ready to help others.”



**Wearing her Volunteer-In-Park uniform, Artist-in-Residence Claire Stovall interacts with park visitors during her residency in June.** PROVIDED BY NPS

Though Stovall didn’t shimmy up trees like Roth was known to do, she tried to frame her shots as identically to his as possible. Sometimes, this was easy — a view of a particular peak or landform is simple enough to replicate if you’re standing at the right overlook. But other images were more challenging, especially those showing a stretch of trail that could have been any section of the multi-mile path.

“There were a few times where I walked back and forth for 20 or 30 minutes knowing it’s somewhere right around here,” she said. “Then I’d just make my best guesstimate or suddenly be like, there it is.”

Placed side by side, the images show how much has changed in the past century. In many places, the forest is older and more grown up than it was in Roth’s day, when logging companies were still active on the land that now forms the park. When she hiked to a place called Parsons Bald to replicate a photo Roth had taken overlooking Gregory Bald, Stovall was surprised to find a thick stand of trees where her ancestor once had a clear view.

However, the trail names and routes were, for the most part, still the same, though their conditions have shifted over the years. On the back of a photo

taken Feb. 19, 1933, Roth had termed Boulevard Trail a “new Class ‘A’ trail” — at more than 90 years old, the trail is certainly no longer new, though it remains an immensely popular way to summit Mount Le Conte. Roadwork also proved a timeless presence in the mountains.

“There was an interesting Appalachian Trail crossing at Cheoah Bald and Stecoah,” Stovall said, mentioning a location south of the park’s western portion. “It was under construction then, and Dutch has a photo of it where he was crossing it. Within the last few months, they actually just started building a new crossing there, so he has pictures of the construction in 1927 and now I have pictures of the construction in 2025 at that exact same crossing.”

Stovall left the Smokies with a desire to continue telling her family’s story and plans to work with her grandmother, a photographer; her great-uncle, a newspaper editor; and her great-aunt, a genealogy enthusiast, to write a book about Roth’s legacy. She feels the pull of family, which perhaps is why during her residency she so enjoyed spending time in Gatlinburg’s Glades Road art district when she wasn’t hiking. Many of these artists continue to perfect the same crafts their grandparents once practiced.

“It’s just a beautiful connection that I think gets lost in today’s world,” she said. “It’s really cool to see that, and to see the knowledge of the crafts being passed down through the generations. It’s nice to be able to pay homage to what Roth did.”

*Each year between June and November, Great Smoky Mountains National Park hosts artists in residence who spend time developing their own work as well as leading public outreach events. Park partner Friends of the Smokies funds the program. Check the park calendar for events. Visit Stovall’s website to learn more about her work. Holly Kays is the lead writer for the 29,000-member Smokies Life, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting the scientific, historical, and interpretive activities of Great Smoky Mountains National Park by providing educational products and services such as this column. Learn more at SmokiesLife.org or reach the author at hollyk@smokieslife.org.*