

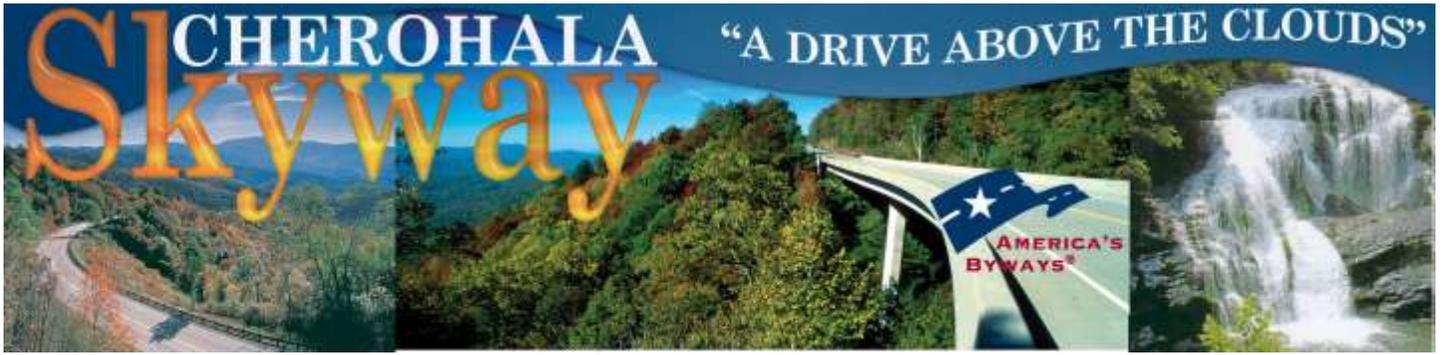
Land Use History

The lands that border the Skyway, like the different peoples that have interacted with them, have evolved significantly through diverse cycles of prosperity and abject destruction. The magnificent Great Valley of Tennessee was in fact much modified by the early Indian populations as soon as an agricultural economy became dominant.

The mountains and valleys were venerated as sacred by the Indians. These same sacred lands were sold for less than a dollar an acre after the Cherokee were removed to lands set aside for them west of the Mississippi. Following the Civil War, large lumber companies moved in and the forests were systematically cut. The mountains were cleared so thoroughly that “barely a match stick remained”, as one report states. This accelerated the process of environmental degradation wrought by massive erosion through unsound agricultural practices, and the institutionalized burning of the forest to reveal mast and to provide grass lands to upland “open range” grazing of livestock. In order to address these deteriorating environmental conditions, the federal government in 1911 authorized the Federal acquisition of these lands, beginning with the large cut-over timber holdings. The bulk of these lands were acquired for public ownership through the 1920’s to the 1950’s. The Forest Service began a long and careful process of forest restoration. This venture was given a considerable boost by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the 1930’s and early 1940’s. Since that time the value of the forest as a magnificent public green space has increased each year.

The present day Cherokee National Forest was originally made up of 4 principle purchase units located in Southern Virginia, Western North Carolina, North Georgia, and East Tennessee. The Cherokee Purchase unit was set up by the NF Reservation Commission in 1912 covering 222,058 acres in Polk, Monroe, and McMinn counties in S.E. Tennessee. Additional purchases were made and by the 1920’s the unit covered 569,151 acres.

Formation of the Present day Cherokee National Forest dated July 19, 1936 President Roosevelt combined the Tennessee portions of Unaka, Cherokee, and French broad division of the Pisgah NF, forming the Cherokee National Forest in its present form. The Cherokee National Forest Headquarters are located in Cleveland since 1925. Today the Cherokee National Forest is the State of Tennessee’s single tract of public land covering 640,000 acres. It is home to 30 campgrounds, 30 picnic sites, and over 600 miles of trails. There are a number of swim areas and boat ramps for water enthusiasts. For wildlife watchers there are designated areas. Located off the Cherohala Skyway there is a black bear reserve.



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