

DRAFT January 30, 2026

**Cherokee Council House
Cherokee, North Carolina**

Date

RESOLUTION NO. _____ (2026)

A resolution advancing EBCI sovereignty and stewardship of lands administered by the US Forest Service and US Park Service across the ancestral homelands of the Kituwah People and endorsing the frameworks for stewardship and collaboration established by the Elohi Dinigatiyi (Earth Keepers).

WHEREAS, the *Anikituwagi* (Kituwah People) have a sacred relationship with the earth and successfully stewarded the almost 80 million acres of their ancestral homelands across the Southern Appalachians in reciprocal relationships with our natural relatives for millennia. This active relationship enabled our culture and people to thrive, our ecosystems to remain healthy, and for the earth to remain in balance; and

WHEREAS, our ancestral mother town of Kituwah, and the surrounding ancient towns and lands, waters, and forests across what are now known as the Tuckasegee and Little Tennessee River watersheds are where we first developed our language, our culture, our matrilineal governance, and our science of stewardship and alliance with other sovereigns, all which are central to the Tribe’s historic strength and continued resilience, and all of which renders the restoration of EBCI’s stewardship of the lands, waters, and forests bordering the current EBCI lands centrally important to the re-indigenization of lands and forests across all of our homelands; and

WHEREAS, over 5 million acres of our ancestral homelands are currently administered by federal land management agencies, the US Forest Service and US Park Service in particular, and though there has been extensive and widespread environmental degradation across these lands, they continue to have extraordinary cultural value, as well as high biodiversity, water quality, and other environmental and economic values and remain a key source of our health and cultural resources for our people. This is especially true of the 1.5 million acres of federal lands bordering the current EBCI lands currently administered as the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP) and the Blue Ridge Parkway National Park (BRPNP); and

WHEREAS, it is now recognized that while the federal land management agencies have ensured a certain level of conservation, these agencies criminalized traditional use by Kituwah People, and by not adhering to traditional land management practices including cultural fire, lands administered by the federal government are highly vulnerable to invasive species, catastrophic fires, and climate change, which all risk destroying the ecosystems that are not only central to Kituwah culture and livelihoods, but upon which the social and economic development of the entire Southern Appalachian region depends; and

WHEREAS, the EBCI has direct cultural and economic interests in the sound stewardship of these lands and waters, the wildlife that inhabit these lands, and the roads and infrastructure that cross these lands; the Tribe’s interest in the sustainable management of the GSMNP elk herd, the demands on the EBCI EMS services from GSMNP visitors, and the management of Highway 441 through the GSMNP are cases in point; and

WHEREAS, the United States owes trust responsibilities to EBCI under federal law, including obligations to engage in meaningful consultation with EBCI in making decisions that affect EBCI

Dinigatiyi (Earth Keepers), as annexed, to guide EBCI co-stewardship arrangements, and the four-part framework for all co-stewardship agreements, and calls for the NRD to develop co-stewardship governance arrangements with the US Forest Service and US Park Service across its ancestral lands, starting with the establishment of an MOA with the US Forest Service for the co-stewardship of the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forest.

Submitted by: Tommy Cabe, Forest Resources Specialist, Natural Resources Department, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians