

Former UST Site Reused As Greenspace And Access To Ancient Ceremonial Nikwasi Mound In North Carolina

A former underground storage tank (UST) site fronting on the Little Tennessee River in Franklin, NC is now reused as an attractive greenspace with parking and Main Street access to the Nikwasi Mound. This ancient Mississippian period (800-1600 CE) ceremonial mound was later the center of the Cherokee Town of Nikwasi. Across the street from the Mound, the reused UST site, which is now owned by the Mainspring Conservation Trust, contains walkways leading to the riverfront, new native plantings, a rain garden, and repurposed remediation activities materials that serve as educational art pieces and functional reminders of the site's environmental legacy.

Work is ongoing to determine cleanup activities and reuse for another adjacent site with petroleum groundwater contamination. Future reuse could include a greenspace connecting the existing 4.5-mile Little Tennessee River Greenway directly to the Nikwasi Mound. Reusing the site this way would result in a continuous pathway leading from the existing riverfront greenway to a planned observation deck and new education path around the Mound itself.

As other properties surrounding the Nikwasi Mound become available, the Mainspring Conservation Trust will work with several partners to further plans for eventually having a Cherokee Heritage interpretive center adjacent to the Mound.



Removing USTs at former site



McRae, Barbara. 1993. *Franklin's Ancient Mound: Myth and History of Old Nikwasi Franklin, North Carolina*. Teresita Press: Franklin, North Carolina



<http://paws.wcu.edu/pcoyle/National-Register/content/site.html?nikwasi2.htm>



<https://mountainx.com/blogwire/community-foundation-announces-grant-awards/>

Background

Saved from commercial lot development by a grassroots campaign in 1946, the Nikwasi Mound was conveyed to the town of Franklin as the trustee for the people of Macon County. The Mound is on the National Register of Historic Places. The nearby Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians have maintained an active interest in the management of the Nikwasi Mound because it is a sacred Cherokee cultural site.

The Mainspring Conservation Trust, headquartered in the area, is a nonprofit organization that has long been at work in the broader region. The Trust has collaborated with the Eastern Bank of Cherokee Indians, helping to preserve and protect former Indian lands in western NC.

Many partners were involved for multiple years in achieving the successful reuse of the former UST site. Numerous partners are continuing additional efforts regarding cleanup and reuse of the adjacent site with petroleum groundwater contamination. What started as an EPA UST enforcement action at the original site and a looming environmental risk to the Little Tennessee

River has come full circle into meaningful greenspace redevelopment. Federal and state partners in both the UST and Brownfields programs worked together to address petroleum contamination and further the vision of the Mainspring Conservation Trust, all while carefully considering tribal concerns.

Reusing the original property has served as a catalyst for revitalization of this blighted and contaminated riverfront neighborhood, which will increase ecological and cultural tourism traffic and boost the local economy. The momentum is growing in the town and broader region as partners focus on a common goal of honoring the cultural significance of the area by highlighting the existence of this ancient site and functionally connecting it to existing adjacent greenways and parks.

For More Information

To learn more about the Nikwasi Mound, see www.mainspringconserves.org/press-room/franklin-press-river-rises-new-focus/

