New concession partner to manage trading post

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LAUREL SPRINGS — The National Park Service has approved a contract transfer from Sally Mae’s LLC to FIND Outdoors for management of the Northwest Trading Post on the Blue Ridge Parkway at Milepost 259.

The Northwest Trading Post, about 45 minutes north of Boone and Blowing Rock, and 30 minutes south of Doughton Park, has provided retail merchandise and food and beverage services to Parkway visitors since 1958.

“FIND Outdoors is excited to have the opportunity to build upon the legacy of the previous managers, who ran the trading post as ‘Sally Mae’s on the Parkway,” said Beth Hooper, director of visitor centers for FIND Outdoors. “Our plan is to expand the Trading Post to include educational opportunities so we can inspire others to ‘FIND’ their place on our beautiful public lands.”
FIND Outdoors, formerly the Cradle of Forestry Interpretive Association, has a 47-year mission of education and recreation in the natural world through partnerships and community involvement.

The organization’s mission is to promote educational, recreational and interpretive opportunities about forest and water resources, natural history, and the Cradle of Forestry in America.

“We are elated at the chance to expand our reach and provide Blue Ridge Parkway visitors with keepsakes and educational experiences that help inspire and connect every individual to our natural world,” said Natalie Britt, executive director.

J.D. Lee, Blue Ridge Parkway superintendent, praised the change in management.
“National Park Service concession operators have a long and important history of helping the National Park Service carry out its mission and enrich the visitor experience,” Lee said. “We are delighted to welcome FIND Outdoors to the parkway. Their legacy and future as a leader in environmental education and recreation opportunities will bring many new opportunities for the Parkway.”

The trading post will offer its guests a large mix of nature and forest-based souvenirs, such as T-shirts, hats, nature-based games and children’s activities.

Hooper said the post will sell a large assortment of items.

“We’ll have things there that folks have never seen before, in addition to a variety of locally made crafts,” she said.

In addition to the array of merchandise, the FIND Outdoors team will offer guests an opportunity to “grab and go” a variety of snacks, including biscuits, sandwiches and several drink options.

Opening dates for the 2020 season are not yet finalized and will be coordinated with other park openings planned in conjunction with local and state public health guidance related to COVID-19.
For more information, visit the Northwest Trading Post Facebook page or Blue Ridge Parkway website.