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JAN. 8, 2026 - An aerial view of the Noquisiyi or Nikwasi Mound in Franklin, N.C. (Photo credit: WLOS Staff)

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FRANKLIN, N.C. (WLOS) — After more than a century and a half outside of Cherokee ownership, the Noquisiyi Mound, a sacred and historically significant site in western North Carolina, will soon be returned to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

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(WLOS)

The mound, located in Franklin, was part of a Cherokee mother town hundreds of years before the founding of the United States. Since the 1800s, the land has been owned either by private

Members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians say the transfer marks the end of decades of advocacy and collaboration aimed at restoring the land to Cherokee ownership.

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"I'm glad that we are finally are reconnected, it's like being reconnected with family," said Jordan Ocumma, a Cherokee member and mound ground keeper.

For many Cherokee citizens, the long separation from the mound carried emotional and cultural weight.

“Whenever you have something as special to your people as this place is and you're not allowed to have anything to do with it, it feels like you're being kept on the outside. It feels like they're depriving you from your own culture, your own history,” Ocumma said.

The Noquisiyi Mound, later interpreted as Nikwasi, according to the Noquisi Initiative, is known not only for its historical significance but also for its place in Cherokee storytelling and spirituality.



Earlier this week marked a hard-won and deeply meaningful moment for our people. With a unanimous vote by the Franklin Town Council, ownership of Nikwasi Mound has returned to the care of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. This did not happen quickly, and it did not come without persistence. For years, I have believed, and have continued to say, that we should own this land.

Nikwasi, known to our ancestors as Noquisiyi, was once a thriving Cherokee town along the Little T... [See more](#)

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"If you look up anything about it, you'll find stories about the Spirit Defenders of Noquisi and they're said to be a race of people that come out of the mound in times of need and they've been known to help people that live around the mound in times of need," Oocumma said.

The restoration of ownership has been a collaborative effort between the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the town of Franklin and the Noquisi Initiative. The nonprofit has managed the site since 2019.

"To get it from private ownership back to the tribe became a core concern of ours," Bob McCollum, co-chair of the Noquisi Initiative, said.

McCollum said the process required multiple steps and years of coordination.

ownership," he said.

Franklin Mayor Stacey Guffey says this is a step in the right direction, connecting the tribe and the town.



JAN. 8, 2026 - *The Noquisiyi or Nikwasi Mound in Franklin, N.C. (Photo credit: WLOS Staff)*

"If we can't honor something like the ownership of this mound and reconnecting it to the people that live there, who have a culture that's alive and well now, it's not an artifact from a museum, it's a history living culture and if we can't honor that we're not doing our job as mountain people," he said.

Chief Michell Hicks of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians said the return of the mound represents both pride and an opportunity to educate the broader community about Cherokee history.

LUMBEE TRIBE OF NORTH CAROLINA GAINS LONG-SOUGHT FULL FEDERAL RECOGNITION

Hicks said he hopes the restoration sends a message of perseverance and hope to future generations.

“There's no price on culture, there's no price on tradition, there's no price on the history of our tribe. Sometimes you have to be diligent, sometimes it requires patience, but at the end of the day, it teaches our future generations that we can never stop to make things right,” Hicks said.

The initiative says official transfer of the Noquisiyi Mound will happen in the next coming months.

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