

Meetings & Task Forces

Although meetings are normally scheduled as listed below, changes are sometimes made due to holidays, scheduling conflicts, and so on. Please check with the listed Chapter leader or staff member to confirm meeting dates and other information.

— Chapter Meetings —

Macon County Chapter
Contact Kristina at (828) 371-0527 or email tinakristina@hotmail.com

Madison County Chapter
Contact Laura at (828) 649-0591 or email donkopp@aol.com

Good Earth Stewards of McDowell County
3rd Tuesday, 6:30 pm at the Marion Visitor's Center. Contact Nick or Linda at (828) 738-0600 or nmystic@mcowell.main.nc.us

Tuckaseegee Community Alliance & Smart Roads Alliance (Jackson County)
Contact Jeanette at (828) 269-6748 email madevans2003@yahoo.com

Tusquitee Chapter
(Clay & Cherokee Counties)
Contact Aurelia Stone
(828) 835-8473 or email nc_trout@verizon.net

Watauga River Conservation Partners, (Ashe, Avery, Watauga Counties)
4th Thursday, 4:30 pm at the Agricultural Extension Office in Boone. Contact Richard at (828) 963-8682

— Task Force Information —

Forest Task Force
Last Tuesday at 5:30 pm, at the WNC Alliance's Asheville office. Contact Dan at (828) 293-9661.

Public Parks Task Force
Contact Bob at (828) 258-8737 or email bob@wnca.org

— Committee Meetings —

Membership Committee
3rd Monday, 4 pm at the WNC Alliance Asheville office. Contact Jody or Karen at (828) 258-8737 or email karen@wnca.org.

Steering Committee
3rd Thursday, 6 pm at the WNC Alliance's Asheville office. Contact Jody at (828) 258-8737 or email jody@wnca.org.

WNCA Leadership Key in Shaping Transit Improvement

by Karen Austin

Here's a little true/false quiz on Asheville's Transit System:

1. Asheville's diesel-burning buses are much worse for air quality than automobiles.
2. Because the buses are usually empty, there's little savings in fuel consumption or air quality.
3. Using smaller buses would make the system more efficient and economical.
4. Most Asheville citizens live too far away from the routes to use the bus.
5. People will only use the bus if no other transportation option is available.
6. Bus service is the only transit option offered by the City of Asheville.

All six are "False". How did you do? Here are some explanations:

1. All Asheville Transit buses have been retrofitted with clean-burning technology as part of a grant from the Caterpillar Corporation. The retrofit reduces each bus's emissions by one ton per year. All new buses purchased will have the anti-pollution devices installed before delivery.
2. According to the rule of thumb, a bus carrying seven or more passengers represents a savings in fuel consumption and emissions. It's hard to see inside the blacked-out windows of Asheville's buses, but on average they have about 15 riders on board. At some times on some routes, they're relatively empty, but at other times they're almost at capacity.
3. Despite appearances, the smaller buses have fuel consumption rates and emissions levels almost equal to those of the large buses with almost double their rider capacity. The smaller buses also break down more frequently and cost more to maintain. Surprisingly, the larger buses actually have a smaller turning radius and are easier to maneuver on narrow, twisting roads.
4. Over 75% of Asheville's citizens live within a quarter-mile of a bus stop.
5. Most folks using transit are those with limited options – the poor, the elderly, the disabled. But "choice riders" – folks who choose to take the bus over some other means of transportation – are growing in number. For transit to have the most positive impact on air quality, land use patterns, and the overall quality of life, it must reach out to those choice riders.



Bus stops are being fitted with color coded maps of bus routes associated with each particular stop, offering on-the-spot information to potential riders. Photo by Karen Austin

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National Park Service Exotic Pest Management Team Director Nancy Fraley gives a brief lesson on invasive plant identification to volunteers prior to control work WNCA helped coordinate in 2005. Photo by Bob Gale

WNCA Funding Assures Continuation, Improvement of Invasive Species Work

by Bob Gale

After a year of "pioneering" work on training citizens in inventorying and controlling non-native invasive plant species on public lands, the Western North Carolina Alliance is poised to continue and improve this program in 2006-2007.

The WNC Alliance thanks the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for awarding grants, which will enable WNCA to further its public education and involvement efforts on the invasives issue.

In 2005, WNCA offered trainings to citizen groups, garden clubs and schools offering topics of invasive plant identification, information on how to fill out monitoring data sheets, and use of Global Positioning System (GPS) hand-held units for determining the longitude and latitude of invasive exotic plant locations. This information becomes entered into a database maintained by the Southern Appalachian Man and Biosphere (SAMAB) program

and is accessible to federal, state and municipal agencies and citizens, many of which are now attempting to focus efforts on controlling these species. The database helps them to prioritize areas most in need of control.

The WNC Alliance also provided leadership in 2005 in organizing a partnership with several groups including conservation organizations, consultants, federal agencies and local citizens, who performed experimental control work in areas that had already been inventoried on public lands in the Hot Springs area. Together, the Partners generated nearly 500 volunteer

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Accent

Accent is a quarterly publication of the Western North Carolina Alliance, a grassroots environmental organization which aims to promote a sense of stewardship and caring for the natural environment. The WNC Alliance's primary goal is to protect and to preserve our natural land, water, and air resources through education and public participation in policy decisions at all levels of business and government. The WNC Alliance encourages its members to recognize the interrelationships among environmental issues and to take personal responsibility for achieving protection of the environment in their communities.

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~ Dee Eggers, WNC Alliance

Letter From the Chair

by Dee Eggers, PhD

What do you really want to see in this region in 20 years? What should it look like in 2026? Think about it. I am. I think our personal and collective vision for the future, must be clear. Only then can we hope to create it.

Often, we focus on existing problems and how to get rid of their symptoms. It's much more powerful to consider the systems that create those problems and fix them.

Right now, I'm deep in the midst of the first-ever regional Design Science Lab put on by the Buckminster Fuller Institute and BigPictureSmallWorld and hosted by the Black Mountain College at UNC Asheville. If you don't know about the DSL, you should; it's a powerful tool to create real world solutions that can be implemented using current technologies and resources. Design Science is a way of approaching creating a future: it is a method only. Emerging from this method are radically innovative and achievable solutions to current problems. (You can learn more at www.bfi.org.)

We may have another DSL next year. If we do, consider participating. I'm not done yet, but I think this might be the most visionary, hopeful, and intellectually rewarding 10 straight days of my life. My head is exploding with possibilities for our region in the best way imaginable. Our final report will be on the web some time this fall. The United Nations is very interested in this work. The two previous labs were held at the UN. The final document from all DSL's is available through the UN and BFI (in paper or for free as a pdf). Ours should be available in the fall. You can already read the results of the

2005 lab on line. Go to the part about The Giving Tree. Amazing.

So, what are we doing? We know that the world today has massive problems that must be solved. WNCA is working hard on this. We face a choice of creating a sustainable world or catastrophe. In the next 100 years, I think those are actually the only choices. Our region faces the challenge of "attractiveness." People are coming in fast, rivers are filling with sediment, forests are turning to paper towels, and species are being lost forever. This is no good at all. We need to turn things in a different direction. We can either decrease attractiveness in some way, increase the attractiveness of other places, or have good land use planning. There really aren't other solutions. To our credit, WNC Alliance members are becoming increasingly involved in land use issues. Thank you.

The key outcome of DSL's is a design plan. But first, people define a "preferred state", a.k.a. a vision for the future. Knowing where to go, we then design plans to get there. Vast resources of the Internet, UNCA's National Environmental Modeling Center and others we use over the 10-day (and some of the night...) lab, enable teams to create comprehensive plans. Then those plans have to be of interest to investors and decision makers. Teams are working on energy, environment and education, primarily.

What is a compelling design plan? According to Medard Gable (one of our fantastic facilitators who worked with Buckminster Fuller and founded BigPictureSmallWorld), they encompass the following characteristics:

1. The preferred state is compelling.
2. It's doable. The design gets us to the preferred state in a demonstrable way
3. It uses present-day technology.
4. It uses known resources.
5. The design and implementation are affordable - the more so, the better.
6. The more profitable, the better.
7. The more easily understood, the better.
8. The more sustainable, the better. And the more people who win, the better.
9. What else? Some folks in the lab suggested we add that solutions should be beautiful, reproducible in other areas, scalable, tied to the heritage of the region, and create jobs.

Well, who could be against all that? But does it work? Yes.

Buckminster Fuller said we had to think holistically. WNCA works in a holistic fashion to create a better future through our varied program areas. Because we understand the interrelatedness of air and water quality, land use, human health, etc., we are able to work on high leverage initiatives. Thank you for your continued support of the great work of conservation. Be active! 🐾

Business Member Profile:

"Green" Realtor Ginny Lentz

Ginny Lentz is not your average Realtor. She has a special attachment to our natural environment and carries the "green" label in the real estate profession under the ECO-Certification for REALTORS® program. Realtors with this certification have a commitment to eco-promotion and education regarding energy-efficient, healthy-built, new and "re-newing" construction.

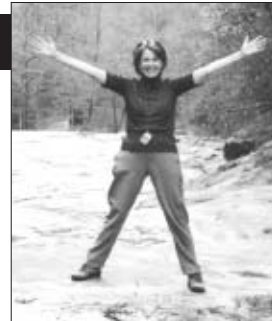
Says Ginny, "We have a responsibility to encourage developers to create sustainable communities which include careful site planning... not just for maximum profit... but for quality of life, to include greenways, quiet spaces, gathering places, community gardens, parks, trails and bikeways... to name a few."

Ginny says her world has always been green. "I grew up in a wooded neighborhood with dozens of girls my age... and my "greening" began with girl scouting, trail blazing and wilderness camping. We were taught to leave the site better than we found it and we wore our green uniforms with pride, knowing we were doing our small part to make the world a better place."

"My mother was one of our leaders. She taught us how to plant seeds and trees and anything that would grow. By example, she left a long, "country road" legacy of huge cherry and dogwood trees that grace my hometown to this day. Our troop picked up litter, recycled bottles, turned out the lights, hiked and biked to the edge of our world... and naturally, we were happy!"

Being an advocate for earth's ecosystems had its costs. In 1970, Ginny spear-headed Earth Day at the high school where she taught Biology and Ecology. "Honoring 'Mother Earth' and 'tree-hugging' were radical ideas then," notes Ginny, "and if we had not gained the support of the town and the media, I would likely have been fired. Twenty years later, working on Earth Day 1990 in Asheville was quite a different experience. I had finally found my 'home.'"

Ginny adds, "As ECO-Agents, we are catalysts for change. Right now we need more mainstream builders to commit to



Green realtor Ginny Lentz enjoys a scenic North Carolina mountain stream.

Energy-Star ratings (www.energystar.gov) on everything they build, and then to "raise the bar" to affordable N.C. Healthy-Built Homes (www.healthy-builthomes.org)." Thanks, Ginny, for promoting a higher standard in the real estate profession, and thanks, also, for supporting the WNC Alliance in its efforts to protect the natural communities of the North Carolina mountain region. 🐾

EDITORIAL POLICY - Unsolicited article submissions to *ACCENT* are welcomed, and every effort will be made to include them, if appropriate to the issue theme or WNC Alliance goals. Submissions not published due to space limitations may be considered for subsequent issues. Photos should include the photographer's name, permission to use, and detailed information for use in captions. Articles and photos must be received on or before the issue deadlines as follows:

Spring Jan. 15 Summer April 15
Fall July 15 Winter Oct. 15

Steep Slopes — Steeper Costs

by Norma Ivey

People often move to the mountains to have a "view". Houses placed on the side of a steep slope or mountaintop offer the best views, but at what costs?

As more and more development is moving uphill, counties are realizing the need to address this trend toward building for the best views. Landslides, soil slump, or "creep" and water considerations provide hidden costs for this type of development.

The public is potentially at risk building on slopes even if a landslide is not in the offing. There is a comparatively new house in Haywood County that is condemned, and on which the owner is still paying the mortgage. The huge crack in the brick wall happened when the slope on which it was built ever so slowly responded to gravity and moved enough to cause the crack.

This is not as dramatic as the Peaks Creek landslide in Macon County that cost 5 lives in 2004, however, it is costing money and causing heartache that may have been avoided. Steep slope development is an increasing problem these days. A look "under the surface" offers some reasons why this should be a concern for local governments and homeowners.

Slope failure occurs when the soil and cover of the slope move downhill in response to gravity. This may be rapid and dramatic such as a landslide, or it may occur at a snail's pace, as surface soil slowly slumps downward year after year. Though this seems simple risk of slope failure can vary greatly from place to place due to the high number of different soils formed on our mountains, the degree of slope, and the aspect (compass direction) the slope faces.

Even under natural conditions, without tree and plant cover removal or other major disturbance, failure can happen, though with less frequency and perhaps severity. The surface of the underlying bedrock may contribute to failure if it is smooth rather than jagged, so that soil and roots cannot get a secure hold.

On the other hand, tree roots that extend into cracks and around jagged projections in the underlying rock help "anchor" the soil cover in place. Soil disturbance such as cut and fill for roads or buildings changes the equilibrium that has developed on a given slope through time and may set up a failure potential. All other facts being equal, a steeper slope offers greater failure potential than a less steep one.

History repeats itself with respect to slope failure. Close inspection of an area and even analysis of a topographic map may reveal past failures. The curved growth habit of tree trunks in response to light when growing on creeping slopes can also indicate slope movement.

So how does one avoid becoming a victim to moving soil? Counties need to require a "check off" system that includes analysis of potential for slope failure. Local governments need to move more quickly in this direction. If they do not, more houses will develop the problems noted with the house above. If the warming climate creates more catastrophic storms and heavier rain patterns, as predicted, the soils on slopes may become more fluid and slope failure will only increase in frequency. This will only drive up the cost of that dream home with a view. ☘

6th Exciting Year for SEE EXPO

Help volunteer at WNCA exhibit!

by Ned Doyle

New members to the WNC Alliance might be surprised to know that the annual Southern Energy & Environment Expo, now in its sixth year and the largest event of its kind in the South, was born in 2001 as a cooperative effort between the WNC Alliance and BackHome Magazine. More than a few questions, and eyebrows, were raised back then at the idea of combining environmental issues with clean energy issues and inviting the public to a weekend long event about not only the environmental challenges we face, but the solutions to those problems.

BackHome Magazine, published in East Flat Rock, N.C. since 1990, is a nationally circulated magazine about sustainable living. The staff of BackHome Magazine originated from the original Mother Earth News Magazine, which for years was located in Hendersonville, N.C. Because of those years with "Mother", they collectively had decades experience in sustainable technologies even before the first issue of BackHome Magazine hit the stands in January of 1990 as "Your Hands On Guide to Sustainable Living".

Meanwhile, the WNC Alliance had been leading on many regional environmental problems, most notably forestry issues, but were also tackling air pollution, acid rain and other issues that impact the biosphere of WNC. The

Steering Committee at the time recognized the potential value of broadening their mission from basically fighting each battle, to looking at the whole 'war' on our environment.

And so, in 2001, after months of initial preparations, the 1st Annual Southern Energy & Environment Expo was held at the WNC Agricultural Center in Fletcher, N.C. To everyone's delight, just over three thousand folks participated in that first three-day event. The 5th Annual S.E.E. Expo drew nearly seven thousand participants, and the combined total to date has been approximately 25,000 participants.

Each year the WNC Alliance has been a significant presence at the S.E.E. Expo, talking to hundreds of visitors each day, signing up new members and educating the general public about our forests, wildlife, natural resources and the value of our wilderness areas. Each year members of the WNC Alliance volunteer their time to 'person' the impressive booth, hand out literature, sign up new members and, perhaps most importantly, they also get to meet scores of other people who also care about our natural treasures and care about solutions for protecting them.

And they might even take in a few



of the dozens of educational presentations each day, shop some of the 100+ vendors or browse around the ECO Clean Air Car Fair, the South's largest displays of clean burning, alternative fueled and electric cars, with 70 cars on display last year. August 25 - 27th 2006 is the weekend for the Southern Energy & Environment and the chance to volunteer alongside the WNCA Staff and Steering Committee for the biggest event of its kind in the South.

More information about the 6th Annual Southern Energy & Environment Expo can be found at www.seexpo.com. Or contact the WNC Alliance at info@wnca.org, or 828-258-8737 to volunteer and be a part of the action! ☘

Update on Interstate 3

by D.J. Gerken

A group of concerned citizens is working hard to prevent construction of a new and wasteful interstate across the southeast, from Savannah, GA to Knoxville, TN.

Last year's transportation bill appropriated \$1.32 million for a report describing "the steps and estimated funding necessary" to construct a new interstate in the Southeast. Commonly called I-3 by the public and press, the proposed "3rd Infantry Division Highway" would connect Savannah, GA to Augusta, GA and then cut through the mountains of northern Georgia, western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee to Knoxville, TN.

WNCA members have been integral to the formation of the Stop I-3 Coalition, a grassroots network of individuals and organizations opposed to the I-3 proposal. The Stop I-3 Coalition was founded by citizens in western North Carolina and northern Georgia who are concerned that the new interstate would devastate the natural beauty that defines their region and undermine the mountain economies of their rural communities.



From those humble beginnings, the organization has developed into a regional coalition with members and participating organizations drawn from across the nation. WNCA members are an active part of the Stop I-3 Coalition and will be working with the coalition in the coming year to educate communities along the corridor of this proposed interstate about the negative impact interstate highways can have on rural communities and natural resources.

The I-3 study will be conducted by a contractor hired by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The FHWA has been moving slowly, but surely, towards hiring a contractor and getting the study under way. In response to pressure from Stop I-3 and WNCA, the FHWA has agreed that the study will provide opportunities for public input. The Stop I-3 Coalition will work to generate public comments, as part of that process, and to ensure that

the study takes an honest look at the extensive costs and damage that would be caused by this road proposal.

The Coalition is also moving forward with a number of efforts to mobilize communities along the proposed I-3 corridor at the grassroots level. Plans include a motorcycle rally along some of the winding mountain roads that are threatened by I-3, a petition drive, a public awareness campaign modeled after the rhyming slogans of the Burma Shave ad campaign, and political outreach. The Coalition hopes to generate enough public opposition to the proposal to persuade county commissions along the route for I-3 to pass resolutions opposing the road.

This approach has already produced results in the mountains of western North Carolina, thanks to the work of WNCA, with three counties issuing resolutions opposed to the construction of I-3. Last month the regional transportation planning organization for southwestern North Carolina also issued a resolution opposing I-3. The position taken by that transportation planning organization poses a significant barrier to construction of I-3 through the mountains of western North Carolina.

The Stop I-3 Coalition plans to extend this success into Tennessee and into Georgia where we already have obtained resolutions opposing I-3 from four county commissions. In the coming year, the Coalition will be working to repeat this success all along the I-3 corridor with the aim of putting an end to this wasteful proposal, from the ground up. ☘



Lindsay Majer grapples with a stubborn oriental bittersweet vine. Many consider this vine worse than kudzu, since it's berries are spread by birds and the plant grows in both sun and shade. Photo by Bob Gale

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Continuation, Improvement of Invasive Species Work

hours with close to 40 volunteers working over six days, and suppressed invasive exotic plant outbreaks on over 12 miles of roads and trails. Evaluation monitoring transects have been installed in the areas to monitor our control work. Spot treatments using herbicides, where necessary, were scheduled to occur this summer by the Forest Service.

WNCA will be performing additional work in Hot Springs, as well as adding two new areas of monitoring and control. The Hot Springs model will be exported to these other sites. The sites have been chosen through planning and prioritization developed with significant input from each of the listed partners, many of which were involved in the 2005 work.

Partners include the National Park Service-Southeast Exotic Plant Management Team, Appalachian Ranger District of the Pisgah National Forest, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, North Carolina Exotic Pest Plant Council, and Equinox Environmental Consulting and Design, Inc. New partners for the 2006-2007 work include the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program and the University of North Carolina-Asheville.

Three sites are targeted for work. They each include North Carolina state-

designated Natural Heritage Areas and populations of rare plants and/or amphibians, all within the French Broad River basin. One area, near Asheville, is home to a globally significant montane alluvial forest containing federally endangered bog turtles, 4-toed salamanders, mole salamanders and the eastern spiny softshell turtle. The second area involves the French Broad River corridor through Hot Springs, which is one of the more biologically diverse sites in North Carolina, and is home to over 620 species of vascular plants.

The third area, the Davenport Gap - Snowbird section of the Appalachian Trail, borders the globally significant Great Smoky Mountains National Park and is also home to rare species. Vectors and land disturbances at each site - including trails, roads, and recent wildfire burns - make the sites susceptible to infestations of invasive exotic plants and put the sensitive native populations in great peril.

Invasive plant surveys have been performed at each site over the last two and a half years through the SAMAB Southern Appalachian Volunteer Environmental Monitoring Program (samab.org) and locations of occurrences documented with GPS and GIS mapping.

Specific goals of this work will include:

Short Term:

- Eradication of oriental bittersweet, privet, multiflora rose, mimosa, Princess Tree and other species of special concern to land managers.
- Eradication of invasive exotic plants in areas known to have high natural heritage significance in the project areas.
- Removal of seed stock from the sites, preventing further germination new seedlings in the area.
- Educate volunteers and the general public about the threat posed by invasive plants and how to identify plants of concern.
- Expand our invasive exotic plant inventory from trails and rights-of-way into forest interior areas.
- Education of citizens/volunteers on effective control measures for use on their private lands.
- Dissemination of information on safe and appropriate use of herbicides.

Long Term:

- Re-vegetation of native flora, resulting in restored native ecosystems.
- Habitat improvement for native fauna, including rare and threatened populations.
- Greater public awareness of the threat imposed by exotic invasive species.
- Expanded understanding of the tools available to combat the spread of these noxious weeds.
- Involve adjacent property owners in monitoring and control work.



U.S. Forest Service Silviculturalist Linda Randolph and WNCA intern Joel Bassett removing invasive exotic species along the Appalachian Trail near Hot Springs. Photo by Bob Gale

- Implement monitoring methods that allow us to evaluate the effectiveness of control work over several years.
- In addition to the three work areas above, the WNC Alliance will continue to offer trainings on invasive exotic species identification and inventorying to WNCA chapters, and local citizen groups upon request. To schedule one of these, or to become involved in any of the work areas contact Bob Gale at 828-258-8737; bob@wnca.org. 📧

Roger Turner Leaves Strong WNCA Presence in Western Counties

by Bill Crawford

The Western North Carolina Alliance recently reduced its staff in order to bring down operating expenses. As a result, the organizing position in the Western Office in Franklin was eliminated, though the office will maintain limited hours.

Roger Turner has served in this position with great success for the past six years. All members of the WNC Alliance regret this decision and hope that future funding will allow us to expand our organizing staff. The remaining field organizer, Norma Ivey, will split her time now between Asheville and Franklin. Norma, who was the original organizer in the Western Office, has already met with WNC Alliance members in the area and there is a determination to continue the good work of the organization in the Southwestern counties.

Roger has been more than an organizer for environmental activists in the western region. It is hard not to love Roger's warmth and enthusiasm as he has built his network of friends. Even issue opponents become friends of Roger! These issues can be listed somewhat chronologically and geographically.

In Jackson County, Roger helped members lead the organizing to bring "Smart Roads" sensitivity to road building proposals. In Swain he has given critical organizing assistance to the group that wants a cash settlement on

the "North Shore Road" issue. In Swain and Macon, Roger was able to help organize the grassroots group "Neighbors for Needmore".

In the FERC relicensing process, Roger has worked with other WNC Alliance members through a three-year negotiation to protect water levels on numerous lakes and streams. In Macon County, which is undergoing enormous growth pressures, Roger helped organize "Macon Tomorrow" to promote land use planning. Most recently, this group has worked on a "Steep Slope Ordinance" for Macon County and "New Urbanism" concepts for Franklin. For Clay, Cherokee, Macon and Graham Counties Roger has helped members lead the opposition to the Interstate 3 proposal.

Roger has also been the key person in bringing together a series of well-attended Spring Meetings for WNC Alliance, showcasing critical and developing conservation issues.

Southwestern North Carolina is under great growth pressure entailing numerous environmental questions. It is important to rally around the great heritage of the Western North Carolina Alliance and the work of its chapters in the Southwestern counties and keep up the fight. The best tribute to Roger is for all of us to keep on working! 📧

Employee Giving Campaigns Heating Up

Are you a state or federal employee?

This is the season for workplace giving campaigns - the state campaign begins in August, and campaigns on the campuses of UNC-Asheville and WCU kick off in September.

Look for the WNC Alliance and Earth Share of North Carolina in your workplace giving campaign! You can join hundreds of thousands of North Carolinians supporting our environment by making a payroll deduction contribution right at your workplace. ESNC is a giving option in all North Carolina state and federal workplaces, as well as some local government and private company campaigns. You can designate your gift to the WNC Alliance or to ESNC by using these codes:

Federal codes
4628 - WNC Alliance
4601 - Earth Share of NC

State codes
1125 - WNC Alliance
1100 - Earth Share of NC

Pisgah/Nantahala Forest Projects Move Forward

by Bob Gale

The Forest Service has moved steadily ahead with previously proposed projects, recently issuing Environmental Assessments (EA's) for public comment. Most of these involve logging. Here are the current projects and issues of concern to the Western North Carolina Alliance Forest Task Force.

Globe Project

Avery, Caldwell and Watauga Counties; Grandfather Ranger District, Pisgah National Forest

Major Issues: Logging proposed in old growth forest; project occurs in viewshed of Blowing Rock and local overlooks.

This District has a new Forest Ranger with whom FTF members and members from the Southern Environmental Law Center, Southern Appalachian Biodiversity Project and Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition met earlier in the year. We discussed our concerns about the above issues, thanked the Grandfather District for its past efforts to keep projects out of old growth forest communities.

We offered to meet with District staff on the project site, as we have done in the past, to reach mutual agreement on the

issue before a great deal of work had been done by staff. The Forest Service has continually expressed its desire for such early meetings.

Unfortunately, the District published the EA without any further consultation with WNCA and other groups, apparently without significant changes to the project. Due to discrepancies in project stand maps between the N.C. National Forest Service office and its Grandfather District office, it appeared that significant old growth forest would be logged.

In response, and fearing that the Forest Service might deny that there was old growth in this project, the FTF sent a team of botanists and old growth researchers to conduct intensive scientific surveys on site in order to document exactly where the project stands and the old growth communities are located. We found that there are only small groups of older trees scattered in the area, rather than large intact old growth stands.

Nevertheless these stands should remain unlogged since they form important connections for wildlife and genetic exchange to large adjacent old growth communities. We are also gathering old growth research from scientists around the eastern U.S. to add credibility to our efforts in making this case to the

District. This work will also lay the foundation for legal action if that should become necessary on this or other future projects, but it is hoped that the Forest Service will ultimately withdraw from these old growth areas, as it has always done before.

Horseshoe Project

Macon County; Wayah Ranger District, Nantahala National Forest

Major Issues: Overlap into a small amount of old growth forest; project occurs adjacent to much of the Appalachian Trail and near the Bartram Trail. Rare plants are found within the project. The Forest Task Force initially commented on the likelihood of old growth occurring within the project, as well as expressing serious concerns about the trails viewshed issues.

Since that time, old growth researcher, Josh Kelly, has verified that two acres of old growth

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Forest Task Force member and Southern Environmental Law Center attorney D.J. Gerken poses next to a 277 year-old chestnut oak. This tree, and others were documented in and adjacent to the Globe Project in a recent old growth survey sponsored by SELC and conducted with Forest Task Force expertise. Photo by Bob Gale

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WNCA Leadership Key in Shaping Transit Improvement

6. Asheville has a ride-sharing program you can sign up for online, at www.sharethridenc.org. Ride sharing is especially helpful for folks who commute to Asheville from outlying areas. The city's Transportation Demand Management coordinator is also working to establish park-and-ride lots and other options to ease commuter traffic.

In 2002 the WNC Alliance hosted Asheville's first public forum on transit. Afterwards, a group of WNCA members banded together to work toward a goal many thought was impossible - to make Asheville's transit system one of the best in the Southeast. In the following years there was gradual progress, but in 2006 the WNC Alliance's efforts were rewarded with a huge success.

On July 11, Transit Director Bruce Black and City Councilman Brownie Newman unveiled a pilot program that included extended service hours, a fare-free promotion, and partnerships between Asheville Transit and private employers. After four long years and much hard work, the effort of Asheville's transit activists paid off.

The activists started in 2002 by determining what the public wanted. Through public forums and surveys, they found that evening service was by far the number one request. With service ending at 6:30 or 7 pm, Asheville Transit wasn't an option for those who worked later hours. Citizens also wanted more extensive routes, a better route map and schedule, and improved bus stops. To increase ridership, the activists wanted to try a fare-free

period and to join employers and the transit system in a transit pass program. Meanwhile, many in the city leadership thought their goals were too ambitious to be attainable.

At the end of 2003 the city's Transit Commission had five vacancies. Four were filled by members of the WNC Alliance's transit working group. Over the next four years progress was slow, but they saw improvements. Bike racks were installed on each bus in the fleet. New routes were developed to serve Black Mountain and Warren Wilson College through partnerships with the town and the college. Connecting service was established with Hendersonville Transit. New benches and upgraded bus stop signs improved the stops. With a route to Weaverville opening in the fall of 2005, a rider could travel all the way from Weaverville to Hendersonville using transit!

New maps were unveiled in November 2005. Replacing an unwieldy 50-page booklet, the new maps are a single colorful page that folds up like a travel brochure. Wordy route descriptions are replaced by graphics that make the map understandable even to those who cannot read or speak English. A big hit with riders, the maps are now in their fourth printing and are being installed in holders at bus stops throughout the city. Route maps can also be viewed and downloaded from the Transit System's website, www.ashevilletransit.com.

Volunteers are donating labor and materials for new bus shelters at busy stops through a program called "Top-a-

Stop". Standard Plexiglas and metal shelters cost thousands of dollars and are almost uniformly ugly. The "Top-a-Stop" shelters were designed by a local architect to be cost-efficient and easy for volunteers to build, with a look that reflects Asheville's architecture.

With the new programs that were announced in July, the "unattainable"

Program" was also unveiled at the July 11 event. Businesses of any size can sign up to receive bus passes for employees at a significantly reduced rate. The employees pay no fare to ride the bus, and the cost to the employer is far less than the cost of providing parking for employees. It is hoped that this will provide an attractive benefit for employees, save money for

Other cities that have tried fare-free, even for a short promotional period, have experienced ridership growth of up to 30% or more.

goals set by the WNC Alliance members and others in 2002 are becoming reality.

Evening service now extends transit along the city's primary arteries until 10 p.m. or later. Even though there are only eight evening routes (as opposed to 18 daytime routes), they reach roughly 45% of the city's population. Ridership on the evening routes is already exceeding expectations and will undoubtedly grow.

The fare-free promotion begins August 14 and continues until November 11. The idea is that once people try the bus, they'll continue to use it. According to Transit Director Bruce Black, "During the Hurricane Katrina gas shortage, our ridership increased tremendously, and many of those newcomers continued to ride the bus after the crisis passed." Other cities that have tried fare-free, even for a short promotional period, have experienced ridership growth of up to 30% or more.

An initiative called the "Pass-Port

employers, and relieve some of the demand for parking in Asheville.

Asheville's transit system has seen steady improvement over the past four years, and much credit goes to the WNC Alliance members who gave their time and energy to the cause. The improvements they spearheaded contributed to a steady growth in ridership.

This year Asheville transit had a total of over a million riders, an increase of over 8% from the previous year. The next step is increasing the frequency of service, giving riders a shorter wait for the bus, but the ridership must increase to make more frequent service feasible. With the continued improvements in Asheville's transit system, it's just a matter of time. ☼

Karen Austin has been a member of the Asheville Transit Commission since 2003 and has served as its Chair since December 2005.

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Accent on Action — Many voices united cannot be ignored!

Logging Bill on the Move in the Senate – Speak Out Now!

Earlier this year the House of Representatives passed a bill that would hasten the logging of our National Forests after a wildfire or other natural disturbance.

Rep. Greg Walden's (R-OR) "Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act", H.R. 4200, waives our country's most fundamental environmental protections and the right for public input for so called "salvage" logging projects anywhere on National Forests lands.

Now it's making its way through the Senate. It was taken up by the Forestry subcommittee of the Senate Agriculture Committee on August 2 and has moved on from there. If it is reported out of the Agriculture Committee it will likely go to the Senate floor for a vote this year. It sets very bad precedents in order to ramp up logging in national forests. This bill ignores important scientific research, could actually increase the risk of wildfire, bypasses the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and would impact private forest landowners.

With the fire season in full swing out west, the bill becomes more appealing to the western senators, so it is very important that the SE voice is heard on this issue. In regard to the fire issue, the bill actually takes the focus off of the very concerns that should be up front, that of protecting communities from fire hazard. Instead this bill puts the focus and resources on timber harvesting after the fire/disaster, diverting resources from the effort to reduce fuel loads near at risk communities and fire prevention/suppression activities.

Please send letters to Senators Elizabeth Dole and Richard Burr urging them to not support this bill if it makes its way to the Senate floor. Tell them that environmental laws should not be overridden to favor commercial interests in managing our publicly owned lands.

Request the email version of **Accent On Action**. Save trees and \$ – Send your email address to karen@wnca.org.

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Pisgah/Nantahala Forest Projects Move Forward

are included and even more significant old growth communities are adjacent to the timbering stands.

Tree cores from the site reveal ages in excess of 200 years with diameters of 3 and 4 feet. WNCA sponsored an off-trail hike led by Josh to this area, and revisited the stands recently with the Wayah District Ranger and staff. At this writing, it was hoped that these visits, coupled with the comments that WNCA and other groups are submitting, will convince the Forest Service to withdraw from these sites keep activities away from trail viewsheds, and protect documented populations of rare plant species.

Case Camp Ridge

Transylvania County; Pisgah Ranger District, Pisgah National Forest

Major Issues: Project lies within the viewshed of Looking Glass Rock overlooks and Case Camp Ridge Trail; possibly within view of Blue Ridge Parkway overlooks; also, the Pisgah District is one of the most

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Website: www.burr.senate.gov

For more information, contact Ed Mayer, WNCA Forest Task Force member, (717) 818 6894, ednsue74@earthlink.net.

For more on this legislation go to www.wnca.org and click on "Task Forces" and "Background on HR 4200 – the Walden Bill".

heavily used districts for hiking, biking, horseback riding, nature study, birdwatching, photography, hunting and fishing.

Forest Task Force groups again met with the Forest Service early on in the planning of this project to raise concerns, primarily about the viewshed issues. In the EA, a few small concessions were made to leave more trees in the logging stands, but the project is so extensive and visible that it will still leave a visual blight for many years if carried out as planned.

A hike to Looking Glass Rock was sponsored by the Southern Appalachian Biodiversity Project (represented on the Forest Task Force), which was well attended. The project area was pointed out and discussed. Other hikers passing by were astounded to learn of the project and see the obvious impact it would have. Plans have been made for petition-gathering at the site and for outreach to the many recreation user groups of the District, again focused on generating as many comments to the District as possible, to leverage further beneficial changes to this project. 🌲

WATER: Another Steep Slope Development Cost

by Norma Ivey

People want those views from the very top. What they may not realize until after the house is built and the well is sunk is that water may be an "iffy" thing on the mountaintop. Soils may be thin there. Water availability fluctuates with precipitation more often than down slope, where users have recharge from shallow water table areas above.

We are in an area of largely metamorphic rock — solid large masses of rock with large roughly perpendicular zones of jointing or cracks. These fractures hold ground water that percolates to bedrock and are the targets for water wells. We don't have typical aquifers made of gravel layers or water-bearing sandstones. Water doesn't flow into these mountains from "somewhere else". Precipitation that falls

on these high places is needed to recharge the local groundwater supply immediately below.

So, it is very important that our mountains are not allowed to be covered up with rooftops and asphalt roads, all of which shunt water into ditches, streams and rivers, which transport this runoff quickly away. Once water is in a stream system, it is mostly removed from the ground water recharge cycle.

Under normal conditions, and especially during drought conditions, it will no longer be used by local trees and plants, or be available for water wells. Mountain top development comes at a price that may be expressed by limited water availability both to the homeowner and the surrounding environment. ♣

WNC Alliance New Business Members

Izzy's Coffee Den, LLC
Mike Byer Auto & Truck Repair, Inc.
 Nancy Byer
Asheville Wine Market
 Eberhard Heide
News of the Blue Sky, LLC

Susan Marie Designs, Inc.
 S. Phipps
Street Fair
 Susan Turner
Boone KOA Campground
Three Eagles Outfitters

WNC Alliance New & Renewing Members

Student Members

Melissa Williams

Individual/Household Members

Sieglinde Anderson
 Susan Anspacher
 Felix & Hoa Ashinhurst
 Gary Beecham
 Ennalls & Susie Berl
 Charles & Jody Bryan
 Laura & Thomas Burke
 Marion Calhoun
 Douglas Campbell
 Robert Eidus
 Barbara & Richard Engle
 Bob & Pam Gale
 Lisa Goldstein Fern
 Center for Womens Health
 Joseph Haun
 Joan & Dick Hearn
 Sonja (Sunny) Himes
 John Humphrey
 Christine Balgooyen
 & Matt Jones
 George & Helen Kaltsunis
 Stephanie Jane Lovett
 Gary MacPeck
 Ellen Kaczmarek
 Marshall & Amye McCallie
 Merelyn McKnight
 Rose McLarney
 Paul & Ann Milner
 Perry & Jan Mixer
 Jeff & Randi Neff
 Ryan Pickens
 Ryan Pickens
 Jo Ann & Alfred Schaffner

Catherine Scott Phil Jamison
 Larry & Maethel Shindelman
 John & Lisa Sizemore
 Hershella Smith
 Jeff Smith
 Thomas Smith
 Diane VanHelden
 Douglas & Margaret White
 Nettie White
 Robert & Glenda Zahner

Renewals with Additional Support & Donations

Lydia Aydlett
 Milo & Patty Beran
 Katie Breckheimer
 Chris Brouwer
 Ralph & Emma Buelow
 Thomas Eshelman
 Sara Evans Chuck Dayton
 Kathryn & Ed Gettys
 Laura Gordon
 Greg Gregory
 Jud & Kimberley Handley
 Benjamin Henderson
 John Humphrey
 Linda Ives
 Marian & Thomas Jerdee
 Mountaine Mort Jonas
 John & Elise Judy
 Tesia Rivers
 Jerrilyn Smith
 Nancy Sommer
 James & Linda Taylor
 Pauline & Dimitri Vastakis
 Diana & Jack Zerby

WNC Alliance Calendar of Events

- AUGUST 11 -

Ride For Free!

Fare-free promotion on Asheville Transit begins.

- SEPTEMBER 14 -

Steering Committee Meeting

Asheville office. Food & social time begin at 5:30, business meeting convenes at 6 pm.

- AUGUST 25-27 -

S.E.E.Expo

Southern Energy & Environment Expo. Exhibitors, presentations, and more showcasing renewable energy and sustainable economics. At the WNC Agricultural Center, across the highway from the Asheville Airport off Interstate 26. Admission is \$8 per person per day. See the website at www.see-expo.com for a schedule of presentations and a coupon for \$1 off the admission price.

- OCTOBER 7 -

Fall Membership Meeting

At the Center Community Center near Mars Hill. Election of Steering Committee members, presentation of the Cunningham Award, and the opportunity to learn about our issues and meet with fellow members. Details including an agenda, map and directions will be mailed and emailed to our members in the coming weeks. Watch for it!

- AUGUST 26 -

Riverfest

Entertainment and education focused on protecting the Watauga River. At Valle Crucis Park (near the original Mast Store), 11am until 3pm. For more information contact Richard at 963-8682

- MEETINGS -

Meeting schedules for WNC Alliance Chapters and Task Forces can change. Please check with the contacts listed on page 1 of this issue for up-to-date information on meeting times, dates and locations.

- OUTINGS -

Watch your email for announcements on outings. Fall foliage and the migration of monarch butterflies give you plenty of reason to get outside with the WNC Alliance!

on the HORIZON

November 4 - Steering Committee Retreat

Orientation for new Steering Committee members, planning and goal-setting for the coming year.

November 11

Fare-free promotion on Asheville Transit ends.

Clip and mail to:

WNC Alliance, 29 N. Market St., #610, Asheville, NC 28801

Join WNCA Now!

WNC Alliance Membership Levels

- ___ \$30 Individual
- ___ \$40 Household
- ___ \$50 Business
- ___ \$50 Two-Year Membership
- ___ \$1,000 Lifetime

Give a GIFT MEMBERSHIP to a Friend!

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT: ___ \$25 ___ \$50 ___ \$100 \$ _____ Other Amount

YOUR NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____ E-MAIL _____

VISA/MC # _____

EXP. DATE _____ SIGNATURE _____

COUNTY _____

Please contact me about: ___ Volunteer Opportunities ___ Planned Giving



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Accent



Accent is printed on recycled paper. Read it, share it, then please, recycle it again.

Save the Date!

**Saturday,
October 7**

All WNC Alliance members and their guests are encouraged to attend the Fall Members Meeting to be held on Saturday, October 7 at the Center Community Center, near Mars Hill. The meeting will focus on our area's most pressing environmental issues, particularly growth and development.

Members will also elect at-large representatives to the Steering Committee and be presented with a draft budget for 2007, and the winners of the 2006 Cunningham Award and the New Growth Award will be announced.

The meeting begins with coffee and socializing at 9:30 am, and the program gets underway at 10 am.

Watch your mail and email for details about programs, lunch, and directions to the center.

The Center Community Center, near Mars Hill



Leadership Opportunity For WNC Alliance Members!



If you've been a member of the WNC Alliance for at least six months (since March of this year) and would like to lend your skills to help grow the organization, we need you! We're currently accepting nominations for Steering Committee member elections at our Fall Meeting.

Members, who serve two-year terms, are asked to attend monthly Steering Committee meetings and to serve on any of our committees to help with fundraising, organization development, print and web media, personnel management, finance or membership recruitment. The WNC Alliance is your organization, and we'd love to have you help make it the most effective environmental group possible.

If you'd like to nominate yourself or another WNC Alliance member, please let us know by September 1st so we can make the necessary arrangements for the election at the Fall Meeting. We're always looking to increase the ethnic diversity of our leadership, and are particularly interested in candidates with fundraising and donor development experience. Submit your nomination to Jody Flemming at 828-258-8737, or email it to info@wnca.org.

Cunningham Award Nominations

It is also time for Esther Cunningham Award nominations. The Cunningham award honors the spirit and determination of Esther Cunningham, a founder of the WNC Alliance and continuing source of inspiration to western North Carolina's environmental community.

The award, which can be given to WNCA members or non-members, recognizes outstanding community service in conserving our natural resources. If you'd like to suggest someone for the award, please mail or email us your nomination along with a brief description of the nominee's service to the environment. Our Cunningham Award Committee will announce the selection at our Fall Meeting.



WNCA Leadership Key in Shaping Transit Improvement

This bus stop shelter is one of several recent improvements made by the Asheville Transit system. More attractive than the standard models of the past, these shelters are also far less expensive. Photo by Karen Austin

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Earthshare
Campaign Begins
Steep Slopes –
Steeper Costs
WNCA Fall Meeting

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Walden Salvage Logging Bill Alert ...6

The House of Representatives passed a bill that would hasten the logging of our National Forests after a wildfire or other natural disturbance.