

Editorial

What is the function and purpose of this newsletter? It is, after all, except for writing an annual check, the only contact many of our members have with Friends of State Parks. We hope that it keeps those members aware of the activities sponsored and supported by FSP and helps them recognize that the organization they support works on its commitment "to the understanding, enjoyment and protection of North Carolina's State Parks."

This issue includes an article by Board Member John Boesch on the Environmental Education certification program which has been coordinated by the Office of Environmental Education. It is a program involving 200 hours of professional development required of park rangers and encouraged for school teachers and all educators. This issue includes also an article by Park Ranger Tom Randolph of Mount Jefferson State Park who organized the annual poetry contest (prizes by FSP.) Both cover programs aimed at the next generation of the stewards of our environment.

April 29th was Environmental Lobby Day when, under the umbrella of Land for Tomorrow, FSP members together with more than 100 others from the Sierra Club, North Carolina Conservation Network and many other concerned environmental groups from organizations across North Carolina came to the General Assembly to talk about the importance of conservation to North Carolina's future. The day was filled with visits with legislators, ice cream from Maple View Farms and a reception at the Museum of Natural Sciences. Legislators expressed understanding of conservation issues but they also expressed concerns about budgetary problems. This is without question the toughest year conservation has faced at the legislature. With raids of our conservation trust funds' accounts to shore up the state's ability to pay its bills, the conservation community is down approximately \$161 million from where it was back in February. Among the amounts 'sequestered' is \$6M from the Parks & Recreation Trust Fund and among the programs eliminated is that of the Office of Environmental Education of which John writes. The Trust Fund is financed from a small tax on real estate transfers which will be reduced by about 40% this year and probably by at least this much in future years. The funds finances land aquisition for State Parks but also local community needs such as athletic fields, greenways and beach access.

If you attended Lobby Day - thank you and please follow up with your legislators and continue to tell them about the importance of conservation to your community's economic wellbeing. If you were unable to attend, please visit <http://www.landfortomorrow.org/> to get familiar with the issues and contact your legislators! If you need to find out how to reach your legislators go to <http://www.ncleg.net>.

The Poets Of Ashe County

By Park Ranger Tom Randolph

Earlier this fall, more than 250 young Ashe County poets began working on their writing skills as contestants in a local annual poetry competition. The poets' challenge was to find just the right words to describe Mt. Jefferson State Natural Area.

This year's contest has been the best yet, with more poets and a greater variety of poetry styles. What the contest offers is a unique opportunity for elementary and middle school students to use their creative skills as they compete for some really cool outdoor camping gear.

The prizes include tents, sleeping bags, backpacks and flashlights. All of the prizes were paid for by a non profit organization known as the Friends of North Carolina State Parks. This is the 3rd annual contest, and the Friends have com-

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mitted to continue the funding of the poetry contest in Ashe County for the next 5 years!

The poetic students use the same skills that are required lessons taught in the state's schools. The NC standard courses of study 6th grade competency goal 5.02 requires a "Study the characteristics of literary genres (fiction, nonfiction, drama, and poetry)" The 3rd grade goal 2.03 states "Read a variety of texts, including poetry (proverbs, riddles, limericks, simple poems)".

The students who have competed this year and in past poetry contests truly deserve applause. These kids have met the challenge and have expressed a value in words by bringing more than 250 new poems into existence this year alone!

The kick off of the contest is each year in the latter days of fall, when the leaves have all but disappeared. This is the same time of year that Mt. Jefferson originally became a state park back in 1956. Back in those days local people actually donated land and money for the park to be established. One resident told me in an interview that they gave because "they were just so proud of that old mountain".

We hear that same sense of pride in the voices and poetry of our talented young people today, so let's hear it for the poets, the teachers, the principals and perhaps the mountain muses as well.

Brianna Walton 5th grade

Jefferson is more than just a state park it has a view that is a work of art.

High above West Jefferson it is a place for family fun.

Many folks will go hiking, However not as many go biking

*For Mount Jefferson is very steep
Peddling would make you weep*

*Early in the spring the leaves begin to turn green
and birds will sing*

*There is a chill in the air but visitors do not
care they come from miles away to see the
beauty every day.*

*In the summer the butterflies will flutter the wild
flowers are blooming and*

*Mt. Jefferson is booming. The sun is shining at
times it is blinding,*

*Some families are picnicking While others are
just looking at the beauty surrounding.*

*In the fall it is the most beautiful of all the colors
are changing and the leaves are falling Or-
ange, yellows, reds, and browns are all you
can see when you look around. The views are
breath taking Mother nature is amazing.*

*In the winter Snowflakes fall from the sky it is a
beauty to see with the eye. The trees are bare
and not a flower anywhere Yet, the magnifi-
cent views are everywhere. Mt. Jefferson is
more than just a state park it really is nature's
work of art.*

Sarah Bishop 1st grade

*Mt. Jefferson: In Mount Jefferson in the fall animals
gather seeds and berries*

*In the snow animals hibernate, in the spring ani-
mals get up in the summer animals run and
play*

Blake Day 5th grade

*There is a place in a little old town, that would
erase just about any old frown,*

*Mt. Jefferson is where it's at. You have to come and
see all of that. With breath taking views as far
as the eye will go. Come see this place with a
fresh winter snow. I doesn't matter what you
have come to do, This place will always be
with you. Have a picnic on the bench Or take
a walk on a trail and see big deer shake its tail
or see a squirrel climb a tree there is so much
for you to see. So if you get a chance come take
a glance you will be glad you did it, Mount Jef-
ferson in North Carolina is a good as it gets*

1st Place Poet, Autumn Hayes – Blue Sky Mountains

*Run into Mount Jefferson climb up a tree
Hide in the dark shadows of you and me
Ponder and wonder all through the night
With nothing but the blue mountains in your sight*

*Glaring up at the sky so beautiful and blue
Just waiting for us to climb it, yes me and you
Leaves crumbling, rocks tumbling
So peaceful, so quiet. Nobody here, nobody mum-
bling*

Mountain so quiet, mountain so tall

*Never, not in a hundred years will they fall
Squirrels climbing up a tree, shaking their little tails
at me*

It's so wonderful, I wish you could see.

The Office of Environmental Education

John Boesch

While researching environmental web sites for North Carolina I came across the Office of Environmental Education. As it turned out the site is a clearing house for all of North Carolina Environmental Education <http://www.eenorthcarolina.org/index.htm>. After reviewing the web site for some time I was amazed by the amount of information available to North Carolinians regarding their States Natural Resources. The RSS feeds for consumers <http://www.eenorthcarolina.org/consumer.htm> , parents and educators are remarkable. In some ways, I can not believe how fortunate we are to have such an incredible resource to call upon but then again we are in North Carolina. Recently, a letter from Brian A. Day Executive Director of the North American Association for Environmental Education sent a letter to Governor Perdue stating that North Carolina was considered a national leader in environmental education. Yes, we have something to be proud of but the jewel is slipping or already has slipped from our fingers because of budget constraints. It is not my intention to add more hardship on our state leaders during this economic troubling time but I hope that they will find a way to preserve this program.

The Office of Environmental Education is also responsible for overseeing the Environmental Educators Certification program. The intent of the certification is to increase environmental literacy and develop professional standards for those individuals that desire to become leaders in environmental stewardship. Many of our Environmental Educators work in the State Park system. These people are in essence our states natural resources ambassadors. People like Kelly Hoke, Joseph Shimel and Keith Neelson have completed or on their way to complete a professional development program that as of now takes 200 hours. The information that these folks have acquired is staggering. If the state is to increase its environmental literacy it will be due to the efforts of people like Kelly, Joseph and Keith. As Certified Environmental Educators they have taken on the task to teach North Carolinians about their natural heritage and also train both formal and non-formal educators to become what they are professional Environmental Educators. Obviously there are more people like Kelly, Joseph and Keith in the State Park system that have completed the certification program and I don't think I would lose any money betting that the folks I haven't met are just as warm and friendly,

with any luck I'll meet many more.

By now I have probably led one to believe that I am in some way personally involved with the Environmental Educators program and taking classes. As of February 09, I was accepted into the program after completing 10 hours of independent study. Currently, I have acquired 28 hours of the 200 hours needed to complete the program. But why, you may be asking yourself, have I decided to enroll in a certification program at this stage in my life. Good question and there are many answers but it seems that according to my family and friends I have missed my true calling life and should have been a Park Ranger or Wildlife Officer but that is only part of the answer. I hope to share with FSP the information that I gain is another answer. The best answer is that an opportunity to learn from gifted and talented people does not always come around and should not be missed if at all possible. In a few short days I'll be attending an Invasive and Exotic Species workshop with Kelly and a Fire Ecology workshop with Joseph. Both classes will be in State Parks and with any luck I'll have an opportunity to enjoy what each park has to offer.

FSP Board Meeting

The next FSP board meeting will be held at Grandfather Mountain State Park on Saturday, July 25th. The meeting will commence at 10 am.

Friends of State Parks
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Please send me:

- _____ North Carolina State Parks Map Guide @ \$19.95 (\$15) + \$3 S&H = \$22.95 each
- _____ Guide to the Snakes of North Carolina @ \$10.00 (\$8) + \$2 S+H = \$12.00 each
- _____ Exploring the Geology of the Carolinas @ \$19.95 (\$15) + \$2.50 S+H = \$22.45 each
- _____ North Carolina State Parks: A Niche Guide @ \$14.95 (\$12) + \$2 S&H = \$16.95 each
- _____ Jawbone Trail Cookbook @ \$10 (\$7) + \$2.50 S&H = \$12.50 each

Note: FSP members prices in parenthesis

Name: _____ City & Zip _____
Address: _____

All The Parks' News Isn't Bad ...

The North Carolina state parks system has been named one of four finalists for the 2009 National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Parks and Recreation Management. As a finalist, North Carolina advances to the next round of consideration along with state parks systems in Pennsylvania, Georgia and Michigan, with a winner to be announced in October. The National Gold Medal is an award based on the challenges and resources of a system and how it is meeting those challenges.

Reservation System Now In Place.

We're saving a place for you in 2009



North Carolina State Parks Reservations System

A complete online- and call center-based reservations system for campsites, picnic shelters, cabins and other facilities in North Carolina's state parks will be introduced in 2009.



www.ncparks.gov/reservations.php