

Friends of the Smokies' Report to Park 2008

In May of 2008, Friends of the Smokies and Great Smoky Mountains celebrated an important milestone in park philanthropy, with the gift from Toyota Motor USA of \$1 million to expand Parks as Classrooms curriculum as part of a multi-year project. Toyota's generosity did not end with financial support; they also gave three hybrid Prius automobiles to serve park needs.



*Jim Hart, President- Friends of the Smokies
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Also, 2008 saw the launch of a remarkable new trail maintenance initiative in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Through the generosity of the Aslan Foundation of Knoxville, which is the legacy of founding Friends' board member Lindsay Young, Friends of the Smokies received a \$2 million challenge grant to establish a \$4 million endowment called *Trails Forever*. Every dollar given to Friends of the Smokies and designated to *Trails Forever* will be matched dollar-for-dollar by the Aslan Foundation. Once it is established, interest from the endowment will fund a third, permanent trail maintenance work crew to help improve the more than 800 miles of hiking trails in Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

The Young family did not want the park to have to wait until the endowment was fully funded to receive help on refurbishing trails, so they offered an additional \$350,000 to be matched by Friends of the Smokies and the park to kickoff the program's pilot phase, called *Trails Now*. The *Trails Now* crew completed their first project on the Jakes Creek trail in July of 2008 (photo below).



The Aslan Foundation challenge grant allows Friends of the Smokies to raise \$2 million over the next few years, until 2012. Friends reached its 2008 Trails Forever fundraising goal of \$500,000, which was matched by the Aslan Foundation.

In all, park disbursements from Friends of the Smokies to Great Smoky Mountains National Park totaled \$1,232,573 in 2008. Below are highlights from the park needs funded by Friends in 2008.

EDUCATION AND VISITOR SERVICES

Parks as Classrooms Education Program \$ 85,600

-Education rangers work with teachers to provide in-Park curriculum-based lessons for K-8 students from communities bordering the Park (in TN and NC). Rangers use the Park as an outdoor classroom. Since its beginning, Parks as Classrooms has reached 100,000+ students (12,600 in 2006 alone).

Sugarlands Accessible Trail Exhibit \$ 5,000

- Replacement of faded, deteriorating informational exhibits on the Sugarlands all-access trail.

Revamp Sugarlands Visitor Center Exhibits \$ 50,000

-The exhibits at Sugarlands focus on the Park's natural resources and history. Specimens have deteriorated, and signage needs to be replaced to maintain fresh content that is visually appealing to enhance visitors' learning experiences.

Science Teacher Workshops \$ 23,650

-The North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline Foundation's grant for science teacher enrichment workshops provides opportunities for educators to learn research and data collection methods that they can take back to their classrooms, and impart their newfound knowledge of the wonder of the Smokies to their students.

Burroughs Wellcome Intern Program \$ 38,100

-Each summer the Park hires high school students to conduct hands-on research at the Appalachian Highlands Science Learning Center at Purchase Knob under the guidance of Park staff. At the end of the season, each student must present the process and results of his or her activities. In 2008, for the first time, several of the internships will be based out of Oconaluftee Visitor Center, assisting with resource education programs for Junior Rangers and visitors.

Develop Traveling Air Quality Exhibit \$ 8,000

-On air quality standard exceedance and poor visibility days in the Park, rangers will transport an exhibit containing photographs and educational information to places like Clingman's Dome to help visitors understand the air quality issues in the Park, and the research into these issues.

Oconaluftee Visitor Center Exhibit Planning \$ 212,000

-The Oconaluftee Visitor Center is the major North Carolina park visitor stopping place. The exhibits there focus on the Park's cultural history from pre-Cherokee through logging and the establishment of the area as a national park. Plans are underway for the construction of a new visitor center, complete with new exhibits, and areas to house portions of the Park's vast collection of cultural history artifacts. New exhibits may incorporate sculpture, multimedia, as well as other various visual mediums. Planning and development is needed for content and presentation.

CULTURAL RESOURCE PRESERVATION

Develop Plans to Preserve and Interpret Elkmont Historic District \$ 50,000

- Funding for planning for the historic preservation work and educational components that will help tell the important story of the Elkmont area of the Park.

Complete Fencing Replacement in Cades Cove \$ 30,000

-Fences in Cades Cove protect the native plant species and wildlife from encroachment by vehicles. They add to the aesthetic beauty of the area, and maintain the historic farmland appearance. Over time with constant exposure to the elements, the materials break down and need replacement.

FRONT COUNTRY FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Remove/Restore Site of Appalachian Highlands Tennis Courts \$ 8,600

-Atop Purchase Knob, the Learning Center is a picturesque setting with a spectacular view of the North Carolina mountains. It was once the summer home of Friends of the Smokies' emeritus board member Kathryn McNeil and the late Dr. Voit Gilmore, but was donated by the family to the Park Service in 2001 to serve as a residential research facility for the National Park Service and visiting scientists from all over the world. Removal of the tennis courts, which were not being used, will allow the area to return to its naturalized state.

Appalachian Highlands Building and Landscape Upkeep \$ 25,000

-Provides interior custodial services, utilities, road maintenance, and mowing of the meadows.

Visitor Amenities at Cataloochee, Townsend Wye, and Roaring Fork Trailheads \$ 42,500

Upgrade Landscaping at Gatlinburg Entrance \$ 40,000

-Gatlinburg is the Park's busiest entrance. The appearance of this Park Entrance is critical to visitors' first impression of the Park. Planned improvements should prevent vehicles from encroaching onto natural areas and protect vegetation.

TRAIL AND BACKCOUNTRY FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Appalachian Trail Ridgerunner Program \$ 30,000

-The Appalachian Trail Conservancy Ridgerunners provide visitor assistance on the A.T. where 47% of backcountry camping in the Smokies occurs. The Ridgerunners are sometimes the only presence on the A.T. to educate hikers on appropriate practices. They are trained in environmental ethics, backcountry skills, and first-aid; they also perform essential trail maintenance functions.

Reduce Backcountry Bear Problems \$ 4,000

-The Park has 102 backcountry campsites, and food storage cables must be maintained at all of them to help promote visitor and bear safety. This program has been very successful in reducing the number of bears that need to be relocated or removed due to campers' food and garbage.

Remodel Double Springs Gap Shelter \$ 10,000

-This is the 10th trail shelter to be remodeled in the Park through the support of Friends of the Smokies and the Haiman Foundation. A volunteer work crew uses materials delivered by helicopter to create more user-friendly facilities.

Restore Little Cataloochee Trail \$ 17,000

-Severe erosion along this well-worn and much-loved trail necessitates major trail stabilization efforts. An anonymous donor has stepped forward to fund Friends' portion of the work along the Little Cataloochee Trail.

NATURAL RESOURCE PRESERVATION

Reduce Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Damage \$ 135,000

-The non-native hemlock woolly adelgid, an aphid-like insect, arrived in the Smokies in 2002 and now poses a serious threat to up to 74,000 acres of hemlock trees. In other places across the U.S., hemlock mortality from this predatory insect has been over 80% within 3-5 years. This funding supports the salary and material costs of a crew of forestry technicians who help preserve selected hemlock stands through application of soap sprays and injection of systemic pesticides. This crew also releases two species of predator beetles that are reared at the Lindsay Young Beneficial Insects Laboratory at U.T. (funded in-part by Friends of the Smokies) as a biological control and monitors the treatment results. Targeted treatment areas will be expanded through the support of Friends of the Smokies, with a goal of saving more trees.

Support All-Taxa Biodiversity Program \$ 50,000

-Discover Life In America (DLIA) is a non-profit organization managing the Park's All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory, a massive and unique science project seeking to discover and document every living species in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the most biologically diverse park in the country. Funding from Friends of the Smokies and the Great Smoky Mountains Association supports scores of scientists involved in this research, and provides for project administration.

Preserve Fraser Fir Plantings at Purchase Knob \$ 2,000

-Since 1962, the balsam woolly adelgid, an exotic predatory European insect, has killed 91% of the Park's naturally-occurring stands of high-elevation Fraser firs. The Park and U.T. planted 600 seedlings at Purchase Knob in 1995. While some of these trees have been attacked by the balsam woolly adelgid, they are treated to preserve samples of the trees' genetic material, which is important for species preservation.

PARKWIDE INITIATIVES

Parkwide Student Conservation Association Interns \$ 72,000

-These interns are utilized all over the Park to supplement the Park's staff. They provide visitor information, work with crews to suppress pests like the hemlock woolly adelgid, and perform trail maintenance duties. These young people are a very effective labor force, and will use their valuable experience in future careers.

Volunteer Roadside Assistance Program \$ 4,000

-This unique program supplements the Park's law enforcement ranger staff by providing disabled vehicle visitor assistance, traffic control, campground patrol for food storage, and other tasks. The Park recruits knowledgeable, professional volunteers with law enforcement backgrounds.

Volunteer Recognition Activities \$ 6,500

-Great Smoky Mountains National Park has the largest volunteer program in the National Park Service's Southeast Region. Over 2400 volunteers donated over 114,000 hours in 2007, valued at more than \$2 million. Friends sponsors an annual recognition banquet for the Park's volunteers, and more than 300 volunteer attendees are honored for their hard work.

75th Anniversary Coordinator \$ 30,000

-The Park's 75th anniversary is fast approaching in 2009. Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Great Smoky Mountains Association are funding an individual to work solely on planning for this important milestone.

75th Anniversary Activity Support \$ 60,000

-Items funded include the Park's 75th Anniversary website, which can be found at GreatSmokies75th.org.

Upgrade Ranger Safety Equipment \$ 24,000

-Improved in-car video equipment, vehicle light bars and sirens for Park law enforcement.

Electric Vehicles for Cataloochee/Smokemont \$ 11,200

-The Park has two new zero-emissions "Neighborhood Electric Vehicles" for use in high-visibility areas on the North Carolina side of the Park. They serve to educate visitors about the Park's air quality issues and demonstrate available transportation alternatives which do not utilize traditional fossil fuels. The vehicles were funded through a \$31,900 grant from the Clean Fuels Advance Technology (CFAT) program through the North Carolina Solar Center at NC State University, along with \$11,200 from Friends of the Smokies.