

Friends of the Smokies

2022 Annual Report



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HOW WE BECAME FRIENDS

by Gary Wade

As Friends of the Smokies embarks on its 30th year of service, it celebrates the remarkable achievement of generating more than \$87 million for the benefit of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the crown jewel of America's national treasures and the most visited. Supporters from all 50 states contribute each year to preserve, protect, and provide for the park, a privilege I have been part of for the last three decades.

Looking back, the tale of Friends of the Smokies begins for me in the summer of 1957 when fate introduced me to Tommy Trotter, an exuberant boy playing badminton at a church camp in Townsend. Over the years, Tommy and I became inseparable friends, sharing mutual interests, playing sports, and eventually working together in Sevier County. As an architect, Tommy founded Trotter and Associates, known for its artistic designs that blend harmoniously with our mountain environment.

In the early 1990s, Tommy realized that, despite growing up in the shadows of the Smokies, we had not explored all the trails the park had to offer. Determined to change that, he challenged me to set aside weekends for hiking adventures. Armed with a map of marked trails, we embarked on a journey of discovery, traversing popular routes like the Chimneys, LeConte Lodge, and Charlies Bunion, as well as lesser-known gems such as Jake's Creek and Huskey Gap.

These hikes provided the perfect opportunity for us to see the true impact of recent federal budget cuts that resulted in the loss of millions of dollars of critically needed funds. Around this same time, Park Superintendent Randy Pope presented the state of park budget issues to the Tennessee Great Smoky Mountains Park Commission. One of the members, longtime editor of the *Maryville Daily Times* Dean Stone, approached him about establishing a

support organization. The superintendent had been monitoring the success of the Yosemite Fund and knew he needed committed community support to move the idea forward.

After a memorable hike to Mount Cammerer's fire tower, Tommy and I learned firsthand just how badly support was needed. We encountered the historic fire tower in dire need of repair. Inspired by the tower's potential, Tommy pledged his architectural services to Superintendent Pope, who, unfortunately, lacked the necessary federal funds to make the needed repairs. Undeterred, Tommy enlisted my help in raising the required \$35,000 for the restoration. With the support of the Rotary Club of West Knoxville and other generous donors, we managed to raise the funds needed to restore the fire tower to its former glory.

On September 3, 1993, an organizational meeting was hosted by Superintendent Pope and Bob Miller, bringing together prominent individuals like Lindsay Young, Barney Coulter, Steve Woody, Natalie Haslam, and others who shared a passion for preserving the park. Soon after, the Friends of the Smokies began to take shape, with a dedicated group of supporters rallying behind the cause.

Through the collective efforts of generous donors, including Lamar Alexander, Ned McWherter, and Phil Bredesen, the Friends secured 156 \$1,000 gifts from charter members. The support continued to grow, and in the spring of 1994, Karen Wade took over as the new superintendent. The first executive director, Charles Maynard, and park management assistant Bob Miller collaborated in lifting the organization from an idea into reality. In 2002, leadership transitioned to President Jim Hart, who grew the program into the flourishing organization it is today, bolstered by a talented staff and committed volunteers.



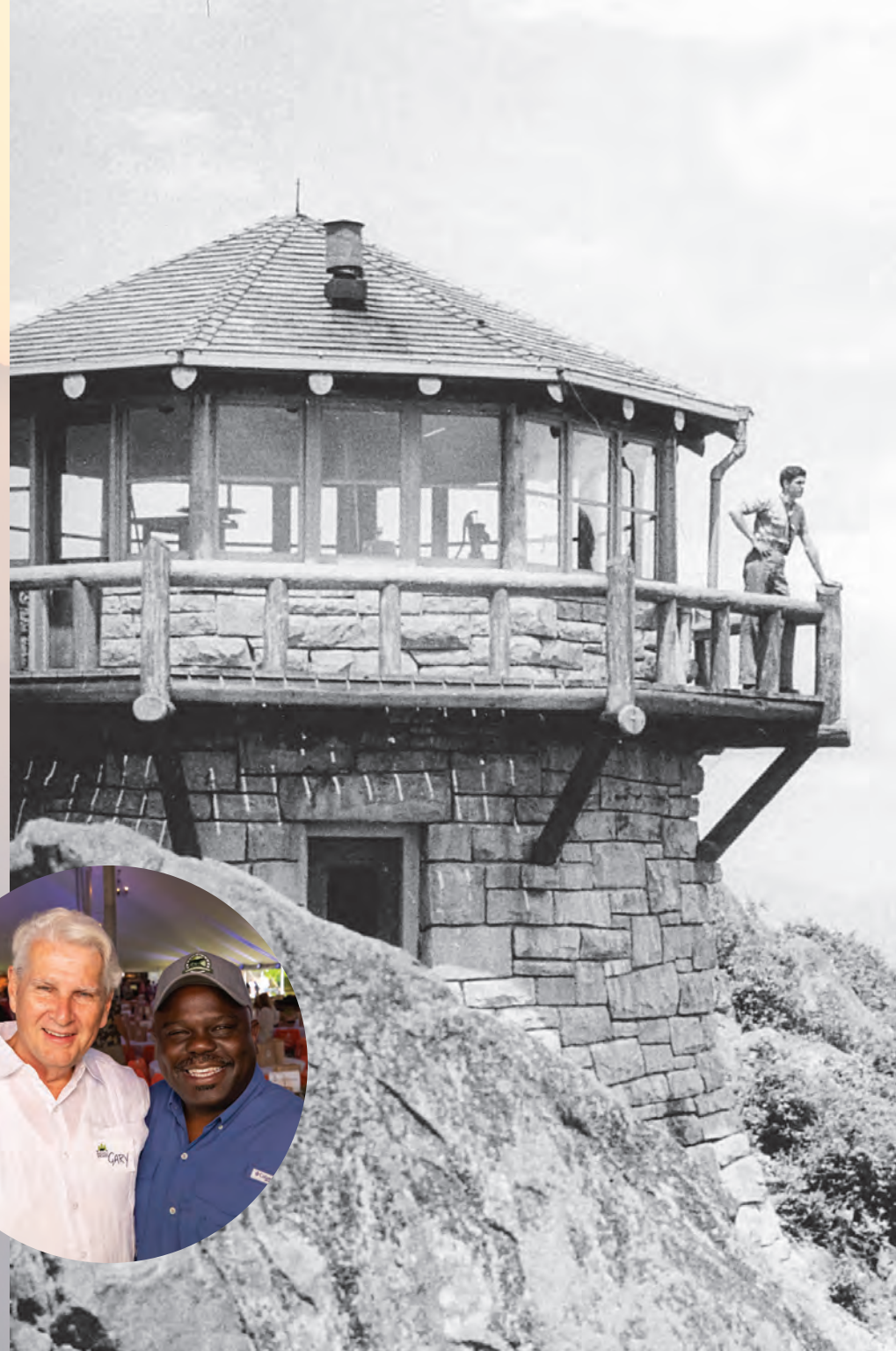
Left: Mount Cammerer fire tower recalls a time when fire watchers manned remote posts, scanning the horizon for smoke. This iconic structure was built in 1937 by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Below: Gary Wade with Superintendent Cassius Cash at a Friends of the Smokies event.

The history of Great Smoky Mountains National Park itself stretches back to the 1920s, when visionaries like Anne and Willis Davis, Colonel David Chapman, and Horace Kephart paved the way for its creation. John D. Rockefeller Jr. provided a significant grant that allowed the park to open its gates on June 15, 1934. Today, Friends of the Smokies and its partners continue their legacy, ensuring the preservation of this beloved wilderness for generations to come.

Trail maintenance, scientific research, historic structure preservation, habitat restoration, and environmental education are just a few of the accomplishments made possible by the Friends and its dedicated supporters. The iconic Mount Cammerer fire tower stands as a symbol of the commitment of “we the people” to cherish and protect these mountains for posterity. I am proud that, through the Forever Places program, we will once again be able to make much-needed repairs to this iconic destination.

As Friends of the Smokies celebrates its 30th anniversary, the organization remains devoted to its mission—embracing the spirit of those early visionaries who laid the foundation for the park’s preservation. With the unwavering support of friends from all walks of life, Great Smoky Mountains National Park will continue to thrive as a testament to the enduring love for nature’s wonders.

Gary Wade is founding chair emeritus of Friends of the Smokies. He is a former chief justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court and dean emeritus of Lincoln Memorial University’s Duncan School of Law.



Looking Back GRATITUDE Looking Forward

As we celebrate the 30th anniversary year of Friends of the Smokies, I am filled with profound gratitude and a sense of awe for the unwavering support our donors have shown to Great Smoky Mountains National Park for three decades. It is my privilege and honor to now lead this remarkable organization into the future, and I am humbled to stand on the shoulders of the tenacious, undaunted champions who had the vision and foresight to create this unmatched opportunity for all of us to contribute to the care of this special place.

Through your generosity and dedication, the Friends of the Smokies has raised a staggering \$87 million to support projects and programs that have safeguarded this American treasure. Your contributions have played a significant role in preserving the stories of the people who once lived, worked, and carved out a life in these mountains, while also protecting the incredible diversity of life found within the most biodiverse national park in our nation.



I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the visionary leaders of the national park, from Superintendent Randy Pope who brought this organization into reality, to Superintendent Karen Wade who skillfully implemented the partnership, to Superintendent Dale Ditmanson who spearheaded legacy projects like

Trails Forever, and finally to our current superintendent, Cassius Cash, who is leading us into the future with innovative partnership opportunities like Forever Places and investing in improvements that help ensure that high-quality visitor experiences are accessible to all.

I also want to express my deepest appreciation to the founding board members of Friends of the Smokies, and my predecessors who led this organization, Charles Maynard, Jim Hart, and Tim Chandler. Your passion and dedication have inspired countless others to join hands and actively participate in the stewardship of our beloved park. This ongoing investment honors the ancestral lands of the Cherokee Indians and the subsequent sacrifices made by the people of east Tennessee and western North Carolina in the creation of America's most-visited national park.

As we look to the future, I am filled with excitement and hope. Together, we can build ongoing support to ensure that this amazing park continues to be enjoyed, respected, and preserved for generations to come. I am immensely proud to be part of this organization, and I am eager to work alongside our talented staff who make sure your generous donations are used efficiently to support vital programs, projects, and the incredible National Park Service employees and volunteers involved each year.

Your steadfast support has truly made you our "Forever Friends." On behalf of Friends of the Smokies and Great Smoky Mountains National Park, I extend my deepest gratitude for your three decades of giving and look forward to many more.

With sincere appreciation,

Dana Soehn

Dana Soehn

Friends of the Smokies President and CEO





Thirty avid supporters share why they are Friends of the Smokies on our 30th anniversary



Danny Bernstein

"Great Smoky Mountains National Park is my national park. The park needs organizations like Friends of the Smokies and other private funding because our taxes and government allocations do not cover all its needs."



Linda Spangler

"As a 900 Miler, I have a strong love for our Smokies, and I want to do all I can to help keep the park the wonderful place it is. It truly is a place of wonder and of peace. A place I want to help keep special for future generations."



John Clayton

"Although my family has enjoyed coming to the Smokies for more than 40 years, I only discovered the real jewels of these mountains through programs offered by Friends. After experiencing firsthand many of the major contributions that Friends have provided for improving and sustaining the park for years to come, I wanted to be a part of those efforts that federal funding doesn't provide."



Randy Graham

"I am a Friend of the Smokies because they provide additional resources to help the park restore, maintain, and preserve this place of incredible beauty for both human visitors and the amazing diversity of wildlife—plants and animals—that is found here and often nowhere else."



Mildred Queen

"I am a Friend of the Smokies because they encourage hikers to hike to their ability. Hiking is not only a physical activity but also relieves stress. The more you hike, the more you feel good physically and mentally."



Sam Curtis

"The Friends of the Smokies is a vehicle by which we can exponentially raise more money for Great Smoky Mountains National Park's needs that we could not do on our own. It is a privilege to be a part of the organization that partners with the park to enhance the Trails Forever and other park programs to perpetuate the preservation and education of the park."

LEADERSHIP

Board Members

Sharon Miller Pryse (Chair)
Jake Ogle (Vice Chair)
Nancy Daves (Secretary)
Laura Webb (Treasurer)
The Honorable Gary Wade
(Founding Chair Emeritus)
Rev. Dr. Dan Matthews (Chair Emeritus)
Mark Williams (Chair Emeritus)
Jenny Boyd
David Colquitt
Cindi DeBusk
Steve Gigliotti
Brad Herman
Himanshu Karvir
Dr. Rob Powell
Ken Stamps
Melissa White
Marilyn Wright

Honorary Board Members

Kay Clayton
Victoria (Vicky) Fulmer
James Haslam, II
Luke Hyde
Bruce Hartmann
Dale Keasling
John Mason
Diane (Deener) Matthews
Jim Ogle
Linda Ogle
Chase Pickering
Meridith Elliott Powell
Heath Shuler
Robert Tino
Jack Williams
Kristin Williams
*Deceased: Mimi Cecil, Wilma Maples

Emeritus Board Members

John Dickson
Natalie Haslam
Mary Johnson
David White
Stephen W. Woody
*Deceased: Dr. Myron "Barney" Coulter,
Leon Jones, Kathryn McNeil, Judy Morton,
Wilma Dykeman Stokely, John B. Waters, Jr.,
Lindsay Young



Our Staff

Jim Hart, *President Emeritus*
Dana Soehn, *President and CEO*
Marielle DeJong, *Chief Operating Officer*
Lauren Gass, *Director of Philanthropy*

Sarah Herron, *Director of Marketing and Communications*
Nan Jones, *Director of Finance and CFO*
Debbie Speelman, *Database and Accounting Associate*

Kathryn Hemphill, *Special Projects Director*
Krista Heilmeier, *Development Manager*
Lindsay Howell, *Special Projects Manager*
Olivia Wright, *Outreach Coordinator*



FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



Dear Friends,

As I reflect on what Friends of the Smokies has done for the park over the last three decades, I notice one common theme: your dedication to helping park visitors, communities, and employees. I can see how much you care about the Smokies through your support to help us restore historic structures, rebuild trails, reveal untold stories, and

much more. Thank you for protecting this park, making it relevant and accessible for all communities, and instilling a sense of stewardship in this and future generations.

It has been wonderful to see how your involvement has paid off, and I'd like to briefly highlight three of this year's major projects that you supported. First, our Forever Places team recently finished major renovations to the Walker sisters cabin. It is worth a hike to the cabin to see the expert artistry of our crew! Secondly, thanks to your support, our emergency responders now have ultramodern AEDs in their patrol vehicles and at facilities across the park. Lastly, your generosity has helped us introduce and invite new audiences to explore the African American journey in the park through the African American Experiences in the Smokies project. New waysides, oral histories, and musical performances are connecting visitors to this special place and the diversity of people who have called it home.

We have also been busy this year with a groundbreaking new initiative. In March, we launched the Park It Forward parking tag program, which will have a legacy effect on our visitors and employees. One hundred percent of

the revenue generated by Park It Forward stays in the park to directly benefit visitors and help take some of the burden away from our staff. Through just the first four months of the program, the park's recreation fee revenue is already almost double that of 2022's revenue, which was made up only of camping and venue reservation fees.

While we are proud of the Park It Forward program, it is not a cure-all: we still have an urgent need to support our employees and park programs in other ways. We're a staff of about 250 people who serve 13 million visitors a year, care for more than 500,000 acres of land, protect over 21,000 species of life, maintain hundreds of miles of roads and trails, and maintain dozens of facilities. Park It Forward is a great step toward helping our employees and resources, but we can only truly move forward with a group like Friends of the Smokies walking by our side.

As we approach our 90th year as a national park, and Friends of the Smokies turns 30, together we are hitting our stride to protect this special place. Thanks to your continued dedication, I strongly believe our best days are in front of us.

Cassius Cash

Superintendent of Great Smoky Mountains National Park





Marita Vornehm

"I love the mountains, and I love the dedication of the people who work at Friends of the Smokies."



Ray Sellers

"There are so many problems left out of the park service's budget related to wildlife conservation, trails, and historic structures. This is a means to protect these elements by assisting in the fundraising. Also, it is fun meeting the Friends' staff and volunteering."



Dewey and Fran Clark

"We are Friends of the Smokies because we want to help ensure that the park will continue to be available to future generations. When we donate funds or volunteer time at an event, we get the satisfaction of knowing the preservation of history, the protection of wildlife and environment, and the education of following generations will occur."

MOUNTAINS OF MILESTONES

1993

Friends of the Smokies was founded by 156 charter members, establishing a passionate and dedicated organization committed to preserving, protecting, and providing for Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

1996

The organization begins annual support of Parks as Classrooms, delivering environmental education programs to thousands of students every year. To date, Friends has provided \$5 million to park education programs.



2001

Friends helped Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Great Smoky Mountains Association in funding a six-year \$1 million project providing for the release of the first elk to roam the park since they were extirpated by over-hunting nearly 200 years ago.

Greenbrier Picnic Pavilion completed. It is one of the park's most idyllic settings for large gatherings with seating for up to 70 people.



2007

Friends of the Smokies provided support assisting with the construction of the Twin Creeks Science and Education Center, a visionary laboratory for park scientists and researchers that houses the park's Natural History Collections and provides workspace for NPS science branches.

1995

Friends successfully supported the restoration of the historic Mt. Cammerer fire tower, a beloved landmark in the park.



1999

The establishment of specialty license plate programs in Tennessee and North Carolina allowed plate owners to actively support projects and programs in the Smokies, contributing to the park's conservation and enhancement efforts.



2004

Friends of the Smokies raised an initial \$300,000 in emergency funds to combat the hemlock woolly adelgid infestation. The park's program is now a national leader in hemlock preservation research and sustains the lives of hundreds of thousands of trees.

2008

The Trails Forever partnership created a highly skilled crew dedicated to rehabilitating some of the park's highest-use trails. To date, more than 20 miles of trails have been fully restored.



2009

The 75th anniversary of Great Smoky Mountains National Park celebration included a Knoxville Symphony concert with US Senator Lamar Alexander playing piano among the old cabins and barns in pastoral Cades Cove near Townsend and the groundbreaking for a \$2.5 million Oconaluftee visitor center in Cherokee, NC, that highlights the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians and Appalachian culture.



2015

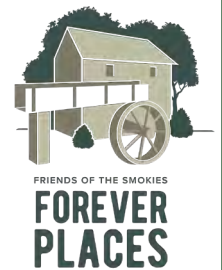
The organization provided support for the construction of The Collections Preservation Center in Townsend, Tennessee, which houses nearly 1.4 million historic documents including correspondence documenting the lives of those who lived on the land before the park's establishment.

2019

In celebration of Friends of the Smokies' 25th anniversary, \$2.5 million was raised to upgrade the park's emergency radio system. By acquiring new radios, the park service gained enhanced communication capabilities, enabling it to optimize resources during emergency situations.

2021

Friends provided funding for the John Oliver Cabin Accessibility Trail in Cades Cove. The trail features an accessible surface that makes it possible for individuals of all levels of ability to enjoy an outdoor experience and visit the John Oliver cabin, one of the park's most iconic historic landmarks.



2013

Friends of the Smokies contributed \$600,000 to support a multiyear project to enhance the Oconaluftee Visitor Center and Sugarlands Visitor Center, improving visitor experiences in the park.

2016

The 100th anniversary of the National Park Service 'Founders' Day' event hosted by Friends, the Smoky Mountain Tourism Development Council, and Great Smoky Mountains Association featured live music and honored over 340 employees who dedicate themselves daily to preserving and protecting the park.



2020

Friends launched the "Forever Places" endowment with a goal of raising \$9 million for the preservation of the park's historic cabins, churches, mills, and barns. Funds have already supported the hiring of two historic preservation crew members in 2022.

2023

Unveiling new waysides for the African American Experiences in the Smokies project showcased the rich history and contributions of African Americans within and around the park, promoting a more comprehensive understanding of the stories of Smoky Mountain families.

The 30th anniversary of Friends of the Smokies commemorates a remarkable milestone of contributing more than \$87 million to the park over the past three decades.

LEGACY of Leadership



Dear Friends,

It is my honor to express my deep appreciation to Jim Hart for his lasting impact on our Friends of the Smokies. His humility masks the significant impact that he has had. Our Friends of the Smokies is recognized as one of the most effective Friends organizations in the country, and his impact is felt locally as well. Jim knows how to bring the right people to the table. His connections with elected officials, foundations, and donors both large and small have combined to make Friends of the Smokies what it is today. Jim, thank you for all that you have built. Friends will certainly be one of your great lasting legacies.



Yours very truly,

Sharon J. Pryse
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
The Trust Company of Tennessee

John Oliver cabin in Cades Cove.





Stephanie Daniel

"We have one of the most accessible parks in the country right in our backyard. While it may only take us minutes to get out and enjoy the park, the work of Friends makes it available to an entire nation of visitors."



Suzan Bales

"I've traveled all over the world, but the Smoky Mountains will always be home to me. Now that I'm retired, it has been a great opportunity to be a volunteer with Friends of the Smokies whose goal is to preserve for generations the rich history, culture, and biodiversity of the most beautiful place on earth."



Kevin and Irene Anton

"The Great Smoky Mountains are a national treasure that needs to be protected for future generations to enjoy. The Forever Places and Trails Forever programs help preserve the rich history of the families that preceded the park and help ensure sustainable access to the park itself. The needs of maintaining such a treasure are many, and we are thankful to be able to help Friends of the Smokies in the preservation and enhancement of the park."

TRAILS FOREVER

21 Miles and Beyond

by Julie Dodd



Thanks to the Trails Forever program, crews have rehabilitated nearly seven of the most heavily used trails in the park over the last 15 years.

Ramsey Cascades Trail, the challenging, scenic four-mile trail in the Greenbrier area of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, is the current trail restoration project of the Trails Forever Crew funded by Friends of the Smokies.

The project began in April 2022 with 70 locust log bundles—each weighing 1,000 pounds—transported by helicopter from the Cosby Picnic Area parking lot to locations along the trail. The locust logs are a key part of the trail restoration, being used for staircases and other trail structures.

The seven-person Trails Forever Crew divided into two teams, explained crew supervisor Josh Shapiro. Three of the members stayed in a backcountry camp and worked on the section of the trail near Ramsey Cascades. The other four crew members worked on the lower areas of the trail and hiked to the trail work site daily.

Progress went well from May to July, Shapiro said.

The crew has already completed 18 locust staircases and six stone staircases. They built a 25-foot raised section of the trail—a locust log turnpike—that allows for better drainage. The crew also improved the trail surface by removing roots and



rocks, widening trail drainages, and regrading sections to make the trail safer and to reduce erosion.

The Trails Forever Crew was assisted by members of the Southeast Conservation Corps (SECC) who helped with the construction of the stone and locust log staircases and worked on improving the trail surface, improving existing trail drains, and transporting locust logs to work sites on the trail.

“Forty-one volunteers contributed 205 hours of work on the trail,” Shapiro said. “They primarily worked on the lower 1.5 miles of the trail, mainly cutting back Rhododendron along the trail and improving trail drainage.”

Unforeseen setbacks

Then, unexpectedly, two flash floods hit the area in July of 2022, creating damage and unfortunate delays.

“The first flooding incident occurred on July 12,” Shapiro said. “The Greenbrier area received more than eight inches of rain over a two-hour period. The flooding took out both footlog bridges on the trail and caused substantial damage to a 200-foot section of trail.”

The flooding washed out several sections of trail near the stream and also washed away gravel and stone that had been used as filler in some of the staircases and other trail structures in the upper section of the trail. As soon as possible, the crew continued the trail restoration work, including moving back into place the log footbridge on the lower portion of the trail that had been dislodged by the flooding.

Then, a second flash flooding incident occurred just nine days later on July 21. That flooding so severely damaged Greenbrier Road, which provides access to the trailhead, that it had to be closed.

Shifting gears, the crew moved into working on maintenance projects on trails throughout the Tennessee side of the park, including clearing fallen trees on trails, clearing trail drains, and clearing back vegetation along trails to keep the existing trail corridor open.

Trail work resumes in 2023

Fortunately, the Trails Forever Crew was able to return to the Ramsey Cascades Trail restoration work last spring. Shapiro said their priorities were repairing flood-damaged areas and replacing the footlog bridge on the upper portion of the trail. The crew is now on track to complete the trail rehabilitation in November.

Before planning a trip to the Greenbrier area, be sure to check the Great Smoky Mountains National Park website to determine the status of Greenbrier Road.

To learn more about Trails Forever and to see how you can help, visit SmokiesTrailsForever.org.

Ramsey Cascades is the seventh trail restoration project taken on by the Trails Forever Crew since the program was established in 2012. The Trails Forever Crew has restored Alum Cave Trail, Rainbow Falls Trail, Trillium Gap Trail, Abrams Falls Trail, Chimney Tops Trail, and Forney Ridge Trail.





Preserving

NATURE'S TREASURES



WILDLIFE AND PRESERVATION

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is one of the largest tracts of wilderness in the eastern United States and provides crucial wildlife habitat for 65 species of mammals, 67 species of native fish, 200 varieties of birds, and 80 types of reptiles and amphibians. The park's most famous residents are black bear and elk, but the Smokies are also known as the 'Salamander Capital of the World.'

Black Bear Research and Wildlife Management Projects

Your support enables critical studies to be conducted on black bear populations, behavior, and habitat to ensure the protection of the park's most iconic residents. Additionally, Friends supports management initiatives that promote a healthy environment not only for black bears but also for many other wildlife species in the park. This work plays a pivotal role in preserving the natural balance and biodiversity of the Smokies ecosystem.

The Native Brook Trout Habitat Restoration Program

You helped address the many challenges that threaten the existence of brook trout in the Southeast. With the support of Friends, GSMNP field staff were able

to undertake critical work in fulfilling the park's ongoing efforts to restore brook trout, the only native salmonid species in the Smokies. In 2022 alone, 44 miles of trout restoration surveys were conducted, and seven streams were identified for restoration of Southern Appalachian brook trout.

Seasonal Wildlife Rangers

These important NPS employees play a crucial role in protecting and preserving wildlife. With your help, they conducted research and management

projects, ensuring the safety and well-being of diverse park species. Their efforts make tremendous strides in protecting the park's natural resources and enriching visitors' experiences in one of the country's most biodiverse national parks.

Right: The brook trout is the only trout species native to the Smokies. Below: Students from a park gateway school identify a plant in the Little Greenbrier area.



Inspiring the NEXT GENERATION

EDUCATION

Your support provides funding and resources for outdoor learning experiences, environmental education, and cultural heritage programs for students.

Parks as Classrooms

You helped this program provide educational opportunities for students and teachers in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Through place-based learning opportunities, workshops, and youth programming, over 10,000 students and 400 teachers engaged in hands-on learning experiences. The program fosters a deeper connection to nature, cultural heritage, and scientific exploration, enhancing the park experience for future generations.

The Urban Youth Program

You helped to engage youth from untapped communities through environmental education, outdoor experiences, internships, and community partnerships. This program provided staff support, transportation assistance, and

opportunities for kids to connect with nature, learn about conservation, and experience the beauty of the park.

The Gateway Community School

With your assistance, this program provided a unique three-day, two-night immersive experience in Great Smoky Mountains National Park for students from Pi Beta Phi Elementary School in the important park gateway community of Gatlinburg. The program aimed to connect students with nature, cultural history, and outdoor learning opportunities, enriching their understanding of the park's natural resources and recreational activities.





Enhancing the VISITOR EXPERIENCE

RECREATION AND ADVENTURE

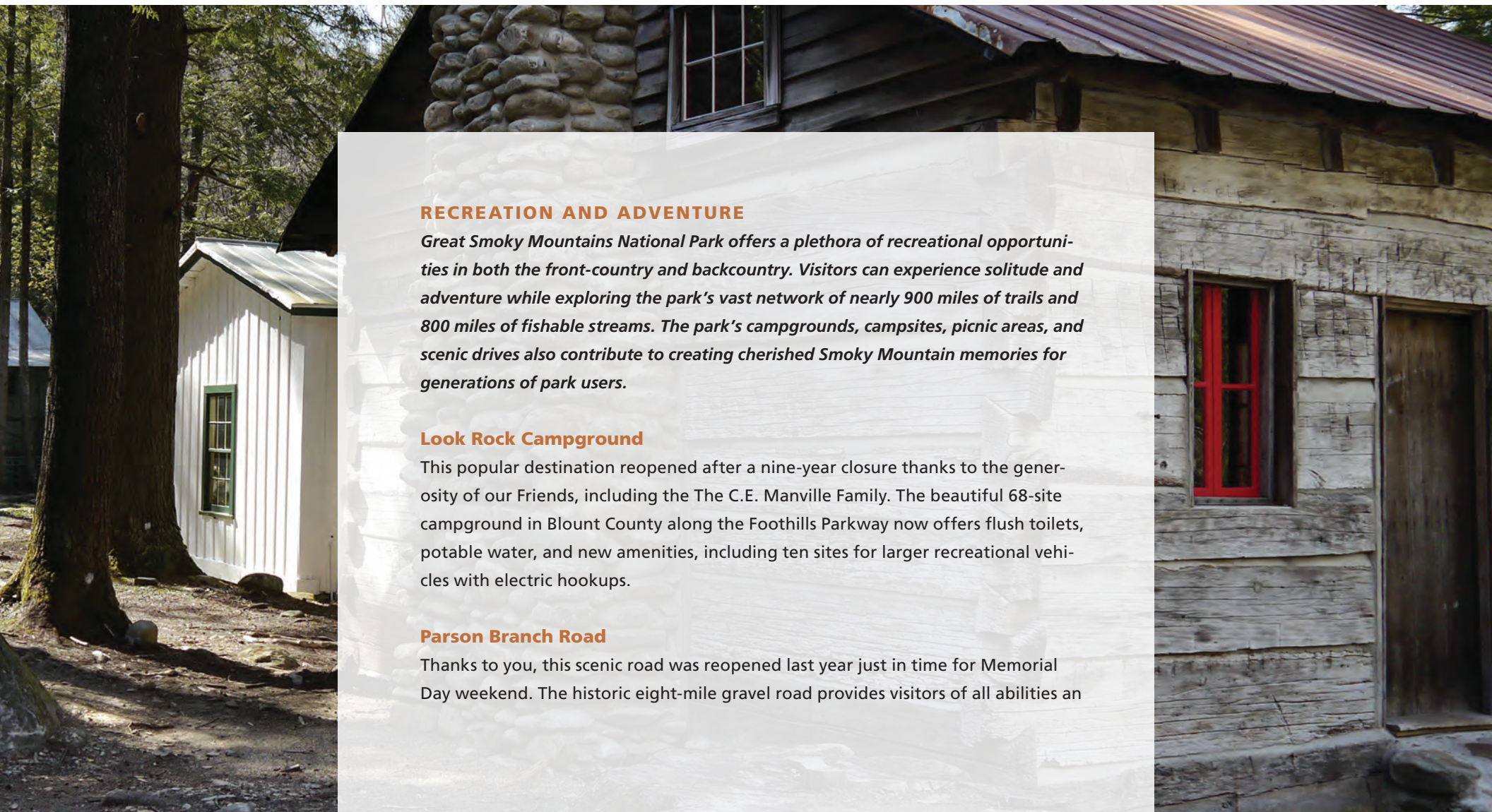
Great Smoky Mountains National Park offers a plethora of recreational opportunities in both the front-country and backcountry. Visitors can experience solitude and adventure while exploring the park's vast network of nearly 900 miles of trails and 800 miles of fishable streams. The park's campgrounds, campsites, picnic areas, and scenic drives also contribute to creating cherished Smoky Mountain memories for generations of park users.

Look Rock Campground

This popular destination reopened after a nine-year closure thanks to the generosity of our Friends, including the The C.E. Manville Family. The beautiful 68-site campground in Blount County along the Foothills Parkway now offers flush toilets, potable water, and new amenities, including ten sites for larger recreational vehicles with electric hookups.

Parson Branch Road

Thanks to you, this scenic road was reopened last year just in time for Memorial Day weekend. The historic eight-mile gravel road provides visitors of all abilities an



opportunity to have a trail-like experience from their vehicles. The celebration, held May 26, 2022, honored the hardworking NPS crew, and Larry Sparks paid tribute to his great-grandfather Russell Gregory who built the road with a pick and shovel in 1838. (Note: High-clearance vehicles are recommended for traveling Parson Branch Road. Motorhomes, buses, vans longer than 25 feet, and passenger vehicles towing trailers are prohibited.)

Appalachian Trail Ridge Runners

With essential funding from Friends for resources, training, and tools, these experienced Appalachian Trail stewards promoted 'Leave No Trace' principles, educated hikers about park regulations and safety guidelines, and provided assistance during trail-related issues or emergencies. Their efforts ensure a positive and sustainable hiking experience for all visitors on this iconic long-distance trail.

P R E S E R V I N G

Sharing and Inspiring

STORIES OF PAST AND PRESENT

Great Smoky Mountains National Park preserves and shares the rich and continuing stories of human history in the Southern Appalachians. The park protects artifacts, landscapes, and structures that help weave mountain families' stories together.



Forever Places

You supported the restoration and repair of the park's historic cabins, churches, mills, and barns. Funds raised in 2022 enabled the hiring of two historic preservation crew members. With your continued support, we can ensure these irreplaceable places aren't lost forever,

Visitor Safety

Your support included funds for several programs and initiatives that help the park provide a safe and positive experience for its millions of visitors. This included supplying safety equipment and PPE to the Search and Rescue Team, offering advanced Search and Rescue training, and providing support for two skilled park medics who responded to the most serious emergencies in the backcountry. These medics not only offered critical care but also served as valuable sources of information on trail safety, hike difficulty, and preparation for hikers.

Previous page: The Forever Places crew completed several cabin renovations in the Daisy Town community of Elkmont. Right: Superintendent Cassius Cash (left) with special guest Eric Mingus (right) unveil a new educational wayside panel near Enloe Slave Cemetery in the Oconaluftee area of the park. The new sign is one of several installed throughout the park with the goal of sharing history and research gathered by the African American Experiences in the Smokies project.



allowing future generations to walk in the footsteps of those who once called the Smokies home.

The African American Experiences in the Smokies Project

Your funding supported extensive research into the historic presence and influence of African Americans in the Southern Appalachians from the 1540s





to the present day. Within this framework, the park is exploring various key topics, including enslavement, the American Civil War, social dynamics, laws and policies, careers, recreation, and oral histories. This work includes research briefs for both park staff and the public, new oral histories, and public outreach events ranging from virtual town halls to in-person cultural

festivals. The results of this research are being used to educate park visitors, partners, and staff through teacher workshops, interpretive programs, products, and digital media.

Visitor Center Demonstrations and Living History Activities

Friends supported activities at Mountain Farm Museum, which included blacksmithing, mountain farming, gardening, and heirloom apple orchard

management. Replacement pop-up tents were purchased to serve a dual purpose for COVID mitigations and cultural demonstrations at various sites. Costume purchases were made to enhance interactive experiences at Daisy Town and for various cultural demonstrations at Elkmont and Cosby amphitheaters. Additionally, support was provided for demonstrators who brought historic structures to life in Cades Cove through blacksmithing, quilting, music, and storytelling.



A blacksmith shows visitors the process of forging metal during cultural demonstrations at the Mountain Farm Museum near the Oconaluftee Visitor Center.

N U R T U R I N G N A T U R E and Empowering the Future

SCIENCE AND STEWARDSHIP

The park's incredible biodiversity is a result of its unique geographic location, diverse ecosystems, and varied elevations, making it a haven for nature enthusiasts and researchers alike.

Scientific Research

Friends of the Smokies enables park managers to make science-informed decisions for effective land and resource management. This support addresses emergent issues and questions that require start-up funding before traditional research sources are available. It allows for quick

assistance for research needs that inform management strategies. Examples included funding research to predict the spread of non-native ants, assessing the risks associated with insect declines due to climate change, and collecting baseline data to assess the health of spruce-fir ecosystems by monitoring specific fungi.



The Air Quality and Meteorological Monitoring Program

You helped support this essential tool for the park's management, providing timely data to assess both long-term trends and current conditions for visitors, staff, communities, and the EPA. These funds play a crucial role in monitoring ozone and other air pollutants that help the park to track public health conditions. Additionally, meteorological monitoring at Cades Cove and the critical high-elevation weather station at Cove Mountain provide the park with vital information on mountain wave and wind gusts, aiding in weather understanding and preparedness.


The Vital Signs Monitoring Program

You provided funding to conduct long-term monitoring of vegetation and soil quality throughout the park. This crucial monitoring helped the park gain insights into trends and changes in unique ecosystems like grassy balds, wetlands, and heath balds.

Cataloochee Field Management

This park initiative involves preserving the cultural landscape and unique natural habitats found in the open fields of Cataloochee. These fields provide essential habitats for a diverse range of species, including pollinators, turkeys, coyotes, foxes, rabbits, deer, bear, elk, and ground-nesting birds like quail. Some fields are mowed after nesting season to keep them open, while others undergo controlled burning to restore native meadow habitat. Funding from Friends helped the park maintain these valuable habitats.

You Helped Preserve FOREVER PLACES




Great Smoky Mountains National Park's collection of historic cabins, churches, mills, and barns weaves together the story of these mountains. Many of the structures are in critical need of repair, so an endowment called Forever Places was established in 2020 to hire a permanent, dedicated crew who had specialized skills in historic preservation.

Friends of the Smokies is nearly halfway in reaching our goal to fully fund the \$9 million endowment. The board and staff of Friends of the Smokies would like to thank those who have generously contributed to Forever Places thus far, enabling the park to hire the first two permanent crew members.

Walker Sisters Cabin Rehabilitated and Reopened

Due to safety concerns, the park temporarily closed the Walker sisters cabin in December of 2021. Park crews were concerned about movement around the chimney in the two-story cabin, which dates back to the 1800s and was occupied by the Walker sisters until 1964. Noticeable cracks and buckling around the stone masonry needed to be repaired and stabilized to prevent further movement.

Through Forever Places, the Friends quickly provided funding to support the crew along with additional funds for immediate stabilization work, materials, and



supplies. Without this critical funding, this priceless piece of history might have suffered even more damage.

The Walker sisters cabin was fully rehabilitated and reopened to the public June 20, 2023. Visitors may reach the historic farmstead to see the cabin and outbuildings by hiking approximately 1.4 miles along the Little Brier Gap Trail located near the Metcalf Bottoms Picnic Area.

In 2023, the Forever Places crew is also making much-needed repairs to the John Ownby cabin, the David Chapman cabin, and the Mount Cammerer fire tower. You are helping to make their work possible.

To learn more about Forever Places, visit SmokiesForeverPlaces.org or contact marielle@friendsofthesmokies.org.

The incredible story of the Walker sisters is one of strength, hard work, and a love for the land of the Smokies. Their father, John N. Walker, married Margaret Jane King in 1866 shortly after returning from the Civil War, where he fought for the Union and was imprisoned by the Confederacy. The Walkers obtained a house and property in Little Greenbrier Cove through Margaret's family. Together the Walkers raised 11 children. The sisters who did not marry stayed in Little Greenbrier with their father and inherited the farm after his death in 1921. After the national park was established, the Walker sisters received a special lifetime lease—a chance to live out the rest of their lives in the log cabin. Though the Walker sisters are now gone, their legacy lives on through their homestead, the objects they created and lived with, and the neighbors and visitors they interacted with well into the 1950s.



IMAGINE THE POSSIBILITIES

Expand the park's impact with your 30th anniversary gift.



With a 30-year history of providing support to the national park, Friends of the Smokies has been instrumental in preserving and protecting Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Each year, the park relies on Friends to support special projects and programs that would otherwise remain unfunded.

Your generous contributions make a significant difference, enabling us to fulfill these requests and provide visitors with the best possible experience while safeguarding our beloved Smokies. With your help, Friends will fund over 70 projects and programs this year. For example, your support will:

CONNECT KIDS TO THE PARK

Friends supports several resource education programs, including the Parks As Classrooms program, benefiting thousands of students engaged in place-based and robust, nationally recognized distance learning programs.

The 'Parks as Classrooms' Bus Transportation Program provides essential funds for Title 1 schools, allowing them to bring students to the park for enriching place-based learning experiences. Over the past few years, the cost of bus travel to the park has tripled, now averaging \$600 per bus. These funds enable us to cover half of the total transportation cost, making it possible for

over 30 low-income schools to afford their educational trip to the Smokies.

The Urban Youth Program aligns with the park's goal of promoting relevancy, diversity, equity, and inclusion. The funds directly support staffing, urban youth intern stipends, and transportation to the park, benefiting partner organizations, Asheville Greenworks, and Fulton High School in Knoxville. By addressing barriers like transportation and providing a living wage, these funds enable more youth from untapped groups to participate in the program and connect with nature.

BREAK DOWN BARRIERS

Friends of the Smokies supports the park's continued efforts to provide a welcoming, accessible place to visitors of all backgrounds and abilities. This includes improved infrastructure, inclusive interpretive programs, and diverse outreach initiatives.

The Accessibility Improvements Project will make it possible for staff to develop ranger-led programs using a variety of mobility devices and technology. Programs will be offered to the public at Sugarlands or Oconaluftee Visitor Center. Two assistive chairs will be purchased and retained in the park at each location for use by participants, as needed.

Voices of the Smokies is an inclusive storytelling project that aims to broaden the park's interpretative content by including the histories of all communities that contributed to the Smokies' heritage. While existing interpretative materials mainly focus on white settlers, Voices of the Smokies will highlight the stories of the Cherokee, African Americans, and other ethnic groups. Through new video content, updated exhibits, demonstration programs, and thorough research, this project will portray the inclusive history of how diverse communities lived and worked on park lands.



The Tuskegee NPS Career Academy facilitates two week-long trips to the Smokies each year for 12 college students and two professors during the spring and fall semesters. This project was initially piloted in 2022 through a Youth Partnership grant. During their time in the park, students delve into NPS careers and internships, gaining valuable insights and experiences. The successful pilot program from last year resulted in two students securing summer internships, showcasing the program's effectiveness in fostering career opportunities.

PROTECT AT-RISK SPECIES

Great Smoky Mountains National Park boasts a rich diversity of wildlife, plants, and trees, including rare, threatened, and endangered species. Preserving these unique and delicate ecosystems is essential to ensure their survival and maintain the park's natural heritage for future generations to cherish and enjoy.

The Hemlock Protection Program, supported by Friends since 2003, has been a vital part of the nation's most ambitious and successful hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) treatment initiatives. This funding has played a crucial role in maintaining the health of hemlocks across the landscape, with dedicated park staff, interns, and volunteers working tirelessly to save this iconic tree species.

Park Monitoring Programs allow park management to make informed decisions to protect and preserve the rich biodiversity of the Smokies. These initiatives include monitoring vegetation and soil quality, which provides valuable insights into the overall health of the park's natural landscape. Air-quality monitoring allows the park to assess potential impacts on public health and take proactive measures to safeguard the environment. The fisheries program is vital for restoring the delicate balance of aquatic life in the park, particularly through the reintroduction of brook trout into streams.

Learn more about the list of park needs Friends of the Smokies is hoping to fund in 2023 at [FriendsoftheSmokies.org/2023-park-needs](https://friendsofthesmokies.org/2023-park-needs).



The Smokies has become an exemplar for hemlock preservation, protecting over 300,000 trees in conservation areas and high-visitation spots. Through a 5- to 7-year treatment rotation, more than 12,000 acres of diverse forest types are covered, with a single treatment providing up to seven years of protection for a tree. In addition to insecticidal treatments, the park has released over 600,000 predatory beetles and conducted pioneering sil-verfly releases as part of the comprehensive landscape-level control efforts.





Butch Robertson

"Volunteering for the Friends of the Smokies gave me a unique opportunity to help preserve a national treasure while utilizing a lifelong interest in fine wine and assisting a University of Tennessee sports club to achieve its community-service goals. It was a slam dunk to become and stay involved with the Friends of the Smokies."



Larry Vaught

"It's easy to be a Friend of the Smokies because of the great work the group does to help preserve a special, special place—not only for me to enjoy but for my grandchildren and many more to enjoy. I love the passion this group has for assisting the national park in any way it can and consider it a blessing to help in any way I can because I love spending time in the park."



Dolly McLean

"I have always loved national parks, and I love the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. When I got introduced to the Friends of the Smokies with the monthly hikes, I knew it was a group I wanted to support. The Friends are able to help in so many areas of the park that don't get enough funding. I used to say, "My heart is in the public schools, and so are my children." Now it's "My heart is in the Smokies, and so am I."

2022 FINANCIALS

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

ASSETS

2022

CURRENT ASSETS

Cash/Cash Equivalents	\$9,691,141
Certificates of Deposit	\$190,625
Accounts Receivable	\$427,539
Prepaid Expenses	\$41,030

LONGTERM ASSETS

Investments (endowments)	\$14,334,108
Property and Equipment (net of accumulated depreciation)	\$139,512
Other Assets (Right of Use, Beneficial Assets, Life Insurance)	\$592,125

Total Assets	\$25,415,720
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LIABILITIES

2022

CURRENT LIABILITIES

Accounts Payable	\$13,026
Current portion of long-term lease	\$25,086
Deferred revenue	\$376,945

LONGTERM LIABILITIES

Longterm lease liability	\$298,905
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NET ASSETS

Net Assets without donor restrictions	\$387,489
Net Assets with board designation	\$3,732,347
Net Assets with donor restrictions	\$20,581,922

Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$25,415,720
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STATEMENT OF ACTIVITY

TOTAL SUPPORT & REVENUE

Contributions and grants	\$5,748,691
Less amounts designated by donors for other organizations	(\$1,000)
Tennessee license plate revenue	\$1,043,515
North Carolina license plate revenue	\$562,628
Special events (net of direct expenses)	\$690,625
In-kind contributions	\$109,926
Other income	\$12,251.00
Investment income net of expense	\$278,452

Total Support, Revenue, and Other	\$8,445,088
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EXPENSES

Park Projects	\$4,104,839
Park Project Program Services	\$236,460
Management and General	\$580,950
Fundraising	\$614,750

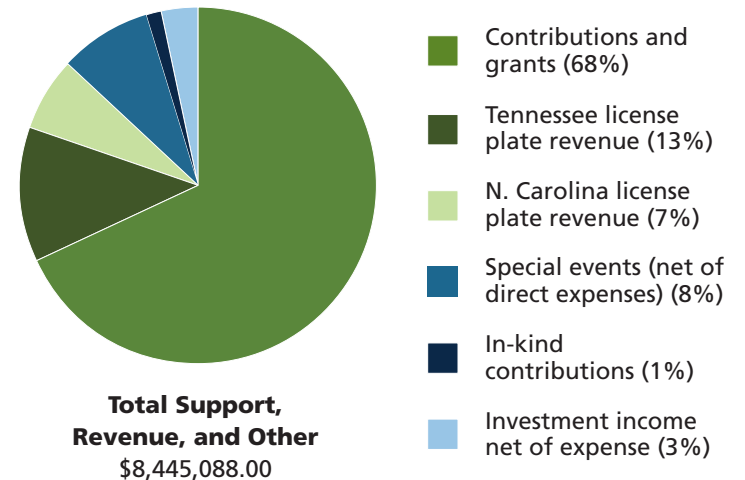
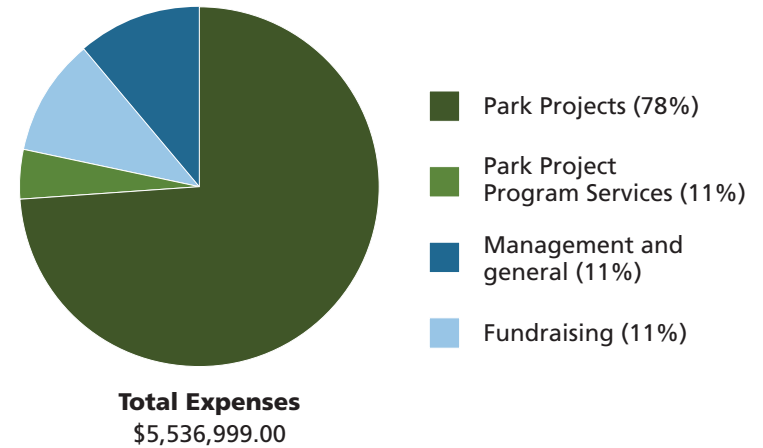
Total Expenses	\$5,536,999
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OTHER CHANGE IN NET ASSETS

Unrealized (loss) on investments	(\$2,362,824)
Net assets at beginning of year	\$24,156,494
Change in net assets	\$545,265

Net Assets at End of Year	\$24,701,758
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2022



Less amounts designated by donors for other organizations (.0001%) and other income (.001%) not shown in pie chart.

The amounts presented here are derived from audited financial statements of Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park for the year ending December 31, 2022. There are slight variances in figures due to rounding. Copies of the complete audited financial statements of Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park are available upon request and on our website.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE



We express our gratitude to 6,289 individual donors, thousands of park visitors who contributed funds through donation boxes, and our specialty license plate owners in North Carolina and Tennessee.

THANK YOU

Friends of the Smokies received gifts of \$1,000 or more in 2022 from the following individuals, foundations, businesses and partners:

Individuals

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 Estate of Thomas A. and Jean C. Ogle

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 All Occasions Party Rentals
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 Anakeesta, LLC
 Analysis and Measurement Services
 Corporation
 Appalachian Lodge
 Aunt Mahalia's Candies
 Bank of America
 Barnes Insurance Agency, Inc.
 Benevity, Inc.
 Benton Roofing

Beverly-Hanks and Associates
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 Biltmore Property Group, LLC
 Blue Ridge Power
 Buddy's Bar-B-Q of Sevierville
 Burger Master
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 Calloway Oil Company
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 Cirrus Design Corporation
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 Clayton Homes, Inc.
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 Diamond Hill Plywood Company
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 Dominion Energy
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 Ferguson Enterprises
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 Forest and Park, LLC
 Gatlinburg Inn Properties
 Gatlinburg Skyliift
 Green Line Media, Inc.
 Holston's Kitchen
 Home Federal Bank
 Hospitality Management Solutions, Inc.
 ILM Rentals, LP
 IHOP of Sevierville - Pigeon Forge
 The Inn at Christmas Place
 Jennings Builders Supply, Inc.
 JTEKT Automotive Tennessee
 Kroger Company/Gift Services
 Department
 Lakeview Partners, LLC
 Larry's Coffee
 Leadership Sevier, Inc.
 LeConte Medical Center
 Legacy Centers, LLC
 Lexus of Knoxville
 Liquor and Wine of the Smokies
 Little Arrow Outdoor Resort
 Maples Ridge Cabin Rentals
 Martin and Company
 Masco Corporation
 Mast General Store, Inc.
 Mountain Commerce Bank
 Mountain Creek Quilters

NAI/Koella/RM Moore
 Nantahala Outdoor Center, Inc.
 Network for Good
 New Belgium Brewing Company
 NHC Place Cavette Hill Memory Care
 No. 308 LLC National Parks
 Conservation Bar
 Ober Gatlinburg, Inc.
 Old Forge Distillery, LLC
 Ole Smoky Distillery, LLC
 Orvis Company - Sevierville
 Personal Computer Systems, Inc.
 Phillips and Jordan, Inc.
 Pickel Properties, LLC
 Pilot Travel Centers
 Pinnacle Bank
 Premier Sotheby's International Realty
 Pugh CPAs
 Realty Executive Associates, Inc.
 REI, Inc.
 Republic Plastics, LTD
 Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies
 Ritway
 River Sports Outfitters, Inc.
 Riverside Tower
 Roberts and Stevens, PA
 Sevierville Tax Service
 SmartBank
 Springboard Audio Video
 Stokely Hospitality Enterprises
 Stowers Machinery Corporation
 Sugarland Cellars, Inc.
 Swag Resort, LLC
 Target Circle
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 Ward and Smith, PA
 Wayne Blalock's Home Center
 Wildland Trekking
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Steve Pierce

"I am a Friend of the Smokies because Great Smoky Mountains National Park protects and preserves these storied mountains that inspire me, challenge me, and provide a place of sanctuary and diverse beauty."



Rob Howard

"I've found the Friends to be a well-managed group of 'happy warriors' supporting a cause close to my heart—providing resources to expand the capacity of the team that stewards one of America's greatest national treasures."



Julie Dodd

"Being a Friend of the Smokies enables me both to connect with and to support Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The Smokies provide me with inspiration through hiking, taking photographs, watercolor painting, exploring the histories of locations in the park, and sharing the beauty of nature with friends and family."



Mike and Cindy Corn

"All you have to do is take your first step onto the trail and become immersed in a magical kingdom to want to keep the beauty of the Smokies going for everyone. Loving Friends since 2009; loving the Smokies forever!"



Julieanne Foy

"I am a Friend of the Smokies because I care deeply about our park. The work of the Friends is vital to the ongoing care and protection of our park, and I know my support goes directly toward important projects in the park. I look at being a Friend as insurance that our beautiful landscape will be taken care of for generations to come."



Karen Bentz

"I am a Friend of the Smokies because stewardship of our national parks is my personal and professional goal. It is in the wildness of our Smoky Mountains that we each find our special place to reassure us of the important legacy we leave for future generations. The support of the park through Friends of the Smokies conserves the natural and historic features in this fragile environment."

Foundations

American Online Giving Foundation
Arconic Foundation
The Charlie and Moll Anderson Foundation
Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, Inc.
The Earl and Bettie Fields Automotive Group Foundation, Inc.
National Environmental Education and Training Foundation
National Park Foundation
Richard Haiman National Parks Foundation, Inc.

Additional Partners

Appalachian Trail Conservancy
City of Maryville
Experience Your Smokies TN, Inc.
Gatlinburg Convention and Visitors Bureau
GFWC Ossoli Circle
Great Smoky Mountains Association
Great Smoky Mtn Jeep Invasion
Haywood County Tourism Development Authority
Knoxville Garden Club
Maryville College
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
Rotary Club of Knoxville
Sevier County Mayor's Office
Smoky Mountains Hiking Club
Smoky Mountain Tourism Development Authority

Friends Tennessee License Plate Owners



Friends North Carolina License Plate Owners



DISTINGUISHED LIFETIME GIFTS

Friends of the Smokies recognizes philanthropic supporters whose lifetime contributions have reached \$100,000 or more. These contributions have made a profound impact on our shared commitment to preserving and protecting the Smokies' historic and natural resources.

The list of contributors who have generously contributed \$100,000 or more over their lifetime of support include:

\$1,000,000+

Estate of Elaine Gibson
Jim and Natalie Haslam
Lindsay Young and the Aslan Foundation
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North Carolina License Plate Owners
Tennessee License Plate Owners
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\$500,000+

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In 2022, contributions made in honor of these individuals have played a crucial role in preserving and protecting Great Smoky Mountains National Park. We gratefully acknowledge the following individuals who have been honored and remembered through these meaningful gifts, as their legacy continues to live on in our beloved park.

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In 2022, the board and staff of Friends extend heartfelt appreciation to our volunteers, whose dedication and selflessness have contributed thousands of hours helping at events, serving on committees, and providing invaluable assistance in the office every week. These contributions further our mission and amplify the impact of our donors' contributions, enabling us to achieve more and create a lasting impact on Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

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Friends of the
Smokies volun-
teers working
on Ramsey
Cascades Trail.





Morton and Senator Becky Massey

"Both of us are native Knoxvilleans who have spent a lifetime camping, hiking, fishing, and birdwatching in our wonderful backyard national park. For the last 20 years, we have had the distinct pleasure of assisting at many of the large fundraising events the Friends group has put on."



Missy Kane

"In 1998, 'Get on the Trail with Friends and Missy' began, and for over 25 years this hiking series has served as a great way to raise funds for the park while helping folks get in shape and bringing new friends to the Friends of the Smokies. It's been a joy and a win-win partnership, and I am grateful to Friends for allowing me to continue leading this hiking series every April and October!"



Nancy East

"Besides enhancing the overall experience for visitors enjoying the park's 800+ miles of trails, the support provided by Friends of the Smokies to the Trails Forever program helps reduce the number of hikers getting injured or lost. Moreover, if a visitor requires assistance from search and rescue (SAR), Friends also plays a vital role by equipping SAR personnel with the necessary gear, enabling them to respond efficiently and safely."

OUR SPONSORS

Fundraising events play a significant role in preserving and protecting Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Beyond raising funds, these special occasions serve as opportunities to connect with new audiences and involve volunteers in our mission. The unwavering support of our dedicated patrons is instrumental in ensuring the success of these events, and we extend our heartfelt gratitude for their invaluable contributions.



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The Rowdies Group

"Proud to be members of Friends of the Smokies where a portion of our donation goes to trail improvements so we can keep doing what we love—hiking!"



Debbie Magill

"Growing up in East Tennessee, I have always appreciated and loved having the Smokies—and all of the activities and beauty associated with it—so close to home. Supporting an organization that is committed to preserving and protecting the park for generations to come was always an easy decision for me. Friends of the Smokies is certainly a group I am proud to have my name associated with!"




SMOKY MOUNTAIN MEMORIES

for you, and for them.

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This annual report was produced by Great Smoky Mountains Association. Friends of the Smokies extends our heartfelt thanks for the generosity of GSMA's time and talents, and for their friendship as we partner together to support our beloved park.



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GSMNP Archives: 3 (Mt. Cammerer), 22 (Walker Sisters)

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NPS photos: 9, 10 (Parks as Classrooms), 11 (100th anniversary), 17 (kids), 24 (monarch), 25

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Michele Sons: Cover, 2–3 (view), 7, 24 (trees), 30 (both), background image of all 30 on the 30th pages

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southeast Region: 17

Roy Wagner: 28, back cover (mountains)

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Tennessee Office

3099 Winfield Dunn Parkway

PO Box 1660

Kodak, TN 37764

(865) 932-4794

North Carolina Office

PO Box 3179

Asheville, NC 28802

84 Coxe Ave., Suite 200

Asheville, NC 28801

(828) 452-0720

FriendsOftheSmokies.org

info@FriendsOftheSmokies.org

