

FRIENDS OF THE SMOKIES

2025-26 Annual Report



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FRIENDS OF THE SMOKIES





FriendsOfTheSmokies.org



FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Friends,

As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with gratitude for the remarkable community of supporters who stand behind Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Your generosity made an extraordinary difference during one of the park's most challenging moments. When the federal government experienced its longest shutdown in history, Friends of the Smokies donors stepped forward to help ensure that the park remained fully open, staffed, and protected throughout the busy month of October. Because of you, millions of visitors continued to experience the Smokies safely, and critical resources remained cared for when they were needed most.

You also helped us achieve a transformational milestone: the successful completion of the Forever Places endowment campaign. Because of you, the park now has permanent funding for a dedicated historic preservation crew of skilled craftspeople who will protect and preserve the park's irreplaceable cultural treasures for generations to come.

Beyond these accomplishments, your annual support fuels the everyday work that makes an extraordinary impact across the park. From youth education programs and trail rehabilitation to wildlife protection, scientific discovery, resource stewardship, and visitor experiences, your generosity touches every corner of the Smokies.

In 2026, we celebrate the centennial of the Congressional Act that authorized the creation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. One hundred years ago, visionary citizens came together to establish this special place for the benefit and enjoyment of all people. Together, we are honoring their legacy by helping to ensure its care for the next 100 years.

Thank you for your partnership, your generosity, and your belief in the future of the Smokies.

With gratitude,

Dana Soehn

Dana Soehn
President and CEO,
Friends of the Smokies

FRIENDS OF THE SMOKIES



FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Smokies Team, thank you for your continued support of Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

It's been an honor in my first official year as superintendent to work alongside Friends of the Smokies. One of the greatest strengths of this park is its incredible partners who provide essential support through donations, volunteering and long-standing commitment. The partnership with Friends of the Smokies this past year has been especially inspiring to me and our staff — you have helped us meet challenges with resilience and continue fulfilling our mission to protect the Smokies for this and future generations.

Your contributions are truly helping us save lives in the Smokies. This year, the Friends helped our search and rescue team by funding two seasonal emergency responders, purchasing a new cardiac monitor for advanced life support and providing a new UTV that allows us to reach visitors more quickly and safely in the backcountry. Our search and rescue team responds to more than 350 emergencies each year, and your generosity helps them respond faster and provide critical care even in the most remote areas.

In 2026, your partnership also strengthened education, science and historic preservation efforts across the park. You helped fund accessible ranger-led programs for visitors of all abilities and provide education programs for more than 18,000 students. You contributed to the rebuilding of the historic Messer Barn and the rehabilitation of cabins throughout the park. Your investments also helped protect the park's remarkable biodiversity, from funding treatments and monitoring for threatened hemlock and ash trees to advancing bear tracking and research.

Thank you for your continued friendship and dedication to Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Sincerely,

Charles D. Sellars

Charles D. Sellars
Superintendent,
Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Celebrating 25 Years of

SMOKIES ELK

by Julie Dodd



The Cataloochee and Oconaluftee areas of Great Smoky Mountains National Park are considered some of the best locations in the country to view elk. But 25 years ago, no elk lived in the Smokies. These iconic giants had been absent from the area for more than 150 years due to overhunting.

Then in 2001, elk were reintroduced into the park thanks to a coordinated effort by several agencies and organizations, including Friends of the Smokies. This year, we celebrate the reintroduction's 25th anniversary.

Almost 1,000 people attended the release in Cataloochee Valley on Feb. 2, 2001. Initially, 25 elk were brought to the park from Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area in Kentucky.

In 2002, 27 elk from Elk Island National Park in Alberta, Canada, were added to the herd. Since then, the herd has grown to more than 250 elk. Most live in Cataloochee and Oconaluftee, in the North Carolina section of the park.

Kim Delozier, the park's chief wildlife biologist at the time, coordinated the reintroduction project. He held dozens of meetings, worked with University of Tennessee researchers and other elk experts, built community support and obtained the needed funding.

Delozier retired in 2010. He said seeing the elk released into Cataloochee Valley was the highlight of his 32-year career in the park.

"When we released the elk, it hit me. This is the fruit of our labor," Delozier said. "All those meetings. All those phone calls. It's worth it."

Park wildlife biologist Joe Yarkovich has coordinated the elk program since 2006.





Left: A large bull elk protects his territory and harem of cows during mating season in Oconaluftee. Top right: The first elk step out of a transport trailer into their new home in Cataloochee Valley on Feb. 2, 2001. Below right: The first recorded calf born in the Smokies in summer 2021.



Bull elk bugle to attract cows or challenge other males during mating season.

"It all started as an experiment to see if the elk could survive and sustain themselves. Elk are now part of the Smokies landscape," Yarkovich said.

The park has since become known as one of the best places in the country to see elk in their natural environment. Some visitors travel here specifically to see them, having a positive impact on tourism and the local economy.

"People in the park every day are excited about the elk," Yarkovich said. "They are thrilled because the elk are right there. People get out of their cars and immediately they're smiling. It's an awesome viewing opportunity."

"It's been interesting for me as a biologist to see the elk adapt to the area," Yarkovich said. "The first few years that elk were in the park, the calf survival level was really low because the elk had no experience with black bears. They didn't know how to hide their calves and how to protect them."

The elk cows found safer locations for birthing and learned to defend against bears, Yarkovich said. Park staff also relocated bears from the Cataloochee area to other areas of the park before the elk birthing season. Most of the relocated bears returned to Cataloochee, but by the time they did so, the young elk were larger and agile enough to escape.

Yarkovich called the 25th anniversary of the elk reintroduction "a great milestone."

Friends of the Smokies plays an important role in the success of the elk reintroduction. Over the years, Friends has invested more than $300,000 to support the elk project.

"Every year since the reintroduction, we've had Friends of the Smokies as a funding partner," said Yarkovich. "The equipment we are using and the people we have in the field are the direct result of Friends."

Read more about the elk reintroduction at FriendsOfTheSmokies.org/blog.

Smokies Staffed and Safe Amidst GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

Your generous support of Friends of the Smokies put us in a position to help with some unexpected expenses in 2025. As federal funding lapsed in October, Friends joined state and local governments to keep the park fully operational and staffed throughout one of the busiest visitation months of the year.

The Friends of the Smokies board voted to contribute more than $200,000 to ensure families could still experience the wonder of the park, explore places like Cades Cove, and have rangers on the job to protect the Smokies. It also meant the entire park staff was able to receive pay rather than be furloughed.

"Under extreme and unusual circumstances like the government shutdown, we have to still take care of people," said Eugene Naughton, president of Dollywood Parks & Resorts and member of the Friends of the Smokies Board of Directors. "It warms my heart to know that we're giving our park teams a chance to do what's most important to them, and that's providing a safe experience for everyone who is visiting the park."

Friends of the Smokies helped ensure park workers could still do their jobs, protect the Great Smoky Mountains and its wildlife, and serve more than 1.5 million people who visited the park in October 2025.



A ranger shows visitors a map of Cades Cove at the Visitor Information Kiosk during the government shutdown in October 2025.

Families Preserve History with

FOREVER PLACES FUNDING



Preserving more than 120 historic structures in Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a job that never ends. A crew with specialized skills in historic masonry and woodworking is required to authentically maintain these iconic places.

In 2020, Friends of the Smokies launched an ambitious campaign to raise $9 million for an endowment that would fund the salaries of a six-person team devoted to historic preservation. After years of generous donations from hundreds of supporters, the campaign crossed the finish line in dramatic fashion thanks to two incredibly generous gifts in 2025 and 2026.

In August 2025, the Colquitt Foundation announced a $750,000 donation to assist with Hurricane Helene recovery efforts, including repairs to cabins and barns from Cataloochee to Cosby. The foundation made the gift on behalf of The Swag and Cataloochee Ranch, two historic mountain retreats that Annie and David Colquitt operate on the boundary of Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Haywood County, North Carolina.

“Hurricane Helene left its mark on Cataloochee Valley,” said David Colquitt. “Cataloochee Ranch was founded in that valley, and we feel a responsibility to help. We are honored to partner with Friends of the Smokies to contribute toward its revival and restoration.”

“Cataloochee Valley is a jewel for our entire region,” said Annie Colquitt. “Its cultural, historical, environmental, and recreational value is something that cannot be replaced.”

In February 2026, Friends of the Smokies received an equally generous gift of $750,000 from The Boyd Foundation. The Boyd Foundation was launched in 2017 by Jenny and Randy Boyd along with their sons and daughter-in-law, Harrison, Thomas, and Lindsey. The Boyds' gift carried Friends of the Smokies across the finish line to complete the $9 million Forever Places endowment.

"The Great Smoky Mountains have shaped who we are," Randy and Jenny Boyd said in a letter to Friends. "Growing up, these mountains were a place of wonder, reflection, and deep connection for our family. Supporting Friends of the Smokies Forever Places is our way of ensuring that the beauty, history, and cultural significance of this extraordinary landscape are preserved for future generations. Protecting these places strengthens our community, honors our heritage, and sustains the vitality of East Tennessee for years to come."

The partial Forever Places crew has already completed large-scale rehabilitations at the Walker Sisters Cabin, Little Greenbrier Schoolhouse, Chapman-Byers Cabin in Elkmont, Elijah Oliver Cabin in Cades Cove, and John Ownby Cabin near Sugarlands Visitor Center. The crew also replaced the Cable Mill flume in Cades Cove and performs routine maintenance on the park's 126 historic structures, preventing them from falling into a level of disrepair that would require large rehabilitation projects.

While the Forever Places endowment is complete, this does not end our annual fundraising for the Forever Places program. The endowment ensures funding for the salaries of the crew members, which is only a portion of the overall cost of preserving historic structures. Your license plates and annual donations continue to make a meaningful difference in providing the crew with needed supplies, architectural plans, and internships to carry out the mission of the Forever Places program.

In 2026, Friends of the Smokies contributed $560,000 for the program. That includes $410,000 for staffing, supplies, materials, and tools for this specialized work. Another $90,000 funds the contract of a historic architect. The architect performs critical foundational work to design repairs and create rehabilitation solutions for projects.

Another key element of the Forever Places program is the Straker Renovation Fund. Ed and Diane Straker of Boston, Virginia, established the fund in 2025 due to their passion for historic preservation. The fund contributes $100,000 annually with $60,000 devoted to internships with the Forever Places crew. The interns gain valuable hands-on experience working alongside Great Smoky Mountains National Park professionals in the management of historic resources.

"We are beyond grateful to the Colquitt, Boyd, and Straker families for helping us reach significant milestones with the Forever Places program," said Dana Soehn, president and CEO of Friends of the Smokies. "It means we can confidently say the park will have the funds to ensure future generations can walk in the footsteps of history at the most-visited national park in the country."

Left: Forever Places crew member Rob Sanders nails new handcrafted boards to the interior of the smokehouse at Tipton Place in Cades Cove. Below: The smokehouse at the Elijah Oliver Cabin in Cades Cove is shown in January 2025 before its restoration and in November 2025 after the project's completion.





Cheers for VOLUNTEERS

We cannot adequately express our gratitude for our many supporters who donate their time to help Friends of the Smokies. Our volunteers made 2025 an amazing year. Nearly 200 people volunteered more than 3,000 hours of service. That time is valued at more than $110,000, but the impact is priceless.

Our office volunteers counted dollars and pennies from donation boxes in the park. Our ambassadors represented Friends at 22 community events. Our hike advisory team led more than 175 hikers on group treks covering more than 125 miles of trail. Volunteers for our special fundraising events helped host more than 1,800 people and netted almost $1 million. Volunteer photographers help us capture and share these generous moments with you.

Friends of the Smokies presented Fran Clark with our "Friend of the Year" award for 2025. For more than 15 years, Fran has spent nearly every Tuesday volunteering in our office to help our finance team.

Thank you to all our volunteers for being Friends of the Smokies!



Far left: Volunteer Fran Clark receives the "Friend of the Year" award from Friends of the Smokies CFO Nan Jones. Left: Friends of the Smokies volunteers and staff attend the volunteer appreciation party held at the Appalachian Clubhouse in Elkmont.

A Great Smoky Mountains
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Your support of Friends of the Smokies turns the most-visited national park into an incredible hands-on classroom for students and educators. That includes $555,600 for education staffing, outreach initiatives, and a variety of resource education programs.

Education programs in North Carolina and Tennessee reach more than 34,000 students and 400 teachers. These funds also support educational programs at the Appalachian Highlands Science Learning Center as well as the Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont.

We'd like to recognize one of our special partners through the years, as 2026 marks a quarter-century of significant giving by Arconic to support educational programming in the Smokies. Since 2001, Arconic has provided funds totaling more than $700,000 to support education in the Smokies. These grants fund the Parks as Classrooms program, including teacher training workshops and STEM-based field trips for students. This partnership continues to create meaningful, hands-on STEM learning experiences while expanding access to the park for students who might not otherwise have the opportunity. Thank you to Arconic for being such a loyal Friend of the Smokies.



Interpretive ranger Omar Campos speaks to students from the Clinton, Tennessee, chapter of the Boys & Girls Clubs.

Trails Forever Crew Bullish on BULLHEAD TRAIL

by Julie Dodd





Bullhead Trail leading to Mount Le Conte and LeConte Lodge has been undergoing restoration work since spring 2025.

The nearly six-mile trail, built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps, is being restored by the Trails Forever Crew funded by Friends of the Smokies. The seven-person crew aims to complete the restoration by November 2026.

The goals of the restoration are to improve hiking safety and reduce erosion. The improved trail enables the park's search and rescue teams to better reach injured hikers and quickly transport them to medical care.

In addition to working on Bullhead Trail, the seven-person Trails Forever crew also worked on the top sections of Rainbow Falls Trail, Alum Cave Trail, Trillium Gap Trail and Boulevard Trail to improve drainage around the Mount Le Conte summit.

Friends of the Smokies contributed $643,000 during 2025 to fund the Trails Forever Crew and the crew's equipment and materials. Friends also provided $180,000 to support an assisting six-person American Conservation Experience (ACE) Crew and a six-person Southeastern Conservation Corps (SECC) Crew.

"Without the support from Friends of the Smokies, the rehabilitation of Bullhead Trail would not be possible," said Josh Shapiro, Trails Forever Crew supervisor.

In 2025, the Trails Forever Crew built 33 staircases — two stone staircases and 31 locust log staircases. The stone step sections were built from stone found near the trail. The crew split the stone using hand tools to create stairs with a consistent step height.

Shapiro also credited volunteers for contributing 416 hours to restoring the trail.

"We were fortunate to have such a dedicated and hardworking volunteer crew on Bullhead Trail this year that took a lot of pride in completing high-quality work," Shapiro said.

Bullhead Trail is the eighth trail restored since the Trails Forever program began in 2012. The Friends of the Smokies Trails Forever Crew has restored Abrams Falls Trail, Alum Cave Trail, Chimney Tops Trail, Forney Ridge Trail, Rainbow Falls Trail, Ramsey Cascades Trail and Trillium Gap Trail.

The $8 million endowment that supports the Trails Forever crew was started in 2008 by a generous $2.3 million grant from the Aslan Foundation, which was established by avid hiker and Friends of the Smokies founding board member Lindsay Young.



Far left: Stone found near the trail was cut and shaped to create staircases. Left: Crew members and volunteers widen sections of the trail and improve the trail surface. Right: Members of the Civilian Conservation Corps construct Bullhead Trail in Great Smoky Mountains National Park in a photo taken July 30, 1935, by T.K. Pease.

Bolstering the KUWOHI BYPASS



In 2025, your donations provided $155,000 for an additional trail crew to rehabilitate the popular Kuwohi Bypass Trail. The work included regrading eroded sections, erosion control, construction of water bars and drainage structures, and replacement of stairs.

If you're unfamiliar with the Kuwohi Bypass Trail, it provides an alternate route from the Kuwohi parking area to the Appalachian Trail near Kuwohi's summit. Many use the bypass as part of a loop to the observation tower, going up the paved trail and down the bypass (or vice versa).

Thanks to your support, the bypass will be a much safer and enjoyable hike for years to come. Thank you, Friends!

Before and after photos show the NPS backcountry trails crew's efforts to improve the surface and drainage of the Kuwohi Bypass Trail.

New Marker an MST MILESTONE

At the foot of the Kuwohi Observation Tower at the highest peak in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, a new stone marker now announces the western terminus of North Carolina's Mountains-to-Sea Trail (MST).

The park unveiled the marker in April 2026, a milestone moment for the 1,175-mile MST. The footpath crosses North Carolina from the Tennessee state line at Kuwohi to the Atlantic Ocean at Jockey's Ridge State Park on the Outer Banks. In addition to serving as a starting or finishing point for hikers, the marker will also raise awareness of the trail due to its location at one of the most popular sites in the most-visited national park in the country.

Danny Bernstein of Asheville is an avid hiker, outdoor writer and volunteer for Friends of the Smokies. She was a driving force in the effort to create the western terminus marker after completing the MST in 2011.

"This marker means a lot," said Bernstein. "It is beautiful. It is obvious. It has a very nice description of what the MST is on a plaque. Now we'll have more people seeing this marker and thinking about the trail starting here. And people will want to get their picture taken at the marker looking through the stone."

Friends of the Smokies donated the new marker, commissioning Knoxville artist Preston Farabow to create it from local stone.

"We're grateful that the Mountains-to-Sea Trail now has a more visible presence at Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and even more grateful for the partners who made it possible," said Superintendent Charlie Sellars.



Danny Bernstein, Friends of MST Executive Director Brent Laurenz, artist Preston Farabow, and Friends of the Smokies President and CEO Dana Soehn unveil the new western terminus marker for the Mountains-to-Sea Trail in April 2026.

Resurrecting
MESSER BARN IN GREENBRIER

In the Greenbrier area of Great Smoky Mountains National Park along Porters Creek Trail, the 156-year-old John Messer Barn is one of the few remaining examples of architecture and life in a once thriving community.

The park was at risk of losing the double-cantilever barn after severe weather damaged the aging structure. In 2023, a powerful windstorm caused the roof to collapse. Park crews preserved any materials they could from the ravaged barn. The park ultimately decided that the only way to preserve the landmark was to rebuild it entirely.



Construction crews completed framing the roof at John Messer Barn in May and June 2026.

Thanks to your support, Friends of the Smokies was able to provide more than $500,000 toward rebuilding John Messer Barn. Crews have already made considerable progress and expect to complete the project in fall 2026.

"We want to be able to preserve that for future generations," said Aspen Williams, a civil engineer with Great Smoky Mountains National Park. "We are preserving the style of architecture and the style of construction methods. The goal is for the look and feel of the structure to be the same as it was."

The park chose AJCE Corporation as the head contractor for the project, with much of the work subcontracted to local company Todd Almas Construction. From each beam and wooden stud to the restored loft, crews used thoughtful methods and materials to convey the barn's historic character.

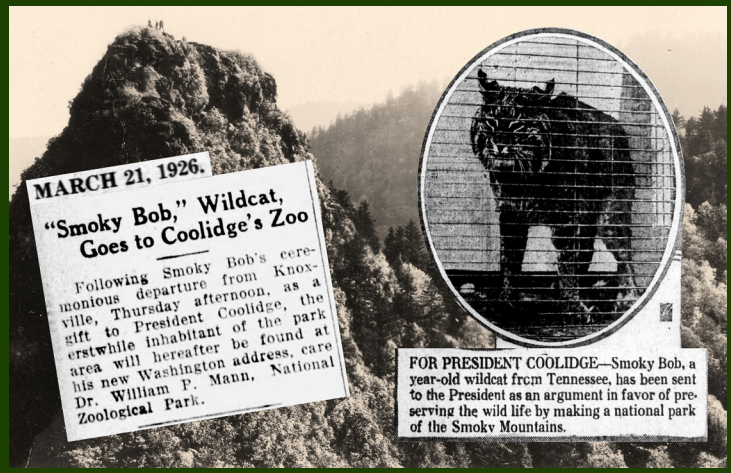
"We're proud that funds raised have helped rebuild Messer Barn. The barn is a powerful reminder of the people who once called these mountains home," said Dana Soehn, CEO and president of Friends of the Smokies. "Ensuring visitors can visit iconic places such as the John Messer Barn means we can share the park's cultural heritage for generations."

100 YEARS AGO IN THE SMOKIES

This year we celebrate the centennial of an important milestone in the creation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. United States President Calvin Coolidge approved two new national parks in the Smokies and Shenandoah on May 22, 1926.

Approval in 1926 came after years of lobbying. Local conservation groups gave federal leaders tours of the Smokies, shared dazzling photographs and even donated a live bobcat named "Smoky Bob" to the president and the zoo in Washington, D.C.

But federal approval in 1926 was just the beginning. For the park to become a reality, Tennessee and North Carolina had to acquire land and donate it to the federal government. After years of fundraising and buying land, the states transferred deeds for 150,000 acres of the Smokies to officially become National Park Service property on Feb. 6, 1930. President Roosevelt officially dedicated the park at a ceremony at Newfound Gap on Sept. 2, 1940.



HOOFING IT FOR HALF A CENTURY



Danny Gibson continues the legacy of training, organizing and caring for the pack mules and horses in the Smokies.

In April 2026, the national park celebrated 50 years of mules working in the Smokies, holding a ceremony at Tow String Barn to commemorate the moment.

The animal packing program started in 1976 after much of the Smokies was proposed for designation as a wilderness area, which restricted the use of motor vehicles on backcountry trails. In came the mules, and they've been delivering vital supplies to crews ever since.

Your support of Friends of the Smokies has purchased several members of the mule team. Support even came in the form of auctioning the chance to name some of the animals. Our most recent auction in 2024 led to a mule being dubbed "Jake," a name selected by auction winners to honor Friends of the Smokies Board Vice Chair Jake Ogle.

HART'S LEGACY
Lives On



The very essence of Friends of the Smokies is forever rooted in what we learned from President Emeritus Jim Hart. Hart died Feb. 5, 2026.

Hart was a revered figure in East Tennessee as a longtime leader in the community and the broadcast industry. He developed a love of broadcasting while working as a young man at WBIR-TV in Knoxville, where his father was the station's first general manager. Jim continued his own prodigious broadcasting career as the general manager of television stations in Winston-Salem, North Carolina and Cincinnati, Ohio. He returned to his roots at WBIR in the 1980s, where he helped develop its "Straight from the Heart" brand as well as The Heartland Series, a longtime award-winning program that proudly shared the richness of the Smokies and Appalachian culture. He went on to serve in a national leadership role as senior vice president of Scripps Howard Broadcasting and vice president for The E.W. Scripps Company until his retirement in 2001.

Hart soon took on a new role as executive director of Friends of the Smokies in 2002, growing the nonprofit into the flourishing organization it is today. Hart helped create endowments that fund the restoration of the park's most beloved trails and the preservation of its historic structures. He utilized his connections for a long-running telethon to benefit the park that aired in Asheville and Knoxville.

Hart served as a leader and mentor with an unwavering sense of humility, always giving credit to others. He kept the focus on a collective mission to help the national park he loved his entire life. In 2016, *Smokies Life Magazine* (now *Smokies Life Journal*) named Hart one of the 100 most influential people in the history of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Because of him, the Smokies are a better place.

In 2026, the Friends of the Smokies Board of Directors established the Heart of the Smokies fund in honor of Hart. Tribute gifts will continue to be added to this fund, which will be used to support critical needs in the park each year.

Longtime Friends of the Smokies advocate and president, the late Jim Hart.

LEADERSHIP

Board Members

Sharon Miller Pryse (Chair)
Jake Ogle (Vice Chair)
Nancy Daves (Secretary)
Laura Webb (Treasurer)
Hon. Gary Wade
(Founding Chair Emeritus)
Rev. Dr. Dan Matthews (Chair Emeritus)
Mark Williams (Chair Emeritus)

Kevin Anton
Scott Bane
David Colquitt
Cindi DeBusk
Steve Gigliotti
Eugene Naughton
Heath Shuler
Chad Smith
Annie Vanderwerken

Honorary Board Members

Jenny Boyd
Kay Clayton
Victoria (Vicky) Fulmer
Phillip Fulmer
Bruce Hartmann
James (Jim) Haslam II
Luke Hyde
Dale Keasling
John Mason
Diane (Deener) Matthews
Jim Ogle
Linda Ogle
Chase Pickering
Meridith Elliott Powell
Dr. Rob Powell
Robert Tino
Kristin Williams
Marilyn Wright

In Memoriam: Mimi Cecil, Wilma Maples, Jack Williams

Emeritus Board Members

John Dickson
Mary Johnson
David White
Stephen W. Woody
In Memoriam: Dr. Myron "Barney" Coulter, Jim Hart (President Emeritus), Natalie Haslam, Leon Jones, Kathryn McNeil, Judy Morton, Wilma Dykeman Stokely, John B. Waters Jr., Lindsay Young

FRIENDS OF THE SMOKIES

Our Staff

Dana Soehn, *President and Chief Executive Officer*
Nan Jones, *Finance Director and Chief Financial Officer*
David Aranda, *Accountant*
Debbie Speelman, *Database and Accounting Associate*
Kathryn Hemphill, *Chief Development Officer*
Lauren Gass, *Philanthropy Director*
Krista Heilmeier, *Development Manager*
Hannah Kincade, *Development Associate*
Lindsay Howell, *Special Events Director*
Amy Marshall, *Special Events Manager*
Jim Matheny, *Communications Director*
Olivia Wright, *Outreach Coordinator*



2025 FINANCIALS

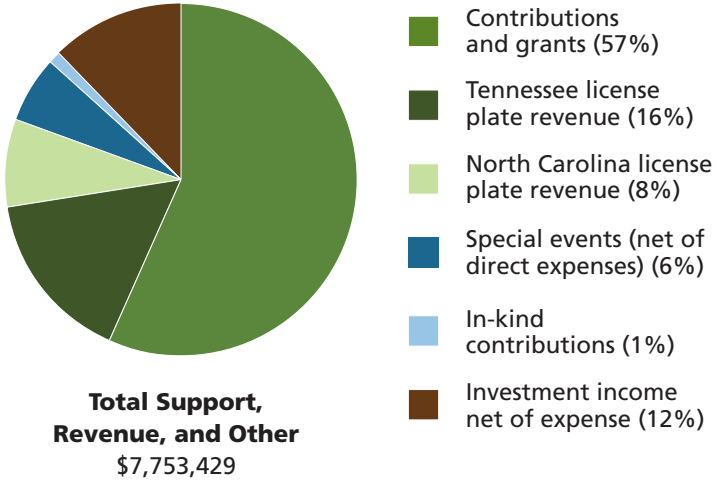
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

ASSETS	2025
CURRENT ASSETS	
Cash/Cash equivalents	$5,090,159
Certificates of deposit	$2,270,700
Accounts receivable	$482,536
Prepaid expenses	$67,962
LONG-TERM ASSETS	
Investments (endowments)	$27,260,482
Property and equipment (net of accumulated depreciation)	$121,502
Other assets (right of use, beneficial assets, life insurance)	$623,622
Total Assets	**$35,916,963**

LIABILITIES	2025
CURRENT LIABILITIES	
Accounts payable	$14,304
Current portion of long-term lease	$29,137
Deferred revenue	$468,648
LONG-TERM LIABILITIES	
Long-term lease liability	$215,679
NET ASSETS	
Net Assets without donor restrictions	$6,753,092
Net Assets with board designation	$1,017,558
Net Assets with donor restrictions	$27,418,545
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	**$35,916,963**

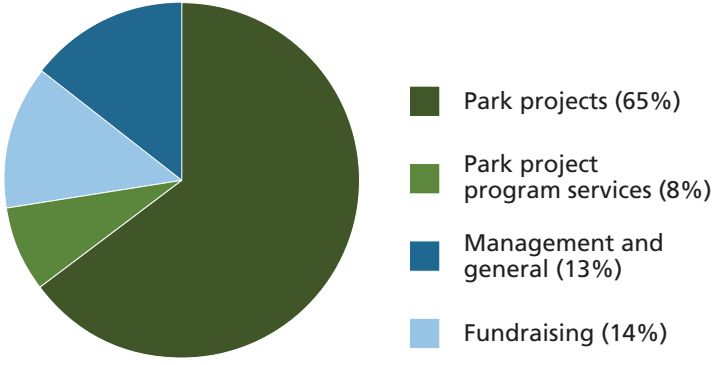
STATEMENT OF ACTIVITY

TOTAL SUPPORT & REVENUE	2025
Contributions and grants	$4,408,877
Tennessee license plate revenue	$1,217,419
North Carolina license plate revenue	$623,447
Special events (net of direct expenses)	$475,932
In-kind contributions	$100,670
Investment income	$927,084
Total Support, Revenue, and Other	**$7,753,429**



Total Support, Revenue, and Other
$7,753,429

EXPENSES	2025
Park projects	$3,418,468
Park project program services	$420,125
Management and general	$687,477
Fundraising	$749,915
Total Expenses	**$5,275,985**



Total Expenses
$5,275,985

OTHER INCOME/EXPENSES	
Unrealized gain / (loss) on investments	$1,875,526

CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	2025
Net assets at beginning of year	$30,836,226
Current year asset growth	$4,352,969
Net Assets at End of Year	**$35,189,195**

Note: There are slight variances in figures due to rounding. The amounts presented here are derived from audited financial statements of Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park for the year ending December 31, 2025. Copies of the complete audited financial statements of Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park are available upon request and on our website.

WE SALUTE YOU



Thank you to all who supported Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 2025. Every contribution made a significant impact, enhancing the experiences of visitors and ensuring the continued protection of this natural treasure for generations to come. Together, we are building a brighter future for the Great Smokies.

THANK YOU

In 2025, the following individuals, foundations, businesses and partners generously contributed $1,000 or more to Friends of the Smokies:

$1,000-$2,499

Anonymous
Cathy G. Ackermann
Tim Alexander and Beth Zabriskie
Larry R. Ammons
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THE 1934 SOCIETY



"Music of the Smokies"





Purchase Knob hike



"The Smokies Rock"



LEAVING A LEGACY OF GIVING

At Twin Creeks Science Center in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, a backlog of collected plant samples seemed destined to languish on the backburner. Then Janie Bitner, a retired banker with a background in botany, volunteered to help.

"They said I'd never get it caught up. I thought to myself, I don't usually start things I don't finish. It took me exactly four years to get all of these plants into the collection for further research. It took a lot of time, but I did it," said Bitner, smiling. "It's very important that we preserve these things for future generations."

Bitner continues to give back by volunteering in the park. She also wants her gifts to extend beyond her life. That's why she decided to establish a planned gift to support Friends of the Smokies.

"I am passionate about preservation. That is my character," Bitner said. "Without Friends of the Smokies receiving dollars and donations, they won't be able to help the park when they're in need for future generations."

Bitner noted planned giving through her estate comes with tax benefits while helping to keep the Smokies healthy for years to come.

"When you are doing estate planning, think about entities you'd like to support. Make those decisions while you still can, while you're alive. Don't let someone else make those decisions after you're gone," said Bitner. "That is the banker in me. I planned for my retirement. I'm going to plan for my death."

Naming Friends of the Smokies a beneficiary of her estate not only helps the national park in the future, it also comes with an immediate reward.

"I think when we do good things, we feel good," said Bitner. "This is definitely a good thing. If you feel passionate about Friends of the Smokies and Great Smoky Mountains National Park, make it happen."

To learn more about how to help Friends of the Smokies through legacy giving while meeting your own financial goals, visit FriendsOfTheSmokies.org/legacy.



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

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North Carolina Office
PO Box 3179
Asheville, NC 28802
84 Coxe Ave., Suite 200
Asheville, NC 28801
(828) 452-0720

Tennessee Office
3099 Winfield Dunn Parkway
PO Box 1660
Kodak, TN 37764
(865) 932-4794

FriendsOfTheSmokies.org
info@FriendsOfTheSmokies.org