

## **Outdoor News for the CMC area – and more**

by Danny Bernstein

By the time you read this, the deadline for comments on the Pisgah-Nantahala Forest plan will have passed. But there's plenty of other outdoor news.

### **DuPont State Recreational Forest to charge an entrance fee?**

With hiking, biking, horse riders and just plain nature lovers, it's predicted that there will be over 900,000 visitors this year in DuPont Forest. So it's no surprise that the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services are thinking of charging an entrance fee for the forest.



After a lot of discussion and delays, NC Governor Roy Cooper signed [State Bill 390](#) that will authorize a study to impose entrance fees for DuPont State Recreational Forest. The bill states in part that the commission should set fees to favor North Carolinians and require out-of-staters to pay more. Fair enough, since the state forest is funded by North Carolina taxpayers.

Now that the bill has passed, there's going to be a study. Any recommendation for legislative action needs to ensure that forest fees are only used for the capital, maintenance, and operational needs of the forest. They need to create a plan for a sustainable income stream that will help preserve and protect the forest. The group that will work out the details of the issue will report back August 2021; it's a long time from now.

### **Pipeline under the Appalachian Trail**

A pipeline company has been petitioning the US Forest Service to build a natural gas pipeline in the George Washington National Forest. The pipeline would cross under the Appalachian Trail. On June 15, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the pipeline company. The 7-2 decision overturned one part of a lower court decision that had blocked construction of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

The proposed pipeline will run from West Virginia to population centers in Virginia and North Carolina. In central Virginia, the pipeline would cross hundreds of feet underground beneath the Appalachian Trail where the trail runs through the George Washington National Forest. The big question was whether the pipeline would be on Forest land or National Park land, since the A.T. is a unit of the National Park Service.



Justice Clarence Thomas wrote the majority opinion. Thomas states that the Park Service held only an easement for the A.T. through the Forest, while the U.S. Forest Service still controlled how the land was used and so under the Mineral Leasing Act could grant the right-of-way.

A good discussion of the issues are in [National Parks Traveler](#).

## **The Great American Outdoors Act - Funding for the Outdoors**

On June 17, the U.S. Senate passed the Great American Outdoors Act by a vote of 73-25, including yea votes from North Carolina's two senators, Richard Burr and Thom Tillis. The bill was co-sponsored by Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tennessee), a champion of Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

The bill, which now moves to the House for final passage, would fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a popular, long-time program that has been on the current administration's chopping block in recent years.

The LWCF invests in national parks, public lands, and communities across the country. LWCF would improve access points, expand trails and services, and create new parks and outdoor green spaces at no cost to U.S. taxpayers, by drawing funds from off-shore drilling receipts.

The Outdoors Act would also provide billions of dollars to help address the backlog of deferred maintenance in America's national parks, including those in WNC – Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Dana Soehn, public affairs officer for the Smokies, said the park received about \$19 million a year from the federal government for everyday operations, including maintenance. For larger maintenance projects, the Smokies has to bid against the other 418 national parks for funding. With more than \$200 million of maintenance backlog, Soehn said that 80% of that are deteriorating roadways. There are 384 miles of roadway in the park with 6,000 visitors driving them every day.

At this point, we should all write to our Congressional Representative to vote for this bill. But those of us living in Western North Carolina in the 11<sup>th</sup> District don't have a representative – the post is vacant.

**From the Fontana Village website:**

If you're a Smokies hiker that uses the boat shuttle across Fontana Lake:

To all Fontana Village Resort & Marina guests, friends, and family: We wanted to let you all know that the recent Owners of Fontana Village Resort have decided to surrender their lease back to TVA as of June 1, 2020. This was a difficult decision to make, but due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic and the loss of a big part of the 2020 season, they have decided not to continue the lease on the property. TVA is actively looking at the future possibilities for Fontana Village Resort & Marina, but we currently do not have a planned opening date. There are a lot of details to work out between both businesses before any announcement can be made.

**Great Smoky Mountains National Park**

And ending on a happy note: Great Smoky Mountains National Park celebrated its 86<sup>th</sup> birthday on June 15. Though the park needs a lot of maintenance, it looks really good for 86 years old. Happy, belated, birthday.