Another chance for our Blue Ridge scenery

Renewed efforts in the General Assembly

As North Carolina’s chief budget writers decide whether to revise the state’s spending plan, they have a fresh opportunity to restore critical preservation funds—and put those dollars to work conserving the vulnerable landscapes that run along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Last summer, in an incredibly short-sighted move, the General Assembly all but eliminated the funds that preserve open space across North Carolina and restricted the Clean Water Fund from acquiring land. So, as state leaders contemplate the next budget, Environment North Carolina staff are hard at work in Raleigh, urging them to change course dramatically.

Environment North Carolina members and supporters joined the fight too, signing petitions to their local leaders, and placing phone calls to the General Assembly, urging them to restore funds to North Carolina’s cornerstone preservation programs.

“The Blue Ridge Mountains are a special part of North Carolina,” said Elizabeth Ouzts, Environment North Carolina state director. “We’re working to make sure state lawmakers don’t forget that this year.”

Our treasured landscapes need help

The Blue Ridge Parkway brings millions of visitors to Mount Mitchell, Looking Glass Falls and the most beautiful vistas and scenic overlooks in America.

As a result, driving down the Parkway feels like a trip through a national park, just what its creators intended when they built it 75 years ago. We have North Carolina’s conservation efforts partially to thank for the incredible views.

State programs key to Blue Ridge

In 1986, the state began creating programs designed to purchase undeveloped parcels of land and preserve them forever. Today, in contrast, thousands of acres of undisturbed mountain landscape hang in the balance.

“I grew up just down the road from the Blue Ridge Parkway and its breathtaking views,” said Ouzts. “And we won’t rest until its gorgeous scenery is preserved forever.”

Two-thirds of the scenery surrounding the Blue Ridge Parkway is unprotected.

State leaders slashed funds that could go to work protecting threatened Blue Ridge scenery.

Read more and take action online.
To our members

It’s the summer, and that means two things. First, our lawmakers are returning to Raleigh for a brief six-week session. Second, the college students and other members of my team are beginning to knock on your doors, wearing our signature blue T-shirts.

After all, Environment North Carolina’s first goal is to bring the voice of the average North Carolinian to bear in the decisions that impact the state’s air, water and open spaces. And the more time we spend talking to you, the more effective we are.

Last year, for instance, our canvassers gathered thousands upon thousands of signatures, helping to convince the governor to veto the General Assembly’s anti-environmental budget. Our task this year? To finish the job.

With your support, I believe we can make it happen.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Ouzts, State Director

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Recent action

New report reveals benefits of offshore wind

A new Environment North Carolina Research & Policy Center report reveals offshore wind has the potential to create three times as many jobs as offshore drilling, without posing any of the same risks to our beaches or thriving tourism industry.

Further, by tapping just a fraction of the winds off our shores, we could provide all of North Carolina’s energy needs. In the coming months, Environment North Carolina will be urging decision-makers to take advantage of this powerful resource, and begin to ease our state’s reliance on coal and other dirty fuel sources. “Despite our enormous potential for offshore wind energy and the boon it would be for North Carolina’s environment and economy, too many opinion leaders remain focused on promoting energy sources of the past,” said report author and Environment North Carolina Policy Advocate Margaret Hartzell.

Air pollution limits at stake

The state’s tough pollution limits on toxic air emissions are still under attack.

Last year, at the urging of Environment North Carolina and allied groups, the General Assembly stopped some of our worst polluters from undoing state limits on toxic air pollution. Unfortunately, lobbyists from polluting industries are back again this year, in an attempt to roll back limits on 21 pollutants, including dioxin, mercury vapor and several types of acid not regulated under federal standards. The state’s limits on toxic pollutants are particularly critical for children, the elderly and others vulnerable to air pollution.

“It won’t be easy,” said Environment North Carolina Policy Advocate Margaret Hartzell. “But if enough of us speak out, we can drown out the chemical industry and other polluters to ensure that North Carolinians are protected from toxic air pollution.”

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How do you want to be remembered?

You can be remembered as someone who cared enough to keep up the fight for a cleaner, greener, healthier future by making a bequest to Environment North Carolina or the Environment North Carolina Research & Policy Center.

For information, call: 1-800-841-7299, or email PlannedGiving@EnvironmentNorthCarolina.org.
On March 27, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed limits on carbon pollution from new power plants. If passed, they will be the first nationwide limits on the largest single source of the carbon pollution that fuels global warming.

As scientists, doctors and other experts have been warning us for years, cutting this carbon pollution is critical because global warming will bring everything from dirtier air and more deadly heat waves, to more devastating floods and extreme weather.

**In the Path of the Storm**

In the weeks before the EPA’s historic announcement, the Environment North Carolina Research & Policy Center released a report documenting the many reasons to cut carbon pollution. The report, “In the Path of the Storm,” found that hurricanes like Irene—which killed six last year—could be more severe in the future because of global warming. Nearly half the state's population has been hit by an extreme weather event since 2006, according to the county-by-county data examined in the study.

Across the country, our national federation’s on-the-ground organizers are gathering tens of thousands of public comments in support of the standards, holding press events to help raise the profile of the issue, and reaching out to public health groups and local environmental groups to demonstrate broad support.

If all goes well, the EPA is expected to finalize these carbon pollution standards for new power plants by the end of 2012, and begin developing standards for existing coal-fired power plants in the near future.

We also launched an interactive online map, available at www.Environment-NorthCarolina.org, where citizens can see state by state and even county-by-county records of which weather-related disasters hit when, and then take action in support of EPA carbon pollution limits. The report and map received extensive press attention, including stories in The Washington Post and USA Today.

The real battle began after the EPA’s announcement, as utilities, coal companies and other corporate polluters began spending millions to convince the Obama administration into thinking that we can’t afford to adopt these commonsense standards.

We know that we can't afford to not adopt carbon pollution standards for power plants, so we joined our national federation, Environment America, in launching a push to educate and mobilize citizens in support of the standards here in North Carolina as well as in Pennsylvania, Virginia and Ohio—all states we know will be in the spotlight this election year.

Environment North Carolina helped to kill this proposal in its early stages, rallying hundreds of supporters to sign petitions to their legislators.

“Keeping our state parks well maintained and open—and creating new ones for Tar Heels to enjoy—should be a no-brainer for decision makers in North Carolina,” said Elizabeth Ouzts, state director for Environment North Carolina.

“We’ll continue to work this summer to protect dedicated funding for our state parks.”

Visit our website to take action, and urge our budget writers to preserve open space in N.C.
General Assembly to re-examine “fracking”

As public concern intensified over potential “fracking,” more than a thousand North Carolinians turned out to public hearings in Sanford, Chapel Hill, and Pittsboro, following Gov. Bev Perdue’s unexpected support for this controversial form of onshore gas drilling. The majority of those in attendance urged the General Assembly to exercise extreme caution as it considered fracking, which could threaten the Deep River, Jordan Lake, the Eno River and the drinking water for up to 2.4 million Tar Heels, if leaders lifted North Carolina’s ban.

Last year, with our strong support, Gov. Perdue vetoed a pro-fracking, pro-drilling measure. But the real fight for our drinking water and threatened landscapes begins this year.

Sen. Bob Rucho has already proposed legislation to legalize fracking as soon as 2014. Environment North Carolina staff will continue lobbying decision-makers to defend our waters and our rural landscapes.