

## Farewell Holly Demuth, Welcome Jim Grode

Farewell Holly Demuth, Welcome Jim Grode  
WaysSouth bids a fond farewell to Holly Demuth who resigned as our executive director to pursue another career path. We appreciate the excellent work she did with the Corridor K projects, in continuing the Stop I-3 effort, and in organizing the superb Railroad Task Force. Her leadership skills will be missed by all of us.

At the Jan. 15, 2009 board of directors meeting, the board voted to hire Jim Grode as the executive director. Grode has been a member of the board of directors of WaysSouth. He is an environmental lawyer who formerly worked for the Southern Environmental Law Center in Atlanta, oversaw the Turner Environmental Law Clinic at Emory University School of Law and has worked in private practice. Grode has written for numerous legal publications and recently prepared the WaysSouth position letter to Mr. Ed Lewis of the North Carolina Department of Transportation Human Environment Unit. This position letter may be read by visiting [www.corridork.org](http://www.corridork.org) and clicking on "letters." We welcome him to the position and look forward to his leadership.



Work on WaysSouth's major projects has continued for the past quarter. The rock slides that closed U.S. 64 at the Ocoee Gorge and I-40 in North Carolina three miles from the Tennessee line show the problems encountered when roads are carved into mountains. The rock slide at the Ocoee Gorge was the second slide in a matter of hours and Vanessa Bateman, a geologist with the Tennessee Department of Transportation, undoubtedly saved many lives by warning of the impending second

slide which was caught on video by the station WDEF Chattanooga. To see the rockslide video, go to [www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/11/11/rockslide-in-tennessee-ca\\_n\\_354003.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/11/11/rockslide-in-tennessee-ca_n_354003.html). To check on the current work, go to [www.tdot.state.tn.us/us64rockslide](http://www.tdot.state.tn.us/us64rockslide). The Tennessee DOT has announced that the highway will reopen by March 31.

WaysSouth's position is that this highway should be improved to be made as safe as possible rather than building a new highway. Four-lane highways are even more susceptible to rock slides, and there is no guarantee that a new highway would not experience closings from rock slides. Also, the need for an improved, safe highway to link the two sides of Polk County is now, not many years in the future. Improving the current U. S. 64 is the quickest way to provide adequate access from one side of the county to the other.

Major letter writing campaigns were conducted on the need for a two-lane option to be considered for the Corridor K Highway that is proposed to pass from Robbinsville, N.C. to Almond, N.C. and through the Stecoah Valley. Our thanks go to the Corridor K Task Force, particularly Sally Lassiter, for leadership in this effort. Thanks also to all those who wrote letters. Letters can be read by visiting [www.corridork.org](http://www.corridork.org) and clicking on letters.

If you have time and talents to share, please contact [volunteer@waysouth.org](mailto:volunteer@waysouth.org). As a grassroots organization, the work of WaysSouth depends on volunteers and supporters like you.  
*Lucy Bartlett, Chair, Board of Directors, WaysSouth*

## **BREAKING NEWS: TWO-LANE CORRIDOR K OPTION MUST BE CONSIDERED**

**The Army Corps of Engineers has informed NCDOT that it must consider an improved two-lane option for Corridor K in NC. The Army Corps letter and a joint press release are available on the [WaysSouth website](http://WaysSouth.org). This sends NCDOT back to the drawing board and requires them to prepare**

**and obtain comment on a full analysis of the two-lane alternative we have been advocating. This is a great outcome and, as you will see from the letter, is a direct result of the great work done by our volunteers who sent in comments to the Corps.**

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Teamwork and "gracious professionalism" are pretty heady core values for a group of young boys. But those values fit the Rabun County chapter of the F.I.R.S.T. Lego League (FLL).

I visited the league last month because I had heard the youngsters are passionate about improving transportation conditions in our area--a mission shared with WaysSouth. The group of six Rabun County boys ages 8-11 was featured last fall on Atlanta's 11 Alive TV news station as well as by local radio station Sky 104 for their efforts to improve traffic safety and flow at the busy intersection of Boggs Mountain Road and U.S. 441 near Clayton GA. But why did this become their mission and what was the connection with those tiny plastic building blocks known as LEGOs? I interviewed the boys and their coach, Mrs. Jan Nash, to learn more.

The "F.I.R.S.T." in the organization's title means: For Inspiration, Recognition, Science and Technology. FLL is one level of an international organization that was started by U.S. inventor Dean Kamen and Denmark's LEGO Group to inspire young people's interest and participation in science and technology. More than 140,000 children from 56 countries participate in small teams of six to 10. Each team is assigned two projects. The first is to design, build and program a robot using LEGO mechanical and computer technology. The second challenge is to research a real-world community problem on a given topic and to design solutions to solve that problem. For 2009-10, the challenge topic has been "Smart Move--how to make transportation safe and efficient."

The Rabun County F.I.R.S.T. LEGO League, or the "techno dudes" as they call themselves, spent months learning about transportation issues in our part of the country, from the literal to the abstract. Their journey led them to WaysSouth chair, Lucy Bartlett, who was a guest speaker at one of their meetings. She explained the issues surrounding the proposed Interstate 3, which is slated to go through their backyards. "I-3 made us angry," said "techno dude" Grayson Lane. "But after voting on possible topics, we decided to try and solve a local safety problem we drive through every day."

With backing from grassroots efforts, the school system, and county and state officials, the "dudes" performed a traffic flow study and observed the intersection area near their school. With their first-hand observations, the "dudes" identified that the proximity of the access road created a gridlock and a hazard. The "dudes" brainstormed ideas and talked to transportation engineers for validation. They took their findings to the Rabun County Board of Commissioners



*F.I.R.S.T. Lego League winners from Rabun County GA*

and presented a three phase proposal for action and called for a study of their proposed solutions to the traffic flow issues. The commissioners listened to the team and began implementing the first phase within days. There is now a sign posted that asks vehicles to not block traffic flow, and the commission is considering a study of the entire area--all based on recommendations of the local F.I.R.S.T. LEGO League.

Looking to the future and county plans for a new school and multi-purpose arena in the area, the "techno dudes" have also recommended that the Georgia Department of Transportation consider a Smart Grid camera light system at the intersection. The system would include a wide angle camera and pavement sensors to detect and control intersection traffic.

The Rabun "techno dudes" won first place for their project presentation at the FLL Super Regional competition in January.

And what about their robot? "We've still got some bugs to work out with our robot before the next competition," explained team member Garrett Lane.

I watched as the robot designed and built by their team rolled through a complicated course on a 4X6 foot flat board

and attempted to complete tasks. The robot was not cooperating the afternoon of my visit.

"Whether or not we win, we're learning a lot, having fun, and making a difference," stated the youngest team member Jeremy Nash.

The team has also learned valuable lessons in civics, among those the fact that it is very difficult to change the course of government agencies and that state and local governments don't necessarily communicate well with each other.

"But these boys have no trouble telling it like it is," said Coach Nash. She smiled and described how the team boldly, confidently, and effectively spoke with county commissioners and state officials.

We at WaysSouth congratulate the F.I.R.S.T. LEGO League and find inspiration in their story.

For additional information about FLL and other F.I.R.S.T. programs visit [www.usfirst.org](http://www.usfirst.org).

*Marie Dunkle,  
WaysSouth Board of Directors*

# Seeking

## Outreach and Graphic Design Intern

WaysSouth is seeking a media and communications intern to augment our outreach efforts. The intern will be serving on the outreach committee, designing our thrice-yearly newsletter, designing a wide range of printed materials (could include brochures, mailers, flyers, etc.) and updating our Facebook and Twitter pages. Written communications will include creating and editing press releases, action alerts, membership appeals, newsletter articles, and portions of grant proposals. Involvement with resource development efforts will include performing other related duties as requested. This internship may include a graphic design component, but the emphasis will be on responsive, creative and effective communications and outreach.

To apply: Send resume including at least two references, three writing samples and three samples of prior graphic design work to [info@waysouth.org](mailto:info@waysouth.org) or mail hard copies to UTM Box 560, Martin, TN 38238. With questions, contact Chance Finegan, WaysSouth executive assistant, at [volunteer@waysouth.org](mailto:volunteer@waysouth.org) or 706-508-3711.

Please see the full vacancy announcement online at <http://bit.ly/69WUPC>

## Heartfelt Thanks

To each contributor this quarter, we express our heartfelt thanks. Donations from individuals and supporting organizations are a major means of our support. As we move forward with a new executive director, your support enables us to advance our programs. With the I-3 study now a "top priority," with the rock slide in Tennessee building momentum for a decision on Corridor K in Tennessee to be made, and with the Environmental Studies Report due soon on Corridor K in North Carolina, we need all these donations. If you have not yet given, we urge you to contribute now. Small and large contributions are welcome. If each of you gives a little, we will have ample funds to do this important work.

WaysSouth Board of Directors

### Supporting Organizations

- Lyndhurst Foundation •Southern Appalachian Biodiversity Project •Lake Burton Civic Association
- Wilderness Society •Appalachian Outfitters
- Granite & Marble Tops & Tiles •Morgan Tools

### Recent Donors to WaysSouth

- |                            |                              |
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# IN HER OWN WORDS: Volunteering With WaysSouth



## WaysSouth Interviews Carrie Tatum

Carrie Tatum, a native of the Lake Burton area and a recent UGA alumna, sat down with WaysSouth earlier this month to share insights about her volunteer role in the organization. With degrees in psychology and anthropology and hopes for graduate school, Tatum is a welcome addition to the WaysSouth team. We hope that her story inspires you to become active to seek responsible transportation in Southern Appalachia.

**Q** Why do you volunteer with WaysSouth? What is your connection?

**A** I am from Batesville, Ga., a small community near Lake Burton. I volunteer for WaysSouth entering petition data and generating interest in the cause in Athens, Ga. I'm concerned about the proposed Interstate 3. I believe strongly that it would be horribly detrimental to social, physical and historical aspects of the Appalachian Mountains. This roadway would allow impersonal corporate businesses and pollution to corrupt our mountains irrevocably. Moreover, I feel that such a costly road system would be irresponsible during economic times such as these.

**Q** How do you help WaysSouth? Does it take up much time?

**A** I enter petition information into spreadsheets in order for mass mailings to be easily completed. I'm also finding new people to sign the petition and help out the cause. I enjoy volunteering and it is no burden to me whatsoever. Although my work is minimal compared to many of the volunteers, I still enjoy my work knowing that I am helping a wonderful cause.

**Q** As a student in college, volunteering must have been tricky for you before you graduated. How did you work volunteering into your busy schedule?

**A** I do all of my work online. The data is e-mailed to me and I e-mail the completed tasks back. This is wonderful because it allows me to help out in whichever city I'm currently in.

**To volunteer your services, contact: [volunteer@waysouth.org](mailto:volunteer@waysouth.org)**

### **New Volunteers for WaysSouth**

- Carah L. Hooten, IRS Letters
- Justine J. Steele, Petition Data Entry
- John Doyal, Strategy Committee
- Gerry Soud, Outreach Committee and Newsletter Editing



*Duncan Hughes with daughter Elizabeth and son Charles up at Tallulah Gorge*

## WaysSouth Board Member Profile

Growing up, canoeing the blackwater rivers of coastal Georgia, it's perhaps natural that Duncan Hughes would be drawn toward protecting Georgia's waters. As a boy, Hughes would camp on the white sandbars during two and three-day canoe trips on the Ohoopsee, enjoying the outdoors and taking in the serene beauty of the tea-colored stream.

"I always thought if I did not become a professional baseball player, I'd do something about water," the rangy Hughes said recently.

Hughes grew up in Statesboro and graduated from the University of Georgia. Later, as a graduate student in environmental science at Columbus State University, he walked rivers and streams all over Georgia, turning over rocks and examining the critters to assess the health of the waters.

Today, the Habersham County resident serves as coordinator of the

Soque River Watershed Partnership, a coalition of some two dozen local governments, state and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations and educational institutions, working together to reduce nonpoint sources of water pollution in the Soque River watershed. He led the development of the Soque River watershed protection plan and has begun to implement its recommendations.

Education and outreach are a large part of Hughes's work. "Most people today are disconnected from their environment," he says. "I want my work to motivate others to be good stewards of Georgia's vital natural resources."

Becoming a WaysSouth volunteer and board member was a no-brainer for Hughes. The original route for a proposed interstate linking Savannah and Knoxville would have run straight through the Soque River watershed. Although the route is now undetermined, he sees a massive highway, built to interstate standards, as a threat to the watersheds, quality of life, cultural heritage and small town charm of mountain communities.

"We have to find a better way to move people and goods than scarring the mountains with massive road projects through environmentally sensitive areas," Hughes says.

For Hughes, WaysSouth is an important advocate for transportation solutions in the Southern Appalachians. He is eager to see WaysSouth become the go-to expert in transportation for the region. "We must achieve credibility across the board, at all levels, for our work to be successful," he says.

As a WaysSouth board member, Hughes is working to develop and nurture relationships with other organizations in the Southern Appalachians that have similar goals for protecting mountain communities.

*"Fortunately, a lot of smart, good folks are coming together to make a difference," Hughes observed.*

# THE RAILROAD ADVANTAGE

Recently the WaysSouth Railroad Task Force completed a study about railroad options and alternatives to meet freight transport needs through the Southern Appalachians. The facts gathered support WaysSouth's position that railroads provide a more affordable, efficient and environmentally responsible way to move goods through our mountains. Making improvements to our present road infrastructure, complemented by the railways, will provide the freight transportation needs of the 21st century. Following are highlights from the study provided by Bob Grove, chair of the Railroad Task Force. The full study can be found on the WaysSouth Web Site, <http://www.waysouth.org>.

## **RAILROAD SCOPE IN SOUTHERN APPALACHIANS**

As of 2007, there were some two dozen freight railroads operating in North Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia on more than 10,000 miles of track. These freight trains carried nearly 600 million tons of freight that year, often toxic and hazardous materials too dangerous to face the traffic of interstates and other highways. They employed more than 140,000 workers whose wages and fringe benefits netted an average income of \$90,000 each.

## **FUEL EFFICIENCY AND REDUCED POLLUTION**

On average, a freight train is more fuel efficient than a hybrid car, three to six times more fuel-efficient than a truck and contributes three to 12 times less air pollution than cars or trucks. One train can move the equivalent of some 280 truck trailers - the equivalent of 1,100 automobiles. Bulk commodities like coal and grain are even more efficiently transported - one train can transport the equivalent of 500 trucks. Shifting a mere 25 percent of truck traffic to rail would reduce 17 billion gallons of fuel consumption per year and reduce air pollution by nearly one million tons per year. Slow-downs from critical traffic levels in major U.S. cities cost our economy \$78 billion a year in lost

time and wasted fuel. A mere 1 percent increase in rail's current share of the freight market for one year would be equivalent to nearly 15 million trucks -- about 600 million tons -- and would reduce shippers' transportation costs by \$25 billion which, should also yield consumer savings.



## **A NETWORK TO COUNT ON**

The U.S. Department of Transportation, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, and the Congressional Budget Office anticipate a 67 percent growth in the freight industry by 2020; rail freight is expected to double by 2035.

Most roads were not designed for today's heavy traffic loads, but rails were. New track can be laid faster, 10 times cheaper and far less destructively than building new highways. Additionally, maintenance is easier and cheaper, reducing the need for expensive highway maintenance and repair.

Intermodal trains already serve inter-city truck distribution by transporting their trailers and containers. UPS is the number one rail customer in the U.S. Giant trucking companies like Schneider International and JB Hunt are major customers as well. Intermodal freight allows major railroad yards to off-load truck trailers and containers for truck distribution of goods to regional towns. New construction of additional spurs and short lines would help even more.

## **RAILWAY INFRASTRUCTURE**

The Rail Corridor Preservation Act gave the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) authority to purchase railroads and preserve rail corridors for "future rail use and interim compatible uses." Amendments to the act declared it a public purpose for the NCDOT to reassemble critically-important, lost portions of rail corridors by condemnation. State and federal funds are available to assist short-line railroads make improvements to tracks and bridges.

In 1988, the NCDOT purchased the former Southern Railway's 67-mile Murphy Branch (part of which has since been purchased by the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad), setting the precedent for additional acquisitions. NCDOT now holds title to more than 100 miles of rail to be preserved for future use, and has restored 12 train stations at a cost of \$74 million to increase train service in the state. In the first decade of this effort, the number of train passengers to Charlotte annually went from 36,000 to 123,000, earning the state a National Trust award in 2007 for its forward-looking transportation policy.

**NOTE:** Statistics drawn from: Association of American Railroads (AAR)

Go21 7th Annual Congestion Relief Index

Go21 Public Affairs releases

The following article by WaysSouth volunteer Wally Smith was recently published by "National Parks Traveler." With NPT monthly readership in the hundreds of thousands, this is excellent press on Corridor K.

In the spring of 1948, Pennsylvania native Earl Shaffer stumbled into Stecoah Gap on the Appalachian Trail, high above the Little Tennessee River in western North Carolina's Graham County. "I must have been a pathetic figure," he wrote later in his memoirs, "streaming with sweat, bleeding from scratches, every muscle aching, crawling endlessly in a back-slipping, bush-clutching struggle before coming out on top."

The gap was a turning point for Shaffer, a war-weary veteran turned hiker who would become the world's first person to complete a continuous thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail later that year atop Mt. Katahdin, Maine. By the time he hiked through the gap, Shaffer had endured several weeks of off-and-on rainstorms and some of the Trail's most rugged terrain. Climbing the hill on the other side of the gap, Shaffer would head towards the Great Smoky Mountains, a region he would later remember as "four straight days of sunnynite and moonlit nights, a halcyon interlude...Nowhere else on the Appalachian Trail do I feel so strong an urge to return."

More than six decades later, Stecoah Gap, perched near 3,200 feet above sea level and a short drive north of Robbinsville, N.C., holds a similar symbolism for hikers traveling America's first National Scenic Trail. For those headed northbound, Stecoah Gap heralds the approach to the Great Smoky Mountains, much as it did for Shaffer years ago. For southbound hikers, the gap signals the beginning of the trail's stretch through the infamous and beautiful Nantahala Mountains, arguably some of the A.T.'s most rugged terrain. Although bisected by a scenic stretch of two-lane state highway, Stecoah Gap is, above everything, a steadfast landmark that has persisted mostly untouched on the Appalachian Trail since the end of World War II.

## Corridor K Collides With AT History, Heritage and Heart



This serenity, however, might be about to change. In June of 2008, officials with the North Carolina Department of Transportation released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement stating their intent to construct a new highway through Stecoah Gap and across the Appalachian Trail. The project is part of a larger proposed highway stretching from Chattanooga, Tenn., to Asheville, N.C., and deemed "Corridor K," one of 30 such corridors originally identified by the Appalachian Regional Commission in 1964 as future highway projects in the Appalachian region.

As currently proposed, Corridor K is slated to cross the A.T. at Stecoah Gap via a four-lane roadway drilled beneath the mountain in a 2,870-foot long, 570-foot deep tunnel. A secondary alternative places a slightly shorter and shallower tunnel through the gap. While not directly removing any part of the footpath itself, construction of the roadway would remove a wide swath of pristine forest that is currently visible from overlooks further up the trail, forever altering the trail's scenic character. Furthermore, scars from rock excavation necessary for the roadway would be visible from trailside overlooks on either side of Stecoah Gap."

Not surprisingly, the road proposal has both local residents and the larger trail community up in arms. Proponents of the project argue that constructing a new roadway

through the trail corridor would improve safety for drivers and spur economic growth. An economic study conducted in 2007 concluded that Corridor K was necessary to "support an economic future we will be proud of." This study, however, never directly addressed any components of the National Park System expected to be impacted by Corridor K.

Opponents of the road include local residents and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy itself - the group charged with the management and maintenance of the trail corridor. In a comment filed with the North Carolina Department of Transportation in late 2008, the conservancy stated, "The proposed US 74 Relocation (Corridor K) will have significant negative impacts on the A.T. and its users... There will be significant changes in the viewshed as seen from the A.T., for example from the overlooks on Cheoah Bald and the rock outcrops along the A.T. north of Stecoah Gap, which will greatly diminish the primitive experience the A.T. is intended to provide."

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To see the full article and join in the online discussion, go to:

<http://www.nationalparkstraveler.com/2010/01/road-proposal-stirs-controversy-along-appalachian-national-scenic-trail5214>

# AT History-continued

Up to 50 other regional and national organizations have echoed this opposition of Corridor K by way of WaysSouth, a group formed to promote responsible transportation projects in the Appalachian region. One of these groups, the Southern Environmental Law Center, has echoed the conservancy in a release about the Corridor K project:

"First proposed by the Appalachian Regional Commission in the 1960s, Corridor K was then seen as an economic boon for the area south of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Today, however, it's clear that the remaining segments of this project would jeopardize the region's true economic engine: the unspoiled vistas, clear-running trout waters, and backcountry recreation sites that drive outdoor tourism."

Outside of these environmental and economic impacts, however, the Corridor K proposal raises some deeper questions about the intrinsic nature of our national parks. The Appalachian Trail is one of the nation's most unique parks, stretching in a continuous 2,175-mile swath of protected land across the highlands of the Eastern U.S. that rarely measures more than a mile in width. This linear nature inevitably places the A.T. at risk of conflicts with development and society, and the Corridor K proposal is certainly no exception. On one side of the debate are the concerns of local developers and governments, who see the new roadway as a boon for local economies. On the opposite side is the National Scenic Trail itself, which was originally developed under the purposes of promoting "the preservation of, public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of the open-air, outdoor areas and historic resources of the Nation."



In between these two sides are questions that desperately need asking - and answers. Does protecting the natural, cultural, and even personal heritage embodied by locations on the trail involve rejecting road proposals that might forever alter - or even eradicate - those very places? Can the existing roadway through Stecoah Gap be improved so as to fit the goals of both regional planners and the national scenic trail, instead of a project that fits the goals of only one set of stakeholders? Does a place as unassuming as Stecoah Gap, N.C., even deserve protection? No matter how clear-cut the answers might seem, these are all questions that should be a major part of the discussion surrounding a project planned to impact one of the most storied components of the National Park System, but to date, they remain largely absent from the dialogue.

Although he passed away long before Corridor K became a controversial issue with the Appalachian Trail, it isn't too difficult to see where Earl Shaffer might stand. In 1965, Shaffer became another part of A.T. history when he completed a second, southbound thru-hike, becoming the first person to travel the length of the National Scenic Trail in both directions. On a Tuesday in October, he passed through Stecoah Gap once more, spending the night under a rock shelf just off the highway. During the course of this thru-hike, Shaffer jotted down a poem in his trail journal, writing "The poisoning of water,/air, and soil/Is reaching limits where/man can survive. Yet man is blind and/greedy, bent on spoil/And soon there may/be few men left alive."

Forty-five years later, those few lines of verse still ring true as a poignant reminder, regardless of your personal outlook on Corridor K. When it comes to projects like this one, it only hurts us all by leaving our national parks out of the discussion.



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