

•Rock Slides •U.S. 441 Widening •I-3 Study To Start

Rock slides all over the region have shed light on the foolishness of building highways through mountainous terrain. Torrential rains and periods of brutal cold that led to the slides are conditions that will happen again. A slide in the Ocoee Gorge last November that closed Highway 64 for five months has reminded us all that building roads through rugged mountain lands is a recipe for ruin. WaysSouth brought its expertise to several public meetings that were held following the slide. The organization provided a strong, clear voice of support for fixing the problems with the highway's existing route, rather than pushing ahead with a damaging four-lane through fragile lands.



Photo by David McCain

The Georgia Department of Transportation has begun work on the proposed widening of U.S. 441 to four lanes from the town of Clayton, Ga. to the North Carolina state line. This project can have potentially devastating impacts on the towns north of Clayton –

Mountain City and Dillard – and on the beautiful valley through Rabun Gap. WaysSouth is assembling a task force to ensure that the interests of the affected

mountain communities are heard and that the environmental, scenic, historic and cultural values are protected.

Of most concern is the announcement that the Federal Highway Administration has issued a Request for Proposal for the long-awaited study of an interstate highway between Savannah and Knoxville, known as I-3. Because the study is outside of the normal procedures for the development of interstate highways, there will be limited opportunities for public input.

Nonetheless, WaysSouth has been in constant contact with federal officials. We're determined to make sure that this destructive road dies before it gets started. Please go to www.WaysSouth.org and sign up to volunteer with any skills and expertise that you can use in this continued fight.

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UPDATE



The proposed Corridor K project in the vicinity of the Ocoee Gorge in Tennessee continues to be a major part of WaysSouth's work. In February, the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) held public meetings and accepted comments for its "Transportation Planning Report," a state document preceding the Environmental Impact Statement. The planning report will state the "purpose and need" of the project and list the construction options the state intends to consider during the environmental assessment.

WaysSouth and its supporters attended the hearings and submitted comments urging TDOT not to build a new road through the Cherokee National Forest, destroying the pristine headwaters of prime trout streams, such as Goforth Creek, and further fragmenting this rugged wilderness area.

We have urged the Tennessee DOT not to build a new road through the Cherokee National Forest, destroying the pristine headwaters of prime trout streams, such as Goforth Creek, and further fragmenting this rugged wilderness area.

Instead, a program of carefully selected improvements to the existing road through the Ocoee Gorge and other existing roads will provide the same transportation and economic development benefits at a significantly lower cost, both financially and environmentally. Our hearts go out to those whose lives were disrupted due to hardships resulting from the rockslide. However, we continue to believe a new road will not solve the issues created by the region's rugged geography and could, in fact, make them worse. (See some of these comments on our Web site: <http://www.corridork.org/letters.php>.)

TDOT has been reviewing comments since late February and is expected to release its "Transportation Planning Report" soon. When this happens, WaysSouth will analyze it and do whatever is necessary to ensure that the TDOT adequately considers all options for Corridor K and ultimately selects the best one. Keep checking our Web site for updates. <http://www.wayssouth.org>

Finally, we reported in the last newsletter that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ordered the NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to consider options that involve improving the existing two-lane highway network for its portion of Corridor K in Graham County. We anticipate that NCDOT will complete its analysis and issue a new report late this summer. Again, keep checking our Web site for updates and analysis on this segment.



WaysSouth Needs You & Your Support

The last several months have been busy for WaysSouth. If you have been thinking of making a financial contribution to WaysSouth, now would be the perfect time.

We invite you to join with us as we advocate for more responsible solutions to the region's transportation needs. We're working in three states at the state, regional and national level. This effort takes money to ensure that we are at the table when decisions are made.

Help protect our mountains and our mountain communities. Support WaysSouth today.

MISSION STATEMENT

To preserve and protect the unique heritage and environment of the Southern Appalachians by promoting sustainable transportation practices.

VISION STATEMENT

The WaysSouth vision is a Southern Appalachian region whose natural beauty, environment and heritage are recognized by all as its economic backbone and whose transportation infrastructure is designed to support, maintain and protect those attributes.

Thank You! Thank You!

Many thanks and deep appreciation to all the people who assist WaysSouth in so many ways. We are especially grateful to all the volunteers who have given their time and resources, and to all our recent financial contributors. WaysSouth has become a go-to place when people want to learn about regional transportation issues, and we are currently monitoring projects in three states. We could not do that without our volunteers and our contributors.

Contributors to WaysSouth

We are grateful to the following organizations and individuals who have dipped deep into their pockets this year to provide financial support that enables WaysSouth to do its work as an advocate for responsible transportation solutions through our wonderful mountains:

Jess Austin
Tom C. Aderhold
Lucy Bartlett
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Robert Sweetser
Lucy Venable
Nancy Waldrop
Stancil O. Wise
Pam L. Weimann
Elizabeth Williams

IN HIS OWN WORDS: Volunteering With WaysSouth



WaysSouth Interviews Tom Hoffman

Tom Hoffman, a native of Washington, D.C., sat down with WaysSouth earlier this month to share insights about his volunteer role in the organization. Hoffman now lives in Pearisburg, Va., having retired from a career with the city government in Washington, D.C. We hope that his story inspires you to become active as we seek responsible transportation in Southern Appalachia.

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

A I have been interested in conservation issues for my entire life. When I was 18, I had a letter published in the Washington Post opposing a bridge project in Washington, D.C. I have a personal relationship with the Smoky Mountains. My first trip to the Smokies was in the early 1970s, and I quickly fell in love with the place. I've gone back probably 20 times. It's almost as if the Smokies are an obsession

rather than a hobby. I started reading about them when I was 14 or so. Several years ago, 2005 possibly, I was perusing a hiking Web site (and) I was horrified to read about the proposed Interstate 3. I fired off letters to my congressman and senators and started to do more research. I quickly found the Stop I-3 Coalition, the predecessor to WaysSouth. I signed up for the newsletter and alerts and responded to a request for help; I forget exactly what it was. At some point then Executive Director Holly Demuth called me, and I started participating on the Corridor K task force and the outreach committee.

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

A I do whatever I can effectively do remotely. In October, I drove 300 miles to Robbinsville, N.C. to attend the Corridor K meeting there. I got up and spoke and mentioned the distance I'd traveled. I also met Holly and some other people face to face. I participate in most of the conference calls of the Corridor K, Rail, and Outreach committees.

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.

Article by Chance Finegan

WAYSOUTH VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

WaysSouth's heart and soul are its volunteers. From folks like Tom Hoffman (featured in this newsletter issue) to people like Carah Hooten, who writes donation receipts for us, our volunteers make WaysSouth work. There's a place for you at this table. If you've only got 30 minutes a week, we have a way for you to lend a hand. If you've got all the time in the world, then we could use your help too with some in-depth research projects. Do you have graphic design skills? Are you knowledgeable about statistical modeling and analysis? Are you a student looking for internship credit? E-mail info@waysouth.org to get started today.



Axel Ringe, Focused on Corridor K and Stopping I-3

Axel Ringe with wife Jeanne Ringe at their Jefferson County TN farm.

WaysSouth Board Member Profile

Continuing in our article series, “Getting to Know the Board of WaysSouth,” I recently interviewed board member Axel Ringe and asked about the priorities of WaysSouth. “We need to provide a positive alternative vision for transportation in the Southern Appalachians,” he said. “That means providing information, options and perspective for transportation planning to our regional opinion leaders and regulators.” “As for priorities, right now our attention must focus on Corridor K, and when the I-3 Study starts we need to be there to make sure that road does not happen,” Ringe stated.

Ringe has been passionate and protective of our mountain environments all his adult life. After receiving a degree in geology from Cornell University in 1969,

he worked in the copper mining industry. Seeing firsthand the environmental destruction, Ringe was motivated to change his career. He worked for the U.S. Department of Commerce and studied animal behavior at West Virginia University. In 1978, he and his wife, Jeanne, moved to East Tennessee for work at the U.S. Department of Energy’s Oak Ridge site.

‘We need to provide a positive alternative vision for transportation in the Southern Appalachians’

After retiring from government work in 1996, Ringe became active in environmental causes with the Sierra Club and helped found the Tennessee Clean Water Network. He continues to provide local and state leadership to these organizations

During the height of WaysSouth’s “Stop I-3” battle, Ringe learned that government plans would bring the interstate highway to a terminus in Maryville, Tenn. He went into action, making citizens and community leaders aware of the impact that the new highway would have on the area. When the environmental impact statement for Corridor K was released in 2003, like a modern day Paul Revere, Ringe spread the word about road plans and impact to fellow citizens. Ringe’s knowledge, passion and energy made him a natural to serve on the board of directors of WaysSouth.

Ringe and his wife live on a farm in Jefferson County, Tenn. where they grow much of their own food and are seeking to return the land to wildlife habitat.

Article by Marie Dunkle

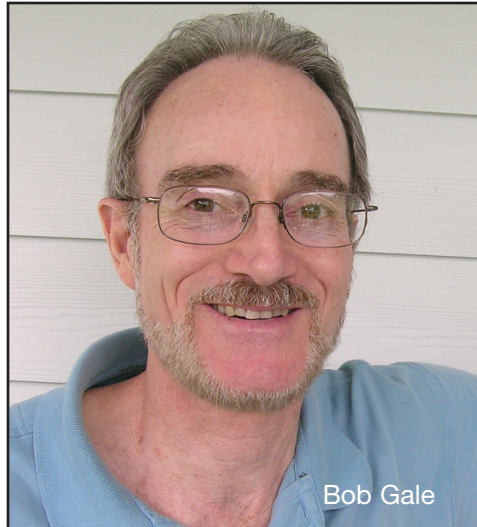
WAYSOUTH ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATE

Each year, effective April 1, WaysSouth elects new officers and directors to guide the organization's work for the next year. The chair, vice chair, secretary and treasurer, along with the immediate past chair, form the WaysSouth executive committee. The new officers are: Chair Terry Miller, Vice Chair Marie Dunkle, Treasurer Bill Blumreich III, Secretary Grace Trimble and Past Chair Lucy Bartlett.

As we move forward this year, we especially appreciate the work and leadership of Lucy Bartlett. She led WaysSouth in its accomplishments for two years, and we are thankful for her continued wisdom and presence this year as past chair. WaysSouth has held strong in its mission and vision with Lucy Bartlett on board.

MEET THE NEW WAYSOUTH BOARD MEMBERS

Three diverse and talented individuals were elected to the WaysSouth board, effective April 1. They bring extensive expertise and passion to the board, and we welcome them..



Bob Gale

BOB GALE is the ecologist for the Western North Carolina Alliance, where he has worked since 1998 providing scientific input on issues related to environmental protection of Southern Appalachian mountain forest communities. Gale's work with the Alliance involves National Forest and National Parks issues, air and water quality, and rural lands protection. He has spent his life working in fields related to botany. He spent 15 years in the landscaping industry and remains a certified arborist by the International Society of Arboriculture.



Clyde Holler

CLYDE HOLLER resides in Morganton, Ga., where he is an associate broker with Coldwell Banker High Country Realty in Blue Ridge, Ga. He holds degrees from the University of Chicago (BA), the Episcopal Theological School (MDiv) and Boston University (PhD), and taught at the college level for nearly 10 years. In 1985, he moved to Atlanta and owned and operated Buckhead Editorial Service until 2000.



Melanie Mayes

MELANIE MAYES, a Knoxville resident, is employed in the Environmental Sciences Division at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory where she has worked for the past 11 years. A graduate of the University of Tennessee with a PhD in geological sciences, Mayes is an expert in hydrology and soils. As a private citizen, she has weighed in on the potential impacts of the construction of a four-lane highway through Stecoah Gap in North Carolina and the Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee.

Highway 441 Plans Rally Citizens

WaysSouth is organizing a group of people who are interested in influencing the improvements of U. S. 441 from Clayton, Ga. to the North Carolina state line. We strongly believe that decisions about highways must consider the needs of the people living in that area and the owners of the National Forest -- the citizens of the U.S. It should not solely be at the discretion of the Georgia Department of Transportation in deciding what we need. Presently, the four-laning of U. S. 441 is scheduled for 2015. Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue proposes to pay for the project as part of a \$300 million bond package to be repaid through the state's general fund, rather than the motor fuel tax. However, WaysSouth intends to demonstrate that there are cost-effective alternatives to a four-lane highway that will ease congestion and accommodate the needs of all users, not just freight carriers.

WaysSouth, with its large base of supporters, can offer help from geologists, environmental lawyers, communication and economic development experts and lobbyists. Among Rabun County citizens, we hope to

recruit people with experience in road building, economic development, environmental protection and those who care about the county and its way of life.



Most of this highway is already four lanes with some passing lanes. We already know that feelings are strongly against an interstate through Rabun County. The Rabun County Commission was among the first to pass a resolution against I-3. The section to be improved is a busy commercial area with several small communities and cities. Additionally, the area is very scenic and contains many endangered species. The Chattahoochee National Forest borders much of the area. Many decisions must be made to accommodate the traffic already on this

highway, plus the future increase that is expected, without damaging the area's environment, economy and way of life.

If you would like to be a part of this effort, please e-mail Lucy Bartlett at hlbartlett@windstream.net or call her at 706-782-7262.

Article by Lucy Bartlett



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