



# Recycling Update

*By board member Robert E. Smith*

Since Mayor Mullen appointed a task force over a year ago to study recycling possibilities for Highlands, and ABC permittees found they were faced with mandatory recycling of alcoholic beverage containers, a lot has unfolded. Unfortunately progress for the citizen hasn't been readily forthcoming, but the cloud has a possibility of showing a silver lining.

It would take much too much space to delineate the entire situation with recycling. Each county does it differently, and each has to operate solid waste management as an "enterprise" or be a "pay-for-itself" operation. The problems for citizens are the barriers which make it difficult, which can be anything from conflicting information to having to separate recyclables, to driving some distance to dispose of it. Those who do this know the problems with separating and storing at home and spending a lot of time at a "convenience" center.



The brighter side is that recyclables, as commodities, are steadily growing in value. Thus, more money can be spent in equipment to separate at a volume facility reducing the need for source point separation. One such entrepreneur, who "sells" to a large separation facility in Spartanburg, has been in operation in the Cashiers area for some time, and has been approved to extend into the Highlands area. Other entrepreneurs have been seeking business opportunities, like curbside pick-up, in Macon and Jackson Counties.

This is the future of recycling: the increased value making it a win-win for all involved, even the landfills. In terms of value of landfill space, the last figure reported was approximately \$1,000 per cubic yard. At my house, recyclables are probably two-thirds the volume of waste generated. So, if we all recycled, the life-time of a landfill could be extended by a factor of 2. We would also support what is likely to be one of the fastest growth industries in the future.

Another timely opportunity is J-MCA's ongoing efforts to encourage and nurture a recycling program at Highlands School. The majority of our youth readily embrace recycling. The amount at a school, particularly in paper, is astounding. Macon County has an incentive program where the Solid Waste Management Department splits the earnings on paper recycling 50-50 with participating schools. Again, this places the burden on schools and parents to collect and transport the recyclables, but the students learn a valuable lesson and often take their commitment for recycling home. As an object lesson, it is worth it, and those faculty and parents who support these efforts are doing commendable work.

If you have questions or want more done for citizens in your area, just contact your county solid waste manager or request action from your elected officials. The perfect picture of "at-home" recycling pickup of everything which can be recycled, is well within reach. J-MCA will remain on top of moving our local county efforts forward.



## **Conservation Action Plan (CAP) for the Upper Little Tennessee River Basin**

Members of the Little Tennessee Non-Point Source Team, US Environmental Protection Agency, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Nature Conservancy and others have joined together in a study to comprehensively address the needs to preserve the unique environment of this river basin. The plan covers the Upper Little Tennessee, Tuckasegee, and Cullasaja Rivers and numerous tributaries in a large scale cooperative effort to protect these rivers and critical habitats for threatened species. The plan has identified critical areas and areas requiring further study, such as the upper Tuckasegee River. This major study used models developed by WWF and The Nature Conservancy to identify areas within the Little Tennessee River Basin of significant biodiversity or conservation targets. This enables focus on these critical areas. To receive a copy of the document, contact our office.