

Thank You J-MCA from The Mountain!!

With the preservation and protection of our unique ecological resources as a natural intersection of mission and purpose between The Mountain Retreat and Learning Center and the Jackson- Macon Conservation Alliance, the past few years have seen some wonderful opportunities for growing the mutually beneficial relationship between our two organizations! Starting with serving as a host site for J-MCA Board Retreats, we have grown this connection into an outstanding partnership that has included environmental education opportunities for youth and adults.

Serving on the Board of JMCA, Mountain Staff member Julia Jamieson was the liaison with J-MCA to bring about an Alternative Spring Break Environmental Education week for Elon College students who came to The Mountain for a meaningful week of service and learning. With an exceptional ecosystem of 92 acres which includes many rare species as well as old growth forest, the unique Mountain property was used as a research site for the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid project enhancing the students learning experience about responsible environmental stewardship. Working with our Mountain volunteers, the students engaged with David Bates and others from J-MCA in a number of teaching sessions, including the opportunity to identify and mark infested hemlocks and participation in beetle release and HWA treatments.

We were pleased to support the J-MCA Green Living Fair this past summer, and congratulate them on the success of this event. We salute you in your effort to bring environmental education and awareness opportunities to our local communities!

In keeping with our values, this past summer the Mountain property was placed in a Conservation Easement with the Highlands Cashiers Land Trust. Coupled with our long standing commitment to protecting this rare property is our belief in the transformative and life shaping nature of environmental education for people of all generations. We believe we are powerfully shaped by our environment and all of our programs, including Elderhostel, Peacemaking Workshops, Spiritual and Congregational Retreats, and Leadership Training include an immersion in our magnificent and inspirational outdoor classroom. Of course Environmental Education has been a core focus of MountainCamp for the past thirty years, and we affirm its essential value in today's world.

To this end, we have welcomed Brian Gifford to our year round staff as Youth and Environmental Programs Director. Brian brings an extensive background in Environmental Education to our staff, having served, among other capacities, as a teacher and Education Director for a 385 acre residential facility serving approximately 1,700 students per year in educational experiences focused on the environment. We are delighted to have Brian on the Mountain staff and look forward to having him meet and work with other environmentally minded people and organizations in our community! Brian has recently joined the J-MCA Board as The Mountain representative, replacing Julia who continues on the board in an At-Large status.

Many thanks to the Staff, Board and Volunteers of the Jackson-Macon Conservation Alliance for all that you do to preserve and protect our rare and wonderful natural environment!

Christy Kelly
Director of Marketing and Development, The Mountain Retreat & Learning Centers, Inc.

Corridor K and Interstate 3 ~ Are they necessary?

Rather than improving existing highways with passing lanes and some curve straightening, NCDOT continues to insist that a new 4-lane linking Asheville to Chattanooga is necessary and won't impact the environment (according to their recent environmental study). The main areas of concern are the Snowbird Mountains in the Nantahala National Forest and the Oconee River gorge where huge expensive tunnels, bridges and excavations are proposed. Although these areas are not in our immediate line of vision up here on the plateau, we are afraid that moving forward with Corridor K will have tremendously negative impacts to our region and possibly be the lead-in for continuing the push for Interstate 3 through our Appalachian Mountains. Originally Corridor K was designed, back in the 1960's, to improve the economic conditions of this region. Now DOT's design for the road will be as a main corridor for heavy transportation traffic. This will not improve our economic conditions or our environment. In 2006, both Macon County and the Town of Highlands joined neighboring NC and GA towns and counties in passing resolutions opposing the interstate 3 highway. J-MCA remains as an organization encouraging transportation practices that protect our fragile and beautiful environment which is the economic draw for our area. We do not support Corridor K and Interstate 3 carving up our mountains for the sake of expediting truck traffic through our region. The Stop I-3 Coalition has recently changed its name to Ways South to reflect its expanded mission beyond addresses I-3, to promote sustainable transportation practices in all of Southern Appalachian and nearby Piedmont communities.