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## Mountain High Hikers Newsflash October 23, 2009

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### **Full Moon Walk – Come Howl at the Moon with Gary and Dorothy Sunday, November 1, 2009 at 7:00 p.m. at Meeks Park**

Meet at Meeks Park in the Blairsville, GA parking lot for the walk of approximately 4 miles. Please bring a flashlight.

If you have any questions, please call Gary and Dorothy Thompson 828-389-4706.

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### **Wilderness Wildlife Week Schedule is now on the website From: George Radcliffe**

I just checked and the 2010 schedule is on the WWW website.

Go to [www.mypigeonforge.com](http://www.mypigeonforge.com), click on Wilderness Wildlife Week on the left side, then click on "hike schedules" or "class schedules" at the top.

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### **Smoky Mountain Elk Herd News**

The 2009 calving season proved to be another successful year for the GSMNP elk herd. There have been a total of 19 calves born this year, 16 of which have survived which makes 2009 one of the best years yet for herd recruitment! While the sex of several of the calves has yet to be determined, it appears that they are split about evenly between male and female. Two of the calves that died were killed by bears and the third was very underweight when it was born. No bears were relocated as part of elk calving season this year, so it is very encouraging to see survival rates so high this year.

Initially there were 52 elk released into Great Smoky Mountains National Park. With this year's calving season included, there are currently about 110 elk in the GSMNP herd. There are 55 female elk, 45 male elk, and 8-10 whose sex has not yet been determined (2009 calves). These elk are spread fairly evenly across all age classes.

The fall rut is in full swing and there has been plenty of excitement around the herd so far! The cows have been divided into several different harems and there have been several different bulls seen with each harem. The most dominant bulls in Cataloochee so far have been #s 16, 3, 67, and an unmarked bull from the Cove Creek area. Bull #67 and the unmarked bull are the first bulls in Cataloochee to have been born in GSMNP and become dominant. The dominant bull in the Oconaluftee area is #74, also born in GSMNP. All of the bulls this year have very impressive antlers, which can be seen as a sign that there is high quality forage available for the elk.

With the leaves changing colors this is an excellent time to visit Cataloochee to view the elk and it seems that more people are making the trip daily. If you make the trip into the Valley, please remember to pull your vehicle off of the road when viewing wildlife, as it is becoming increasingly busy and traffic can congest quickly on the narrow road. Also, please remember that the elk are at an especially agitated state right now with the pressures of the mating season, and they can become aggressive suddenly. Remain in/near your vehicle at all times in the presence of elk and do not approach them! Have a great fall!

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### **Upper Tellico OHV Trail System Permanently Closed**

On October 14, 2009, the USFS announced that it is permanently closing the Upper Tellico OHV trail system in order to correct serious erosion problems in the Upper Tellico River watershed in Cherokee County, NC. It found a need to stem the flow of sediment that is entering the Upper Tellico River and its tributaries from the OHV System.

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### **Welcome New Members:**

Courey, Michael  
Jersey, Steven  
Lane, Gregory &  
Virginia

### **Total Members 176**

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### **More Certified Maintainers:**

Steve Jersey and Tom Shope – chainsaw certified  
Tom Shope and Steve Sutherlin – crosscut certified

## **Jim Morgan - Man On a Quest**

The message, short and sweet “hiked through VT and made it to NH in 12 days.” Check out the MHH shirt! More to come when this guy gets back.



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## **Trail Maintenance Report**

**By: John Quinlan**

"Despite threatening skies and an ominous forecast, 6 volunteers members of MHH braved the elements. We met at Maryanns in Young Harris. A surprise guest in the person of Sandra Key appeared with two of the new club shirts that had been ordered by, as luck would have it, two MHH'ers who were not able to attend. Team #1

(Ben Kennedy and Steve Jersey) took to the "hills" by starting their work from Brasstown Bald and began their trek some two miles down the Wagon Train Trail. One of their main objectives was to evaluate the trail as requested by David Kuykendall of the FS for conditions that could necessitate special assistance relief. Before they were rained out they identified 7 areas with substantial water. Way points identified below:

- 23 N 34 52.332 W 083 48.503
- 24 N 34 52.509 W 083 48.495
- 25 N 34 52.532 W 083 48.555
- 26 N 34 52.931 W 083 48.604
- 27 N 34 52.934 W 083 48.602
- 28 N 34 52.969 W 083 48.606
- 29 N 34 53.048 W 083 48.592

Wet areas in last half mile.some of which they were able to divert.

More is still needed. By having only two folks and thus limited by a few pieces of equipment the fire rake helped but they could have used a Pulaski to do an even more effective job. They cut 3 or 4 blow downs. There was a lot of standing water and running water, and while able to divert a lot of it, a return trip is needed to finish the job. The rain was coming down for most of their return trip. and thus were a little wet by the time they reached the truck.

Team #2 (Steve Sutherlin, Jim Reynolds, Tom Shope, and John Quinlan) approached Wagon Train from the bottom. Using the FS key we drove in Steve Sutherlin's Big White Ford Diesel using 4-wheel drive (low range the whole way) approx a mile to the next gate marking the Wilderness boundary. Enroute to this gate this team made several stops; encountered several blowdowns that blocked the trail/road. One of these was massive with many huge limbs scattered about. No possible way to drive around it. This last stop took much chain saw work to reopen the road way.

Upon reaching the gate we gathered tools and made our way approx 1.8 miles further uphill. Much work involved evaluating the condition of the many water diversion runoffs that we have created on recent work trips. Many of these locations that we previously established were in excellent condition. Much of this credit goes to David Kuykendall who provided detailed guidance as to their initial construction. His vast experience proved its mettle. Our work today was limited to placing a few rocks and minor raking to remove small amounts of sediment and leaves. We were greatly relieved that, despite our heavy recent rains, they have served the trail well and held up and remain remarkably solid. Before today's deluge hit we beat a hasty retreat back down to Steve's truck and had ourselves a slippery ride down the muddy trail/road. Thus the real hero of the day was not a person but Steve's truck. Special thanks to Steve!!! This truck has more than seen its share of trail work and has, at least, earned a jacket! Overall I'd have to say the lower end of this trail is in very good shape.

Thanks again to those who came today. I am always so gratified by MHH'ers- a truly dedicated group of volunteers."



## Corridor K ACTION ALERT: STOP THE DESTRUCTION OF OUR MOUNTAINS

The imminent threat of massive destruction of our scenic mountains proposed by the North Carolina Department of Transportation as dictated by special interests would have ruinous consequences. This waste of taxpayer money would degrade our quality of life, poison our water, reduce fishing, destroy plant and animal habitats, and rob the area of income from tourism.

As presently planned, a new, four-lane highway will soon cut through the most scenic and pristine section of our

remaining mountain refuge; it's a ten-mile long, \$378 million swath of destruction estimated to save insignificant travel time for interstate commerce. And this is the least expensive portion of an interstate road planned to run from Stecoah to Andrews, NC via Robbinsville.



Photos by Larry Winslett

The existing roadway between Robbinsville and Stecoah, NC (NC28 and NC143) can be improved, completing the regional corridor and taking commercial trucks out of the Nantahala Gorge. The DOT admits that our current roads will handle traffic adequately for at least 20 more years, and with supplemental shipping done by railroads, this model should be sufficient for many years more.

The proposed new highway is not only unnecessary, unwise, outmoded, and unaffordable, it squanders and depletes the limited funds available for urgently-needed infrastructure repairs of our bridges, roads, and railroads.

You can stop this destructive and unnecessary project! Here's how:

Voice your concerns at the public hearing to be held Thursday, Oct. 29, at 7 p.m. at the Graham County Community Bldg., 196 Knight St, in Robbinsville. We need numbers. We need YOU to be there to show your opposition to DOT, the media, and elected officials. **Your presence is crucial in changing the destructive direction of this project.**

You can also attend an open house on Tuesday, Oct 27 in Cullawhee, Wednesday, Oct 28 in Stecoah, and Thursday, Oct 29 in Robbinsville. [Click here for more details](#)

<http://www.corridork.org/actionalerts.php>