

A draft letter on the North Shore Road that appeared on the BMTA web site the first part of February gave some readers the impression that the official management plan for the Great Smokies Mountain National Park, and by extension the National Park Service, supported the cash settlement of the North Shore issue. That impression is incorrect and we apologize for contributing to it. The National Park Service is currently conducting an environmental impact study of the various alternative proposals and has taken no position on which of the five proposals should be preferred. For complete information of the NPS position visit their website: www.NorthShoreRoad.info

North Shore Road Project
P.O. Box 30185
Raleigh, NC 27622

Dear Sirs:

As a member of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) I would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the North Shore Road proposals. Twenty-five years ago the BMTA was formed to create a trail from Springer Mountain in Georgia to Davenport Gap in North Carolina, providing a bypass to the heavily-traveled Appalachian Trail (AT). A trail route was identified, and permission to build and maintain the trail was sought. The trail route can be thought of as three segments; two segments are predominately on Forest Service lands, the third segment will be on National Park land. The first portion of the Benton MacKaye Trail (BMT) route, from Springer Mountain north to the Ocoee River in Tennessee was completed in the first years of the organization's existence. The second segment, from the Ocoee River to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park at Deals Gap was approved by the Forest Service in December of last year. Construction and blazing of this segment is underway with completion anticipated for late 2005. The third segment will pass through the National Park, using existing trails, to connect twice with the AT—once at Sassafras Gap and again at Davenport Gap. All in all, the BMT intersects the AT four times, twice in Georgia and twice in the Smoky Mountains, creating short and long bypass or loop opportunities.

As a member of the BMTA I favor management plans that will increase opportunities for low impact, non-motorized recreational opportunities like hiking. I also believe policies that preserve old growth areas, protect watersheds scenic resources are both valuable in themselves and likely to improve the hiker's aesthetic experience. The organization's by laws specifically directs that the BMTA will act "to promote hiking, camping and a wilderness experience in the Southern Appalachian Mountains" as one of its core purposes. With this directive in mind, I strongly support the Monetary Settlement alternative for the North Shore Road.

Road construction can have a direct negative effect the quality of the ecosystem for land animals and plants. The Swain County Board of Commissioners, acting in their capacity as representatives and custodians of the local public interest, has endorsed the Monetary

Settlement. The North Shore Road project, if built, would pass through what has been identified as the “largest, roadless tract of mountain terrain in the eastern United States.” Given this precious resource, and recognizing that back country acreage would be reduced within the borders of the National Park with little expectation of being increased in the future, I cannot endorse any of the alternatives that would allow road construction—of any length or location—as an alternative to the Monetary Settlement.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comment on this proposal.

Sincerely,