



Times-News

Our Legacy Lies in Our Mountains

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ECO NOTES



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Hiking down a favorite mountain trail one day, I came upon a two-headed copperhead. He was stretched across the path leaving me no room to get by.

A fellow hiker arrived on the other side of the trail and we discussed our options. The path was surrounded by laurel thicket, so there was no getting around the snake. If we tried to step on the reptile, the likelihood of one head or the other tearing into our flesh was high. So we each found a long stick and together lifted the snake and placed it gently on the side of the dirt path. It was only then that we realized the snake could have cared less what we did. The two-headed serpent were actually two copperheads mating.

Two-headed vipers seem to be on many paths these days, not just on mountain trails. They pop up anytime people bring up the need to protect our land, streams and mountaintops.

Everyone agrees that protecting our rural character is what they value most. And they agree that protecting farmland and watersheds are an important part of our natural heritage. It's only when we discuss how to take action that the two-headed snake shows up.

I live on a beautiful piece of property surrounded by woods and bordered by a stream. I worked hard to buy it, and I certainly don't want anyone telling me what to do with it. But I also know I can't take it with me. When I go, do I want to have etched on my gravestone: "David protected his property rights till death," (meanwhile the streams silted over, the fish died, the trees were cut down and the green space became grey space covered by development.) I think I'd rather my epitaph say: "He left his grandchildren something sacred and irreplaceable, the natural resources around him."

I suppose my grandchildren could always visit some museum in Raleigh that showcases the great salamander diversity that once existed in WNC before they disappeared due to the lack of stream buffers. And the Heritage Museum might display photographs depicting the beautiful mountain vistas that once existed before we protected our property rights so well that they all got sold to some Florida developer.

Anthropologists say that when man came down from the trees, he gave up a little bit of his freedom to team up with other Neanderthals to chase small furry animals, so they could all survive. Eventually communities were built and new relationships were formed. And each time, the viper crossed our path. We had a choice. Give up a little freedom and maintain a sense of community and a connection to nature, or never give an inch and watch our natural legacy disappear under earthmoving equipment.

ECO has played an important role in confronting the two-headed viper wherever we found it. Every time local citizens are asked about what their biggest concerns are, they always say, protecting our rural character, keeping our streams healthy, and our ridges unscathed by development.

As the voice of the local environment, ECO has worked with residents for more than 23 years to find a way to protect what makes this place special. Now, we're calling on you to help protect ECO. With the down economy, the viper at our doorstep is the threat that we might not be able to continue our mission.

This holiday season, please consider joining ECO's mountaintop campaign and supporting our work through a tax deductible donation. You can do this online at www.eco-wnc.org or by calling 828-692-0385. The future of our mountains might depend on it.

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