



## The Parkway's Future: Scenic Drive or Commuter Route?

“Beautiful, views, connector, memories, trails, birding, family, inspirational, vacations and commuter route”—these are some of the responses given by a diverse group of individuals who were asked, “What is the *one* word that describes what the Blue Ridge Parkway means to you?”



The occasion for this exercise was NPCA's Blue Ridge Parkway Transportation Workshop held last November 9th at the North Carolina Arboretum in Asheville. More than 50 attendees came together to examine transportation planning challenges

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**Above:** Participants review parkway maps during NPCA's Transportation Workshop. ©Gary Johnson

## Park Funding Crisis Ongoing

Congress and the President managed to settle on tax-rate increases in January, avoiding the fiscal cliff for a while, but the threat to national park funding continues. Because our political leaders have yet to reach a comprehensive deficit-reduction plan, our parks could be subject to dramatic cuts in March and all 398 units could even be closed in the event of a federal government shutdown later that month. In February, an internal memo from National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis was leaked to the press, instructing park superintendents to prepare for the 5% across-the-board cut that would result if Congress allowed “sequestration” to go into effect. By the time you read this, those cuts may have already happened, may have been temporarily delayed, or may have been made even worse by a subsequent deal. Of the prospect of facing these cuts, Director Jarvis stated: “We expect that a cut of this magnitude, intensified by the lateness of the implementation, will result in reductions to visitor services, hours of operations, shortening of seasons and possibly the closing of areas during periods when there is insufficient staff to ensure the protection of visitors, employees, resources and government assets.”

Park Service funding is already likely to be seriously challenged for the next decade due to discretionary spending caps passed in

August 2011 under the first phase of budget negotiations. The New Year's deal to avoid the “fiscal cliff” reduced those caps even further for the next two years, raising the threatening prospect that future negotiations could further chip away at the portion of the budget impacting national parks.

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In 2010, visitors to national parks supported more than \$31 billion in spending to local economies—\$10 for every \$1 invested—and more than 258,000 jobs. Additionally, the entire National Park System currently operates on 1/14th of 1% of the federal budget and that funding has already suffered a 6% reduction over the past two fiscal years. Absorbing these additional cuts in

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**Top:** Mabry Mill near Meadows of Dan, VA at milepost 176 on the Blue Ridge Parkway features a restored, working mill, exhibits on rural life in Appalachia plus a restaurant and gift shop. ©Jerry Greer

# FIELD REPORT

Winter 2013

## Southeast Regional Office

Advocating for National Parks in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, North Carolina and South Carolina

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NPCA is America's only private, nonprofit advocacy organization solely dedicated to protecting and enhancing the National Park System.

NPCA was founded in 1919 and today has more than 750,000 members and supporters.

[www.npca.org](http://www.npca.org)

REFLECTIONS FROM THE SENIOR DIRECTOR



In the ongoing national deficit debate, our national parks are innocent bystanders, about to become a casualty of a problem they did not create. The more than \$30 billion annually generated by national parks is comparable to the revenue of some of the top hundred Fortune 500 companies like Time Warner and American Express.

National parks are America's common ground. **A recent national survey, conducted jointly by Republican and Democratic polling organizations, found that 92% of Americans believe that funding for the national parks should be maintained or increased. But Congress hasn't gotten the message. Adjusted for inflation, park funding is down 15% from 10 years ago.** Congress's inability to find common ground

for the common good means deeper cuts that would threaten the very ability of the parks to preserve America's heritage. It is critical that your representatives hear your voice now.

Allowing sequestration or other funding cuts to diminish the parks would be mindlessly counter-productive to America's economic recovery. National parks aren't part of the problem; they're part of the solution, and cutting their budgets in the name of economic recovery would be about as penny-wise and pound-foolish as it gets.

**Top:** Don Barger relaxes on the summit of Hawksbill Mountain (elevation 4,009 ft) overlooking Linville Gorge near the Linville Falls Visitor Center at milepost 316.4 on the Blue Ridge Parkway. ©Lisa Barger

**Please call your U.S. senators and representatives before April 1, and tell them "National Parks are important to me, my community and to America. They should not suffer further funding cuts."**

**TAKE ACTION NOW!**

Here are the main switchboard numbers for easy reference: Senate—202-224-3121 and House—202-225-3121. (Just ask for your senator or representative and the operator will connect you.)

## Volunteers in Parks – The Hendersons

Our national park story began in 2006 when we sold our house north of Houston and bought a fifth-wheel camper trailer and a Dodge truck, driving off in search of good temperatures and opportunities to volunteer at national parks and church camps. Prior to retiring, my wife Diane had been an elementary art teacher for 10 years and I was a university professor. We have been blessed with a good life and health and wanted to give something back in service.

I contacted eight national parks, and five of them offered to provide us full hookup RV space in return for 16-22 hours of volunteer work each week. Heading to the southeast, we decided to volunteer near the Blue Ridge Parkway and at Cumberland Gap National Historic Park. Summer 2012 found us at Mt. Pisgah off of the Blue Ridge Parkway near Asheville, NC where we worked evenings keeping the campground office open after the rangers left. The people there were great to work with and it provided an opportunity to work closely with the rangers in placing people in the campground and collecting money.

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In the fall of 2012 we worked at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park in Kentucky, helping staff the visitor center and assisting with the Gap Cave tours. The visitors we met were impressed and surprised at the beauty and history of the park. We enjoyed providing visitors with brochures, maps, details, suggestions and sharing the park’s history with them. The park staff treated us like part of the park family.

Many parks have homecoming or heritage events with volunteers dressed in period costumes demonstrating the skills, trades, and food that shaped the lives of early settlers. This past September, Cumberland

Gap’s “Homespun Appalachia” festival drew approximately 3,000 children and adults. It is amazing what the Interpretative Rangers are able to accomplish with demonstrations and historical information when they do programs for schools and the public.

The National Park Service budget has been cut many times and one way to help is to volunteer. Our experience volunteering with the Park Service has been excellent and we HIGHLY recommend that others try it. I hope that many others will visit national parks and see that we all need to work and volunteer to keep the parks open and offering great programs.

*David and Diane Henderson are wintering in Texas, planning their next national park trip and volunteer adventure. They are among the 250 volunteers who contribute over 30,000 hours of volunteer work at Cumberland Gap NHP each year. For more info on Volunteers in Parks visit [http://www.nps.gov/getinvolved/upload/vip\\_brochure.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/getinvolved/upload/vip_brochure.pdf).*



# 3020

Number of volunteers who help park staff at the Smokies each year; maintaining trails and campgrounds, removing invasive plants, working litter patrol and assisting in visitor centers. And—they can still use more volunteers!

**Left:** David & Diane Henderson at Hensley Settlement in Cumberland Gap National Historic Park. Ranger-guided tours visit this historic log cabin settlement mid-May through the end of October. Photo courtesy of David Henderson.

## Funding Cuts = Local Jobs Lost

Ten years ago, the nation's most visited park unit had 240 permanent positions to manage "America's Favorite Drive." Today, the Blue Ridge Parkway can afford to fill only about 170 of those jobs, leaving a third of the maintenance department unstaffed.

With only 8 permanent interpretative rangers available for the 14 visitor contact facilities that serve over 22 million visitors annually along the parkway's 469-mile length, park managers spend \$600,000 a year to hire seasonal employees to keep those facilities open during the busy season from April through October. The Parkway's annual budget totals \$16.3 million, so even a five percent cut would reduce the operating budget by \$815,000—more than the Parkway spends each year on its seasonal interpretative rangers. Without this funding, the Parkway will have to cut 21 seasonal interpretative ranger positions, resulting in the closure of seven (half!) of the visitor contact centers. A ten percent cut would almost certainly mean the layoff of some permanent employees and the elimination of seasonal hires altogether, resulting in the closure of additional parkway facilities.

Reduced funding would also be detrimental at Cumberland Gap National Historic Park, where increased visitation at the park has



underscored the park's existing staffing shortages. Currently, most staff members wear many new "hats" as they try to cover the work responsibilities of several permanent positions that are vacant at current funding levels. These positions include a deputy superintendent to help manage the park and its nearly 1 million annual visitors; a resource management specialist to ensure protection of the scenic, historic, and recreational resources at the park; maintenance mechanics and laborers who help maintain facilities; and park rangers to help guide visitors and ensure their safety.

Park staff members have taken several steps to keep operating expenses down, such as turning off the lights, closing buildings, bringing on more volunteers and other cost-reduction strategies. But despite these efficiency efforts, they continue to struggle to meet visitors' needs with insufficient manpower. Additional funding cuts would make a bad situation even worse by reducing or eliminating seasonal hires needed during peak vacation and leaf-peeping seasons.

While these are examples of the staffing crisis facing two parks, it is important to remember that for every two park service jobs, one job outside the park is supported. Local businesses that serve park visitors—the restaurants, shops, equipment rentals, motels, gas stations, and other small businesses—will be negatively affected, too. These businesses, their employees and their families depend on keeping the national parks open and in good condition. To quote from Governor Bill Haslam's recent State of the State address – "In Tennessee, tourism equals jobs." This certainly applies to the other forty nine states, as well.

**Above:** Volunteer re-enactor John Perry shows a young park visitor how a traditional corn grinder works during the Hometown Appalachia living history weekend at Cumberland Gap National Historic Park. ©NPS

## Park Funding Crisis Ongoing

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the last part of this fiscal year would seriously damage the Park Service budget especially as we approach the busy summer tourism season.

If these cuts go into effect, they will harm every site in the park system and could cripple businesses and communities adjacent to parks, not to mention the impact on millions of Americans who rely on national parks for affordable vacations. Our national parks—and the American people who count on the preservation of their rich natural, cultural and historical heritage—deserve better.



**Right:** Sunset view from Mt. LeConte, elevation 6,593 ft - the third highest peak in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, behind Clingman's Dome and Mount Guyot. © Joel Carillet/ISTOCKPHOTO

# PARKS IN JEOPARDY



After two years of declining funding, national parks now face the prospect of additional cuts, including the looming threat of the "sequester" scheduled for January 2013. If Congress doesn't agree on a deficit-reduction plan, the Park Service could face cuts of more than 8 percent. That would likely mean closed visitor centers, closed campgrounds, closed parks, and thousands of park staff out of a job.

## SMALL COST, BIG IMPACT



The Park Service budget is **1/14th** of **1%** of the nation's budget. Slashing it would have a serious impact on the **258,000 Jobs** in surrounding communities.

## ONE GEORGE = TWO ABES



Every dollar invested in park operations generates about **\$10** for local communities, and every two Park Service jobs yield one job outside the park.

## AN OPEN & SHUT CASE



Proposed cuts to NPS budget would be equivalent to closing more than **200** parks with the smallest budgets.

## THE WRONG DIRECTION



In today's dollars, the budget for the Park Service is **\$465 million** less — or 15 percent below what it was 10 years ago.

## A POPULAR MOVE



**92%** of Americans believe that park funding should be increased or remain at current levels.

## ECONOMIC GENERATORS



Parks generate **\$31 billion** for local economies each year, comparable to the revenue of many Fortune 500 companies.

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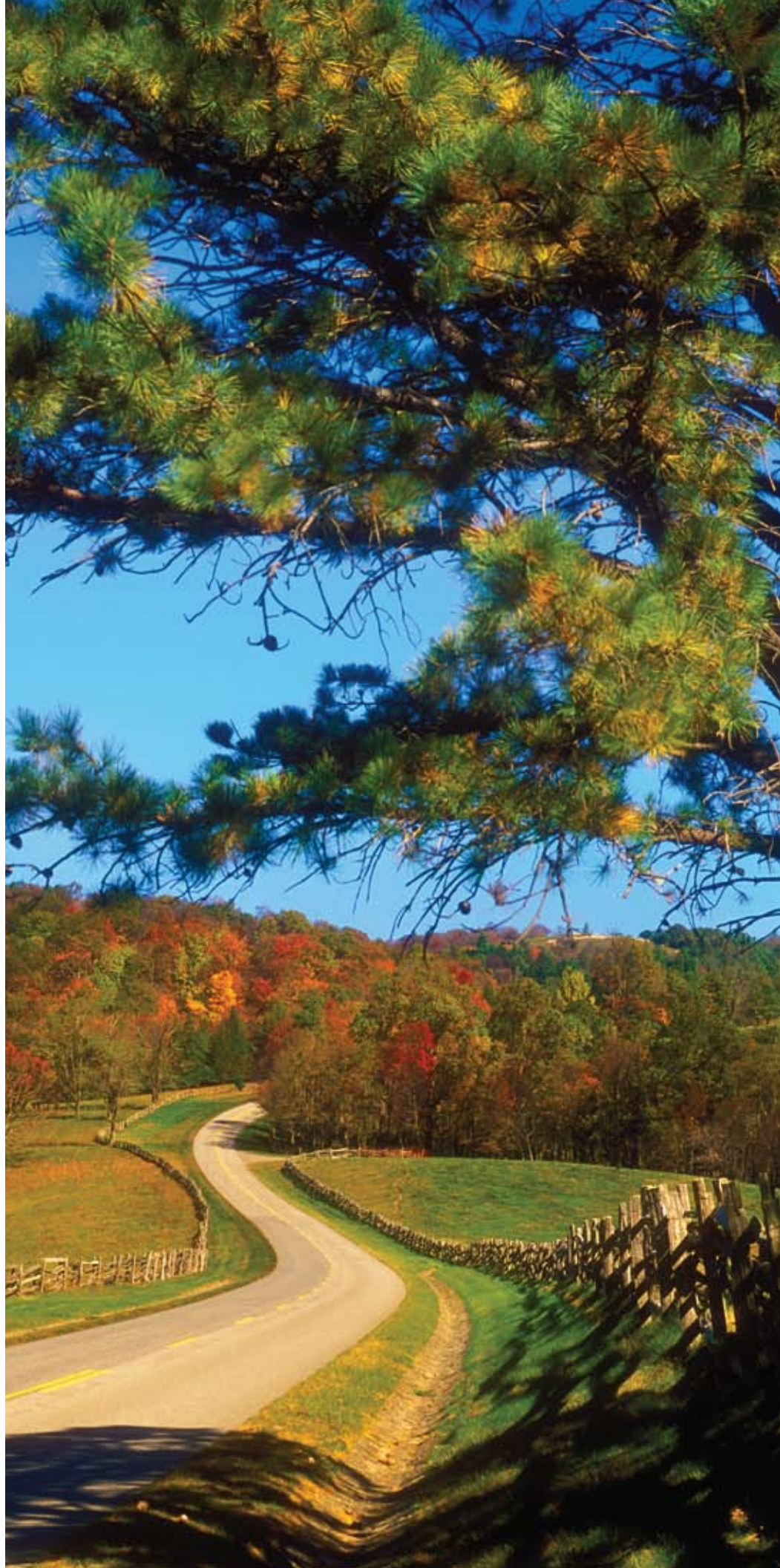
## Carry NPCA in Your Wallet ...

The National Parks Conservation Association is proud to partner with Capital One® in offering exclusive NPCA Visa® affinity cards. NPCA members and supporters have the ability to earn great rewards and generate funds for NPCA every time an account is opened and every time a purchase is made. You can choose from three distinctive images—Yosemite National Park, the Washington Monument, or the Grand Canyon. To learn more and apply for your own NPCA affinity card, visit [www.npca.org/card](http://www.npca.org/card).



## ... and at Your Fingertips!

Now you can access all the great features of [www.npca.org](http://www.npca.org) on your phone with our specially designed website for mobile devices. Read our Park Advocate blog and join in the conversation, find information about the park you're in or those you plan to visit, view park slideshows, renew your membership, support special NPCA initiatives—it's all right at your fingertips. Intuitive and easy to navigate, NPCA's mobile website is our latest effort to connect you with your national parks.



# The Parkway's Future: Scenic Drive or Commuter Route?

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facing the Blue Ridge Parkway. The day long workshop brought together individuals from nearly all 17 counties along the North Carolina portion of the parkway, including community and tourism leaders, land trusts, regional planning groups, transportation officials, recreation interests, wildlife specialists and more. The workshop capped over a year's worth of research and collaboration between NPCA, the University of Georgia's Center for Remote Sensing and Mapping Science, and the Asheville Design Center.

The workshop offered the opportunity to share data, analysis, and maps that showed information such as future population growth and development patterns, critical viewsheds, priority conservation lands, important cultural resources, as well as current and projected traffic volumes and patterns. Workshop attendees spent the afternoon in breakout discussions focused on themes of land and resource protection, recreation access and use, and tourism and economic development.

The workshop brought together individuals from nearly all 17 counties along the North Carolina portion of the parkway, including community and tourism leaders, land trusts, regional planning groups, transportation officials, recreation interests, wildlife specialists and more.

"The event successfully brought together a diverse group of knowledgeable people to help us ground truth our collected information, fill in missing pieces and identify important areas needing further attention," said Chris Watson, NPCA's Blue Ridge Parkway program manager. "After thoroughly evaluating the feedback from the workshop participants, NPCA will be working to define a second phase of this project, which will add new information and refine and expand the analysis to date."

The intent of NPCA's work going forward is to encourage the National Park Service, in collaboration with the North Carolina Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration, to examine the impacts of secondary road

development in a holistic manner to prevent the incremental loss of the scenic parkway experience. We can also lower the cost of such planning by sharing the data and results of our analysis and expect that our research will be useful to the land trust community by helping to identify parcels near key secondary roads that should be prioritized for conservation.

NPCA would like to acknowledge and thank the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation and NPCA Regional Council member, Mary English

for their generous support of this workshop. Stay tuned for updates in 2013 as we move closer to an official NPS transportation plan that will insure that the Parkway remains separate and distinct from the regional transportation system for generations to come.

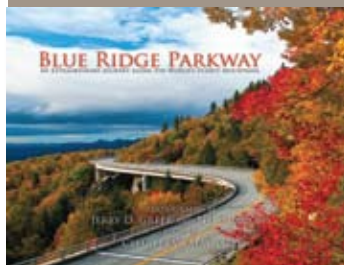
**Left:** Doughton Park near milepost 240 on the Blue Ridge Parkway; one of the best places on the parkway to view wildlife, including white-tailed deer, raccoons, red and gray foxes and bobcats. ©2012 Pat & Chuck Blackley

## NPCA IN THE FIELD

This past September, Southeast Regional Council members and NPCA staff toured the Cumberland Gap National Historic Park and held a reception attended by community leaders, park partners and NPCA members. By learning more about the park's amazing history, its natural and cultural resources, and management challenges, attendees became better advocates for its protection and funding.



On January 23rd, NPCA Southeast staff welcomed more than seventy NPCA members, nature photographers and national park supporters to the East Tennessee History Center in Knoxville to preview the new book "**Blue Ridge Parkway—An Extraordinary Journey Along the World's Oldest Mountains**".



The audience was spellbound hearing insider stories about the collaboration between the book's three creators, **photographers Jerry Greer and Nye Simmons** and **author Charles Maynard** (who serves on the NPCA Southeast Regional Council). The book is a photographic exploration covering all 469 miles of the strikingly scenic Blue Ridge Parkway, offering stunning vistas and endless natural beauty from the misty Appalachian Mountains to graceful waterfalls and fields of

wildflowers. NPCA received half of the sales from this event and wishes to thank everyone who attended and helped make it happen.



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Perhaps one of the most interesting creatures found in the Great Smoky Mountains is the arthropod formally known as *Cosberella lamar alexanderi*, named after Tennessee Senator Lamar Alexander in recognition of the congressman's history of support for the park. The insect's colorful markings reminded researchers of the red plaid shirt Alexander famously wore while campaigning across the state when he ran for governor in the 1970s.

## YOU Did It!

**Thanks to you, Renewing our Promise: The Second Century Campaign for the National Parks raised \$132.5 million toward a goal of \$125 million.**

**A** historic and highly successful fundraising campaign, NPCA's Renewing Our Promise campaign aims to ensure that our national parks are restored and protected for future generations. As the money was raised over the past five years, it was invested in three key places: NPCA's endowment, which will support the organization in perpetuity; existing programs to ensure the organization's health and vibrancy; and new programs that extend NPCA's impact on national parks throughout the country.

Renewing Our Promise sought improvements to virtually every NPCA department and program, an extraordinary infusion of support for our regional and field work, advocacy and government affairs, strategic communications, as well as our park research and park management services.



These widespread enhancements to NPCA broadened and deepened our work on behalf of national parks and help us pursue an even more ambitious path with the approaching National Park Service centennial.

We are grateful to you and to the legions of members, corporations, foundations, and

other friends whose campaign gifts have touched and transformed NPCA—and by extension—the future of our beloved national parks. Thank you!

**Above:** Spring morning on Hyatt Lane in Cades Cove, Great Smoky Mountains National Park. ©Daveallenphoto/Dreamstime.com



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