



WENOCA SIERRAN

Newsletter of the
Western North Carolina Sierra Club

Explore, enjoy and protect the planet

February 2009

Upcoming Events:

Jewish Community Center
238 Charlotte St.

Social 7 pm / Program 7:30

Thursday, February 26
Photographer
Art Grand

*Turning Snapshots
into Photographs*

Thank you from outgoing Chair ...

As outgoing Chair, I wish to thank the members for the opportunity to serve the group and to do my small part to help protect this beautiful part of North Carolina that I am proud to call home.

I wish our new Chair Dave Erb well. I know that he will be a great leader for the WENOCA Group.

Don Baker

Executive Committee meetings are held regularly prior to our monthly programs.

All WENOCA members are invited to attend.

For more information, call Dave Erb at 251-8289.

Turning Snapshots into Photographs

Have you ever witnessed a spectacular scene, grabbed your camera, then later found yourself explaining a humdrum image to an unimpressed audience?

WENOCA Group is pleased to invite you to join us on Thursday, February 26, when Art Grand will discuss outdoor photography techniques that enthusiasts can use to improve the odds that the natural beauty we see ends up in photos that speak for themselves.

Art is a long-time photographer. As an active member of the Carolinas Nature Photographers Association and Animal Compassion Network, he has enjoyed many outdoor adventures in Western North Carolina with his cameras and his dog, Sandy. Photographers and nature lovers of all ability levels can count on a colorful and informative presentation.

Social time begins at 7 pm with our program at 7:30.

WENOCA Chapter News

New meeting location announced

Beginning with the February 26 meeting, WENOCA is moving the monthly meetings to the Jewish Community Center on Charlotte Street. It is with regret that we leave the Unitarian Universalist Church facility as we have met there for many years and we have greatly appreciated the use of their space. The primary reason for the move is financial. The new location will offer the group a substantial savings in rental fees. These funds can now be used for other projects and to help protect the environment of Western North Carolina.

WENOCA seeks volunteer leaders

WENOCA Group is seeking volunteer leaders to re-activate our outings program. Training is provided by the club. Interested parties should contact Dave Erb at (828) 251-8289 or daveerb@charter.net, or any other ExCom member.

Ex Com members elected

The results of the elections are official and all three candidates on the ballot - Margaret Stipewich, Dave Erb, and Don Baker were elected to the WENOCA

Executive committee.

At the Excom meeting on January 12 the following positions were filled: Chair- Dave Erb; Vice chair - Don Jeffries; Treasurer - Grace Curry; Publicity - Sara May; Membership - Margaret Stipewich; and Conservation Chair - Susan Stewart.

Forum for WENOCA members

WENOCA now has a Forum for disseminating and discussing information as we seek to "explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places" of Western North Carolina. To join the listserv:

- 1) Go to: <http://lists.sierraclub.org>.
- 2) Then find and click on: NC-WENOCA-FORUM.
- 3) Click on: Join or Leave the NC-WENOCA-FORUM.
- 4) Enter your Name, Email Address and click on: Join the WENOCA Forum.

You will then receive an email asking you to confirm your action. That's all there is to it! This will greatly facilitate our ability to communicate and will also save money if you are willing to receive the WENOCA Newsletter via email.





**SIERRA
CLUB**
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The WENOCA GROUP
of the SIERRA CLUB
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The Executive Committee meets monthly. For more information, please contact Dave Erb at 251-8289 or at daveerb@charter.net. All WENOCA members are invited to attend. Our website is www.nc.sierraclub.org/wenoca.

County Considering Steep Slope Changes

Five new members have been appointed to the Buncombe County Planning Board. This nine-member Board is reviewing the county subdivision ordinance, which includes the steep slope provisions passed in 2006 and 2007. Some proposed changes may help protect mountains from inappropriate development, **but others will reduce existing protections.** Less protection for our mountains from the impacts of development is **not** what the Commissioners promised when they passed the steep slope law and the public is strongly opposed to any changes that will weaken this ordinance.

The Planning Board's proposal includes the following changes related to allowable land clearing in hillside developments and other issues:

1) Doubling Land Clearing Limits on Very Steep Slopes - The most significant change proposes to double -- from 15%, as currently allowed, to 30% -- the amount of land clearing that can take place in an area with a natural slope above 35%. The previous Board had not been applying land clearing limits according to the meaning and intent of the existing regulations, and now the new Board is considering a change to make the law less protective.

2) Changing "Natural State" Restriction - Another proposed revision would change an ordinance section adopted in 2007. It would eliminate the requirement that land outside of the allowable clearing areas must remain in a "natural state" (its condition prior to development), replacing it with a vague, undefined requirement. This is especially troublesome, because the Planning Department used the "natural state" ordinance to issue a violation notice to a developer who sprayed herbicide over

many acres of his development last summer. (See Mountain Xpress article http://www.mountainx.com/news/2007/070908the_green_scene/). Why would the Board want to change a law that it has already found necessary to use?

Positive Changes - Two good proposed changes should be supported:

1) The first would reduce the number of houses allowed to be built in steep slope developments.

2) The other relates to determining whether a potential development site has an adequate water supply if it is to rely on private wells. With current drought conditions, and over 50% of County residents dependent on well water, there are serious concerns regarding water. There are a growing number of examples of developers who start to build subdivisions, only to find there is not enough water to support the home sites. The Planning Board is considering including a "strong suggestion" that the developers investigate the availability of water supplies, but making it a requirement will do a better job of protecting our mountains if it turns out that water cannot be found. Many environmental groups are encouraging scientific studies be implemented to determine which areas show adequate water availability.

How you can help

Contact each Planning Board member and Commissioner. Tell them the land clearing proposals are a bad idea, and that making the law less protective is wrong.

Planning Board Contact Information:

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WENOCA OFFICERS 2009 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Dave Erb – Chair - 251-8289
Don Jeffries - Vice-Chair
Grace Curry - Treasurer
Sara May - Publicity
Margaret Sticpewich - Membership
Joyce Birkenholz
Don Baker

Susan Keene - Conservation Chair
Elaine Lite - Newsletter Editor

WENOCA SIERRAN is the newsletter of the Western North Carolina Sierra Club. The newsletter is published five times a year. Articles and comments are welcome.