THE INSIDE STORY

LOCAL PRESENCE, LOCAL POWER

SELC’s Asheville Office in the Heart of the Southern Appalachians

To save a special part of the South, there’s no substitute for being there. In 1999, the Southern Environmental Law Center hired Doug Ruley, a Harvard Law grad with special expertise in endangered species issues, to open our first satellite office in Asheville, North Carolina. Our local presence would reinforce ongoing work from SELC’s Virginia-Tennessee and North Carolina-South Carolina core offices to protect the 4.7 million acres of Southern Appalachian national forest.

“If you’re dealing with mountain forests, Asheville is the place to be,” Doug explains. “Being here puts us closer to many of our partner groups and the agencies we work with every day. It allows us to build contacts and relationships that make SELC much more effective. The more we know people and the challenges they’re up against, the more we can tailor our strategies for maximum effectiveness.”

It also makes SELC more nimble, adds DJ Gerken, a University of Virginia law school alumnus who came on board in 2004. “When an issue comes up, we’re on it right from the start. The sooner we get involved, the more opportunity we have to shape how it turns out.”

Thinking regionally but acting locally, our Asheville attorneys really get results. Most recently, they played a leading role in stopping the North Shore Road, a misguided plan to push 34 miles of pavement into the wildest part of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. They’ve helped hold off the proposed Globe timber sale, which would cut old-growth trees up to 300 years old and damage the Blowing Rock viewshed, and are now helping to build support for a national scenic area designation. And they’re the legal muscle that is persuading the U.S. Forest Service to clean up a “monster truck” off-roading area that’s killing trout waters in the Nantahala National Forest.

Thanks to our Asheville office, SELC is also the only organization that is able to work on the full array of local transportation and land use issues—including steep-slope development, soil erosion and sedimentation, conservation of water resources, and preservation of key elements of the landscape—and to take a comprehensive, long-term approach to ensure protection of the unique natural resources of western North Carolina.

“To do this work, we must partner with state lawmakers, county commissioners, and local citizens. We have to reach out to the community, which often means meeting with people in town halls and church basements,” notes DJ. “It really helps when you’re a face they recognize.”

As part of SELC’s new strategic action plan (see Page 1), we intend to expand our Asheville office and open new satellite offices based on this highly successful model.

Help Match a Challenge for National Park and National Forest Protection
SELC has received a $75,000 challenge grant from an anonymous donor that must be matched with gifts earmarked for national forest/national park protection. Make your matching gift at SouthernEnvironment.org/donate/. Thanks!

Take a Virtual Tour of the North Shore Road Case
To follow SELC Asheville attorney DJ Gerken on a virtual tour of the “Road to Nowhere” and hear about our efforts to defend the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, visit our multimedia library at SouthernEnvironment.org/multimedia/.