



CRUSADE OF THE GREEN WOMEN

Preserving the Southeast's Premier Whitewater Playground. The bright blue kayak completely disappears in the churning rapids, then shoots up like a cork from a champagne bottle, momentarily suspending vessel and rider in midair before splashing down into the chilly waters of the Nantahala River. Carolyn Allison has made this run a thousand times, but she'll tell you without hesitation, it's always a thrill.

"I love getting out on the river," says Carolyn. "I guess that's why I own a rafting company." Carolyn's deep appreciation for natural beauty goes beyond its importance for her livelihood. Like so many folks who live in the pristine splendor of Swain County, North Carolina, Carolyn is in love with this little enclave in the Smoky Mountains and is determined to protect it from abuse. That's why she joined the Green Women.

Going Green in a Land of Green. "We started the Green Women because we wanted to raise conservation awareness here in Swain County," says Laurie Perkins, "founding mother" of the organization. "We didn't want to lose what we have."

What they have is a county that is 87% natural woodlands and flowing rivers, including a large portion of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, an International Biosphere Reserve. The Green Women, an informal group of women with a little time and a lot of drive, focus their efforts in two areas: conservation education for youth and reducing the use of plastic shopping bags.

Through the efforts of the Green Women, Swain County students are learning to conserve water and electricity. More and more Swain County shoppers now carry canvas bags to the supermarket. And the Green Women also promote recycling and sponsor trash pick-ups along the county's roadways and rivers. The goal is to get the whole county involved.

An Ecotourist Magnet. This largely unpopulated county in North Carolina's Smoky Mountains offers a raft of opportunities for the growing ranks of ecotourists. With dam-controlled flow and Class II and III rapids, the Nantahala River is the most popular in the Southeast, luring more than 200,000 paddlers to its waters every year. The whitewater enthusiasts who flock to nearby Deep Creek get similar thrills while clinging to inner tubes. And 11,700-acre Fontana Lake offers boating and skiing on its surface while lunker bass, muskie and walleye lurk in its depths.

Swain County also draws hikers who comb the Great Smoky Mountains National Park for a chance to hook a native brown trout, or catch a glimpse of a black bear, elk or rare songbird. Other activities include camping, biking, horseback riding, and exploring the cultures of mountain settlers and the Cherokee Indians whose sacred home is in the county. "The settlers and the Cherokee had the utmost respect for the environment," says Carolyn. "As Green Women, we're encouraging our neighbors and visitors to follow in those ancient footsteps—and leave the smallest footprint possible."

For more information on touring the Smokies, contact the Swain County Chamber of Commerce, 210 Main Street, P.O. Box 509, Bryson City, NC 28713; chamber@greatsmokies.com; or 800.867.9246.