

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



SMOKIES GUIDE

The Official Newspaper of the Smokies • Fall 2025



Chad Duneheew,
Prescribed Fire and Fuels Specialist

Words with a Ranger

Greetings! I serve as the prescribed fire and fuels specialist for the Appalachian Piedmont Coastal Fire Management Zone, working within Great Smoky Mountains National Park's Fire and Aviation Management Division.

As a child growing up in Kentucky, I had the opportunity to visit Great Smoky Mountains National Park multiple times—on family vacations, school trips, and weekend getaways. Those early experiences sparked a lifelong appreciation for the majesty of our public lands and the mission of the National Park Service. Today, I am honored to help protect this iconic landscape, its rich cultural heritage, and the millions of visitors who come here each year.

My role centers around managing hazardous fuels—natural vegetation that, if left unmanaged, could increase

Both sections of the Foothills Parkway—east (accessed near Cosby, Tennessee, and pictured above) and west (accessed near Walland or Wears Valley, Tennessee)—offer views of dazzling fall colors. *Photo courtesy of Smokies Life archives.*

Preparing for Fire Season in the Great Smokies

What to expect this fall

Fire is a natural and essential part of the Smokies landscape, playing a vital role in maintaining ecological balance. It recycles nutrients into the soil, promotes new vegetation growth, and reduces the severity of future fires by preventing hazardous fuels from building up. However, wildfires can also present serious risks—particularly when dry, windy conditions or proximity to developed areas increase the likelihood of rapid spread.

As fall approaches, fire managers are closely monitoring wildfire conditions. Forecasts for the upcoming fall season indicate an above-average potential for wildfire activity. Fall leaf litter, combined with low humidity and gusty winds, can elevate fire danger.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park maintains a dedicated fire staff that includes a wildland fire module, a Type 6 engine crew, a fuels module, a

fire effects crew, and fire management officials. Fires in the park are managed using a variety of strategies, including full suppression, containment within a defined perimeter, or a combination of tactics to ensure human safety while also protecting the park's diverse natural resources.

To stay safe, both residents and visitors should stay vigilant during the fall fire season. Follow all posted fire restrictions, ensure campfires are fully extinguished, and avoid open flames during periods of high fire danger. People with respiratory conditions should monitor air quality alerts and limit outdoor exposure when smoke is present.

Smoke from wildfires or prescribed burns may be visible—or not—but can still travel long distances. Stay informed through local alerts as well as park fire conditions at nps.gov/grsm/planyour-visit/conditions.htm.



PARKING TAG REQUIRED!

Parking in the Smokies for more than 15 minutes requires a valid parking tag (annual tag pictured).

For more info, scan code with camera app



Continued on page 12

OUR PARK
ON SOCIAL MEDIA



GreatSmoky
MountainsNPS



GreatSmokyNPS



GreatSmokyNPS

SMOKIES TRIP PLANNER



Visitor centers

Sugarlands, Oconaluftee, and Cades Cove: open 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Sept.–Nov.; 9 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Dec. (Cades Cove open 7 a.m.–3 p.m. on Wednesdays through Sept.)
Kuwahi: open 9:30 a.m.–6 p.m. Sept.–Oct.; 9:30 a.m.–5 p.m. Nov.; closed Dec.
GSM Institute at Tremont: open 10 a.m.–4 p.m. Tuesday–Saturday.



Road closures

- **Cades Cove Loop Road** is closed to vehicles on Wednesdays through September 24.
- **Heintooga/Round Bottom Road (Balsam Mountain Road)** and **Straight Fork Road** are closed due to hurricane impacts.
- **Newfound Gap Road** is closed from Sugarlands to Newfound Gap due to a landslide.
- Many secondary and high-elevation roads close in late fall. Dates are listed on pages 8–9.
- Click “Alerts” at nps.gov/grsm for all current closures.



Shuttle services

Local shuttle services offer convenient transportation to and from the park’s most iconic destinations. Please consider a shuttle when hiking in the Roaring Fork area. Higher use is expected there during the closure on Newfound Gap Road. Visit go.nps.gov/grsmshuttles.



Weather

In autumn, a pattern of warm, sunny days and crisp, clear nights emerges by mid-September. However, cool, rainy days may also occur. Snow may fall at higher elevations beginning in November.
As winter arrives, days can be sunny and 65°F or snowy with highs in the 20s.



Campgrounds in the national park

The National Park Service maintains developed campgrounds at ten locations in the park. There are no showers, and hookups are available only at Look Rock Campground (ten campsites include electric and water hookups). Circuits for special medical uses are offered at Cades Cove, Elkmont, and Smokemont.
Campsite reservations are required at all park campgrounds. Sites may be reserved up to six months in advance. Camping is permitted only in designated sites.

Make your reservation online at recreation.gov or call 877.444.6777.
Site occupancy is limited to six people and two vehicles (a trailer is considered one vehicle). The maximum stay is 14 days.
Campsites for larger groups are available at Big Creek, Cades Cove, Cataloochee, Cosby, Deep Creek, Elkmont, and Smokemont. Reservations are required and may be secured up to a year in advance. For more information, visit nps.gov/grsm.

Campground	No. of Sites	Elevation	Expected Open Dates 2025	Nightly Fees	Max RV Length
Abrams Creek	16	1,125'	5/19–10/26	\$30	12'
Balsam Mountain	43	5,310'	5/23–10/13	\$30	30'
Big Creek	12	1,700'	5/19–10/26	\$30	tents only
Cades Cove	159	1,807'	open year-round	\$30	35–40'
Cataloochee	27	2,610'	5/5–10/26	\$30	31'
Cosby	157	2,459'	5/19–10/26	\$30	25'
Deep Creek	92	1,800'	4/18–10/26	\$30	26'
Elkmont	220	2,150'	3/15–11/30	\$30	32–35'
Look Rock	69	2,600'	5/19–10/26	\$30–36	no limit
Smokemont	142	2,198'	open year-round	\$30	35–40'



Firewood

To prevent the spread of destructive pests, only USDA- or state-certified heat-treated firewood may be brought into the park. Campers may gather dead and down wood in the park for campfires.



Picnic areas

Picnic areas at Cades Cove, Deep Creek, Greenbrier, and Metcalf Bottoms are open year-round. Heintooga closes October 14; Big Creek and Look Rock close October 27; Cosby closes October 28; and Chimneys closes December 1. Picnic pavilions may be reserved for a fee at recreation.gov.



Accommodations

LeConte Lodge (accessible by trail only, closes November 15) provides the only lodging in the park. Reservations required. 865.429.5704, lecontelodge.com



Services

There are no gas stations, charging stations, showers, or restaurants in the national park. Limited food options are available in visitor centers and camp stores.



Event reservations

Reserve the Appalachian Clubhouse or Spence Cabin at Elkmont for daytime events at recreation.gov. Cabin and clubhouse close October 31.



Pets

Pets are allowed in campgrounds and along roads as long as they are restrained at all times. Pets are not allowed on park trails, except for Gatlinburg and Oconaluftee River trails. Pets must be kept on a leash no longer than six feet.

SMOKIES GUIDE

Smokies Guide is produced four times per year by Smokies Life and Great Smoky Mountains National Park.
nps.gov/grsm
SmokiesLife.org

Publication dates
Spring: March
Summer: June
Autumn: September
Winter: December

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P.O. Box 130
Gatlinburg, TN 37738

Available in digital format at issuu.com/greatsmokymountainsassociation

Printed on recycled paper



Bicycling

Most park roads are too narrow and heavily traveled for safe or enjoyable bicycling. Bicycles are permitted on park roads but prohibited on trails except Gatlinburg, Oconaluftee River, and lower Deep Creek and Indian Creek trails. Helmets are required by law for persons age 16 or under and strongly recommended for all.

Cades Cove Loop Road is open exclusively to cyclists and pedestrians on Wednesdays through September 24. Bikes may be rented at the Cades Cove Campground Store 9 a.m.–4 p.m. Bike rental opens early at 7 a.m. on vehicle-free Wednesdays. 865.448.9034.



Horseback riding

Some 550 miles of park trails are open to horses. See park trail map for trails and rules. The Anthony Creek, Cataloochee, and Tow String horse camps are open. Camps at Big Creek and Round Bottom remain closed due to storm damage. Visit recreation.gov for availability.

Three concession horseback riding stables offer rides from March through November.

- Cades Cove 865.448.9009 cadescovestables.com
- Smokemont 828.497.2373 smokemontridingstable.com
- Sugarlands 865.436.5470 sugarlandsstables.com



Fishing

Fishing is permitted year-round in the park, but a Tennessee or North Carolina fishing license is required. Either state license is valid throughout the park, and no trout stamp is required. Fishing with bait is prohibited. Special permits are required for the Qualla Boundary and Gatlinburg, and licenses are available in nearby towns. A free fishing map with a complete list of all park fishing regulations is available at visitor centers.



Backcountry camping

The park service maintains more than 100 campsites and shelters dispersed throughout the Smokies' backcountry trail network. Although all overnight stays require a permit and reservation at a designated campsite, the greatest challenge might be deciding where to go. See below for help as you prepare for your next adventure:

1. Get the map. Go online to view the park's official trail map (go.nps.gov/grsmmaps), which shows all park trails, campsites, and shelters. Park rules and regulations are also listed here. You can purchase the printed version of the trail map for \$1 at any park visitor center or online at SmokiesLife.org.

2. Plan your trip. Call the park's Backcountry Office from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. or drop into the

office located within Sugarlands Visitor Center for trip-planning help. The office is open to visitors during visitor center hours. 865.436.1297.

3. Get a permit. Make your reservation and get your permit by phone or in person through the Backcountry Office at Sugarlands Visitor Center or online at smokiespermits.nps.gov.

Reservations and permits are required for all overnight stays in the backcountry. The cost is \$8 per person per night. Reservations may be made up to 30 days in advance. Backcountry camping permit holders are not exempt from parking tag requirements.

Fall hikers should be especially aware of abrupt weather changes and the danger of hypothermia—the dangerous lowering of body temperature. The combination of rain, cold, and wind (especially at higher elevations) is extremely dangerous.

See page 11 for more hiking tips and trip essentials.



Special events and ranger activities

See pages 4–7 for special events and ranger activities, inquire at visitor centers, or visit go.nps.gov/grsmcalendar for a full calendar of events.



**MOVING
ROCKS HARMS
AQUATIC LIFE.**

**GSMNP
BY THE NUMBERS**



31 species of salamanders



70 species of mammals



10,500+ species of insects



16 mtns. higher than 6,000'



12 million+ visitors per year



1,000+ species new to science found in the park



The only two pet-friendly trails in the Smokies are the Gatlinburg Trail in Tennessee and the Oconaluftee River Trail in North Carolina.

Learn the BARK principles so you and your pet can have a safe and fun visit in the Smokies.

Take the BARK pledge:



Bag and bin your pet's waste



Always leash your pet



Respect wildlife



Know where you can go

**Download the
free NPS App**

for interactive maps, tours, and more!



RANGER ACTIVITIES



Event schedules are weather-dependent and subject to change. More programs listed on pages 6–7. For a full list, inquire at a visitor center or visit:

go.nps.gov/grsmcalendar



Interpretive Ranger Cody Boettner leads a 2024 program at Deep Creek. Photo by Holly Kays.

NORTH DISTRICT (near Gatlinburg, TN)	PROGRAMS RUN THROUGH OCT 31	WHEN?	MEETING LOCATION	DURATION/ ACCESSIBILITY
Bear With Us!: Come learn all about an iconic symbol of Great Smoky Mountains National Park—black bears! <i>*no program September 10</i>		Monday, Wednesday 11 a.m. Saturday 1 p.m.	Sugarlands Visitor Center patio	1 hour ♿
Junior Ranger Ramble: Join a ranger for a walk, talk, or guided activity to learn more about natural and cultural history and become a steward of the park. Topics vary daily. Check Sugarlands Visitor Center for more information.		Thursday, Saturday 11 a.m.	Sugarlands Visitor Center patio	1 hour
Vital Signs of the Smokies: Join a ranger for a walk or talk about the Smokies’ “vital signs,” observations that can help us better understand the challenges this fragile ecosystem faces and appreciate the beauty around us.		Sunday, Tuesday, Friday 1 p.m.	Sugarlands Visitor Center patio	1 hour ♿
Walker Sisters Hike: Take a walk through the woods to the Walker Sisters Cabin, learning about the communities, religion, education, and “modern” conveniences of the folks who once lived in these mountains. <i>*no program September 10</i>		Wednesday 11 a.m.	Little Greenbrier School	1.5 hours
Hiking 101: Hear from a ranger about tips, skills, and basics to help you experience the joys of hiking in Great Smoky Mountains National Park.		Monday, Thursday 1 p.m.	Sugarlands Visitor Center patio	1 hour ♿
History of Daisy Town: Visit the popular Non-Ghost Town of the Smokies and learn about the community of Daisy Town before the Smokies became a park.		Tuesday, Friday 11 a.m.	Jakes Creek parking area (Elkmont)	1 hour
Stream Splashers: Embark on a hands-on splash in the water with a ranger to learn about the health and history of our Smokies streams. Water shoes recommended. Participation limited to 25. Weather-dependent.		Thursday, September 4 Thursday, September 18 11 a.m.	Metcalf Bottoms Picnic Area	1.5 hours

SOUTH DISTRICT (near Cherokee, NC)	PROGRAMS RUN THROUGH OCT. 31	WHEN?	MEETING LOCATION	DURATION/ ACCESSIBILITY
Wild about the Smokies: Get the inside scoop on where to spot wildlife like bears and elk—and how to do it safely. Discover why scientists study mammals, birds, amphibians, and other species living in the park.		Daily 3 p.m.	Oconaluftee Visitor Center porch	30 minutes 
Down on the Farm: Immerse yourself in Smokies history! Rangers and living history demonstrators will showcase skills like blacksmithing, fence-making, and hearth cooking on which families once depended to make their living in the Smokies. Program topic varies. Check Oconaluftee Visitor Center for more information.		Monday to Friday Drop in, 10 a.m.–12 p.m.	Mountain Farm Museum	Drop in 
Kuwohi Guided Hike: Walk through a unique spruce-fir forest on the Smokies’ tallest mountain and discover all this park has to offer. A ranger will guide this 1.5-mile hike leading to the majestic views atop Kuwohi Observation Tower.		Sunday, Thursday 11 a.m.	Kuwohi parking area	1.5 hours
Stream Splashers: Get ready for a splashing good time discovering the magic of local streams, learning about aquatic life, and connecting with the environment. Water shoes recommended.		Saturday 2 p.m.	Smokemont Campground Nature Trailhead	1.5 hours
Evening Program: Grab your chair or blanket and gather at the grassy area between C and D loop at Smokemont Campground for an unforgettable evening program featuring the ranger’s favorite Smokies topic.		Saturday (first week of the month) 7 p.m.	Smokemont Campground	1 hour 



DUE TO HEAVY FALL TRAFFIC, REGULARLY SCHEDULED RANGER ACTIVITIES IN CADES COVE WILL END ON SEPTEMBER 30.

Some programming may continue on a day-to-day basis. Check a visitor center or the online calendar (see opposite page) for the most up-to-date information, and please allow extra time for your visit to Cades Cove.



CADES COVE (near Townsend, TN)	PROGRAMS RUN THROUGH SEPT. 30	WHEN?	MEETING LOCATION	DURATION/ ACCESSIBILITY
Drop into History: Watch (and possibly try) historic demonstrations related to life in Cades Cove. Offerings vary from day to day but may include blacksmithing, music, quilting, storytelling, doll-making, or weaving.		Sunday, Tuesday, Saturday Drop in, 10 a.m.–1 p.m.	Cable Mill Historic Area	Drop in 
Bear Aware: Join us in the picnic area for a short chat about bears in the Smokies, what to do if you see one, and how it takes all of us working together to keep them healthy and wild. <i>*no program September 27 due to Stargazing Party (see page 6)</i>		Monday, Friday, Saturday Drop in, 1–3 p.m.	Cades Cove Orientation Shelter	Drop in 
Cove Life: Step into the past and learn more about what it was like to live in the Cades Cove community by exploring the cabin where the cove’s first permanent European settlers lived.		Tuesday, Thursday Drop in, 9–11 a.m.	John Oliver Cabin	Drop in 
Autumn Ramble: Stroll through a Cades Cove meadow to learn about seasonal changes in the Smokies.		Tuesday, Thursday 2–3:30 p.m.	Sparks Lane water crossing	1.5 hours
Milling Around: Visit the historic buildings in the mill area to learn how residents used innovative technology to make life in Cades Cove more comfortable and efficient.		Thursday, Friday Drop in, 10 a.m.–12 p.m.	Cable Mill Historic Area	Drop in 
Wild Things: Bring the whole family for an interactive experience to learn about some of the creatures that call Cades Cove home. Some programs ADA-accessible. Check visitor center for more information.		Thursday, Friday 1 p.m.	Cable Mill Historic Area, program circle	45 minutes–1 hour (talk or activity)
Evening Program: Gather in the amphitheater for an engaging program on a ranger’s favorite Smokies topic. <i>*no program September 27 due to Stargazing Party (see page 6)</i>		Saturday 7 p.m.	Cades Cove Campground Ampitheater	1.5 hours 
The Cove After Dark: Take an evening walk with a ranger to experience the sights and sounds of Cades Cove at night. If the clouds cooperate, we’ll even peek at the stars.		Friday, Sept. 5, 12 8 p.m. Friday, Sept. 19, 26 7:30 p.m.	Cades Cove Orientation Shelter	1.5 hours 

THINGS TO DO IN THE FALL



Enjoy elk—safely!

There are few experiences more awe-inspiring than watching a herd of elk during the fall mating season, called the rut. Males show off by clashing their racks together or letting loose with a loud, haunting bugle as they compete for females. Though native to the Smokies, elk were absent for more than 200 years due to over-hunting and reintroduced in 2001.

Safety is important when watching these amazing creatures—males can weigh up to 1,000 pounds. Always stay at least 25 yards away, and be aware that some situations may call for more distance. If the animal is reacting to your presence, you’re too close. Leave a barrier like a car or tree between you where possible, and retreat if it approaches you. Never block an animal’s escape route, and don’t park or otherwise behave in such a way that you create a hazardous situation for other park visitors. *Photo by wildexposure/iNaturalist.*

Festivals offer autumn adventures

Fall is festival time in the Smokies! Stargaze with rangers, partake in the traditions of Appalachian harvest time, and see what life was like in the historic summer community of Daisy Town with weekend events you won’t want to miss.

FALL SPECIAL EVENTS	WHEN?	MEETING LOCATION
Cades Cove Sorghum-Making Demonstrations: Learn all about how this Smoky Mountain staple was grown, harvested, and preserved with these live demonstrations.	Sept. 19, 20, 21 Nov. 13, 14, 15, 16 Nov. 21, 22, 23 10 a.m.–5 p.m.	Cable Mill Historic Area at Cades Cove
Mountain Life Festival: Come on down to the Mountain Farm Museum for a glimpse into the past, featuring interactive cultural demonstrations and live music. Sorghum molasses processing and blacksmithing were important parts of rural family life in these Southern mountains, and the festival will celebrate these and other autumn traditions.	September 20 10 a.m.–4 p.m.	Mountain Farm Museum at Oconaluftee Visitor Center
Stargazing Party: Join rangers and local astronomy club members to see stars and learn about the night sky. The experience will include about a half mile of walking, and participants should bring a red flashlight, binoculars, water, snacks, warm layers, and a picnic blanket or chair. The event will be canceled if the sky is cloudy.	September 27 Sunset	Cades Cove Orientation Shelter
Daisy Town Days: Explore Daisy Town, a community with- in the historic Elkmont district, and celebrate those who lived, worked, and played in the Smokies before the park’s creation.	November 8 10 a.m.–2 p.m.	Jakes Creek parking area in Elkmont



Old-fashioned toy making on display at the Mountain Life Festival. Photo by Kristine Brunsman.

Adaptive programs make Smokies trails more accessible

Adventure awaits all visitors in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, regardless of ability or accessibility needs. Through a partnership with Catalyst Sports, the park will offer three ranger-led adaptive excursions this fall, with a free wheelchair checkout program allowing visitors to explore the park on their own schedule through the end of September.

Registration is required for ranger-led programs to ensure adequate availability of volunteers and equipment, and group size is limited. Registered participants may also bring their own adaptive equipment. Planned programs are shown in the table below.

GRIT Freedom Chairs are available for checkout at no charge on a first-come, first-served basis Sunday through Wednesday at Sugarlands Visitor Center near Gatlinburg or by reservation three to 30 business days in advance. These offroad-capable wheelchairs are designed to navigate uneven terrain, including rocks, roots, and unpaved hiking trails. Adult and child-sized chairs are available for people with core body strength and head control. Weight is limited to 250 pounds or less. To ensure safety, a park volunteer, friend, or family member must accompany chair users.

To learn more about adaptive programs and chair rentals, or to register, visit CatalystSports.org/great-smoky-mountain-adaptive-hike-bike.

FALL 2025 ADAPTIVE PROGRAMS	WHEN?	MEETING LOCATION
Mountain biking	September 10	Cades Cove maintenance area
Backcountry camping	October 4-5	Abrams Creek Campground
Hiking	October 25	Big Creek Picnic Area



A park visitor using an adaptive mountain bike near Deep Creek. Photo by NPS.

ASL programs expand the Smokies experience

This fall, rangers, professional American Sign Language interpreters, and ASL students will present six programs throughout the park. No reservations are required for these family-friendly programs.

FALL 2025 ASL RANGER PROGRAMS	WHEN?	MEETING LOCATION
Bear Aware (Drop in)	September 12 1–3 p.m.	Cades Cove Orientation Shelter
Cove After Dark Walk	September 12 8 p.m.	Cades Cove Orientation Shelter
History of Daisy Town	October 7 11 a.m.	Jakes Creek parking area
Vital Signs	October 7 2 p.m.	Newfound Gap Overlook
Down on the Farm (Drop in)	November 7 10 a.m.–12 p.m.	Mountain Farm Museum
Wild About the Smokies	November 7 3 p.m.	Oconaluftee Visitor Center



Two rangers signing the word ‘mountain’ in ASL. Photo by Sheree Varnes.

Parking tag purchase locations within the park

Parking tags may be purchased at locations designated by these symbols on the map:



- Available 24 hours per day
- Accepts credit/debit only
- Daily and weekly tags only

Located at Sugarlands Visitor Center, Cades Cove Loop Entrance, Metcalf Bottoms Picnic Area, Newfound Gap, Oconaluftee Visitor Center, Deep Creek Picnic Area, Kuwohi (formerly Clingmans Dome), Greenbrier, Cosby, Big Creek, Townsend Wye, Look Rock, and Cataloochee.



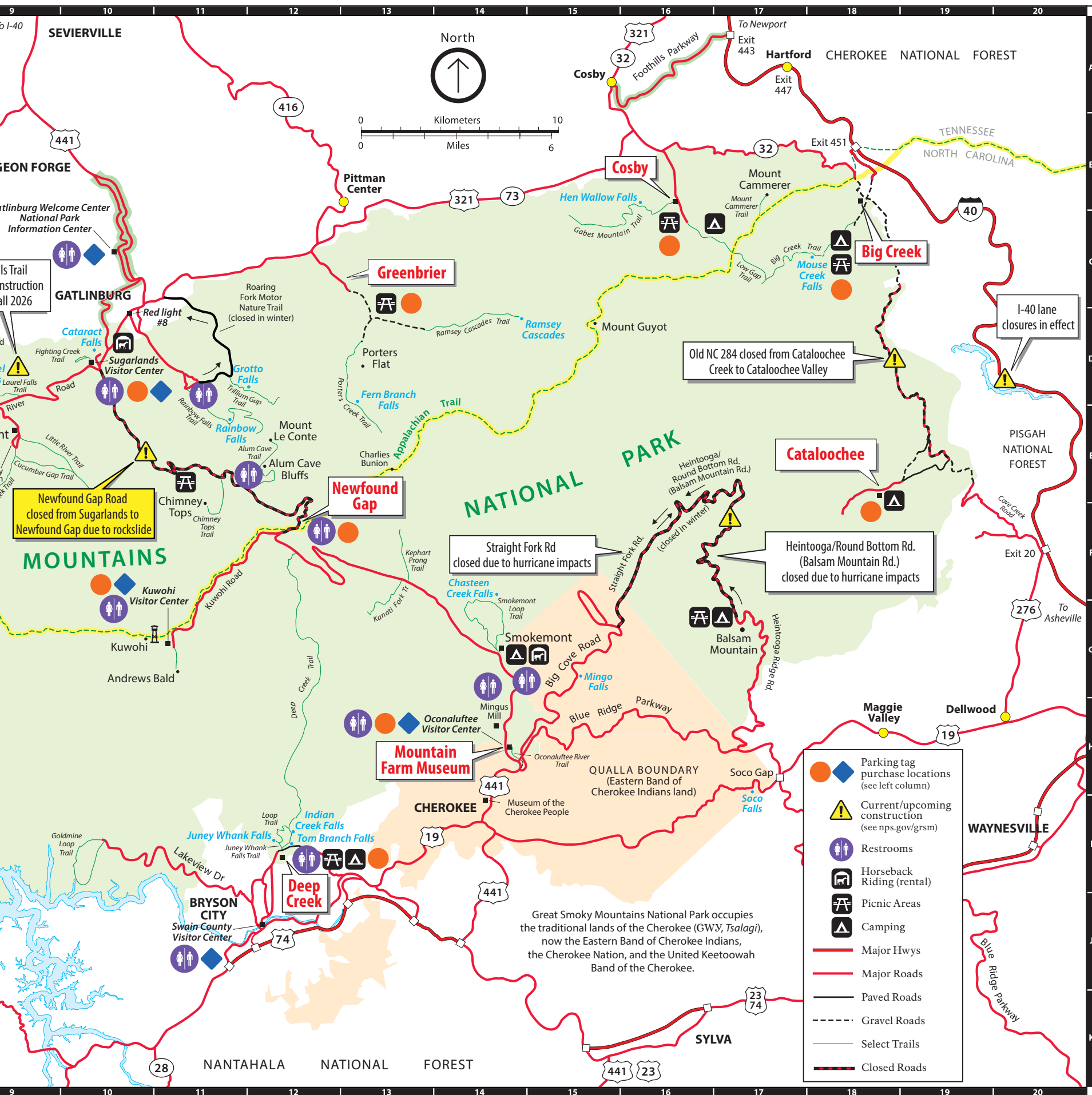
- Open business hours (see page 2)
- Accepts cash or credit/debit
- Daily, weekly, and annual tags available

Located at Sugarlands, Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont, Cades Cove, Oconaluftee, and Kuwohi (formerly Clingmans Dome).

Parking tags are available outside the park at Great Smokies Welcome Center in Townsend, Gatlinburg Welcome Center, Swain County Visitor Center in Bryson City, and select area businesses.

For all purchase locations, see go.nps.gov/grsmfees.





THINGS TO DO IN THE FALL, CONTINUED

Find your trail

Great Smoky Mountains National Park offers plenty of options for a gorgeous autumn hike. The park has more than 800 miles of maintained trails, ranging from leisurely, quiet walkways to challenging mountain ascents. Note that Laurel Falls Trail is closed for rehabilitation through fall 2026 and Bullhead Trail is closed Monday through Thursday each week.

The fall months are busy in the Smokies, so flexibility is key when embarking on your Appalachian adventure. To improve your chances of finding a parking spot, aim to arrive at the trailhead outside the peak hours of 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and remember that parking outside of designated areas is both dangerous and illegal. Have an alternative destination in mind in case your first choice is full.

Pets are permitted on only two trails in Great Smoky Mountains National Park: Gatlinburg Trail near Sugarlands Visitor Center in Tennessee and the Oconaluftee River Trail near Oconaluftee Visitor Center in North Carolina. They are also allowed at frontcountry campgrounds and along roads but must always be restrained on a leash no more than six feet long.

For more hiking options, including pet-friendly trails, consider exploring the national forests surrounding the Smokies—Cherokee National Forest to the west and northeast, Pisgah National Forest to the northeast, and Nantahala National Forest to the south, which includes Joyce Kilmer–Slickrock and Citico Creek wilderness areas. Dozens of pet-friendly trails are searchable on the AllTrails app using the “dog-friendly” search filter. Visit the forest website or call a district ranger office to learn more about current trail conditions before starting your trip.

No matter where you roam, bring a pack with rain gear, layers, water, snacks, a light source (other than a phone), and trail and park maps, and always follow posted rules and regulations. The park’s trail map can be downloaded free at nps.gov/grsm, with physical copies sold for \$1 at visitor centers and kiosks. Visitor center bookstores offer hiking references such as *Hiking Trails of the Smokies*. *Gatlinburg Trail photo by Michele Sons.*



Cruise the Foothills Parkway

Experience breathtaking views and fall foliage without the crowds by taking a scenic drive along the Foothills Parkway this autumn.

This gorgeous road skirts the northern side of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, offering rugged mountain scenery to the east and expansive piedmont vistas to the west. The longest section of the Foothills Parkway stretches more than 30 miles from Chilhowee Lake to Wears Valley, with an additional six miles connecting Cosby to the Pigeon River Gorge.

As fall colors strike the mountaintops and climb down into the valleys, a drive along the Foothills Parkway allows visitors to take in the entire gradient. The road offers unparalleled panoramas of the East Tennessee landscape, featuring awe-inspiring overlooks and a 360-degree vista accessible via a short hike to Look Rock Tower.

To plan your trip, visit nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit or stop by a visitor center. *Foothills Parkway West photo by Joye Ardyn Durham.*



Keep it **SMOKIES SMART**:

- S** Stay hydrated
- M** Map your hike
- A** Always wear proper clothing/footwear
- R** Remember your flashlight
- T** Turn back when conditions change

Tell someone where you're going, stay on established trails, pack the essentials, and know what to do in case of an emergency.

Let the NPS Backcountry Office help you plan and prepare for your hike.
Call 865.436.1297,
8 a.m.–5 p.m. daily

PACK ESSENTIALS

Trail maps and many more of these items can be purchased at any park visitor center. Visit nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/hikingsafety for more hike planning tips.

- Traction support like microspikes and hiking poles
- Navigation—map, compass, and knowledge of how to use them
- Water and food
- Warm extra layers
- First aid kit
- Headlamp or flashlight
- Rain gear and pack cover or waterproof bags
- Emergency whistle
- Sun protection with sunscreen, sunglasses, and hat



FOR A LONGER HIKE

- Repair kit with multi-tool or knife
- Fire starter
- Shelter—emergency tent or tarp

IN AN EMERGENCY

- Call 911 if you can acquire a signal.
- Remain with any injured parties until help arrives. Use what basic first-aid techniques you know, but do not attempt invasive intervention unless you are medically trained.
- Use an emergency whistle to issue a series of three spaced blasts every few minutes to alert rescue crews. If you are in an open area, display brightly colored clothing or gear.



YOUR CELL PHONE IS **NOT**

- a strong light source
- always going to have service
- always going to have battery

Words with a Ranger
Continued from page 1

the intensity and spread of wild-fires. Our team develops, plans, and implements fuel reduction projects throughout the park, with a focus on wildland–urban interface zones, culturally significant sites, and ecologically important landscapes. We use prescribed fire and mechanical treatments such as thinning dense stands of trees and piling brush to reduce fire risk and improve ecosystem health. These efforts are vital for safeguarding lives, property, and the park’s natural resources.

Both fieldwork and office work are integral to my position. In the office, I develop projects, assess operational feasibility, write prescribed fire plans, and coordinate with a range of partners as well as my colleagues. In the field, I help execute prescribed burns, conduct site evaluations, and monitor treatment effectiveness. Wildland fire is a complex, ever-changing environment, and the key to our success lies in strong communication and collaboration across our team.

Since joining the Great Smoky Mountains Fire Management Program in December 2019—just after the fall prescribed fire season—I’ve had the privilege of working on every major fuels project in the park. Our team has expanded our treatment footprint, added new fuel management units, and set records for annual prescribed fire acreage. I’m proud of the progress we’ve made and the professionalism, expertise, and dedication our team brings to this mission.

To serve alongside such a talented group of individuals is both humbling and inspiring. Our work not only protects the Smokies today but helps ensure that future generations can experience the same awe and wonder that inspired me as a child. Being able to serve and work in Great Smoky Mountains National Park is truly one of the highlights of my career.



Raccoon and firewood pest illustrations by Lisa Horstman. All others by Emma Oxford.

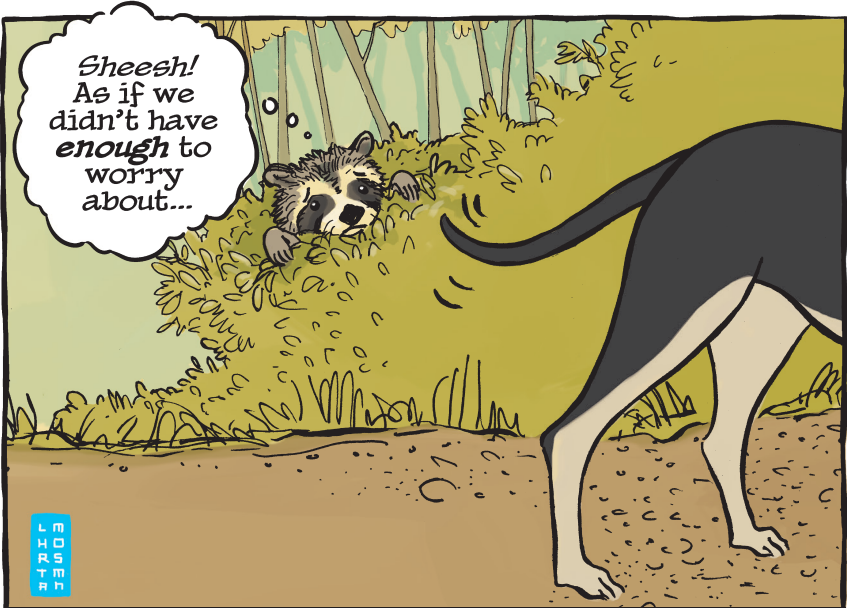
LEAVE ONLY FOOTPRINTS

Writing on or carving into trees, stones, or structures can cause permanent damage—it’s also a crime! Taking a photo is always a better way to remember your time in the Smokies and helps preserve the park for others too.



BIN IT FOR THE BEARS

Help protect bears by packing out all trash and food waste and using bear-proof dumpsters in the park.



KEEP PETS ON DESIGNATED TRAILS

Remember that the Gatlinburg Trail and Oconaluftee River Trail are the *only* pet-friendly trails in the park.

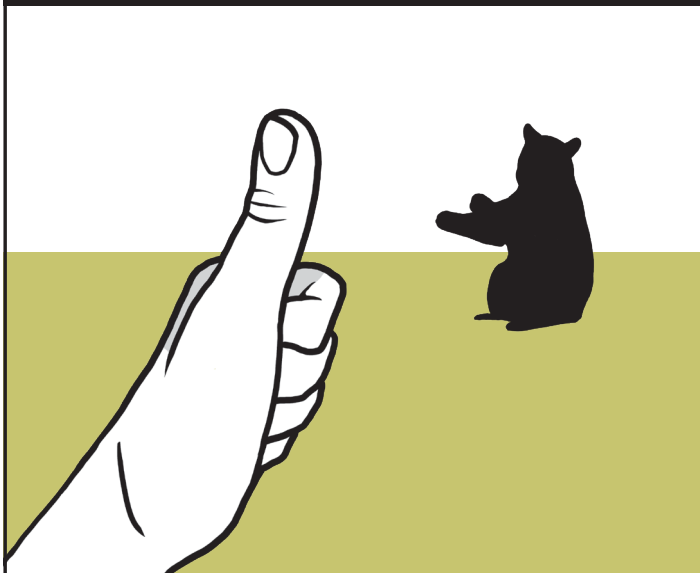
All pets must be kept on a leash no longer than six feet at all times.



PLEASE LEAVE YOUR FIREWOOD AT HOME

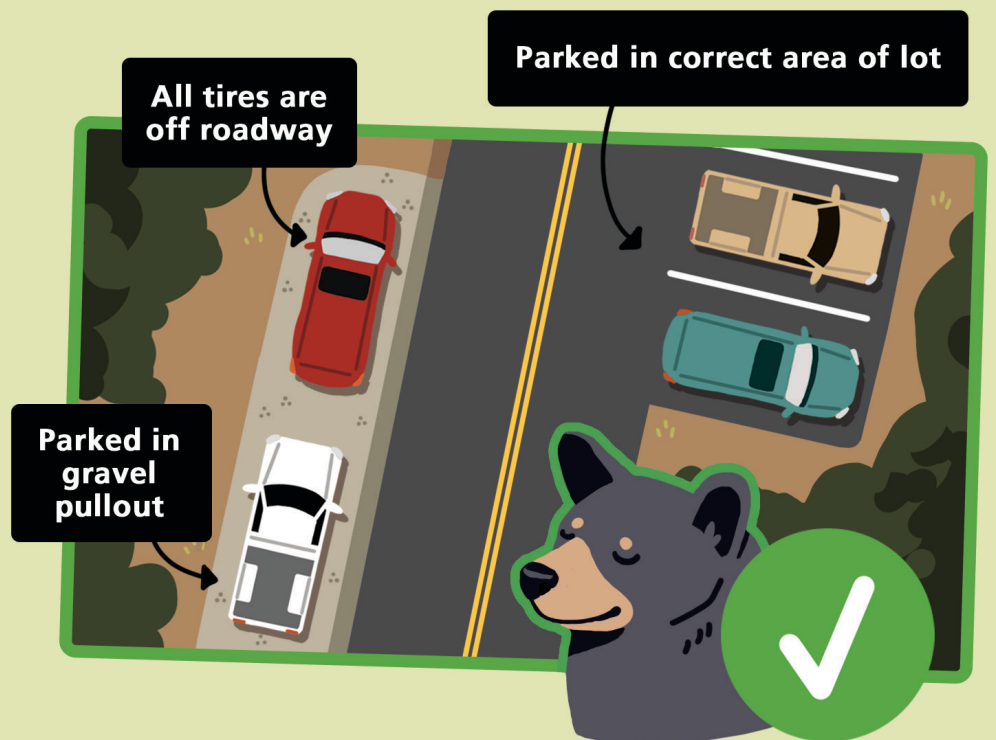
Use only heat-treated or dead and down wood within the park. Harmful pests can hitchhike into the park on your firewood, which could kill millions of trees.

ALWAYS USE THE RULE OF THUMB



When viewing bears, hold your arm out straight. If you can't cover the animal in your line of sight with your thumb, you're too close!

PARK SAFELY IN THE SMOKIES



IF YOU LOVE THE SMOKIES

Help protect this special place for future generations! Consider joining our nonprofit park partners described on this page. They, along with over 1,600 volunteers, help serve park staff and address many needs across the park's 522,000 acres, maintaining this natural resource for millions like you who visit each year.

Smokies Life



Smokies Life operates the park's bookstores and publishes books and other media about natural and cultural resources. Since 1953, Smokies Life has given more than \$54 million toward scientific and historic preservation efforts.

- Members, known as Park Keepers, stay informed through:
- a subscription to the award-winning semi-annual, full-color *Smokies Life Journal*
 - digital access to this quarterly newspaper and the Smokies LIVE blog, which includes "Word from the Smokies"
 - 15 percent off books and other products at visitor centers and on the web store
 - access to expert-led group hikes, backpacking excursions, and educational sessions
- Join today by visiting SmokiesLife.org, or call 888.898.9102, ext. 257.



Friends of the Smokies

As the park's philanthropic partner, Friends has raised more than \$90 million to give to the park since 1993, helping:

- Trails Forever crews improve trails
- Forever Places crews preserve historic structures
- protect bears, elk, and other animals
- supply search and rescue crews with training and equipment
- improve park access for people with mobility needs
- fund educational programs and transportation for school children
- monitor air and water quality while restoring native species' habitat
- protect trees from invasive insects



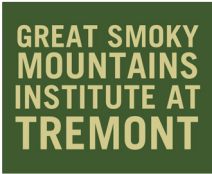
Friends raises money through events, business sponsorships, memorials and honorariums, private gifts, and specialty license plate sales in North Carolina and Tennessee.

Visit FriendsOfTheSmokies.org to donate.



Tremont

Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont is an environmental education



center inside the park that connects people to nature through immersive, multi-day experiences. The institute promotes curiosity and inspires learning for thousands of students and adults each year.

Adult programming includes the Southern Appalachian Naturalist Certification program, photography courses, a writer's conference, backpacking adventures, professional development for teachers, wilderness first responder training, and a naturalist-led adult summer camp.

Youth summer camps and school field trips allow kids ages 4 to 17 (and sometimes their families) to explore the national park for days at a time and connect with nature through new, empowering, discovery-oriented experiences.

Visit GSMIT.org for program information. *Photo by Rich Bryant.*



Discover Life in America

Since 1998, DLiA has collaborated with the National Park Service, scientists, and community members on the All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory. This ambitious effort aims to identify every species living in the park and understand their roles in relation to one another and within the ecosystem.



The ATBI has documented more than 12,000 species previously unrecorded in the Smokies, including over 1,000 new to science. This research informs critical conservation decisions.

DLiA engages people of all ages through outreach and education programs, inspiring stewardship of the natural world and fostering the next generation of nature advocates.

Learn more and join the effort at DLiA.org.



Record life in the park with the iNaturalist app! DLiA.org

GSMNP BY THE NUMBERS



135

species of trees



250+

species of birds



2,900

miles of streams



90+ historic structures



3,500+ species of fungi



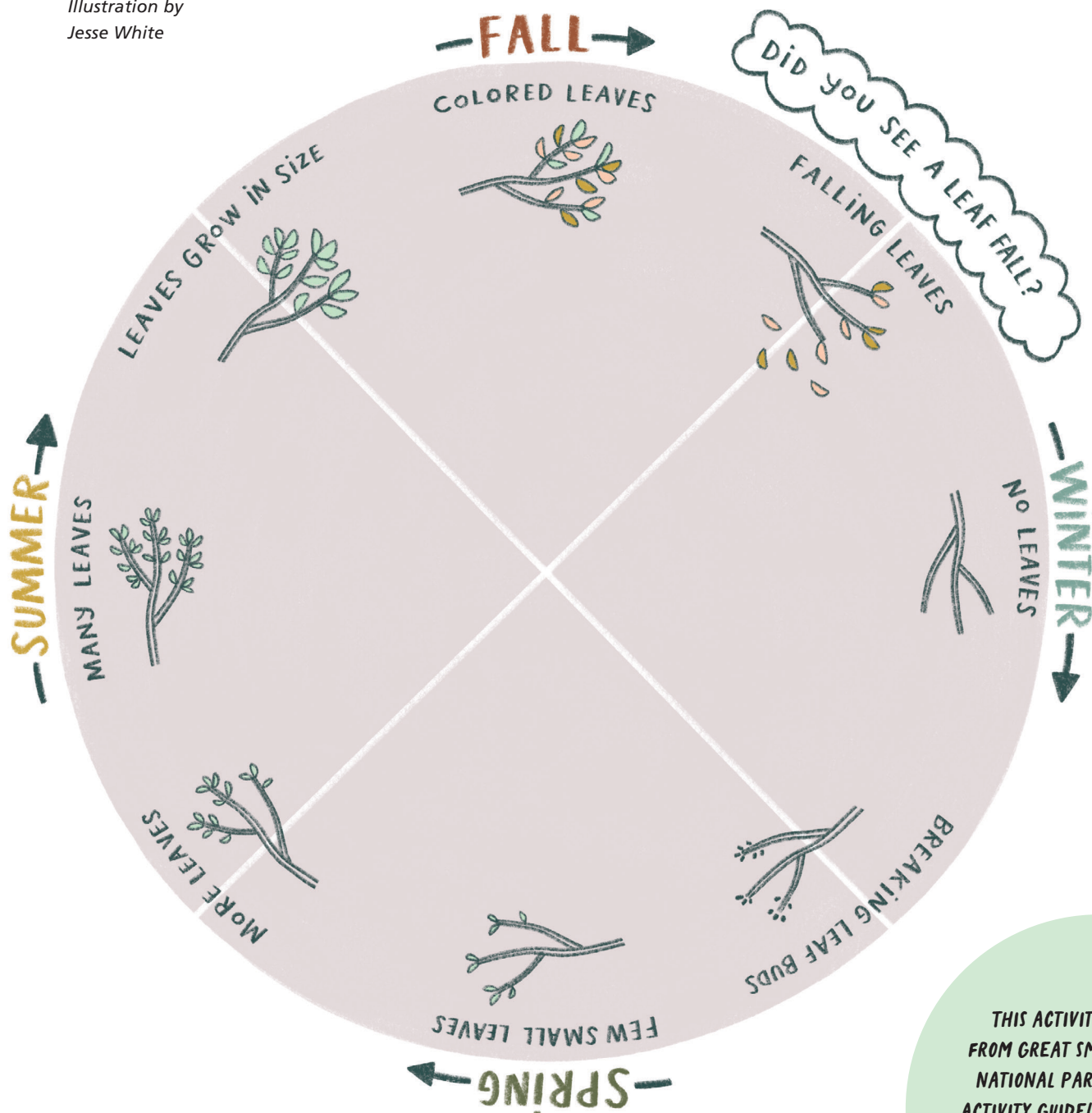
500,000+ acres of land



848 miles of trails

OBSERVE

Illustration by
Jesse White



The study of seasonal changes is called *phenology*. Phenology plots in the park are monitored from early spring through late fall by **VOLUNTEERS**. By observing tree leaves and recording what stage they are in year after year, we learn about the timing of seasonal events and how it is changing.

PICK ONE TREE TO OBSERVE.

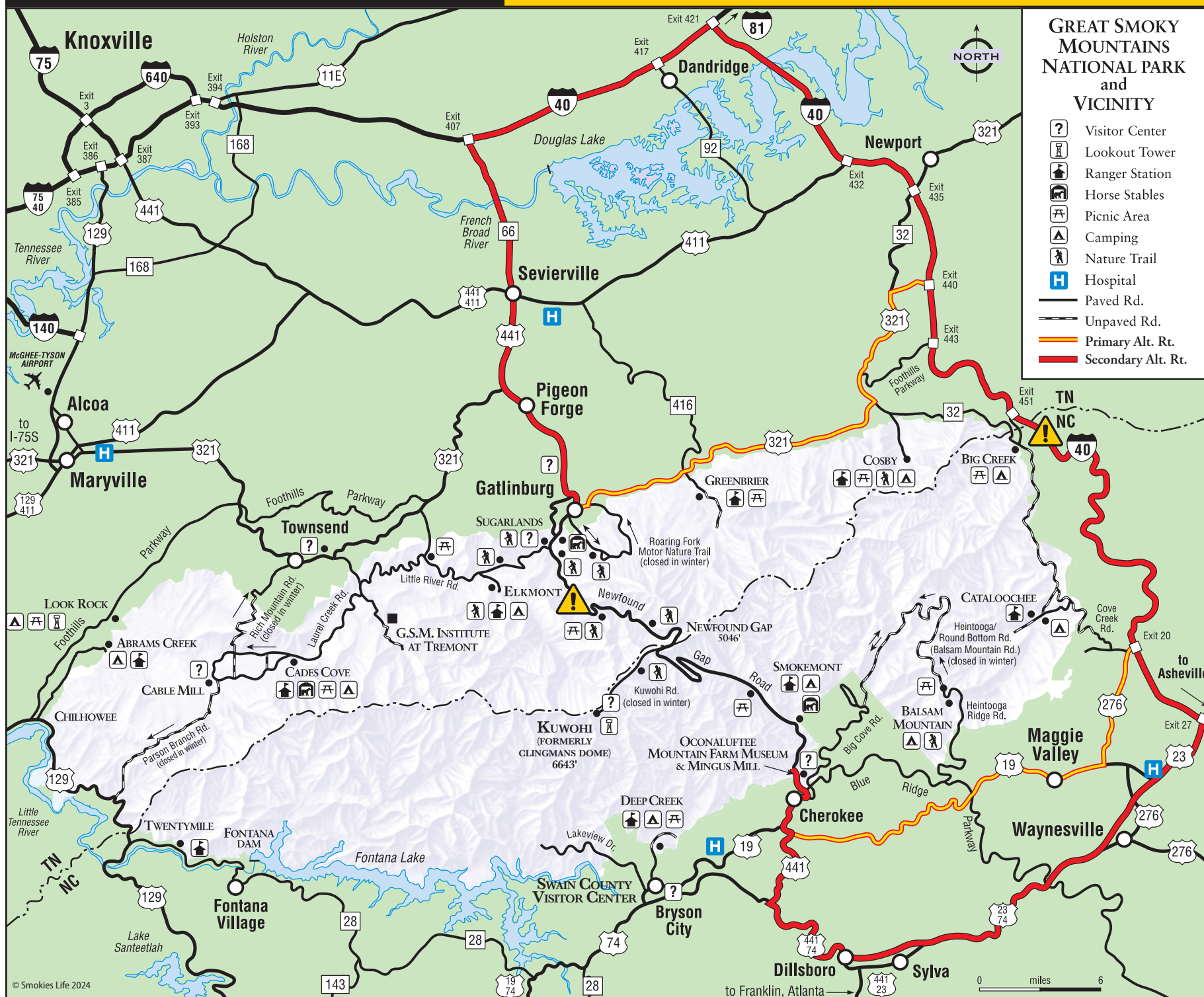
Circle the picture that best shows what stage its leaves are in. Be careful—a tree can have leaves in several different phases.

WHEN YOU GET HOME, pick a tree that you see regularly and try to track it all the way through a year.

THIS ACTIVITY IS ADAPTED FROM GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK'S JR. RANGER ACTIVITY GUIDE! WORK AS A TEAM TO FILL OUT THE GUIDE AND EARN A JR. RANGER BADGE. AVAILABLE AT ANY PARK VISITOR CENTER!



NORTH



Emergencies

911

Gatlinburg Police
865.436.5181

A valid parking tag must be displayed when parked for more than 15 minutes anywhere in the park. Pets are permitted only on the Gatlinburg and Oconaluftee River trails, which allow dogs on a leash. Persons feeding wildlife are subject to a \$5,000 fine. Picking or digging plants is prohibited in the park.

Restrooms at Cades Cove, Oconaluftee, and Sugarlands visitor centers are fully accessible. For more information about accessibility, go to nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/accessibility.htm.