

Community News:

Tracy Davids Dedicates Herself to Protecting Public Lands: The Southern Appalachian Biodiversity Project (SABP) By David Funderburkt

In her cozy office on the fourth floor of the Flatiron building in downtown Asheville, Tracy Davids leaps from her seat and shuffles through a stack of papers. She finds a picture of a freshwater mussel and hands it to me. "Here's the Appalachian elktoe," she says.

Most people have never heard of the Appalachian elktoe, the Carolina heelsplitter mussel, the rock gnome lichen, or the spruce fir moss spider, probably because there are very few of them left. These are some of the many endangered species that the Southern Appalachian Biodiversity Project (SABP) has worked to protect since the early 1990's. Tracy Davids has worked with SABP since 1998 and has been the Executive Director since 2001.

SABP is a volunteer-based non-profit organization that is committed to defending public lands across the southeastern United States and protecting the native wildlife within those lands. Their many programs include legal actions to protect critical habitat areas, public education programs to support community awareness of biodiversity issues, and publication of the Wild Mountain Times, a bimonthly grassroots conservation newspaper. Davids is one of four full-time staff members. She estimates that the organization is aided by about 120 active volunteers.

Davids has not always worked as an environmentalist. After receiving her Juris Doctorate from Suffolk University Law School, she spent the first several years of her career as a civil litigation lawyer in Boston, Massachusetts. Then, according to SABP website (<http://www.sabp.net>), "after coming to her senses, she left the for-profit practice of law and vowed never to use her advocacy skills to do work about which she did not feel passionate."

Davids is definitely passionate about her current work. She shares SABP's successes with a steady pride. "In 2000 we filed a regional lawsuit with some other forest protection groups, and we stopped seventy-nine illegal timber sales in national forests from Texas to Florida and north to Virginia," she says. Such a success demonstrates the level of effectiveness that a dedicated grassroots organization can achieve.

The list of successes continues. SABP has secured critical habitat protection for sixteen species in Tennessee, protected untouched areas of the Pisgah-Nantahala National forest from illegal logging, and assisted an effort that led to the listing of 29 plant and animal species under the Endangered Species Act.

In fact, most of the species for which the SABP seeks critical habitat protection are those already listed under the Endangered Species Act, and the timber sales prevented by the organization are ones which the National Forest Service should not have allowed in the first place, according to Davids. "They're breaking their own rules," she says, "and groups like SABP are out there making sure we're holding our government agencies accountable - making them do their jobs. So, if they did their jobs, we wouldn't be here."

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