

Experts speak on future of black bear

By Kris Ansley
Staff Writer

Does the black bear have a future in the rapidly developing region of the Southern Appalachians?

UNCA addressed this question recently by hosting a wildlife and habitat conference concerning the future of the Southern Appalachian black bear.

Speakers from the region addressed the question of the possible extinction of the black bear due to the latest big-game casualty of over-hunting and over-development in Western North Carolina.

Dr. Gary Miller of the Environmental Science Department at UNCA hosted the conference. Miller produced statistics showing the decrease of black bear population in North Carolina.

"A rough estimate of black bear population in North Carolina lies somewhere around 600 to 800," said Miller. The estimation varies due to dramatic population fluctuations, which depend on the hard mast (acorn and nut) situation, he said.

A crop failure sends the population way down, according to Miller. For example, in 1984 there were no recorded births in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Despite the crop situation, poachers are the bears' true destroyer, Miller said. Poachers commonly venture into the protected parks where the bears are more plentiful and often kill adult bears for their gall bladder, which sells on the black market for about \$150, he said.

Black bears are extremely intelligent animals and are usually able to escape from hunters but, thanks to modern technology, hunters are now able to use tracking devices and long range guns that lower the bears defenses to practically none, Miller added.

Dr. Michael Pelton of the University of Tennessee, the conference's first speaker, presented his issues and a few answers for the Southern Appalachian black bear.

"We may be sitting on the last long-term existence of the American black bear," Pelton said. "The Smoky Mountain National Reserve probably has the most viable population of black bears with the greatest chance of existing into the future."

Pelton has been studying the black bears of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Cherokee National Forest for 17 years as part of his job as professor in the department of forestry, wildlife, and fisheries at



'Stair'-ing down

Students are caught by camera in their daily trek through Carmichael Hall.

Staff Photo--Sarah Gottfried

the University of Tennessee.

Pelton claimed that, without designated wilderness areas, there would be no black bears left in the Southeast.

"We have grossly underestimated the role of the Smoky Mountain National Reserve in the preservation of the American black bear," Pelton said.

Considering all the factors affecting black bears, limited access in the form of wilderness remains at the core of the species' needs, according to Pelton. If such a stable core does not exist within the habitat of the remaining patchy populations, the fu-

ture viability of those populations will be jeopardized, he said.

Although "it is highly unlikely that any new habitats will be created," there is still hope that connection roads can be made between nation reserves, said Pelton.

For example, Florida is in the process of connecting its two main reservations to create one of the largest reservations in the nation for black bears, he said.

In 1978 Pelton participated in the Tri-State Black Bear Study which estimated a total of 2,000 black bears in the mountains of North Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee.

This estimate is based on a combination of "what we know about actual population density in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, bait station surveys and kill data," Pelton said.

In the course of his research, Pelton has trapped, tagged, and released more than 1,000 bears. He has helped to develop research methods that are now standard techniques in studying bears and other mammals worldwide. He is an internationally known authority on bears, and travels to other countries to advise research efforts.

Board of Trustees adds Grimes, Cecil

By Pat Foyles
Staff Writer

The UNCA Board of Trustees will have two new faces at its meetings this year.

Local businessman Jack Cecil and WLOS-TV news anchor Darcel Grimes have been added to the board, according to Tom Byers, special assistant to the chancellor.

"These two members received their appointments from the governor," said By-

ers. He added that Cecil and Grimes have tremendous respect in the community and should fill a need for youthful leadership, as they are the youngest members on the board.

Cecil will serve on the finance and real property committee, as well as the external affairs committee, while Grimes will assist the external affairs and personal policies committees.

"I hope I was chosen for my drive, incentive and mo-

mentum to get things done," said Cecil of his appointment. "My first and foremost concern is the quality of education. The vitality of student life, academic and otherwise, is important to reach desired goals."

As a first step to improving the quality of education at UNCA, Cecil hopes to see an increase in the number of fellowships and scholarships on campus.

"I would like to see an increased number of endowed

chairs and more fellowships offered," he said. "This will help create a top notch student body."

"An increase in scholarships will attract the good students. We need to increase the level of activity on campus so we can encourage students to live on campus and become more involved," said Cecil.

Before attending graduate school, Cecil enrolled in several classes at UNCA and still visits the campus regu-

larly.

Like Cecil, Grimes feels the need for an emphasis on quality education. "The quality of education is my first concern," said Grimes. "I think every person should have a chance for higher education."

"I would like to see a graduate program offered at UNCA," added Grimes. "For people who work all day, the drive to Western Carolina is too long."