

September 25, 2020

To: All Staff at Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Cc: Great Smoky Mountains National Park Management Team

Re: An open letter to the staff at Great Smoky Mountains National Park in response to the recent racist vandalism of the Foothills Parkway Entrance sign

Dear National Park Service staff,

The organizations signed on to this letter stand in solidarity with the staff, family, community, businesses, and visitors of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. We were deeply saddened to learn of the recent racist act of intimidation that occurred when a black bear skin with head attached was draped over the entrance sign to Foothills Parkway accompanied by a hateful sign that read, “From here to the Lake, Black lives don’t matter.”¹ We oppose and condemn this repugnant act. We stand with those affected by this act, including Black staff, their families, local communities, and visitors.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a treasure that belongs to all of us. This park represents the beating heart of the economy of our region. The Park contributed 1.2 billion dollars of economic activity and creates nearly 14,000 jobs. It is the most visited national park in our nation. Beyond its enormous economic benefit, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and our public lands system in general, are places of healing, health, rejuvenation, wonder, learning, science, and reflection.² This attempt to intimidate others based on race does not speak for our community. We believe that Black Lives Matter, that our national parks belong to all of us regardless of race or difference, and that the benefit, joy, and healing spaces represented in our national parks and public lands must be equally available to all. At the same time, we recognize that this repugnant act is only one of the many ways in which systemic racism affects the experience of Black, Indigenous, and people of color on our public lands.³

¹ Lilly Knoepp, *Great Smoky Mountain National Park Seeks Vandals*, BLUE RIDGE PUBLIC RADIO (Sep. 22, 2020), <https://www.bpr.org/post/great-smoky-mountains-national-park-seeks-vandals#stream/0>.

² SMOKIES HIKES FOR HEALING, <https://www.smokieshikesforhealing.org> (last visited Sep. 24, 2020).

³ Latria Graham, *Out There, Nobody Can Hear You Scream*, OUTSIDE MAG. (Sep. 21, 2020), <https://www.outsideonline.com/2416929/out-there-nobody-can-hear-you->

To each of you who act in public service as members of the National Park Service, we stand with and by you as you seek to respond to this racist and hurtful act. We look forward to working with you to ensure that our public lands are welcoming refuges for all people, including Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

Respectfully,

Adventures Accessed, LLC
American Canoe Association, Tennessee Chapter
American Conservation Experience
Appalachian Trail Conservancy
Appalachian Voices
Asheville GreenWorks
Blue Ridge Audubon
Blue Ridge Outdoors Magazine
Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation
Bryant Research, LLC
Carolina Jews for Justice/West
Carolina Mountain Club
Chota Canoe Club
Conservation Council for Hawaii
Defenders of Wildlife, Southeast Program
Discover Life in America
Dogwood Alliance
Don Barger-Retired NPCA Southeast Regional Director
Forest Keepers
Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park
Friends of the Smokies
Gatlinburg Chamber of Commerce
Gatlinburg Convention and Visitors Bureau
Gatlinburg Convention Center
Great Smoky Mountains Association
Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont
Harpeth Conservancy
Knoxville Area Urban League

Knoxville Branch of the Tennessee Chapter, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Commission
MountainTrue
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation, Eastern Division
North Carolina Wildlife Federation
Public Lands Alliance
Rotary Club of Gatlinburg
Sierra Club, North Carolina Chapter
Sierra Club, Tennessee Chapter
Smoky Mountains Hiking Club
Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy
Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards
Southern Environmental Law Center
Swain County Tourism Development Authority
Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning
Tennessee Conservation Voters
Tennessee Environmental Council
Tennessee Ornithological Society
Tennessee Valley Canoe Club
Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church
Tennessee Wildlife Federation
The Coalition to Protect America's National Parks
The Wilderness Society
Wildlands Network