



People stopped at the edge of Lake Lure to view the Party Rock fire on Saturday.

ANGELA WILHELM/AWILHELM@CITIZEN-TIMES.COM

## Crews make progress on fires; Party Rock stable

### Several WNC wildfires are more contained

STAFF REPORTS

Fire teams fighting blazes in the western part of the state were able to make some progress Sunday morning, according to the National Forest Service. Higher humidity helped teams suppress fires.

By midday Sunday, the Boteler Fire, east of Hayesville, was at 8,180 acres and was 23 percent contained. Clay County evacuations associated with that fire were lifted on Sunday.

The Tellico Fire, 3 miles south of Almond, was at 9,965 acres and 33 percent contained on Sunday afternoon. The fire started Nov. 3.

It has closed a 10-mile section of U.S. 19/74 in the Nantahala Gorge because of rocks and debris falling onto

the roadway, the Forest Service said in a release. The closure starts at N.C. 129 on the south end and N.C. 28 to the north.

N.C. Department of Transportation said in a separate release that the road will be closed to all traffic until officials determine it is safe for residents and visitors. There is a 30-mile detour set up around the closure: southbound traffic should take N.C. 28 to Stecoah, south on N.C. 143 in Robbinsville, then south on U.S. 129 to Topton. Northbound traffic will follow the same route in reverse.

A section of the Appalachian Trail is closed because of fire activity in North Carolina and Georgia. The A.T. is closed from Dicks Creek Gap/U.S. 76 in Georgia (mile 69.9) to the Nantahala River/U.S. 19/74 in North Carolina (mile 137.1), according to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's website. Campfires are banned along the entire A.T. in Georgia, N.C. and Tennessee.

The Party Rock Fire, near Lake Lure, remains at 2,883 acres in size and is 15 percent contained, the N.C. Forest Service said in an update later Sunday afternoon. On its west side, the fire moved farther downhill overnight off Round Top Mountain and was at the woods line in some areas of Chimney Rock Village, according to a news release. Firefighters were focusing on protecting structures; so far, no structures have been lost.

Low clouds were keeping smoke in the air, and the air quality was a code orange in much of WNC, if not code red in the farthest west counties. Air Quality alerts can be obtained from the NWS at <http://www.weather.gov/gsp/>.

A stretch of U.S. 74-A leading into Chimney Rock Village from the north and south remains closed. More information on roads can be accessed via the NCDOT Travel Information Management System website at <https://tims.ncdot.gov/tims/regionsummary.aspx>.

## Parkway sections to close starting Tuesday

KAREN CHÁVEZ  
KCHAVEZ@CITIZEN-TIMES.COM

ASHEVILLE - While the Blue Ridge Parkway never completely "closes" during late fall and winter, most facilities, including campgrounds, picnic areas and the Pisgah Inn, closed at the end of October.

After the fall foliage swarms of visitors, the parkway also closes certain sections for maintenance operations throughout the fall and winter.

The first closure in the Western North Carolina section of the 469-mile parkway will be Nov. 15-28 from Milepost 355.3 to 367.5, N.C. 128 (the road to Mount Mitchell State Park) to the Craggy Gardens Picnic Area north of Asheville.

The annual maintenance involves boom axe operations, said spokeswoman Leesa Brandon.

"This is the time when parkway staff go in to remove vegetation to keep those sight distances as maximized as possible," Brandon said. "Between weather and annual maintenance, it's smart to plan ahead before heading out on the parkway."

Boom axe operations require using a large tractor with a cutting head on a long arm, or boom. When boom axe operations are in use, both lanes of the parkway will be closed to all activity, including cars, bicycles and hikers, to ensure the safety of the staff and visitors.

Winter weather can also impact the parkway for extended periods because of the parkway's north facing slopes, tunnels, high elevations, and limited sight distances. There might be limited times of snow and ice removal, but the parkway's natural resource protection priorities limit the use of ice melting chemicals. Park rangers monitor conditions in affected areas and open the road as soon as safe travel is possible.

Planned parkway closures are as follows:

» Milepost 367.5 to 375.7, from Craggy Gardens to Ox Creek Road, Nov. 28-Dec. 19.

» MP 298.6 to 305.1, Hollow Mountain Road to U.S. 221, Nov. 28-Dec. 8.

» MP 393.8 to 402.6, N.C. 191 to Stony Bald Overlook, Jan. 16-Feb. 3.

» MP 402.6 to 408.4, Stony Bald Overlook to the Mount Pisgah Area, Dec. 16-Jan. 16.

The Blue Ridge Parkway is the most visited site in the National Park Service, with more than 15 million visitors a year. The roughly 11-mile stretch between Hendersonville Road and U.S. 70 is also a popular "commuter zone" for local residents.

In response to ever changing road conditions, the National Park Service has developed an online tool for visitors to monitor openings and closings along the parkway, using an interactive, real time road map.

The map allows visitor to zoom in on specific sections of the parkway and provides up-to-the-minute road closure information.

Visitors should also be aware that the parkway has issued a complete burn ban in the North Carolina and Virginia sections due to extremely dry conditions, high fire danger, and little chance of rain in the immediate forecast. Building, maintaining, attending or using a fire, campfire or stove fire is not allowed.

## Project Search interns learn job skills at SCC in Sylva

STAFF REPORTS

SYLVA - Project Search, a national nonprofit program that partners with businesses to create internships for young adults with disabilities, came to Jackson County three years ago in a partnership between Southwestern Community College and Harris Regional Hospital.

The program "allows men and women ages 18-30 with disabilities to gain marketable and transferable employability skills through the implementation of hands-on work experience during a series of three separate, 10-week internships matched to their individual interests, strengths and abilities," according to a press statement.

"What I love about this program is that there is a lot of freedom in accepting a diverse group of young people," said Devonne Jimison, SCC's Project Search coordinator. "As teachers, job coaches and counselors, we focus on each person individually and embrace who they are on their specific journey."

The program allows students with a vast range of disabilities to transition from school into a work environment.

"From the starting point, we help them identify their goals, we make a plan and we begin work on making their dreams come true," Jimison said. "The basic dream for all of them is employment and giving back to their community."

Jimison believes this program offers hope for parents and caregivers when they see how diverse the interns in the Project Search program are. The range this year is from a student with Down



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SCC's Project Search 2016 interns and staff include, front from left, Marzena Bradley, teacher; Lorie Burnett, job coach; interns Charlotte Hill, Lisa Skiver and Ned Baddy; Devonne Jimison, program coordinator. Back, interns Elliott Jacques and Thomas Smith; Mike Rogers, Webster Enterprises.

syndrome and a language barrier to a high-functioning student with autism, who also holds an additional job outside of the internship.

When asked what kind of impact this program has had on their lives, the interns beamed, happy to talk about what Project Search has done for them.

"This program helps you focus more

on your abilities than your disabilities," said Charlotte Hill, an intern from Whittier, whose future goals include being a chef.

"This program inspires people with disabilities and benefits us by helping us get a job in the community," said Elliott Jacques, an intern from Sylva.

SCC's partners in providing the

program locally include Harris Regional Hospital, Vahyah Health (formerly known as Smoky Mountain Center), Vocational Rehabilitation and Webster Enterprises.

To learn more about Project Search, contact Devonne Jimison at 828-339-4486 or [devonnej@southwesterncc.edu](mailto:devonnej@southwesterncc.edu).