

The Southern Environmental Law Center: A Powerful Champion for North Carolina's Mountains and Forests

The Southern Environmental Law Center uses the power of the law to defend healthy air and clean water; to protect our region's mountains, forests, coasts, and countryside; and to promote livable communities in western North Carolina and across the Southeast. Since it was founded in 1986, SELC has handled some 500 cases and projects and, among other results, has secured extra protection for 2 million acres of national forest in the Southern Appalachians.

The key to SELC's success is its ability to work simultaneously in all levels of government and in all three branches of government: in Congress and state legislatures to shape the development of environmental law, in regulatory agencies to make certain that laws and policies are faithfully enforced, and in the courts, when necessary, to stop the worst abuses of natural resources and to set precedents. Accepting no fees for its services, SELC collaborates with more than 100 partner organizations in North Carolina and other southeastern states, serving as their law and policy advocate and helping them achieve their conservation goals.

Fourteen of SELC's 36 attorneys are based in North Carolina, including 12 in Chapel Hill and two in a satellite office in Asheville. The two Asheville-based lawyers—Doug Ruley and DJ Gerken—are part of SELC's public forest team. Over the years they've kept chainsaws and logging trucks away from rare stands of old growth, headwater streams, wildlife habitat, and places beloved by hikers and anglers in the North Carolina mountains.

Doug and DJ were heavily involved in the effort to halt the North Shore Road, the now-discarded plan to push more than 34 miles of asphalt into the Great Smoky Mountains National Park north of Fontana Lake. They're also the legal team compelling the U.S. Forest Service to clean up off-road vehicle trails that have channeled tons of muddy runoff into trout waters in the Nantahala National Forest.

Western North Carolina's daunting growth and transportation issues are another focus of Doug and DJ's efforts. Working with state legislators, county commissioners, and local planning officials, they're helping mountain communities develop the legal and planning tools they need to keep sprawl in check and to protect scenic views, water resources, and other natural treasures.

To learn more about SELC and its protection projects, visit www.SouthernEnvironment.org.