

Carolina Mountain Club

Annual Meeting and Dinner

Saturday, November 1, 2025

Hilton Biltmore Park, Asheville

Outgoing President Les Love called the meeting to order at 7:07 pm. He thanked the Hilton banquet staff, and introduced the following guests:

- Carolyn Ward, CEO of the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation
- Ann Sentz, regional manager of the A.T. Conservancy
- Brent Lorenz, Executive Director of Friends of the Mountains to Sea Trail
- Dana Sohn, Executive Director of Friends of the Smokies
- Marielle DeJong, Donor Engagement Officer for the Pisgah Conservancy
- Michelle Wooley, Executive Director of the Deerfield Charitable Foundation
- Julie Judkins of the Great State Trails Coalition

Les noted that many CMC members attended the premier of the George Masa film two weeks earlier. He said that George would be proud of our club. Hurricane Helene caused the cancellation of the 2024 annual meeting, but we have accomplished a lot in the last two years. Karen Schultz organized the strategic planning process. The communications team has refreshed the CMC brand and created a new, much improved website. Our Helene recovery efforts drew many new volunteers; in one example, the Hot Springs workday after Thanksgiving 2024 had 130 volunteers (including Carroll Koeplinger, about to turn 96 in December). These things made us realize just how important these trails are to our area. We were formally recognized for our work by the A.T. Conservancy, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and the Pisgah and Cherokee National Forests. We partnered with the Tennessee Eastman Club for work on the A.T.

Les thanked the Council members; the hike leaders and schedulers who kept CMC hiking despite numerous trail closures; and the trail work crew leaders. The trail crews have logged 575,000 hours of trail maintenance since 2015. CMC is 100 percent volunteer led.

Strategic Plan

Karen Schultz, CMC Vice President, thanked Les for being a great mentor and inspiration. She outlined the strategic planning process the club undertook this year. Consultant Amy Stork was engaged to work with CMC on building our club's first-ever strategic plan, with the goal of preparing the club for sustainability over the next 20 years and more. Amy gathered input from more than 80 individuals, including over 70 CMC members, plus public stakeholders.

Karen described several changes to the Council structure that were made in response to the strategic plan. One new position is the Preparedness councilor, who will represent CMC with Search and Rescue and coordinate safety training.

The strategic plan defined seven goals, one for each Council Team. Three focused initiatives cut across all CMC's programs:

- Excellent volunteer experience
- Sustainable leadership
- Strong partnerships with public agencies, nonprofits and community groups that share our goals.

CMC is a beloved organization. We will continue to carry out our work as an all-volunteer organization.

Branding and Marketing:

David Huff described the branding and marketing efforts undertaken this year by his committee. We wanted to embrace our heritage but do a refresh. To that end, CMC retained vendor Cross and Crown after an RFP process. This group had done branding work for the ATC as well as other similar clubs.

Cross and Crown created a branding package which includes a new logo with a fresh look that is not a radical departure from our old logo. This allows us to create CMC-branded merchandise, which will be available through an online store on the new website.

The website redesign is the most exciting part of the process. It will be fresh and easy to navigate. The front page will feature the five most current hikes, with a link to view all hikes for the current quarter. David is working with the hiking committee to fine-tune this content. The site will also be easy to navigate on a phone. He will solicit feedback about the new site when it launches early in 2026.

Deerfield Donation:

Past President Tom Weaver introduced Deerfield residents Mel Skiles and Tim Kurtz, along with Michelle Wooley, Executive Director of the Deerfield Charitable Foundation. The foundation has donated \$50,000 to CMC for immediate needs, with a second \$50,000 matching fund for contributions to the CMC endowment. Matching donations had already reached \$38,000 at the time of the annual meeting.

Michelle Wooley quipped that the first \$50,000 was just to get Mel and Tim to come to the dinner. She described the Deerfield Charitable Foundation, which is funded by donations from Deerfield residents. Several CMC members live at Deerfield; Danny Bernstein first brought CMC to her attention, and Mel and Tim encouraged her support. The MST runs right behind Deerfield's property and is used by residents. Hurricane Helene sped the process along, since Deerfield itself lost thousands of trees, in addition to the damage to the trail. She and her board felt they wanted to do something significant and long-range. She thanked CMC for giving them the opportunity to make an impact in the woods of WNC.

Tom also recognized Carolyn Ward of the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, which donated significant funds for the purchase of trail maintenance equipment and safety gear. He has also facilitated a donation from the Rotary Club, which funded a brush mower, dump wagon and a trailer to haul this. The Rotary Club also wants to bring volunteers to work with us on trail restoration.

Annual Awards:

Tom Weaver announced the winners of this year's Award of Appreciation and Distinguished Service Award, decided by a committee composed of past award winners.

The first Award of Appreciation went to Chris Werbylo, Wednesday crew leader since 2018. Chris is also the quarterly work crew leader and has increased average participation from around 30-40 participants to more than 70. Chris himself has logged over 6000 hours of trail maintenance, ranking #13 overall in number of hours worked.

The second Award of Appreciation went to Karen Schultz, who led this year's strategic planning effort, vetting and hiring the facilitator and overseeing the entire project.

Two Distinguished Service Awards, for service over 10 years, were awarded.

The first honoree was George Bauernfeld, jokingly named CMC's first treasurer for life. He took on the role of treasurer in 2016. Since then, the work has grown substantially and now takes three people: Michel Claes as Treasurer, George as Vice Treasurer, and Marie Chamberlain as Assistant Treasurer.

The second honoree was Paul Curtin, whom Tom has known since 1981. Paul has logged over 8000 trail maintenance hours and serves as Friday crew leader and A.T. Supervisor. He created a remote overnight crew to reach sections of trail too far from the trailhead for regular daily crews. He is a voting representative for the A.T. Conservancy Southern Region. Paul started the Max Patch Ambassador program and worked to implement the camping ban on Max Patch.

Special Awards and Recognition:

Les Love introduced Sarah Judge Decker, who thanked all A.T. maintainers, including those who take care of shelters. She gave a special shout-out to those who take care of the privies. She displayed a new card deck, "Crappalachian Trail," depicting the 50 best privies on the A.T., for privy maintainers. Paul Curtin handed out Crappalachian Trail Privy patches (designed by Alison Curtin) to A.T. privy maintainers.

Challenge Awards:

Awards were announced for 66 challenge completers over last two years. Names of completers for 100 Favorite Trails, A.T.-MST, Centennial Challenge, Lookout Tower, Pisgah 400, SB6K, and Waterfall challenges were displayed on slides as the names were read. Brenda Worley handed out certificates to completers in attendance.

Business Meeting:

Les Love introduced the business portion of the meeting.

The first order of business was the 2026 budget, previously distributed to members. Carroll Koeplinger moved to approve the budget and Danny Bernstein seconded the motion. The budget was approved by the membership. The 2026 budget is included as an attachment to these minutes.

Several bylaws changes were introduced. Carroll Koeplinger moved to accept the changes and Jan Onan seconded the motion. The changes were approved. The bylaws changes are included as an attachment to these minutes.

Les announced the nominations for the 2026-2027 CMC Council. Council members continuing in their current roles are:

- Les Love moves to Immediate Past President
- Karen Shultz moves to President
- Michele Claes, Treasurer
- George Bauernfeld, Vice Treasurer
- Marie Chamberlain, Assistant Treasurer
- Eva Blinder, Secretary
- Karen Lachow, Councilor for Hiking
- David Huff, Councilor for Marketing and Communications
- Adrienne Chang, Councilor at Large

Leaving the council after 2025 are:

- Jan Onan, Councilor for Membership
- Jeff Wilcox, Councilor for Education and Outreach
- Ken Hummel and David Pizzolato, Councilors for Trails Maintenance
- Bill Sanderson, Councilor at Large
- Tom Weaver, Immediate Past President

Nominees for the open 2026-2027 Council posts:

- Paul Curtin, Vice President
- Alessia Farley, Councilor for Membership
- Glen Hess, Councilor for Trails Maintenance
- Jed Thorn, Councilor for Conservation
- Nicolas Nouvil, Councilor for Preparedness
- Jim Ervin, Councilor at Large
- John Ribes, Councilor at Large

All nominations passed and the new Council was elected as proposed.

The business meeting closed at 8:15 pm.