

Hellbender Press News

Dust bowl ballads



By Jack Rentfro

With a historic drought creating dusty conditions at this year's Bonnaroo, the entertainment leviathan that sets a new standard for massive, outdoor celebrations found its

environmental values even more poignant.

By the end of the four-day festival in June, a "Dust Bowl" evocative of the legendary dust storms that hit the country during the Depression had enveloped the 800-acre rural site between Chattanooga and Nashville. Unavoidable shuffling of all those feet (and some mechanized traffic) pounded parched fields of the newly purchased Coffee County pastureland outside modestly rustic Manchester into a talcum-powder consistency. Water trucks patrolled pathways, wetting them down to minimize dust did as best they could.

Amid desert conditions in the week before summer officially began—sinus and lung problems notwithstanding—most of the 80,000-plus who gathered to catch 150 music, comedy and theatrical acts probably could not wait to do it again next year. While scientists and politicians dither about the reality of climate change, its relationship to air pollution and where to place the blame, the fact is that farmers and others attuned to the land know full well things are out of kilter. Seasons come with increasingly erratic weather. This year, a late, killing frost, lack of rain and the kind of heat that usually does not come until the dog days of August will ruin many small farmers.

As a 50-year dry spell moved from what the National Weather Service terms "extreme" to "exceptional," the Bonnaroo festival increased its commitment to reducing waste, recycling as much as possible and conserving energy. Sustainable living and reducing our "carbon footprint" may be watchwords of the day, but the overarching cause fostered by Bonnaroo is addressing the problem of global warming.

Greening of Bonnaroo

Bonnaroo claims to be the "greenest festival on earth." Content at its web site asks "all of our fans at Bonnaroo to help counteract global warming and the devastation of our environment ... the only way to do this is to get the word out there and find both big and small solutions we can implement in our everyday lives. It's the toughest challenge of our generation, but we have a chance to make the difference. All we need is leadership, and we look to our Bonnaroo community to provide it."

In the weeks building up to the event, ticketholders were emailed regular "green" tips advising them to reduce fuel consumption and prepare for recycling opportunities. This even included packing and camping tips like foregoing frivolous party items like balloons and silly string.

Throughout the expansive festival area—from the main hive of shops, stages and other facilities called Centeroo to the surrounding campgrounds and parking areas—55-gallon barrels were set up for garbage and recyclables. Because drought creates brushfire conditions, campers were forbidden to have open fires. Grilling was permitted, but only with careful supervision. Plenty of paint buckets labeled "Butts" were set out for smokers. Campers entering the site were handed waste collection bags color-coded for garbage and recyclables. Increasingly, Bonnaroo uses higher percentages of recycled paper for everything from posters to the tissue in the port-a-potties. Official T-shirts are high in organic cotton content. Paints are increasingly non-volatile organic compound (VOC) based. Fuel cells, biodiesel, solar



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and wind power were used to the utmost for on-site electricity and transportation purposes. For example, the stage called the Solar Stage was powered completely by electricity generated by solar panels.

The ideal for the festival itself is a large-scale application of the backcountry hikers' code to "leave no trace," to leave it as you found it.

An area called "Planet Roo" was set up so various environmental and progressive causes could set up shop among the merry-goers. In addition to these on-the-ground efforts to reduce pollution and promote resource conservation, the Bonnaroo website was a platform for several environmental causes and programs. Hellbender Press assistant editor Amanda Womac was one of the "Green Ambassadors" working a booth at Planet Roo. This group of 14 volunteers was a new addition to Planet Roo, giving festival goers even more opportunities to learn about and participate in a variety of causes.

"With the introduction of Planet Roo in 2003, festival goers have numerous opportunities to learn more about ecological and social justice issues including mountaintop removal, sustainable living, renewable energy and human rights violations across the planet," Womac said. "Within this green space, a vibe of sustainability is created not only through the sounds of the Solar Stage, powered completely by solar energy, but also through the efforts each nonprofit organization puts forth to give festival goers a unique opportunity to get involved on site."

Clean Vibes, man

Clean Vibes, a company set up specifically to manage waste at large, outdoor events, does the grunt work at Bonnaroo. Clean Vibes got its start working festivals fronted by jam-band favorite Phish in the 1990s. Some of those original staffers stayed on to work all six Bonnarooos. From the outset, Clean Vibes diverted from landfills and incinerators as much of Bonnaroo's total waste as possible. The percentage has increased steadily each year.

At the time she was interviewed, Clean Vibes owner Anna Borofsky had just returned home from the site and was hours away from seeing the job completed.

"Diverting as much waste as possible from the landfill and educating folks about the importance of reducing and recycling are at the core of our mission and values," she said.

Borofsky said as bad as the dust was with regard to on-site living conditions, she preferred dry weather to wet, particularly "the torrential rains for weeks straight like we had in 2004! The drought definitely affected the air quality around the site, which affected the lungs and sinuses of our crew. I'm still recovering from the congestion myself.

"Obviously we are going to see an increase in the extreme weather fluctuations in the coming years, and this has a direct impact on the event as concert goers and staff alike are directly effected by extreme weather, since the event is basically a temporary city where almost everyone lives outside."

Asked how long it takes to clean up an area the size—and almost the condition of—a battlefield where scores of thousands have partied for four days, Borofsky

explained that it typically takes 10 days to two and a half weeks. "We should be fully packed up and out of there by the end of today (June 27), which means this will be record time for clean-up. We cleaned up the 2002 event in 10 days, but the site was significantly smaller then, as it did not include several hundred acres across the road from the main property, which have been used since 2004."

Borofsky went on to say the crew this year totaled 100-140 professional personnel and up to 175 volunteers.

The results of these efforts were tangible in terms of recycled waste returned to productivity. Said Borofsky: "Here's what we have tallied so far: 300 tons (about 100 tons more than last year) went to the WasteAway facility in Morrison that takes waste and makes landscaping and construction materials out of it. More than five tons of aluminum has gone to CFC recycling in Tullahoma. There should be about one more ton of aluminum collected. Coffee County Recycling in Tullahoma has received almost 15 tons of cardboard. About 5,000 pounds of scrap metals have gone to CFC as well. One very full, 40-cubic yard roll-off (a dumpster-like trucking container) of food waste will be going to a facility in Middle Tennessee for composting."

Borofsky said figures for plastics, which are categorized by grades (those numbers you see on the bottom of plastic bottles), were imminent but not yet available. For comparison, she said, "last year we had 16,980 pounds of PET (No. 1); 1,620 pounds of No. 2; 500 pounds of No. 6 cups, and 4,720 pounds of No. 4 plastic bags.

"We will recycle more than 65 percent of the material produced by the event and that's better than last year's 56 percent. We can only hope that we divert even more in '08."

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Out of the debris-strewn temporary city's litter, only 164 tons of sheer garbage was bound for landfills.

With two recycling facilities in Coffee County, the local economy profits from the efforts of Clean Vibes and festival attendees who disposed of their trash responsibly.

"Coca-Cola is buying the No. 1 plastic directly from Coffee County to process back into soda bottles in their plant in South Carolina," Borofsky said. "The waste hauler who handles all of our trash and recycling hauling is Richardson Waste Removal, a small, family-owned business out of Fayetteville. WastAway is in Morrison and McMinnville and they certainly benefit from the material we bring them."

Dawning of a new era

AC Entertainment (ACE), the music promotion company started in 1991 by Knoxville entertainment impresario Ashley Capps, has a partner in New Orleans-based Superfly Productions. Stemming from their work together promoting jazz festivals, the two businesses have co-produced Bonnaroo since its inception in 2002.

Meanwhile, plans forge ahead for the future of Bonnaroo. Carey Archer, ACE chief operating officer, told Hellbender Press, "the entire Bonnaroo team, from the partners to the department heads, all feel very strongly about greening the event. We all play a very important role with regard to the people and departments we each touch when it comes to assessing the impact our areas have on the environment and figuring out how we can lessen our environmental impact in as many ways as reasonably possible."

Big Hassle, a New York City-based company that handles publicity for the event, said ways to make next year's Bonnaroo even more environmentally friendly are being "aggressively sought."

The Manchester Times reported June 26 on a development that might alleviate dust problems at future events: paving of some gravel roads around the Bonnaroo site.

The paper reported that Big Hassle told local officials "the sky is the limit" for the 530.57 acres purchased in March by New Era Farms (a partnership of ACE and Superfly Productions) for \$8.68 million. Peripheral acreage that is part of the overall Bonnaroo site is leased.

"Currently, we are bringing in engineers and architects from all over the world to look and tell us what we can do," Big Hassle's Jeff Cuellar was quoted as saying. "We are looking at other events such as an arts festival or monster truck rally, but we haven't determined what we are going to do yet."

The same edition of The Manchester Times reported the "exceptional" drought is working its way up from Alabama, where farmers are giving up on this year's growing season due to the dryness of the soil. In the past century, according to the records of the Tullahoma Utilities Board, average rainfall for the area in June is 4.04 inches. Only 0.13 inches had fallen in June as the month neared its end. Water restrictions in some towns were imminent.

Labels: **drought, festivals, recycling**

posted by Hellbender Staff @ 1:26 PM 0 comments

Start me up

By Rikki Hall

Tennessee Valley Authority began generating power with the Unit I reactor at Brown's Ferry Nuclear Plant in Athens, Ala. in May. The reactor was idled in 1985. Fuel rods for the plant were manufactured from surplus weapons-grade uranium rather than enriched ore. President Bush visited the plant in June to promote an expansion of nuclear power generation in the United States.

Labels: **nuclear industry, TVA**

posted by Hellbender Staff @ 2:15 PM 0 comments

Favorite falcon hurt

By Ray Zimmerman

Imagine a rare species nesting on a railroad bridge below a TVA dam. That is what has been happening at Chickamauga Dam since 1997. Peregrine falcons have delighted Chattanooga bird watchers since Roi Shannon discovered the birds that year. The male bird, named Roi in his honor, has returned year after year with a succession of mates to raise a brood. This year, his mate raised one chick without

Roi's help while he recovered from an injury at the Clinch River Raptor Center. Harold Sharp shared the story at the June 16 Peregrine Watch, sponsored by the Riverwalk Bird Club. Harold has been watching the nesting peregrines since they were first discovered. The chick fledged in 1998 was initially known as "Sharpie" in his honor.

Sunday, May 20 was the last day both adult falcons were seen at the dam. By Friday, area birdwatchers had given up on Roi. Seventeen days after his disappearance, Richard Simms of NewsChannel 9 aired a story about the missing falcon. Darde Long, director of the Chattanooga Zoo, informed him that her staff had rescued a male peregrine May 20. The bird had flown into a house near the zoo.

Animal Services of Chattanooga transported the falcon to the University of Tennessee Veterinary School for treatment. Veterinarians put surgical pins in the bird's wing in hopes of healing a fracture then sent the bird to the Clinch River Raptor Center for recovery.

On June 18, the bird returned to the veterinary school because he had pulled the pin out of his wing. He may not be able to return to the wild. Area bird watchers have contributed to a fund to pay for Roi's rehabilitation.

Harold Sharp identified Roi from a photograph. From a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service leg band on the bird, the bird's handlers learned he was released at Cloudland Canyon State Park near Trenton, Ga. as part of a peregrine falcon restoration program. The date of release was July 22, 1993. This makes Roi 14 years old, an age at which full recovery from a broken wing is highly unlikely. Meanwhile, bird watchers have not seen the chick "Falco" since June 17 and the female bird "Dreama" spends less time at the nest. Although this year has been a difficult one for the falcons, they have fledged young at this site several times. Although the peregrine falcon was on the federal endangered species list for several decades, officials delisted the bird in 1997 due to a successful recovery. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service scientists will monitor the species through 2015 to be certain of the success of the recovery effort.

Labels: **wildlife**

posted by Hellbender Staff @ 1:30 PM 0 comments

What are you drinking?

By Rikki Hall

The Tennessee General Assembly unanimously passed a bill requiring the Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) to publish water quality enforcement actions on its Web site. State Senator Jamie Woodson, who represents parts of Knox and Jefferson Counties, sponsored the bill. Previously, citizens had to visit a TDEC office to learn of fines or Water Quality Control Board decisions. Agreed orders, settlements developers often sign at the last minute to avoid fines and formal hearings, were exempted from the bill by an amendment introduced in the State Senate.

Labels: **water quality**

posted by Hellbender Staff @ 2:13 PM 0 comments

Road to Nowhere gets closer to destination

National Park Service officials announced the preferred alternative for the North Shore Road *By Rikki Hall*

Environmental Impact Statement would be a monetary settlement for Swain County, N.C. and no further road construction. The recommendation will be formally published in October, and public hearings and comment periods will be held before a final decision is made. If the settlement is chosen, the U.S. Congress will have to approve funds for the settlement, which was approved by Swain County Commission in 2002 but will likely require another vote by that body. Ever since Fontana Dam inundated a county road in the 1940s, construction of a replacement road through Great Smoky Mountains National Park has been debated. Bryson City, N.C. is now connected to the dam by a highway south of the impoundment, but the old roadway ran along what is now the north shore of Lake Fontana. Tennessee Senator Lamar Alexander and North Carolina Congressman Heath Shuler sent Park managers a letter in support of a monetary settlement and got all their colleagues in the regional delegation except North Carolina Senator Richard Burr and Tennessee Congressman John Duncan, Jr. to sign the letter. Duncan last year pledged his opposition to building the road in a letter to

constituents.

Labels: **GSMNP, planning, TVA**

posted by Hellbender Staff @ 2:04 PM 0 comments

Dry spring

By Rikki Hall

Tennessee experienced the fourth driest spring since record keeping began in 1850, with a southern swath of the state falling in the "extreme drought" category. "Exceptional drought" conditions prevailed in the southern Cumberland Mountains. Most of East Tennessee suffered year-to-date rainfall deficits greater than one foot, and stream flows were well below average, approaching record lows in some locales. Dry soils threatened agricultural productivity. TVA water managers had to limit releases into the Hiwassee River, reducing revenues for rafting outfitters. Hydroelectric output was down by half, causing TVA to urge conservation and warn of possible rate hikes. Temperatures in June averaged around three degrees above normal. National Weather Service forecasters in Morristown said several tropical storms would need to impact the region to bring relief.

Labels: **agriculture, drought, rivers**

posted by Hellbender Staff @ 1:59 PM 0 comments

Recycling done right

By Cynthia Rosenberry

Hamblen County demonstrated its commitment to recycling during recent budget discussions. The 15-year-old program has evolved into a profitable industry and helped municipal leaders meet state-mandated goals many counties have not been able to reach. Collaboration between the Environmental Protection Agency, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, and local government created a situation in which recycling is often more profitable than disposal. So successful is their strategy that even in the face of budgetary shortfalls, county and city officials declared they have no intention of cutting recycling out of the budget. This spring, faced with lagging sales-tax revenue, Morristown officials considered the idea as one of over a dozen options presented; however, according to recently elected Morristown Mayor Sami Barile, "We're not going to let that happen. We've worked too long and hard to get to where we're at just to drop it. We found a way to keep recycling in the budget."

As Executive Director of Hamblen County's Keep America Beautiful (KAB) program for over ten years, Barile played a key role in the evolution of Morristown's recycling business and culture. During that time, Hamblen KAB won several state and national awards, jump started local recycling and expanded it to include household hazardous waste collection. In 1991 Barile worked with county and city officials and the area's business and industry to begin one of the first countywide, full-service rural recycling programs in the nation. The program is the only countywide curbside recycling program in Tennessee.

Barile is not alone in her enthusiasm for recycling. County Mayor David Purkey said of the countywide program, "Our curbside recycling program is doing well. Hamblen County has no intention of making budget cuts in recycling. Our recycling program has enabled us to achieve the goal of 25 percent reduction in landfill usage set by the state."

Public participation in solid-waste reduction solutions has increased over time. led by Hamblen KAB and its partners. The county's recycling culture has rewarded businesses like the Goodwill Industries Material Recovery Facility with a steady stream of salable refuse. Jack Horner, Regional Vice President of Sales and Recycling at the Russellville facility, said participation in curbside recycling is good but could use improvement. "I think it will continue to improve with time because of education. Nowadays, schools teach the kids about it. I remember when recycling seemed like a new fad years ago. That's no longer the case. Kids today are more prepared, and they will grow into adults that, as a result of education, send less waste to landfills," Horner said.

Horner said private participation has steadily increased, yet in his experience, the most impressive increase has occurred in industrial and commercial recycling. "We now have 55 to 60 industrial and commercial customers in the surrounding area, many of which have expanded what they are recycling over time because the numbers add up. Balancing the budget is always important to any business. With landfill fees costing as much as \$28 per ton, added to the hauling fees for

transporting it, many businesses have begun to look hard at ways to reduce the amount of trash taken to landfills. One easy way is to send it to us.”

Many of Horner’s customers not only send him their recyclable waste but also purchase recycled materials such as cardboard for shipping packages. Some materials have multiple markets, such as newsprint, which goes to paper mills for recycling back into fresh newsprint or gets shredded for blow-in cellulose insulation. Plastic soda bottles are sold to an acrylic carpet manufacturer. Old, damaged books are shredded and remade into book covers. Horner knows how to wheel and deal trash. Whatever comes his way, he finds someone interested in purchasing it. His facility accepts recyclable waste from not just Hamblen County, but surrounding counties. Horner said anyone at all is welcome to drop off recyclable waste during business hours (M-F 8am-4:30pm), and he will find it a good home.

A myriad of Hamblen County businesses practice some or all of the three Rs: reduce, reuse, recycle. Antique shops, plastics recyclers, used-car dealerships, thrift stores, salvage yards, almost every commercial street in Morristown seems to have some type of business that contributes to solid waste reduction. Counties in Tennessee unable to reach the state-mandated 25-percent landfill-waste-reduction goal need to take a look at Hamblen County to find out what they are doing right. A number of contributing factors culminated in a successful balance. Great attitudes fuel initiative, and great leaders in the spotlight and behind the scenes create enduring success. Hamblen County’s successful strategy also included not giving up in tough times. With the recent election of Morristown Mayor Sami Barile, Hamblen County proved its commitment to sustainable commerce.

Labels: **recycling**

posted by Hellbender Staff @ 1:23 PM 0 comments

Proposed quarry meets resistance

By Debbie Griffith

Tiny Ingalls, N.C., has found its voice. And it is green.

If you blink and miss the single road sign marking the community on U.S. 19E winding north through Avery County, the North Toe River on your left and Gusher Knob on your right, you would never know you had passed through Ingalls. Avery County, the last county formed in North Carolina, borders Tennessee south of Johnson City, near Roan Mountain State Park. It is home to Grandfather Mountain. Out of this rugged wilderness, Ingalls’ voice is being heard across the region. A combination of native mountain dwellers and recent transplants from Florida, Atlanta and the North Carolina Piedmont have mobilized to protect a mountain they love called Burleson Bald. Part of the Yellow Mountain chain that includes Big Bald and Spear Tops, popular with hikers, it is close to a burgeoning real estate market. Burleson Bald is threatened by a proposed 161-acre gravel quarry near the top of its southern flank. Quarry construction would peel away hardwood forests, laurel and rhododendron thickets and stands of shagbark hickory and tuliptree that in fall turn blazing yellow. In their place would be a rocky scar visible from many sections of the county and from two scenic overlooks on the Blue Ridge Parkway, four miles away.

The loss of the forest would be devastating, but the effects of the quarry would go far beyond that. Trout streams originating on site could be affected by silt and runoff. Groundwater supplies could be compromised in an area where virtually all families rely on shallow wells or spring boxes for drinking water. Air quality could be impacted by dust from blasting, crushing and hauling rock, and the tourism economy so valuable to the region could be adversely affected by the aesthetic blemish.

Avery County needs gravel, developer Randy Carpenter of Spruce Pine said, and he has scoured the county to find a place for a new gravel quarry.

Never mind that four homes lie within 500 feet of the site, and 50 families live along the narrow blacktop of Old Hanging Rock Road that would be the haul route for quarry trucks with growling jake brakes.

Never mind that the site is adjacent to the Yellow Mountain/Raven Cliffs Significant Natural Heritage Area known for rare and endangered plants and animals: sharp-shinned hawks, Gray’s lily, spreading avens, rock gnome lichen and many others. Never mind that silt from the quarry could flow into the North Toe River, where the rare giant salamander that gives this newspaper its name, the eastern hellbender, struggles to survive.

Avery County needs gravel. But not from Burleson Bald, the Unincorporated Citizens Association to Protect Wildcat Cliffs said. The association has convinced the

Avery County Board of Commissioners to impose a 90-day moratorium on high-impact industries like quarries and asphalt plants until the board can consider whether to adopt regulations to control where these industries locate and how they operate. Currently the county has no such regulations, no land-use requirements and no zoning, which in some sections of the county is seen as a threat to individual property rights. The citizens group is undeterred, but the clock is ticking on the moratorium, which ends in August.

Meanwhile, citizens used yard signs, community meetings, a Web site and door-to-door canvassing to turn out more than 200 people in late May to voice their opposition to the quarry at a public hearing held by the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). More than 35 people spoke to hearing officers in the historic Avery County Courthouse in Newland and pleaded for DENR to deny the mining permit. Staff from the Land Quality Section of DENR patiently listened to their pleas. Some residents had well researched data on dissolved oxygen, air quality, hydrological impacts and trout habitat. Others spoke from the heart, recounting the pleasures of walking mountain trails and fishing local creeks. "Putting a quarry on that mountain is about like letting Pizza Hut put their logo on the moon," said lifelong Avery County resident Jodie Lovelace.

After two hours, DNER officials went back to Raleigh to consider what they heard. History indicates DNER never denies mining permits, relying instead on sometimes ineffective and lightly enforced mitigation efforts to protect water and air quality. DNER does not consider nuisances like noise from blasting or loss of property value when issuing mining permits. Those issues are left to county officials to regulate, and there are no regulations of that sort in Avery County. But that has not kept citizens from fighting to save Burleson Bald and Wildcat Cliffs, named for the bobcats that live there.

"We know this will be difficult, but we have to save this mountain," said Ted Johnson, whose family has lived on Burleson Bald for generations. "Destroying the peace and tranquility of this community is unacceptable. This quarry will cause harm to our mountain, harm to the environment, harm to our property values and harm to the local economy. That's too high a price to pay for gravel."

Griffith works in public relations in Raleigh, N.C. and owns property near the proposed quarry.

Labels: **community, natural resources, planning, tourism**

posted by Hellbender Staff @ 1:19 PM 0 comments