Written by Bob White
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Everyone who supports the area's four State Parks is urged to attend the Friends of High Country State Parks' first major membership meeting Wednesday evening April 18th. It'll be easy to attend the pre-dinner time meeting on the ASU Campus in Belk Library room 114. The parking deck beside the library opens to free parking at 5 pm—when light refreshments will be served. The one-hour meeting starts at 5:30. "It's crucial that folks attend this first meeting of 2012," says president Bob White. "We have great events to announce—four state park fun fests this summer—and challenges to address, like how High Country residents can help these economic engines of tourism cope with budget cuts and avoid park closures."

"Please come out and help our parks. You won't believe the impact that we can have," White says.

You'll hear the superintendents of each local park—Elk Knob, Grandfather Mountain, Mount Jefferson, and New River—and the meeting will target concrete ways that group funds and volunteers can improve state parks in 2012 despite shrinking budgets.

The new group has mounted service projects and funded or facilitated modest but important initiatives, including a grant to New River State Park's effort to preserve the Eastern Hellbender, a giant salamander of "special concern" in North Carolina. The organization's mission is "to encourage local efforts to support recreation, education, preservation and adequate funding for our local State Parks."

"Please put this meeting on your calendar," asks president White. "Our parks need our help."

Membership benefits include discounts at Footsloggers and other local businesses, a quarterly Web newsletter, and "Members Only" events. Affordable regular membership is $10, families pay $15, students are $5, and a life membership is $250. Membership, and the group's newsletter, is available through the group's Web site: http://friendsofhcsp.wordpress.com. Or type "Friends of High Country State Parks" into Facebook's search field.