



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Saving Our Kids and Rivers from Drugs Operation Medicine Cabinet Will Launch for the First Time in the High Country on October 3, 2009**

A broad coalition of community partners proudly announces the first ever prescription drug take back day. Dubbed "Operation Medicine Cabinet" by Captain Kelly Redmon of the Watauga County Sheriff's Department, the event is designed to safely dispose of drugs and keep them out of the hands of children and out of our water.

Anyone with outdated or unused prescription drugs, over the counter medications, syringes or other medical supplies are invited to drop these off at the take-back centers on Saturday October 3, 2009. It is an amnesty day, so no questions will be asked. Take-back locations will be available at the Seven Devils Town Hall and the three Food Lion stores in Watauga County: the Hwy 321 store in Boone, the Hwy 421 Deep Gap store, and the Blowing Rock store. The event will be held in conjunction with the county's annual Hazardous Household Waste day from 9a.m. to 12 noon. The disposal of prescription drugs has long been a dilemma, and many medicine cabinets contain unused or outdated medications. Among teenagers, one of the highest increases in illegal drug use over the past several years has been in prescription drug use. The most common method of obtaining prescription drugs is by raiding the medicine cabinet of a friend or family, then taking the pills or selling them.

"From a law enforcement perspective one of our most important jobs is to work diligently and proactively to prevent drug abuse," said Watauga County Sheriff Len D. Hagaman. "By hosting an amnesty day that allows the public to turn in any kind of unused or unwanted medications, hopefully we will keep those drugs off the street and out of the hands of children," he continued.

The other problem with outdated or unused prescription drugs is that people dispose of them improperly by flushing them down the toilet. If their home is connected to a local waste water treatment facility then the drugs wind up in either the Watauga or New River. "A recent investigation by the Associated Press found a whole host of pharmaceuticals-including antibiotics, pain medication, anti-depressants, sex hormones, heart and blood pressure medicine-in the drinking water supplies of more than 40 million Americans," said Donna Lisenby, Watauga Riverkeeper.

ASU Biology and Chemistry students and faculty have conducted environmental tests to determine the effects of pharmaceutical estrogens (birth control and estrogen supplements) from the Boone WWTP on male fish populations in the South Fork of the New River. The results indicated that 60-66% of male hognose and white suckers immediately below the WWTP effluent are being feminized; tests with rainbow trout have yet to be conducted. "Although preliminary tests have shown that pharmaceutical estrogens in the river just below the WWTP are right at levels known to cause feminization, it is unlikely that these levels persist very far downstream," said Dr. Shea Tuberty, of ASU's biology department. "Any attempt to reduce the quantity of pharmaceuticals in water is a significant step towards environmental conservation," Tuberty added.

Planning for the event began in January when the MountainKeepers hosted a community summit on resilience that included a dialogue about issues of concern to High Country residents. Many people in attendance recognized how important the water quality of the Watauga and New Rivers are to the environmental health of our region. They began discussing how they could proactively address the emerging prescription drug contamination threat and decided to explore the possibility of hosting an event to raise awareness while providing a free and easy way for area residents to dispose of their unused or outdated medications properly.

So community members reached out to law enforcement officials from the DEA, SBI, Sheriff's Department as well as the Boone, Blowing Rock and Seven Devils Police Departments. They quickly learned from these law enforcement professionals that prescription drugs abuse is one of the fastest growing drug problems in the country. With misuse of prescription drugs as their common enemy, the river conservationists and law enforcement community united to fight the problem.

"It has been an amazing testament to the collaborative spirit of our community to see how enthusiastically people have united to help host Operation Medicine Cabinet," said Wendy Patoprsty, County Extension Agent. "Our community partners include the MountainKeepers, Watauga River Conservation Partners, Towns of Boone, Blowing Rock and Seven Devils, the Watauga County Sheriff's Office, Boone Police, the State Bureau of Investigation, Blowing Rock Police, Seven Devils Police, the Drug Enforcement Administration, Boone Drug, Watauga County Recycling/Solid Waste Department, Watauga Riverkeeper/Appalachian Voices, Food Lion, The National Committee for the New River, MPrints, NC Cooperative Extension Service, Precision Printing, the Smoky Mountain Center and Appalachian State University just to name a few," she continued.

"On behalf of all our partners, we are pleased to offer this new opportunity to our citizens to safely dispose of unused or unwanted medications properly and we hope you will make plans to come see us on Saturday October 3 and be a part of the community effort to save the rivers and kids from drugs." said Watauga County Recycling Coordinator Lisa Doty.

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