

Mountain Keeping Column July 5/July 12, 2007

“Bottle Bill” - An Answer to Multiple Woes?

By Nancy Reigel

This column has focused primarily on “how tos,” how to make our individual lives more “eco friendly.” The state of North Carolina currently has a number of bills pending that will make our entire state more “eco friendly.” One such bill is S215, the “Litter Reduction Act of 2007.”

On February 20 of this year, Senator Doug Berger of Franklin County introduced S215 with the expanded title “An Act To Reduce Roadside And Other Littering And To Encourage Recycling By Requiring A Deposit On Beverage Containers And Requiring Redemption Centers To Accept Returned Beverage Containers And Refund The Deposits.”

Watauga’s own Senator Steve Goss is one of four senators listed as cosponsors.

The bill proposes that every beverage container holding no more than four liters and no less than 50 milliliters of a beverage sold or offered for sale to a consumer in this state shall have a refund value of ten cents (10¢).

For those of us who abhor the litter we see on our roadsides and for those of us who find the declining rate of recycling in the county and state and its increasing stress on our waste stream more than troubling, this bill provides a glimmer of hope.

First, some facts from the Container Recycling Institute to help us understand the problem:

- Beverage containers account for 20% of the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from landfilling a ton of municipal solid waste and replacing the used products with new products made from virgin materials.
- Beverage containers comprise 40-60% of litter. The Solid Waste Coordinators of Kentucky found that 58% of litter consisted of beverage containers, pull tabs, and closures.
- From 1992 to 2006, beverage container sales increased from 139 billion (yes, *billion*) units to 200 billion. Over the same period, beverage container recycling has dropped from 55% to 34%. No wonder our solid waste stream is reaching flood proportions!

But do so-called “bottle bills” really work? Experience in the 11 states that have enacted them provides a resounding “YES!”

- They reduce litter. In Michigan, which has a 10-cent deposit requirement, beverage container litter dropped by 84%. Think of it -- 84% of those cans and bottles on the sides of our roads *GONE!*

- They increase recycling. In 40 states without a deposit requirement, an average of 191 beverage containers are recycled per person. In ten deposit states this is increased to 490 per person, over 250% higher.

- They reduce our solid-waste streams. Taking beverage containers out of the waste stream and putting them into the recycle stream is a win-win.

What is the current status of S215?

The bill has been referred to the Commerce, Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee, and it's receiving support. As of this writing, the Watauga County Commission, the Boone Town Council, and the Town Council of Seven Devils have all passed resolutions in support of the bill.

But the support of individual citizens also matters. Please contact your Senate and House representatives from Watauga County.

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