

MOUNTAINS

Search and rescue volunteer makes big impact



Word from the Smokies
Walt Evans
USA TODAY NETWORK

“I’m just a backwoods guy,” Bill Gober says. “I try to stay out of the limelight.”

It’s 10 a.m. on a Wednesday, the beginning of his shift volunteering with the preventative search and rescue (PSAR) team at Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

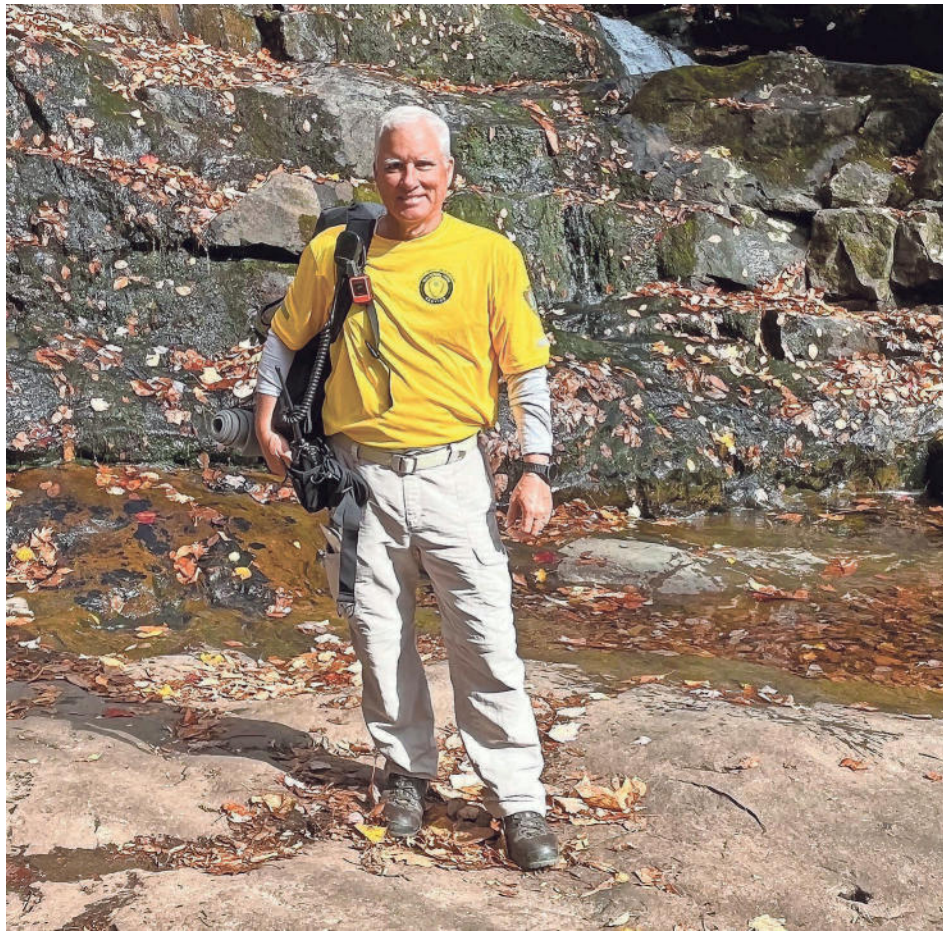
After a long career in medical equipment sales, Gober began volunteering as a rover on Laurel Falls Trail in 2012, over a decade ago. If you ask his park supervisors — PSAR Ranger Josh Albritton and Emergency Services Coordinator Liz Hall — or any of the visitors whose lives he’s helped save, they’ll tell you he’s much more than just a backwoods guy.

“Bill certainly sets the standard for our PSAR VIP (Volunteers-in-Parks) cadre,” says Albritton. “He volunteers at least once per week, generally getting out on trail to educate our visitors about how to hike safely. He’s also a very active member of our SAR (search and rescue) team, often responding from his home in Knoxville or direct from his trail post, regardless of the time of day.”

With approximately 100 carry-outs now under his belt, Gober attributes much of his enthusiasm for the park’s search and rescue efforts to his own brush with danger. In 2015, he experienced a heart attack on Laurel Falls Trail and had to call in his own rescue.

“Since I had taken the American Heart Association’s Heart Saver First Aid and CPR class as a volunteer, I recognized the heart attack signs and got out of denial early,” he says. “It’s thanks to our Great Smoky Mountains Rescue Team and their partners — Gatlinburg Fire Ambulance Team, Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center Heart Team, and Park West Cardiac Rehab — that I’m alive and well.”

Search and rescue is personal for Gober, and he does not take his respon-



Bill Gober stands at the base of Laurel Falls, one of the most popular hiking destinations in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. After a long career in medical equipment sales, Gober began volunteering as a rover on the trail in 2012. PROVIDED BY BILL GOBER

sibility lightly.

“I’ve been in the rescue basket, carried out by our rescue team,” he says. “I can identify with our injured visitors, and they bond with me quickly once they find out I’ve been in their position myself.”

Recently, Gober’s commitment to his volunteer duties has been paying off. He volunteered to take the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians’ Emergency Medical Responder (EMR) test, which allows him to provide direct medical care. Then, he became GSMNP’s preventative search and rescue VIP lead.

Preventative search and rescue differs from other search and rescue efforts in that it prioritizes getting people the assistance or supplies they need before a medical emergency occurs. Gober gives the example of park visitors who alert emergency services after running out of water but before they’ve become dehydrated.

“That’s not a medical event yet,” he says, “but it could quickly develop into one.”

The PSAR program is relatively new to GSMNP, and it addresses a vital need. With millions of people entering the park each year, many have never experi-

enced backcountry environments and are underprepared for situations that arise.

As journalist David Brill noted earlier this year in an article for Smokies Life, Emergency Services Coordinator Liz Hall says that instances of poor planning and insufficient preparation on behalf of visitors account for around 8% of all search and rescue incidents in the park. The PSAR program aims to lower that figure by helping less-experienced visitors better understand the preparation needed for a safe park outing.

Asked if there’s anything he’d like people to keep in mind so they can enjoy the park safely, Gober says the best safety tip is also the simplest: Follow the rules.

“The rules are there to keep you safe,” he says.

He’d also like people to know the park could always use more volunteers to assist with search and rescue.

“Anyone who has an interest, but particularly if they’re an EMR or EMT,” he says. “People who retire from medical careers, if they want to keep utilizing those skills, they can get on board as a volunteer and potentially participate in PSAR or search and rescue.”

Gober emphasizes that he’s grateful for the opportunity to help visitors who find themselves in emergency situations.

“Growing up, I wanted to be a park wildlife ranger,” he says. “My hero was Smokey Bear, and I wanted to help Smokey save the world from forest fires. So, it’s an honor for me to support our professional Great Smoky Mountains team. Hopefully, I have many more years to volunteer and help our visitors enjoy the park in a safe, responsible manner.”

Walt Evans is a writer based in Knoxville, Tennessee, and a contributor to Smokies LIVE, a blog at SmokiesInformation.org hosted by park partner Great Smoky Mountains Association, which provides this column. He holds an MFA in creative writing from the University of Tennessee and is currently at work on his first novel.

What to know about efforts to end daylight saving time in NC

Sarah Honosky
Asheville Citizen Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

ASHEVILLE - Despite legislative efforts otherwise, this weekend Western North Carolina will see its clocks turned back, like always. Or, at least, as it has for decades.

The time shift, also referred to as “spring forward, fall back,” will happen at 2 a.m. Sunday, Nov. 5. For most people, this means setting clocks back before going to bed Saturday night. For the majority of states, including North Carolina, autumn ushers in a return to standard time, with clocks set back one hour.

In March, daylight saving time will begin again for 2024, when clocks are set forward and people lose an hour of sleep.

Will NC make daylight saving time year-round?

Efforts to stop the twice-yearly clock switching, which some call “disruptive,” are nothing new.

State legislatures have considered at least 450 bills and resolutions in recent years to establish year-round daylight saving time as soon as federal law allows it, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Inherent in the debate is whether to enact either permanent standard time or permanent daylight time. The federal Uniform Time Act allows the former op-

tion but not the latter.

The U.S. Senate unanimously approved a bill called the Sunshine Protection Act in 2022. Introduced by Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Florida, the act would permanently extend daylight saving time for the entire year. However, the measure has not yet been signed into law by President Joe Biden as it hasn’t yet been passed by the U.S. House of Representatives, where it was “held at the desk,” according to USA TODAY reporting.

In the last five years, 19 states have enacted legislation or passed resolutions to provide for year-round daylight saving time, if Congress were to allow such a change, and in some cases, if surrounding states enact the same legislation, according to NCSL. Because federal law does not currently allow full-time DST, Congress would have to act before states could adopt changes.

N.C. House Bill 326, which would adopt DST year round, was introduced in March in the General Assembly. It passed the House in May, but stalled in the Senate.

Chris Cooper, a political science professor at Western Carolina University, said in September that it’s not the first time the discussion has come to North Carolina’s legislature.

“It’s sort of like the Olympics,” he said. “Every few years someone brings up daylight savings time again.”

But most years, there’s not too strong of a push. The most recent bill was a little bit different.

“It’s hard to know what the cause and the effect is,” Cooper said, but it seemed to be gaining momentum. Unlike other years, when similar bills might be introduced but rarely get a hearing or vote, the 2023 proposed legislation passed the lower chamber “pretty easily.”

In part, Cooper attributed it to Rep. Jason Saine, a Republican out of Lincoln County, among those who introduced the bill. With a powerful Republican as its primary sponsor, it was no surprise the bill got more attention.

Though it didn’t make it through both chambers this year, he expects it will come up again, particularly as other states also push similar legislation.

“This idea is having a moment,” Cooper said. “It’s being discussed at the federal level, it’s being discussed by various states. I certainly can’t predict what is going to happen with it, but I don’t think it’s going to go away anytime soon.”

When did federal time changes start?

The Standard Time Act of 1918 was the first law to implement standard and daylight saving times at the federal level.

“Federal oversight of time zones began in 1918 with the enactment of the Standard Time Act, which vested the Interstate Commerce Commission with the responsibility for establishing boundaries between the standard time zones in the U.S.,” according to The U.S.

Department of Transportation. “This responsibility was transferred from the Interstate Commerce Commission to DOT when Congress created DOT in 1966.”

Why?

The U.S. Department of Transportation oversees the observance of daylight saving time as well as U.S. time zones, according to transportation.gov. The DOT said energy reduction and reduced crime are reasons for having both standard and daylight saving time.

When was daylight saving time 2023?

This year’s daylight saving time began at 2 a.m. Sunday, March 12.

Which states don’t observe daylight saving time?

Arizona (except for the Navajo Nation) and Hawaii do not recognize daylight saving time. Neither do Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam and the Northern Marianas.

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