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Appalachian Offsets

Nonprofits reduce energy use, use savings to help their cause

BY SAM RUARK-EASTES
 Cue the music ... Appalachian Offsets, your local solution to global pollution, is back! Back by popular demand and with the help of two grants, Appalachian Offsets (AO) will reduce climate changing emissions through funding energy efficiency upgrades for facilities used by local nonprofit organizations. This voluntary carbon offset program of the WNC Green Building Council offers businesses, organizations and individuals the option to easily reduce or offset their carbon footprint.

The scientific consensus is in. Climate change is happening and is greatly influenced by the burning of fossil fuels. In our everyday lives, our actions emit harmful carbon. The U.S. has one of the most staggering greenhouse gas emissions rates of any country in the world. Climate change is having massive detrimental impacts throughout the world, causing erratic and destructive weather, severe famine, rising sea levels and crop failures. Appalachian Offsets was set up to address this pressing issue. The program encourages all of us to reduce our carbon emissions first, then pay into a fund that collectively helps others do the

same. Through upgrading inefficient lighting and supporting clean energy projects, Appalachian Offsets will help us reduce our collective impact on climate change.

The first era of Appalachian Offsets was launched in 2005. From 2005 to 2007, we completed four energy-efficiency retrofits for local nonprofits, with the most successful project being in fall of 2007. Students from UNC Asheville volunteered with the Asheville Housing Authority (AHA) to switch out 13,000 inefficient incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs). Through this retrofit, the AHA and its residents collectively reduced carbon emissions by more than 1610 tons, saving over \$200,000 per year.

With the onset of the 2008 recession, interest in the program waned as building projects were delayed or cancelled and busi-

nesses lacked the resources to offset their emissions.

Environmental stewardship (and the economy) are once again growing in Western North Carolina. In a survey of our membership, 70 percent of respon-



dents requested that we revive this program to offer a low-cost and community-enhancing pathway to cut emissions. Payments for carbon offsets will be directed to meet the needs of more nonprofits, schools and low-income housing.

Appalachian Offsets is the bridge that matches companies looking to offset their emissions with organizations who need support cutting their costs and upgrading their facilities.

As we revive this program, several changes will be enacted to make it more transparent and connective. The previous program did a great job of

engaging nonprofits and community members to do specific projects. We will build upon this success and add projects that have significant cost and energy savings. We will partner with organizations like the Land of Sky Waste Reduction Partners who perform energy audits for nonprofits, schools and municipalities. Projects will be transparent to ensure that offset buyers are directly aware of the specific projects they help fund, so all participants know the quality of the offset they are purchasing.

Appalachian Offsets offers a tremendous secondary benefit in that offsets allow the recipients to retain more capital for mission-related efforts. And by keeping those dollars local and with community organizations, these credits will cycle funding through the local economy and yield a positive impact for a much longer time than traditional carbon credits.

The relaunch of their program is made possible by grants from the Kendeda Fund and the Ray Anderson Foundation.

Sam is the executive director of the WNCGBC and has been working in the field of sustainability for 18 years with local governments, small businesses and nonprofits. He is a LEED AP and Certified Permaculture Designer.



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