

# **Severe Weather Trail Policy For Hikers and Backpackers At Grayson Highlands State Park**

Grayson Highlands State Park has provided access to the Appalachian Trail since the park opened in the early 1970's. This access is well known and is expected by many park visitors that want to venture into the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area "high country". Due to the incidence of severe weather in the high country at Grayson Highlands and the danger it poses for hikers/backpackers and potential rescuers, conditions for potential trailhead closure have been examined and this policy developed as an effort to decrease that risk.

It is recognized that some individuals may have the expertise and equipment to endure the most severe weather; however, the Division of Park's policy for trailhead closure and public safety must not be based on the expertise of a few. The health and safety of the general public and rescue personnel must take priority. The following policy and/or actions will be implemented and enforced by park staff as of 12/01/05.

- Trailhead access will be posted as closed from December 15 – March 15 when air temperatures are 15° F or less with wind speeds of 35 mph plus, and the 3 or 4 day weather forecasts are predicting an approaching storm with freezing rain/snow.
- Park staff will post closure signs at the park office, Massie Gap trailhead, the over-night backpacker's parking lot, and the trail access at Wilson Creek.
- A 10 day weather forecast will be posted weekly at the park office and on the Kiosk at Massie Gap. This forecast will be updated should a significant change in the forecast take place.
- Park staff will stay aware of the daily weather forecasts and inform/warn inquiring callers/visitors of any predicted inclement weather.
- More detailed and pertinent information will be obtained from backpackers on the required registration form gathered at the contact station or park office.
- Basic equipment needs for backpackers will be provided on 1/3 card stock at the park office and contact station. This information is also available at [www.backpacking.net](http://www.backpacking.net).

