

FOREST NEWS

Georgia Forestwatch Quarterly Newsletter Autumn 2004



Who's watching your forest?

Georgia Forestwatch Appeal of Rich Mountain "Road" Construction Denied

On September 13, 2004, Melinda Mosser, the deciding officer on an administrative appeal to the proposed \$500,000 construction of the so called Rich Mountain road was denied. Appellants, Georgia Forestwatch,

Wild South & Wilderness Watch, represented by Turner Environmental Law Center, have decided to take the case to court. The following history and background on this decision will be of interest to all GFW members. ♦

A History of the Rich Mountain "Road"

By David Govus: Cohutta/Toccoa Co-District Leader

In 1970, the U.S. Forest Service bought nearly 15,000 acres at a price of \$70 an acre from two northern timber companies. This purchase comprised almost the entire Rich Mountains, an isolated, very steep group of mountains located in northeast Gilmer County with peaks nearing 4,100'. Being remote, steep, and comprising a relatively small area delayed industrial forestry in the Rich Mountains and some allege that virgin forest was being cut there as late as the 1950s. Abundant rainfall (some evidence suggests 100" per year on Aaron Mountain) due to orographic lift, "rich" soil, and high elevations made this range a unique and significant botanical area with many boreal disjuncts, (i.e., remnants of Boreal vegetation not normally found this far south). *Herculeam Maximum* (a magnificent 6' high flowering plant,) *Columbo*, and *Trientalis Borealis* are just a few of the many rare Botanicals to be found in the Rich Mountains.



The U.S. Forest Service acquired a series of roads constructed by the timber companies (with no easements granted to counties or private parties) when they acquired the land. One such road traversed the Rich Mountains from west to east, spanning a distance of some 9.69 miles, starting at an elevation of 2,000' at Persimmon Gap just a mile east of the Appalachian Super Highway 515 and reaching nearly 4,000' before plunging down again to reach Gilmer County Road 153 (Stanley Gap road). Very Steep!

(Continued On Page 4)

In This Issue...

From the Director..... 2

Tallulah District keeps on ticking..... 3

Pols propose new Interstate highway Through Southern Appalachia..... 5

Filming of ATV abuse to air on Turner South Network!..... 6

Forest Service Contacts..... 6

Deadline on Roadless Rule..... 7

Georgia Forestwatch Membership Form..... 7

Fire Management in the Forest Plan..... 8-9

Interview with Katherine Medlock; 10/11/04..... 10-11

President Bush Supports Georgia Wilderness..... 12

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Well! It has been quite a busy month for the Georgia Forestwatch staff and your Board of Directors, as you will see in this edition of Forest News. Three new Board members have joined the Board and I have been selected as your new Executive Director. I am challenged and excited to have been chosen for this important position and wish to thank the Board for their confidence. I thought you might like to know a little about me, my experience, and why I am passionate about protecting our National Forests in Georgia

I was born in the Blue Ridge mountains of Lynchburg, Va., but spent most of my formative years growing up in Norfolk, Va. I have always been drawn to the natural world. Our family camping outings and subsequent backpacking and fishing trips to Virginia's Blue Ridge with friends are among my fondest early memories. At age 16, I visited a friend's relatives in Cleveland, Ga., and was surprised by the lush beauty of the north Georgia mountains. In 1976, at age 21, I moved to the Ellijay area. I found myself in the lap of a green heaven, spending many long days wandering the Chattahoochee National Forest, falling ever deeper under the spell of white cascading streams, soaring green mountain forests, and abundant plant and animal life. I spent many nights alone, sleeping soundly on the soft forest loam, lulled by a southern woodland insect chorus, and awakening to the startlingly melodious songs of birds I could not name. I was hooked and determined to stay.

Shortly afterward, I met my future wife, Lori Richman, an artist, who also quickly fell under the spell of these same forested hills, as we courted from waterfall to waterfall throughout the southern Blue Ridge. But the idyll did not last.

Together we got a first-hand look at the increasing road building and timber harvesting being conducted by the U.S. Forest Service on the Chattahoochee National Forest. This turned into a pivotal and depressing experience. Clearcuts were springing up on the mountainsides like mushrooms after a warm spring rain. A hike one Sunday into our favorite grove of huge white pines, in what is now the Mountaintown Inventoried Roadless area, broke our hearts as we confronted a desecrated landscape. The cool forest had been harvested like corn in a farmer's field, with roads cut into hillsides, timber debris, and slash strewn about and large naked stumps squatting, like tombstones, where a vibrant, green forest once stood. The clear gurgling stream that once creased this cove lay sullied with mud, skidder tracks, and tree tops – wandering helplessly to find its old familiar bed. We, too, felt sullied as this

experience seeped into our hearts and bones. We felt something important had been taken from us and became motivated to do something after this place we knew and loved, had been destroyed.

Soon afterward, I met Brent Martin (my predecessor at Forestwatch) and his wife Angela and learned of the Forestwatch work to protect our national forest treasures. Over time, I became more involved, receiving and responding to scoping notices about specific Forest Service projects and getting out on the ground with District Leaders, learning the lay of the land and forest speak, the complex and arcane jargon used by the Forest Service to describe its management activities to the public. Later, I would become a member of the Forestwatch board. Later still, I was hired by GFW to produce a report on illegal ATV activity on the Chattahoochee. All this time, as I became more knowledgeable about our forests and the ways of U.S. Forest Service management, my love for the region only deepened and my concern about this management increased. GFW has given me an opportunity to grow in knowledge and empowered me to engage and affect change on the ground. I am deeply impressed by the good work accomplished over the years by Georgia Forestwatch, and proud to serve as your Executive Director.

If you are a member of Forestwatch, I am sure you share my love for the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests and are concerned about their care. Perhaps you, too, have had an experience that moved you to action and this is why you are with us now. Good! There is much to do and your continued support is part of the solution for preserving, protecting, and healing our public lands. Thank you. ♦



Wayne Jenkins



Tallulah District Keeps on Ticking

The Tallulah Ranger District was hard hit by leftover winds and rain from Hurricane Ivan (better than 10-12 inches in 24 hours in some parts of Rabun County), forcing closure of several Forest Service roads.

According to preliminary estimates provided by Ranger David W. Jensen, it likely would take between \$300,000 and \$400,000 to repair the roadways and handle other, less extensive damage to several footbridges along certain hiking trails.

Visitors and friends of Forestwatch should contact the ranger's office @ (706) 782-9944 to ascertain the status of the following roads, which were closed at this writing, and whose re-opening, Jensen suggested, likely will depend on special, emergency appropriations from Congress:

- Overflow Creek Road
- Popcorn Creek Road
- Dan Gap Road
- Tottery Pole Road
- Old Tuckaluge Creek Road
- Flat Branch Road

Except for one picnic table that was totaled by a blowdown, the rest of the district and its numerous campgrounds escaped remarkably unscathed, Jensen reports.

By comparison, Rabun County reports more than \$3.3 million in Ivan-related damage to county roadways.

The district, meanwhile, has issued an Environmental Assessment in connection with proposals to create "early successional habitat" at three, high-elevation locations of the district: Along the Billingsley Creek Road extension, along the Coleman River and in the old Lake Burton Wildlife Management area.

The proposals, first aired in 2002, generated no small amount of comment from the public, which split generally along two lines: Some fully supported the plans to create this habitat (originally requiring about 120 acres of timbering). Others, including Georgia Forestwatch and other conservation interests, warned that the Billingsley Creek Road proposal bumped into several Old Growth areas.

In the latest iteration of the proposal, the Forest Service proposed to "daylight" Billingsley Creek Road extension and abandon the mini-clearcuts in the backcountry above it, bringing the total proposed timbering to 90 acres – a partial victory.

Georgia Forestwatch and interested citizens in Rabun will have commented on the amended proposal by deadline and will closely watch and monitor the outcome.

Also being monitored: Restoration, thinning, and logging in several forest stands damaged by the Southern Pine Beetle (a total of 587 acres scattered across 27 different stands); the continuing work on and along the Rabun powerline over Glassy Mountain; several small salvage timber sales; and an upcoming proposal to move the Forest Service office and work center in Clayton to a combined new location south of town.

(Continued On Page 11)

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A History of the Rich Mountain “Road”

(Continued From Page 1)

The Forest Service erected a gate and attempted to assert its rightful control over this road, but backed down in 1976 when individuals tore down the government’s gate. Gilmer County then, as now, had no easement or right of way for the road, had never done one bit of maintenance on it, and never displayed it on a county road system map.

In 1986, over the objections of the Forest Service, the 10,400-acre Rich Mountain Wilderness was created at the initiative of conservationists, some local folks, and former Rep. Ed Jenkins. The existence of this ‘road’, and the Forest Service’s failure to assert ownership, resulted in the Northern Boundary of the wilderness being established 66’ south of the road. As a result, some 4,000-5,000 Acres of prime country on the northern slope of the Rich Mountains did not receive Wilderness protection.

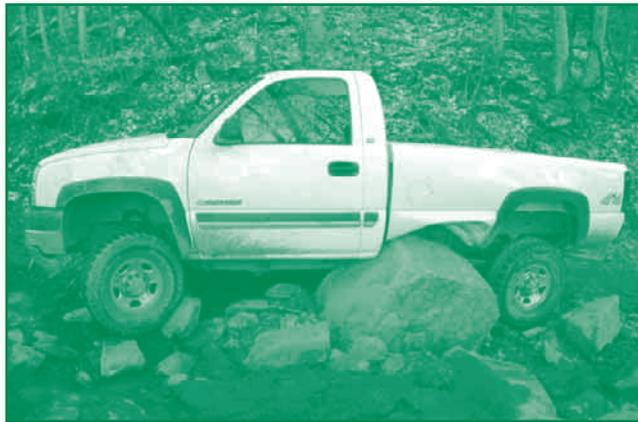
Over the past 15 years the ‘road’ has become a destination for ORV / ATV users, despite the fact that this ‘road’ was never designated for such activity and that it is the boundary of a congressionally designated Wilderness Area. Jeep clubs came from as far away as Florida, to practice their “hobby”, and the ‘road’ was prominently mentioned on a number of offroad websites. ATV users cut illegal, renegade trails into the Wilderness and adjoining Natural Area to the north of the ‘road’. The ‘road’ (as described by the Forest Service in a recent Environmental Assessment) is “primitive, poorly designed, and improperly located with slopes exceeding 30 %.” Several decades of lack of maintenance and abundant rain, combined with the destructive effects of offroaders’ rough tread tires, reduced the single track road to a gullied, eroding mess.

Several members of Georgia Forestwatch began a campaign to close the ‘road’ in the 1990s. In May of 2002, the Forest Service proposed that the agency and Gilmer County jointly operate the ‘road’ as a fee demonstration ORV course. This was proposed without an environmental assessment on the border of a Wilderness Area. This certainly would have made the Chattahoochee National Forest unique in having an ORV/ATV course on the border of a Wilderness Area. The Gilmer County Commissioners, uneasy about the potential liability of managing such an environmental disaster, declined to operate the road. In March of 2003, due to hints of litigation and strategic lobbying on the part of Forestwatch, the three Gilmer County Commissioners renounced any claim

to the road, past or present. Months passed and the Forest Service did nothing to close this illegal, de facto ORV course or halt the environmental damage. In September of 2003, The Turner Environmental Law Clinic and WildLaw filed suit, on behalf of Georgia Forestwatch and Wilderness Watch, to force the government to close this ‘road’ and heal the damage. The suit was lifted in December as part of an agreement whereby the road would be closed, an Environmental Assessment would be done, and public comments would be accepted concerning the future of the ‘road’.

Then, unbeknownst to Forestwatch, during the appropriations cycles of August 2003, usually reliable sources report that the Forest Service received \$318,000 for rebuilding the “road” – thus making a mockery of any independent, neutral assessment of what to do with this roadway.

Environmental procedures were followed, however, and in June of 2003, Cassius Cash, District Ranger for the Toccoa District, where the “road” is located, proposed closing the



westernmost first mile of the road and rebuilding the rest, soliciting comments, and initiating an Environmental Analysis . In March of this year, the Environmental Analysis was released, which recommended that a road be rebuilt and kept open on a seasonal basis. Another 30 day comment period was initiated. The Turner Clinic and WildLaw commented on behalf of Georgia Forest Watch, Wilderness Watch, and Wild South arguing for the commonsense, less costly alternative of closing the road. On June 25, the Forest Service released a Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). This decision, of course, affirmed the plan to close one mile of the 9.77-mile road and rebuild the rest of the road at a cost ranging from \$250,000 to \$500,000. Simultaneously, the government requested proposals to rebuild the “road” with bids/proposals due on July 21, 2004. Georgia Forestwatch, Wilderness Watch, and Wild South filed an administrative appeal that was fashioned by the Turner Clinic with input from WildLaw. This appeal was rejected by an Appeal Review Officer, located in Mississippi, and the Appeal Rejection was certified by the Chattahoochee National Forest Superintendent, Kathleen Atkinson on September 13. This decision seems at odds with the recently developed Forest Service national “roads” policy, which states on its opening page:

(Continued On Page 5)

Pols Propose New Interstate Highway Through Southern Appalachia

By Joe Gatins, Tallulah District Leader

Psssst. Coming one day to a national forest near you: A new, multibillion dollar interstate highway that would cut right up the heart of Southern Appalachia.

Maybe, that is, if Georgia's two Senators and several Representatives have their way.

The proposal, at this writing, is only that – a proposal. The bill at issue, if passed this year, would require the Secretary of Transportation to produce “a study and report regarding the construction and designation of a new interstate from Savannah, Georgia, to Knoxville, Tennessee” by December 31, 2004.

While the details are still up in the air, the bill calls for a route “generally defined” to include Toccoa and Young Harris, Georgia, (the latter being the hometown of U.S. Zell Miller,) before getting to Knoxville via Maryville, Tenn.

Look at your maps. One does not need to be a highway engineer to see that this general route probably would either skirt or transect good portions of the Chattahoochee-Oconee and Nantahala National Forests, as well as the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Appalachian Trail, and the Joyce Kilmer Slickrock Wilderness.

The bill is co-sponsored in the Senate by U.S. Sens. Miller and Saxby Chambliss. The chief sponsor in the House is Rep. Max Burns, a freshman Republican from Augusta said to be facing a credible re-election contest. His co-sponsors from Georgia include Reps. Norwood, Bishop, Kingston, Scott, Majette, and Marshall and five others (from Alabama, Tennessee, and South Carolina.)

The legislation for this Interstate 3, named in honor of the 3rd Infantry Division at Fort Stewart, Georgia, is twinned with a companion bill to establish a second new interstate. This one, dubbed I-14, would run east-west from Augusta to Macon and Columbus, Georgia, continuing through Montgomery, Alabama and Natchez, Mississippi. This bill, also authored by Rep. Burns, is aimed at fostering economic development in the traditional “Black Belt” of the Deep South.

Local, state, and federal officials, including a spokesman for the powerful Georgia Department of Transportation, all report it is too early in the process to focus on a specific, potential route, but that the public will have ample opportunity to comment on the proposal if it survives the political campaign season and secures enough traction to get initial Congressional approval. It then would take decades to both plan and finance such a large project, many of the spokesmen added.

Those pushing the interstate proposal also have not yet contacted Forest Service personnel, according to a spokesman for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.

But Rep. Burns noted that appropriate coordination would eventually occur. “I know that specific plans and routes will change as we engage all stakeholders in these projects,” he said in announcing the proposal on July 23.

“We need to be flexible and encourage that input – it will make the projects better,” Burns said. ♦

A History of the Rich Mountain “Road”

(Continued From Page 4)

“The availability of road maintenance funding will be considered when assessing the need for new road construction; and that, instead of focusing on constructing new roads, emphasis will be given to reconstructing and maintaining classified roads while decommissioning unnecessary classified and unclassified roads.”

This “roads policy” was developed by the Forest Service in light of a \$14 billion road maintenance backlog, which has resulted in a great deal of environmental degradation to public land across the country. The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest acknowledges a \$14 million road maintenance backlog on their necessary, engineered, two lane system roads, which any forest user can testify to. In light of this, the decision to spend scarce tax dollars on rebuilding an unclassified, “primitive, poorly designed, and improperly located (road) with slopes exceeding 30 %,” that is not

even listed in the Forest Service transportation atlas, is difficult to understand. The only reason given for this decision is to improve access to the Rich Mountain Wilderness, which is only 10,000 acres large and barely 5 miles across. Despite this alleged need for greater access, as part of the proposed construction project, the government also plans to abandon the public access to the western part of the Rich Mountains. Usually reliable sources report that the Forest Service will allow private landowners to gate the one mile road from the Appalachian Super Highway to the existing Forest Service parking lot and welcome bulletin board at Persimmon Gap. Georgia Forest Watch has protested this abandonment of the public's legitimate access. ♦

Filming of ATV Abuse to Air on Turner South Network!

On August 28, Cohutta District Leader, and GFW new Executive Director Wayne Jenkins led Mary Grace Hicks, producer, Walter James, audio, and Ed Myers, cameraman, aka SaltRun Productions, to three areas of ATV use/abuse on the Chattahoochee National Forest for the filming of 'Machines in the Garden' to be aired as the first of three segments on the Turner South Network's, 'The Natural South' on Oct. 30 at 10am and again on Oct. 31 at 7am. ♦

Georgia Forestwatch Joins In Suit



Georgia Forestwatch has joined several other southeastern conservation organizations in a 'deadline' lawsuit for failure by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to designate critical habitat in violation of the Endangered Species Act. Two fish species, the Goldline Darter (*Percina aurolineata*) and the Blue Shiner (*Cyprinella caerulea*), were listed by the FWS as threatened on April 22, 1992. However, FWS, after more than twelve years, has yet to designate critical habitat necessary for the survival of these species.

When Congress authorized the Endangered Species Act in 1973, they declared that species of "fish, wildlife, and plants are of aesthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value to the Nation and its people." The purpose of the Act is to provide a means whereby endangered species

and their ecosystems may be conserved. The intent of the Endangered Species Act is not to just list species as endangered or threatened, but rather, to recover the populations of these species to a point where they can be removed from the list.

Blue Shiners and Goldline Darters are, medium-sized fish, historically found in the Cahaba and Coosa River systems of Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia whose habitat requires cool, clear water over sand, gravel, and cobble. Both fishes' habitat range has been reduced and fragmented due to dam construction and water quality degradation through sedimentation, sewage pollution, and development. It is our hope that FWS will be encouraged by this suit to begin the long road to recovery for these species by finally designating the habitat requirements necessary for their survival. ♦

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Deadline For Roadless Rule Comments Has Been Changed To November 15, 2004

It appears that the 1 million-plus comments concerning President Bush's attempts to overturn the Roadless Rule, have convinced the administration and the USFS to extend the deadline to after the Nov. 2 elections. If you have not sent in comments, you now have more time to keep the pressure on and speak out for protecting the last large unroaded areas on public lands. Public Roadless Rule Comment Extension Talking Points:

Explain in your own words why large un-roaded forestlands are important to you. Do you hike, fish, hunt, camp, canoe, watch wildlife, desire to breathe clean air and drink clean water, seek solitude, etc? Do you have favorite roadless areas that you visit for physical and spiritual renewal? Tell the Forest Service your story. Other points you should make are below.

The American people continue to overwhelmingly support protecting our last wild forests

The Bush administration should immediately schedule public hearings in order to give the American people adequate opportunity to make their voices heard.

The Bush administration should abandon its logging proposals and protect America's last wild forests for future generations. Keeping the Roadless Rule intact in the Lower 48 and in Alaska's Chugach and reinstating the rule in the Tongass would be a good start.

The Roadless Rule was enacted in January 2001, to protect 58.5 million acres of pristine national forests from most logging and road-building. On July 12th, the Bush administration proposed replacing the Roadless Rule with a convoluted process that allows governors to petition for protections for – or for logging, mining, and drilling in – pristine national forests in their states, with no guarantee of protection.

Send your comments to:

Content Analysis Team,
ATTN: Roadless State Petitions USDA Forest Service
P.O. Box 221090

Salt Lake City, UT 84122

faxed to (801) 517-1014;

or e-mailed to statepetitionroadless@fs.fed.us

THANK YOU! ♦

Georgia Forestwatch Membership Form

Name: _____

(please print)
Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

<i>(Please, circle one)</i>	Individual	Joint
Student/Senior	\$15	\$20
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Generous	\$50	\$75
Extra Generous	\$100	\$150
Gilded	\$200	\$300
Life	\$350	\$500

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Fire Management in the Forest Plan

By Jim Walker, Toccoa District Leader

Note: All Forest Service activities on the ground take direction from the Land and Resource Management Plan.

While the overall fire policy as stated in the Land and Resource Management Plan, for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests (The Plan) is unobjectionable, Georgia Forestwatch may have some differences of opinion with the Forest Service regarding underlying premises and will most likely disagree strongly with the Forest Service's implementation of its own fire policy, which seems to be driven by considerations not stated in the Plan. However, the Plan does provide the most effective tool for limiting the Forest Service to reasonable and acceptable use of prescribed fire.

Goal 57 of the Plan (Plan, p. 2-53) says, "Keep firefighter and public safety the highest priority in all fire management operations," and certainly no one will disagree with that.

Although Georgia Forestwatch questions the need for fuel reduction treatment anywhere in the Chattahoochee National Forest, the organization does not object to whatever fuel reduction treatment the Forest Service considers necessary in the wildland-urban interface (WUI). Of course, this raises the question, exactly what is the WUI? Presumably, it is a strip of National Forest land of a certain width adjacent to private property. But what is the width, and can it be adjacent to any private property, property with structures, or with inhabited buildings and structures? When the Forest Service issues scoping notices for prescribed burns, it seems reasonable to ask that they identify sites considered to be part of the WUI, and all sites not within the WUI have lower priority for fire management projects (Objective 58.2).

There is very little in the Plan to justify prescribed burning outside the WUI and much to argue against it. The key to all fire management policy on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests is Goal 58 (Plan, p. 2-53), "Reduce the risks and consequences of wildfire through fuel treatments that restore and maintain fire regime Condition Class 1 to the extent practicable."

"A fire regime is a generalized description of the role fire plays in an ecosystem. It is characterized by fire frequency, predictability, seasonality, intensity, duration, scale (patch size), as well as regularity or variability."¹ "A natural fire regime is a general classification of the role fire would play across a landscape in the absence of modern

human mechanical intervention, but including the influence of aboriginal burning (Agee 1993, Brown 1995)."²

"Condition Class 1 is characterized by: (a) fire regimes within or near an historical range, (b) low risk of losing key ecosystem components, (c) departure (either increased or decreased) from historical frequencies by no more than one return interval, and (d) intact and functioning vegetation attributes (species composition and structure) within an historical range. Condition Class 2 is characterized by ... (c) departure (either increased or decreased) from historical frequencies by more than one return interval ..." (Plan, p. 2-52).

In other words, if a stand has a historical wildfire return interval of, say, 50 years, it remains in Condition Class 1 until it has not been burned for at least 100 years (departure from the historical frequency by more than one return interval).

In order for the Forest Service and/or Georgia Forestwatch to apply this standard, the historical fire regime range and historical fire frequency must be known. They are not. And this allows for (or excuses) considerable differences of opinion regarding the need for prescribed burns to maintain Condition Class 1.

However, there is overwhelming evidence to support the contention that the historical return interval for wildfire in the Chattahoochee National Forest is very long.

The 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan defines five Fire Regime Groups. In Groups I and II, the fire return interval is 0–35 years; in Groups III and IV, 35–100 years. "Group V is the long interval (infrequent), stand replacement fire regime and includes temperate rain forest, boreal forest, and high-elevation conifer species."³ "The highest amounts of precipitation (up to 125 inches per year) in the Appalachians occur in the region near the border of Georgia and the Carolinas. The climate of some Southern Appalachian forests is sufficiently humid to warrant a rain forest designation, making this area the only temperate rain forest in the U.S. east of the Mississippi (McCrone et al. 1982, pp. 11-12; Toops 1992, pp. 12, 15; Shanks 1954, p. 355; Redington 1978, pp. 12-13)."⁴

In the whole Forest Service Southern Region, lightning caused 12% of all wildfires in 1999–2003. In the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, lightning was the cause of 3% of wildfires in 2003, burning a total of 3 acres, or 1% of the area burned by wildfire.⁵ "In Great Smoky Mountains National Park, lightning fires average six per year over an area of approximately one million acres. Data from all sources indicate that approxi-

Fire Management in the Forest Plan

(Continued From Page 8)

mately 15% of fires in the Southern Appalachian Assessment area are attributable to lightning Almost half of all lightning strikes occurs on ridge tops.”⁶ Since 1985, the Chattahoochee National Forest has averaged 105 wildfires per year [all causes] with an average size of 11.4 acres (Plan, p. 3-32).

Obviously, the return interval for lightning-ignition wildfire in most of the Southern Appalachians and the Chattahoochee National Forest is extremely long – way more than 100 years.

However, some people argue that Indians used fire as an ecosystem management tool on a rather large scale, and therefore the historical fire regime is that which prevailed before the arrival of European settlers, with anthropogenic burning of the forest perhaps as frequently as every year. Others, such as Quentin Bass, an archaeologist with the Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee and 2003 winner of the Wilderness Society’s Murie award, dispute these claims. A very cogent, concise explanation of this debate is given in “Effect of Wildfires on Ecosystems Hotly Debated.”⁷

The highly questionable theory that Indians used fire not only to manage landscapes in the vicinity of their villages, but also to alter ecosystems over an extensive portion of the Southern Appalachian Mountains is the only justification the Forest Service has for the need to use prescribed burns to maintain Condition Class 1 in the Chattahoochee National Forest. There is very little evidence to support this theory, and it is intuitively false. The only other purpose of prescribed burns mentioned in the plan is to “expand the role of fire to recover and sustain short interval fire-adapted ecosystems” (Goal 61), but these occur on very limited areas, mostly xeric southern slopes and high ridges.

Even if this questionable, if not ludicrous, theory of large-scale Native American ecosystem management is accepted, there is still no chance of fuel buildup (with the possible exception of SPB affected stands) in the Chattahoochee National Forest, due to high precipitation, moisture content and rapid decay, and therefore no need for fuel reduction to restore and maintain historical fire regimes. Outside of the WUI and very limited areas for restoration of fire-adapted pine ecosystems, the Plan contains no other goals or objectives to justify prescribed burns. Objective 58.3 “Prescribe burn a three-year rolling average of 30,000 acres per year on the Chattahoochee and Oconee combined to meet plan goals and objectives,” is inconsistent with the goals and objectives stated in the Plan.

There may be other goals and objectives requiring pre-

scribed burns, but since they are not stated in the Plan they cannot be used to justify burn projects. Improvement of wildlife habitat and timber management (controlling white pine seedlings) are mentioned in some scoping notices, but these goals, even if they may be desirable and achievable, are incidental. According to the Plan, the only valid uses of prescribed burns are fuel reduction, which must be prioritized in favor of the WUI, and ecosystem restoration on areas that are suitable for recovery of fire-adapted ecosystems.

Conclusions: The Forest Service’s burn proposals need to be analyzed for specific sites, rather than just total acreage for each district. All fuel reduction burns should be in the WUI; ecosystem restoration burns are acceptable on sites that can support fire-adapted ecosystems (xeric southern slopes and high ridges). For all other burns, the Forest Service should be required to document the site’s present Condition Class according to the procedures in the Fire Regime Condition Class Field Method Guidebook.⁸ Any prescribed burn outside of the WUI, suitable ecosystem restoration areas or Condition Class 2 or 3 is in violation of the Plan.

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Interview with Former Forestwatch Staff Ecologist Katherine Medlock; 10/11/04

Wayne Jenkins, Executive Director, Interviewer

1. Good morning Katherine! Let me begin by saying Thank You! for the fantastic job you did for GFW during the Forest Service Planning process and the following work with our legal representation on the Appeal. All of us are grateful to have had you on staff over that critical period of Inter-Disciplinary team meetings, the comment period and beyond which has set the stage for the next 10-15 years of Forest Service management of our Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forests and our Appeal of the "Plan".

Good Morning, Wayne! Thank you for your kind words. Working with the GFW members and volunteers through the Plan Revision process will always be dear to my heart. It was my pleasure!

2. Could you speak to how the new forest plan differs from the former one with its commercial timber harvest program?

The new Forest Plan is different in many ways. First, it is centered on Restoration not Commercial Harvest, as the previous plan was. It is also different in numerous detailed ways that I won't bore you with here. Additionally, the public played a major part in the conceptual process. Though some important points that we advocated for were ignored, we had a much greater involvement in the process this time. This was key in getting the Goals and Design Criteria for the new plan to reflect our concerns. Some of the major issues in this plan include Old Growth, Riparian Issues, and Threatened and Endangered species.

One of the major issues now is implementation. The new plan allows for management flexibility on the part of the Forest Service staff. This could be a very good thing if the managers (District Rangers, etc.) take the principles of Restoration to heart. It could also be disastrous if they choose to continue with the same old mind-set of "getting the cut out." I see this as one of the major hurdles for GFW in the coming years.

3. Is it clear, when the FS uses the term "Restoration", that their use of the term would be the same as the definition widely accepted by the scientific community?

It is true that often the term "Restoration" is subject to interpretation. That is one reason why it is so important to clearly state the goals and desired future condition of an area before proceeding with any projects. As I pointed out above, the term gives flexibility that could be used to proceed with ill-conceived projects. However, I urge GFW members and volunteers to use the "Citizen's call for Restoration Principles" as a guide for good restoration. I also advocated for the Forest Service to use this document while I was still with GFW. The Principles can be found at <http://www.asje.org/sum.pdf>

4. GFW's District Leaders are already seeing a mix of proposed projects under the guidance of the new plan that do not appear to be well thought out, proposed on a fairly large scale and without a proper monitoring plan. How would you suggest we respond to such projects?

It is imperative that each project be dealt with individually. Each project or parcel of land presents a unique opportunity to not only improve the condition of the land, but also our terminology and ability to communicate with the Forest Service about our wishes for how that land will be managed. Goals and desired future conditions should be well thought out and agreed upon before the project begins. That is one of the reasons that GFW has been so successful in the past...we know the land and look at each project individually. Though that is often a daunting task and often an agreement cannot be reached, I cannot overstate how important I think it is to try.

5. Beyond submitting well thought out comments on specific projects, what can we do to adjust, delay, and/or stop projects that may be harmful to forest ecosystems?

There are several laws that are in place that allow the public to let their voice be heard. One of them, the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) is the reason for the new plan. It says, basically, that each National Forest must have a plan of action with goals, measurable objectives, standards for operation, etc. Violations of that plan are against the law. Another law is the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which, basically, sets out the process for public participation and citizen appeals of projects. Submitting well thought out comments and engaging the Forest Service to make them aware of our concerns are often just the first step in what can become a long process of appeal and litigation if an agreement cannot be reached. However, I believe that appeal and litigation should be a last result. It is costly both in time and effort, but, unfortunately, it is often the only way to protect precious resources.

6. Where might GFW find common ground with the Forest Service managers as they work to implement the new plan?

Well, this is one reason why I think it is so important to engage the Forest Service on every project. Often, common ground can be found just in having open, honest conversations; but I think that there are some very clear issues that we agree on. Stopping the spread of the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, and garnering more money for the Land and Water Conservation Fund are two that come to mind.

Interview with Former Forestwatch Staff Ecologist Katherine Medlock 10/11/04

(Continued From Page 10)

7. In the short term, what do you believe are the greatest threats to the Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forests? In the long term?

Actually, for this question, I will start by laying out what the Forest Service sees as the greatest threats to the CONF. The Chief of the Forest Service laid out four major threats to our National Forests. They are unregulated/unmanaged recreation, loss of open space, invasive species, and fire/ fuels management. I agree that unregulated or unmanaged recreation is an imminent threat. This is often caused by the loss of open space. People don't have the space to recreate on private lands because so much of our lands are being lost to development. This is extremely obvious on the Chattahoochee National Forest with Atlanta at its back door. We are seeing a huge amount of user created trails, ATV/ORV damage, and overuse of areas on these forests. I also agree with the Forest Service that invasive species are a huge threat to our Forests. It is absolutely frightening to think about the loss of our Hemlocks to the Adelgid or of our Oaks to the Gypsy Moth. However, my opinion of the fire and fuels management situation differs from the Chief. In some areas, under some circumstances, fire is absolutely necessary. However, I fear that it is being used as a "silver bullet" to fix everything and that is simply wrong-headed. Though our past efforts of fire exclusion have been proven to be disastrous, I think we are now swinging in the opposite direction and have become determined to burn every inch of our Forests. I see the Forest Service's prescribed burn program as a threat to some areas of our Forests. Don't get me wrong, urban interface burning, burning for the Red-cockaded woodpecker, and burning in several rare communities is essential, but it should not be spread across our Forests like butter is spread across bread.

8. What advice or words of wisdom might you have for those involved in protecting and preserving these incredible forest communities.

Keep your chins up! Remember that the National Forests are YOUR lands and you have a right to have a say in how they are managed.

Thanks so much Katherine! We wish you the best in everything you do and appreciate the unique contribution you have made to our work. ♦

Tallulah District Keeps on Ticking

(Continued From Page 3)

The Tallulah district, also, is in the initial stages of studying a series of proposed timber sales in the 18,000-acre "Upper Warwoman" area of Rabun County.

To stay abreast of this forest management activity, contact Ranger Jensen in writing at the Tallulah Ranger District, 809 Highway 441 South, Clayton, Georgia, 30525. Ask to receive ALL "scoping notices" and decisions. ♦

-- Joe Gatins, Tallulah District Leader

August 28 Georgia ForestWatch Hike

By Parrie Pinyan

About 30 hikers from Georgia Forestwatch and the Georgia Botanical Society hiked the Slaughter Creek Trail from Lake Winfield Scott on August 28, 2004. The hike was led by plant specialist Richard Ware and was facilitated by Parrie Pinyan.

Even in late August the Slaughter Creek Trail and a parallel trail, Jarrard Gap Trail, are surprisingly cool and pleasant. The trails pass through excellent examples of second growth hardwood cove forest on north facing slopes, which are moist and shady. And the elevation gain and loss is quite gradual. This habitat makes for very interesting and comfortable late summer hike. The trails offer several options; about five miles for a return on Slaughter Creek, about seven to the summit of Blood Mountain, and about nine miles for the Slaughter Creek, Blood Mountain and return via Jarrard Gap trail. Although Slaughter Gap is closed for plant regeneration, the trails are well marked to the Appalachian Trail, Blood Mountain, and Jarrard Gap Trail.

We probably hiked one or two weeks early as far as the best fall wild flower viewing in this area is concerned, but the roadside and open trailside flowers were in full flush.

To raise awareness of the Hemlocks' plight, Mark Warren from Medicine Bow Wilderness School led a lively discussion concerning the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, which may kill every Hemlock tree in the mountains. The "experts" differed somewhat as to what to look for, but everyone agreed that if the Hemlocks were completely annihilated it would certainly be an environmental catastrophe. We did advise the hikers to consult the U.S. Forest Service website for more information.

It was a fine day with just enough sprinkles and thunder to make for a very interesting and enjoyable hike for everyone. ♦

President Bush Supports Georgia Wilderness

In a surprise announcement, Agriculture Secretary, Ann M. Veneman announced the Bush Administration would recommend to Congress that an additional 8,090 acres of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest in Georgia be protected as Wilderness. The Sept. 3, 2004 press release goes on to state "The announcement marks the 40th anniversary of the Wilderness Act."

"The Department of Agriculture has long played a leading role in working with states and local communities to protect and manage wilderness," said Veneman. "The Bush Administration is committed to the importance of these wildlands and the wealth of biodiversity they represent."

I am sure all the members of Georgia Forestwatch and many others throughout Georgia welcome the administration's sudden embrace of Wilderness values. This would be a great time to contact your Congressional Leaders and suggest they champion a Wilderness bill in the next Congressional session and add areas like Mountaintown and Kellys Ridge. Phone calls, personal letters, and e-mails are all powerful statements to legislators. See the 'Contacts' section of your newsletter for contact information. ♦

Georgia Forestwatch Hikes; Fall/Winter of 2004

For the following hikes wear good shoes & bring raingear, water, and lunch. Some may enjoy having a walking stick.



Introductory forest hike with Tallulah District Leader, Joe Gatins to Holcomb Creek and Ammons Branch falls in the Three Forks watershed.

Saturday, October 30, 2004

at 10 a.m. Meet at Ingles parking lot in Clayton The drive to the hike is about 25 miles round trip. The

hike is a 3-mile loop that

will be walked at leisurely pace over average terrain (total elevation gain of 200 feet) to two of

the sweetest waterfalls in Rabun County through an impressive stand of hemlocks, including some of the biggest hemlocks in Georgia.

This hike is free to the first 24 GFW members. Contact info@gafw.org or 706-635-8733 to reserve a slot or contact jgatins@alltel.net

Cohutta Wilderness hike

on the Chestnut Lead Trail with GFW Executive Director,

Wayne Jenkins Saturday, November

13, 2004 at 10 a.m. Meet at the GFW office, 1 mile west of Ellijay, corner of Hwy. 52 and Tower Rd. The drive to the hike is about 30 miles round trip. The hike is a 3.6-mile, out-and-back, stroll of moderate difficulty through a very nice second growth mixed hardwood forest. If the group wishes to go further upon reaching the Conasauga River it will require a wet crossing. All hikes are free to the first 12 GFW members. Contact info@gafw.org or 706-635-8733 to reserve a slot, or contact wjenkins@gafw.org ♦

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