

FOREST NEWS

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Spring 2006



Who's watching
your forest?

Apples and Oranges and Clearcutting for Golden-Winged Warblers

By Jim Walker : District Leader

How many apples is an orange worth? As everyone knows, this is an unfair question; you cannot compare apples and oranges. But why not? They are both fruits, good to eat and about the same size. It would seem fairly easy to compare them with respect to many components and characteristics, but the ultimate decision as to their relative worth still depends on subjective preferences.

Here is another tricky question: how many trees is a songbird worth? While this question may be even more unanswerable than the apples/oranges one, it is not abstract but typical of the kind of practical decisions that the Forest Service is forced (or volunteers) to make. How many trees would you cut down to save one songbird? If you accept the premise that this question is worth investigating as a practical matter, you will no doubt want to know exactly what kind of birds and what kind of trees we are talking about.

Golden-winged warbler. While this neotropical migrant species is not rare or endangered, it is generally accepted that the golden-winged warbler population is declining in parts of its range, especially at the extreme southern limit, in the mountains of north Georgia. On the other hand, its range is expanding northward into Canada. The reasons for this decline are not known for sure but

may include climate change, destruction of wintering grounds in Central and South America and/or loss of preferred habitat in the Chattahoochee National Forest. The preferred habitat for this species is early-successional, such as shrubby regenerating forest in abandoned fields, with the additional requirement at the southern edge of its range that this habitat must be close to or above 3,000 feet of elevation. This type of habitat peaked almost a century ago and has become increasingly less common as logged or cultivated land has returned to forest, particularly since 1999, when most clearcutting of the Chattahoochee National Forest was halted. Nowadays, such habitat is created naturally by disturbances such as hurricanes Opal and Ivan or artificially by wildlife management practices that mimic clearcuts.

But the golden-winged warbler faces another serious problem: competition and hybridization with its close relative, the blue-winged warbler. In areas where the ranges of these two warbler species overlap, as they do in north Georgia, the blue-winged tends to outcompete its golden-winged cousin, and the hybridization process usually results in domination of blue-winged phenotypes in a relatively short time.

The largest known concentration of golden-winged warblers in north Georgia

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Our National Forests for Sale

President Bush has included the sale of over 300,000 acres of national forest lands in 35 states, 4,500 of those in Georgia, in his proposed budget for 2007. The monies generated by these sales would continue funding the "Secure Rural School and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000," commonly known as Payments to States. In the past, counties have received payments from the federal government to offset the un-taxed national forest acreage in those counties which used those funds for schools and roads. During periods of aggressive timber harvest these payments were taken as a percentage from the sale of timber. The Act addresses the decline in revenue from timber harvests on Federal land in recent years. For each year 2001-2006, the law allowed counties to receive a payment from the Federal government based on the state average of their top three years of timber harvest.

Now, it would appear that during our present period of soaring public debt, payments to counties would be augmented and replaced by selling the public's lands. So we continue to devolve. For years counties have depended on timber harvest levels to fund the recompense for having federal forest lands within their borders. Now, this latest proposal would just sell off some of those lands for payments to counties. Brilliant! As another writer has commented, "Honey, I'm cold, let's burn the furniture!"

Presently, the Forest Service uses outlying parcels of valuable public property for trading or swapping land, with willing owners, in order to include important adjacent or internal properties under their management. Important property in the past could also be purchased outright by using the Land & Water Conservation Fund -- monies received by the government for off-shore oil drilling leases. But Congress has historically failed to fully fund this program and our region has never received much of a share, leaving the swap option as the Forest Service's only tool for land acquisition. Now, the folks in Washington want to cash in all the chips, without which, no future

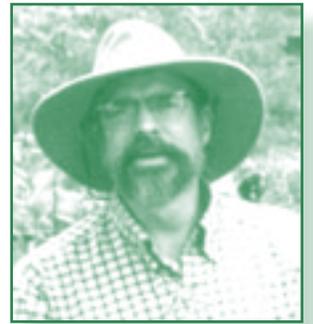
additions to our public lands will be made. Worse, once headed down this path would we sell some more public land in a few years and more after that.....? Then what?

Looking back may help us gain some perspective. The purchase of private lands for inclusion in a national forest system originated in spirit with the Forest Reserve Act of 1891.

Industrial scale over-harvesting of forests in the Southern Appalachians led to vast quantities of soil, washed from steep mountain slopes into important river stretches, impeding river commerce. Leftover slash and timber burned out of control, threatening nearby farms and communities. Congress' intention and investment in restoring these degraded forests is one of the great success stories of government intervention and the "lands nobody wanted" are now clothed in trees.

What Congress and the U.S. Forest Service could not have predicted is the modern role these public lands now play. The national forests are where millions of Georgians go when we want to get away from the stress and pressures of modern life, to hunt and fish, camp and hike, bike and boat, picnic and play. These forests deliver high quality drinking water to dozens of towns and communities throughout north Georgia and protect the headwaters of Atlanta's Chattahoochee, a river needed by millions. The region's national forests and natural beauty, greatly recovered from the gross misuse of the past, are now also driving a burgeoning building boom. The lands nobody wanted are now the lands everyone wants and are being rapidly developed, new developments and houses pouring across the mountain landscape.

Selling these 4,500 acres would effectively shift lands that are now stable forests, serving important environmental and social functions, benefiting the majority, to uses benefiting a minority of developers and homeowners in an area already destined for more development than the local governments or



Wayne Jenkins

landscape can healthily support. And once it's gone, there's no getting it back. Our national forests may be the only green space left, post the present explosive building boom.

Selling the public lands, for any reason, reverses one hundred years of land conservation and better stewardship of our natural resources serving all the people. Let's not begin the slide down that slippery slope! Let's not add hurt to injury by selling and developing these forests.

Let your representatives in Washington know you are 100 percent against this proposal. Write, call and/or email senators Chambliss & Isakson as well as your local congressman and Nathan Deal, Charlie Norwood and John Barrow whose districts include Georgia's national forests. See the Political Leaders contact page for contact info.

According to the USDA Forest Service website (www.fs.fed.us/news/2006/releases/02/secure-rural-schools.shtml) a 30- day comment period began March 1. Details for commenting and maps of the proposed tracts for sale can be found there. See www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/spd.html#GEORGIA for a list of proposed tracts/maps for sale in Georgia. ♦



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Apples and Oranges, *(continued from page 1)*

is in and around Ledford Gap, just below Brawley mountain, in an area that suffered significant windfall from hurricane Opal in 1995 and was later salvage-logged. In 2002, Nathan Klaus, a wildlife biologist with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, found “at least 3 territories, 3 males, 1 female, 5 fledglings, plus 2 adult hybrids” there.

In hope of increasing this population, the Forest Service proposes to remove timber from 725 acres adjacent to Ledford gap (the range of one pair of golden-winged warblers is about six acres). On approximately 200 acres of the upper slopes and tops of the three ridges in the project area the canopy would be reduced by less than 80 percent, which is described in the project file as “nearly clearcut.” The canopy reduction would range from 40 percent to 70 percent over an additional 400 mid-slope acres and less than 30 percent on the remainder of the project area. After the timber has been removed, the area would be maintained as “open woodland” by means of intensive herbicide application, grass seeding and frequent prescribed burning (every 3-5 years), which is a novel, unproven, extremely costly and open-ended process.

...in reality, it is not a question of golden-winged warbler versus mast-producing oak trees, but one of ecosystems...

The golden-winged warbler is a good-looking bird, and certainly no one would object to having a few more of them in Georgia. But at what price?

Mixed mesophytic forest. In the 725 acres of the Brawley Mountain project area, the forest varies widely in age and composition, depending on soils, aspect and elevation, as well as when it was last logged in different stands. About a quarter of the area has been logged within the last 25 years, when clearcutting was the preferred method; about another quarter has not been logged for at least 100 years, which probably means that it was never industrially logged, but only selectively. An additional 200 acres is listed in the Forest Service’s data as over 80 years old, and most of this area is mixed mesophytic forest, which “typically (1) has a diverse mix of species, (2) occurs on non-riparian sites that have a cooler and more moist microclimate than other non-riparian communities within the same landscape, and (3) has high or very high productivity” (Final Environmental Impact

Statement for the Land and Resource Management Plan, Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests).

The rich soils and high productivity of this forest were confirmed by a tour of the project area, where Georgia ForestWatch volunteers and staff found stands structurally resembling old growth, with many oak trees (red, white & chestnut) between two and three feet in diameter at breast height and well over 100 feet tall. These trees are just reaching their peak production of acorns, which are a staple food resource for deer, bear, squirrels, turkey and other forest animals. The ecological value of such trees is extremely high, but they also have monetary value as timber. The timber sale and removal of these trees will not only open up the forest but also provide the money to pay for the intensive and very expensive management practices (herbicides, prescribed burning and grass seeding) supposedly needed to enhance golden-winged warbler habitat.

If golden-winged warblers had a monetary value, it would be easy to figure how many mature oak trees each bird is worth, at least in economic terms. Even then, some coefficient would have to be applied to allow for the unknown probability of success of any management practice in increasing their population and the unknown prospects for survival of the population in North Georgia, with or without any management actions. In the absence of such a quantitative criterion, many arbitrary decisions have to be made. From the Forest Service’s proposal, it is obvious that they believe the more or less remote possibility of, say, doubling the population, i.e., adding perhaps as many as 12 birds, is worth nearly clearcutting 200 acres of forest, a large part of which closely resembles old growth, and removing more than half the timber, presumably the most valuable, from another 400 acres, much of it highly productive, mixed mesophytic forest.

Of course, this statement of the problem is grossly oversimplified. In reality, it is not a question of golden-winged warbler versus mast-producing oak trees, but one of ecosystems.

To get the Forest Service’s side of the story, read the Brawley Mountain Golden-winged Warbler Habitat and Woodlands Restorations Scoping Letter on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/conf/sopa/wildlife-nepa.htm>. To receive an electronic copy of Georgia ForestWatch’s response (45 pages), you may request it from info@gawf.org.

If you would like to see the facts on the ground, join me for a hike through the project area on Saturday, April 8. Please call the Georgia ForestWatch office at (706) 635-8733 or Jim Walker at (706) 273-3465 for details. ♦

Stop I-3 Coalition Initiates Petition and Fundraising Drives, Moves Counties to Oppose Ruinous Road

The Stop I-3 Coalition ain't going away.

Since the last newsletter, the coalition, a broad amalgam of community and conservation groups in Southern Appalachia, has seen an additional three county board of commissioners in North Carolina formally enact resolutions opposing the proposed interstate.

Those resolutions were passed (all unanimously) in Clay, Macon and Cherokee counties and there are indications that other locales in Western North Carolina are considering the same.

Five county commissions in north Georgia also have done the same – in Habersham, Rabun, White, Towns and Lumpkin counties.

Those grassroots efforts, in turn, are being bolstered by a broad, coalition petition drive aimed at getting thousands of signatures from interested voters and residents to signal their personal opposition to I-3 or anything like it in the special mountains and forested areas of the Southern Appalachians.

Petitions can be found at many of the usual locations in local counties, as well as on the Internet, at: <http://www.stopi-3.org/>.

The aim is to deliver the petitions to a wide variety of elected officials as local, state and federal levels of government by Election Day, 2006.



The coalition's website also provides opportunity for making a tax-exempt donation to The Stop I-3 Coalition, as part of a new partnership with the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition in Asheville.

Georgia ForestWatch is intimately involved with the Stop I-3 Coalition as one of its affiliate members, and is both providing volunteer support to its steering committee and helping coordinate the coalition's outreach to news media. ForestWatch members far and wide also are supporting the coalition efforts and providing a variety of help to local coalition members across north Georgia.

For its part, the federal government, working through the Federal Highway Administration, is working up a \$1.3 million study of possible routes for the interstate (also now dubbed the Third Infantry Division Highway.) Details of this pork-barrel legislation can be found at: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/sec1927corridors.htm>. That study website, however, does not make provision for public input to the study. The coalition urges all interested citizens to play a part in the effort to provide for meaningful and comprehensive public input. Write your congressmen (see names and addresses on page 16 of this newsletter) as well as J. Richard Capka, Acting Director Federal Highway Administration 400 Seventh Street, SW, Washington, DC 20590. Or fax it to Capka at 202-366-3244. ♦

Below, Georgia ForestWatch member Jack Johnston with fairly intact old American Chestnut log: castanea dentata.

Photos by Jack Johnston



A Rare Find

It is rare to discover the weathered old corpse of long fallen American Chestnut trees in as good a condition as this one, found by Jack Johnston of Lakemont, Georgia. These last relics of the southern Appalachian forest's most important tree species lie scattered in coves all across the mountain region of north Georgia, the rot resistant wood slowly mouldering into the rich brown earth.

The foreign fungus Cryphonectria parasitica

or chestnut blight was introduced into New York City around 1900 and spread throughout the chestnut's natural range, extending over the Appalachian hills and highlands from Maine to Georgia. By 1940, three and a half billion American chestnut trees had perished. It is not uncommon to find young sprouts of the chestnut, valiantly springing from the old rots in our forests, but in time these too succumb to the blight. There is hope that on-going breeding research will develop a resistant form of American chestnut that would allow forest managers to reintroduce this valuable species and perhaps in time return it to its rightful place in our forest ecosystems.

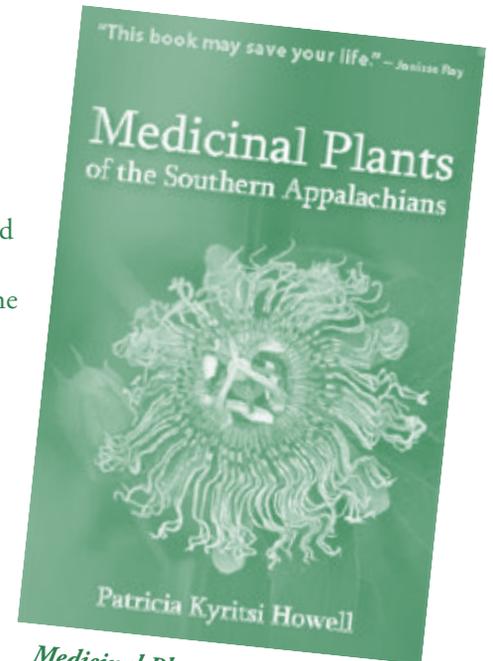
Patricia Howell Publishes Book on Medicinal Plants

Suffering from an earache? Consider using a remedy made from the carefully collected stalk of the ever-so-spiny Devil's Walking Stick (*Aralia spinosa*). If you cut the stalk into one-foot lengths, remove the thorns, strip the bark into pieces and cook it gently in oil, the strained oil makes an effective remedy for relieving ear pain.

Author Patricia Howell, a ForestWatch member from Mountain City, provides detailed instructions for using this and another 44 native medicinal plants – from Bethroot and Black Cohosh to Witch Hazel and Yellowroot – in a compelling new book, *Medicinal Plants of the Southern Appalachians*. The book details how native plants were used in folk medicine and more importantly, how they can still be used today. It also describes exactly how and when to harvest medicinal plants, which parts of the plant to use, and includes easy to follow guidelines for making simple medicines.

Much more than just another herb book, Janisse Ray, the well-known environmental writer, notes that “this book may save your life.” It also may serve, as Howell notes in her introduction, as “a manual for amnesia recovery, designed to revitalize our intuitive ability to use wild plants for healing.”

This seminal tome is an important reference for every family and library throughout the region.



Medicinal Plants of the Southern Appalachians, by Patricia Kyritsi Howell. BotanoLogos Books, Mountain City, Georgia. 2006.

Available at local independent bookstores or directly from the publisher at www.botanologos.com. You may also send check or money order for \$19.95 for each book (plus 7 percent sales tax for Georgia residents and \$3.00 postage and handling per book) to: BotanoLogos Books, P.O. Box W, Mountain City, Georgia 30562-0917. Or call 706.746.5485 to place a credit card order. Discounts available for orders of 10 or more. ♦

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U.S. Forest Service Opens Door to “Creeker” Runs on Upper Chattooga

By Joe Gatins : District Leader

The USDA Forest Service has decided to open the narrow and shallow upper reaches of the Wild and Scenic Chattooga River to test boating trials – a signal development boding ill for the wilderness and special sensitive values of this very wild stretch of river corridor.

The self-styled “creeker” community – those who push the extreme sport of running small, fast waterways at times of heavy rain – is beside itself with anticipation and glee.

Birders, photographers, hikers, fishermen, even some long-time river people and many others interested in the continued protection of this area, which had been closed to boating since Congress established the Chattooga as a Wild and Scenic River, are uneasy, to say the least.

The Forest Service decision announced in a news release of February 3, will permit “restricted public boater trials” on the stretch of river beginning at the Old Iron Bridge at Bull Pen Road and running past Burrell’s Ford to the Russell Bridge at Route 28. This stretch of road above Burrell’s Ford essentially bisects the Ellicott Rock Wilderness Area. Below, the river includes the primitive Big Bend Falls area as well as the near-mythic wilds on both sides of Rock Gorge (an inventoried roadless area under current forest plans.)

The decision, it turns out, also permits such trials by “expert panels of researchers, boaters, anglers and other users” in the far reach of the river stretching from Bull Pen to Grimshaws on Whiteside Cove Road, according to John Cleaves, the principal planner for the Forest Service project. About half of that stretch runs through private property on both sides of the river.

The Forest Service was forced into conducting such trials after the kayak lobby group, the American Whitewater Association, headquartered in Cullowhee, N.C., successfully appealed the new Sumter National Forest plan, which had continued the current prohibition on boating these 17 miles of the Chattooga. As a result, the chief of the Forest Service ordered that further study be made.

For background on this legal issue, details of the Feb. 3 decision, and a lot of pro-and-con discussion of the topic from the public see: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms/forest.projects/chatt.shtml>.

It is the position of Georgia ForestWatch that the current ban has served this part of the national forests in three states well and that no good reason exists for opening this part of the Wild and Scenic River to further degradation and overuse.

ForestWatch also is concerned that any successful move to open the Upper Chattooga to

private kayaking inevitably would lead to permitting for-profit classes and “creeking” by commercial outfitters. Anyone who has experienced the zoo atmosphere of the outfitter-friendly river downriver of Route 28 knows what that would do to one of the few remaining stretches of territory that provides a true experience of wilderness and solitude. Not to mention degradation to wildlife habitat, trails and put-in and put-out locations that would occur with a vast influx of new users.

Allowing “creekers” unfettered use of the Upper Chattooga would lead to direct user conflicts, would exacerbate damage to the outstanding resource values of the Wild and Scenic river corridor and the Ellicott Rock Wilderness Area, and make it inevitably more difficult for the Forest Service to properly manage this area in the future.

So, what’s next?

The Forest Service will spend the next few months developing a “work program” leading to the “detailed design” of the data collection and boater trials, after which the public will get another chance to comment on the Forest Service efforts. This effort will entail “gathering biological, physical and social information” about the river above Russell Bridge, and include use of focus groups, a “comprehensive, statistically valid user survey,” and review of existing studies and reports about similar rivers.

The boating trials will require special use permits, Cleaves said.

What can one do about this? For starters, file comments about the plan and the study (most easily done via the special website) and file copies of your comments with the three forest supervisors who are dealing with this issue, as well as your local, state and federal elected officials. Their names and addresses appear on page 3 and page 16 of this newsletter.

Be ready to attend the next public meeting on this issue, likely to be held in the Highlands-Cashiers area of North Carolina later in the spring. That is when the Forest Service is expected to disclose its plans for permitting boating trials on the river. ♦



UPDATE: Our Georgia Roadless Areas: Going, Going, Gone?

By Wayne Jenkins : Executive Director

This issue of *Forest News* will bring you up to date and cover a little history on one of our most important national forest issues, the fate of our Inventoried Roadless areas. In 1995 the Wilderness Society published “Georgia’s Mountain Treasures,” a document showcasing many unique and ecologically important areas on the public lands of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. The report recommended that these areas be given permanent legal protection using various designations such as Wilderness, Scenic Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers and Natural Areas, which require Congressional approval. This was during a period of aggressive and rapidly growing road building and clear-cut timber harvest that threatened many of these special places. Georgia ForestWatch volunteers and staff were critical in identifying the location and boundaries of Georgia’s Mountain Treasures. Over time, some of these areas have received permanent protection and now serve important ecological and social needs. Clean water flows from these places and their special features of great beauty, biological diversity, protection and recreational opportunities are unmatched. Many other “treasured” areas have received no permanent protection and are now under a mix of various forest service management prescriptions of varying levels of active management options, meaning roads can be built through them and the forest felled.

Since 1999, two excellent opportunities for protecting these critically important areas have yielded little to no fruit. In January 2001, the “Roadless Rule,” after decades of analysis and three years of the largest public participation process in American history, became law. The clear outcome from the public was overwhelming support for protecting millions of acres on national forests across the nation and over 65,000 acres here in Georgia. The areas in Georgia included the six largest of Georgia’s Mountain Treasures and the “Rule” placed these and other smaller areas under special protection and suggested that these should be further considered for permanent protection as Wilderness or other protective designations.

Chattahoochee’s 6 Large Inventoried Roadless Areas, Districts & Acres:

Lance Creek, Toccoa District.....	9,064
Rocky Mountain, Toccoa District	4,306
Joe/Patterson Gap, Tallulah District	6,592
Sarah’s Creek, Tallulah District.....	6,922
Kelly Ridge, Brasstown District	8,396
Mountaintown/Pink Knob, Cohutta District	12,174

Chattahoochee’s 16 smaller inventoried roadless areas & acres:

Ben Gap.....	1,294
Big Mountain.....	2,923
Boggs Creek.....	2,075
Cedar Mountain.....	1,140
Duck Branch	190
Ellicott Rock Addition	704
Foster Branch	165
Helton Creek	2,451
Indian Grave Gap.....	1,024
Ken Mountain.....	527
Miller Creek.....	714
Shoal Branch.....	412
Tate Branch.....	1,085
Tripp Branch.....	638
Turner Creek	1,515
Wilson Cove	563

TOTAL Georgia Inventoried Roadless Acres, 64,874

Enter the Bush administration in 2002. Determined to undermine the “Rule,” the president has consistently worked to gut it. His recent proposal, based on completely false claims that local communities and states did not have adequate chance to comment on the “Rule,” requires Governors to petition the administration for roadless protection. States have to invest substantial time, funds, and personnel to participate in the petitioning process. The federal government can then reject or ignore any state’s petition for any reason. Even if a state petition is heard, the result could be no permanent protection. This is a blatant end-run, with the sole purpose of maintaining these lands eligible for more road building and timber harvest and continued active management.

The second opportunity for greater protection of Georgia’s Mountain Treasures was during the seven-year forest management planning process culminating in the Land & Resource Management Plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, implemented on April 1, 2004. Although thousands of Georgians commented on the Draft Final Forest Plan, clearly indicating support for

protecting our handful of large un-roaded areas, not a single one was designated for the Wilderness Study prescription that would have moved them one step closer to permanent protection. These five areas received various prescriptions that will be used over the next 10-15 years, the life of the new management plan, for various active management levels which could lead to permanent disqualification from future permanent protection. About 8,000 acres in these small tracts of the nearly 65,000 acres of existing Inventoried Roadless areas were recommended by the forest service for inclusion in the national wilderness system as additions to existing wilderness areas. These areas await legislation for inclusion in the national Wilderness system.

We have been verbally assured by the Forest Service leadership in the Forest Supervisor's office in Gainesville that our concerns over the future status of our six large, stand alone, Inventoried Roadless areas will be maintained in a manner consistent with the spirit of the roadless rule for the life of the new forest management plan, despite reversal of the rule at the federal level. Our concerns are not eased. A recent proposed timber sale and large-scale prescribed fire project for creation of early successional habitat within the boundaries of the Mountaintown/Pink Knob Inventoried Roadless Area does not respect the remote qualities of this special area. We are appealing this project to curtail the proposed active management.

All the jargon and forest management language is confusing so let's make this simple. Presently the Chattahoochee National forest contains 749,690 acres and the Oconee National Forest some 115,354 acres, for a total of over 865,000 acres. Presently nine Wilderness areas containing almost 118,000 acres give permanent protection to nearly 14 percent of National Forests in Georgia, all of this on the Chattahoochee. The total acreage of large and small inventoried roadless areas combined is nearly 65,000 acres or 7.5 percent. These special places – identified back in 1995 as our last best places in Georgia for experiencing remoteness and solitude, large areas with few roads, soaring mountains and rushing trout streams should be permanently protected. These beautiful self renewing mixed forests yielding clean water and opportunities for unhindered hunting and fishing, hiking and camping, nature study and contemplation – should be allowed to continue their ageless processes, unhindered. Large areas where nature manages the landscape in its timeless manner and the forces of climate and topography, growth and decay, wildlife and man interact in quiet harmony, should be

considered a wise management option. All of these areas should receive permanent protection. That is, 7.5 percent, or 65,000 acres. The last and the best!

Here's what you can do. Now that the president has put the burden of protecting these areas on our Governor, Sonny Perdue needs to hear from you. Tell the governor that these areas are important to you and all Georgian's as the last large areas of intact, un-roaded natural mountain forests in the state within rapidly developing north Georgia. Tell him that federal and state agencies cannot manage all of the lands they presently have and that our few roadless areas are a great opportunity to lessen their management burden for focusing their budgets and work on less remote areas. These areas are the highest quality green-space we will ever have in north Georgia and their unique natural features and small total acreage make them ideal and common sense candidates for permanent protection. Contact the Governor today!

Go to the Governor's website at http://www.gov.state.ga.us/contact_dom.shtml and send Sonny an e-mail or call or write him at: Office of the Governor, Georgia State Capitol, Atlanta, GA 30334, Office Phone: 404-656-1776. ♦



Georgia ForestWatch photo

Georgia ForestWatch Executive director with rare double trunked Old Growth yellow poplar, lirodendron tulipifera L., found in upper Mill Creek watershed on the Ed Jenkins National Recreation Area, Toccoa District.

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Thanks to all our forest friends!

Seabrook joins ForestWatch board

Charles Seabrook has joined the Georgia ForestWatch board of directors.

Hardly needing introduction, Seabrook recently retired as the national environmental reporter for the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, is the author of two compelling books and countless articles on cultural and environmental issues, and now stands ready to shoulder a variety of tasks for ForestWatch.

Look for him to spend a good bit of time in the national forests. Welcome, Charlie!

Mark your calendars

As the sap rises in the spring, so do thoughts of planting and transplanting greenery around one's house – including the native plants that, with a little shade and a little water and tender loving care, can make such a statement in the mountains of north Georgia.

So, mark your calendars to attend Georgia ForestWatch's **Annual Native Plant Sale and Wine Tasting**, Saturday, May 20, to be held again this year at Tiger Mountain Vineyards, Tiger, Georgia.

The plant sale will run 2-7 p.m. The wine tasting, 5-7 p.m. The music, 5-7 p.m. (with tunes from Thea and the GreenMan.)

A partial plant list includes Turk's Cap Lily, Black Cohosh, Maiden Hair Fern, Sensitive Fern, Solomon's Seal, Virginia Blue Bells, Cut-Leaved Toothwort, Blue-Eyed Grass, Beautyberry, Clethra, Fothergilla, Itea, Calycanthus.

Vintages available from Tiger Mountain Vineyards, a prize-winning farm winery, are best reviewed at www.tigerwine.com.

Note: This event also serves as an "affordable fundraiser" for Georgia ForestWatch as well as a real nice social event, so those attending the plant sale or the wine tasting or both will be asked for a voluntary contribution of \$20 per adult. Georgia ForestWatch thanks you, and the forest thanks you.

ATV Bill Advances in Legislature

By David Govus : District Leader

For the seventh year in a row, an ATV bill has been introduced in the Georgia legislature. This series of bills was triggered in 2000 when Georgia ForestWatch members, with the help of Mary Maclean then of the Southern Environmental Law Center, forced the State Department of Revenue to halt the illegal practice of selling license plates to ATVs (4 wheelers) . ATVs then and now do not meet federal safety and emission standards and their use on public roads has always been illegal. The impetus for license plates on ATVs was the desire of ATV enthusiasts who were seeking to counter the wishes of the U.S. Forest Service, which was working to bar their operation on the 1,200 miles of forest roads on the Chattahoochee National Forest. Once on these roads it was quite simple for ATVs to create numerous, destructive illegal off-road trails and they did. (For a complete history of the struggle over ATVs, public roads and the forest see the Georgia ForestWatch summer 2005 newsletter (<http://www.gafw.org/05summerNewsletter.pdf>).

For the past six years, the ATV bills introduced in the Georgia legislature have attempted in one fashion or another to legalize the illegal by creating some type of license plate to allow them to operate on some type of public road. Georgia

ForestWatch along with a coalition of other groups has led the fight against these bills and along the way educated a number of legislators as to the dangers of unregulated ATV use from the standpoint of resource damage, trespass and safety. This year for the first time, the latest ATV bill, HB 1004, attempts to curb the use of ATVs on public roads and to require the owners of these machines to register them so as to allow law enforcement personnel to be able to identify those who use these machines illegally. The bill requires ATV owners to purchase a license plate stamped "for off-road use only" and requires those less than 16 years of age to wear a helmet, among other things. The proposal also has a statement in it that no provisions in the bill shall affect federal land. This language was suggested by Georgia ForestWatch's lobbyist Neill Herring and is important in case future amendments alter the intent of this bill, as is unfortunately often the case in the Georgia General Assembly.

As of this writing HB 1004 has been reported out of committee and remains a good bill. Georgia ForestWatch will continue to monitor the bill and all members should pay attention to e-mail alerts. If the bill should be altered it may be necessary to launch a call in campaign to defeat it. ♦

ForestWatchers hike to huge hemlocks in the upper Nottely River watershed

Photo by Dudley Sisk



Photo by Dudley Sisk



Georgia ForestWatch members take the measure of some really large old growth hemlocks in the upper Nottely River watershed

Oaks, Acorns and Wildlife

By David Govus : District Leader

The primary food source for much of our wildlife in the Chattahoochee Oconee National Forests is hard mast. Mast is derived from the Old English word *maest* and refers to the fruit of trees or plants. Hard mast is distinguished from soft mast such as blackberries and blueberries and refers to durable nutritious nuts. The most important of these on our forest is the acorn which is the fruit of the many species of Oaks that grace these mountains.

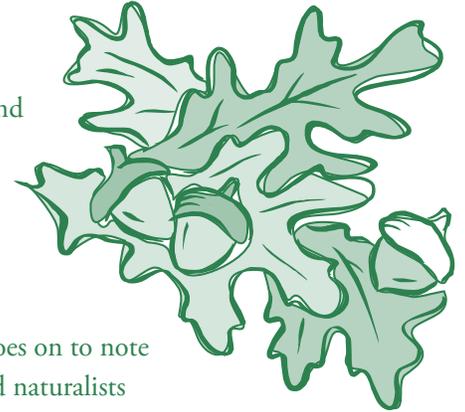
A technical paper from the U.S. Forest Service's Silviculture and Ecology Upland Central Hardwoods Research Unit written in 1994 has this to say about the importance of Oaks and acorns:

"Oak forests are life support systems for the many animals that live in them. Acorns, a staple product of oak forests, are eaten by many species of birds and mammals including deer, bear, squirrels, mice, rabbits, foxes, raccoons, grackles, turkey, grouse, quail, blue jays, woodpeckers, and waterfowl. The population and health of wildlife often rise and fall with the cyclic production of acorns. Acorns' importance to wildlife is related to several factors including their widespread occurrence, palatability, nutritiousness, and availability during the critical fall and winter period. It would seem natural, then, that some Oak stands and perhaps extensive forests be managed primarily for acorn production."

This study goes on to chart the production of acorns relative to the size of Oaks and shows that acorn production

increases as Oaks age and states, "Other factors being equal, trees of large diameter produce more acorns than trees of small diameter." The study goes on to note what many hunters and naturalists have noticed and that is that not all healthy Oaks are reliable acorn producers, production varies depending on species, weather, aspect and in our mountainous region on elevation. The study then recommends that before beginning vegetative management projects forest managers should study mast production for five years so as to be able to identify and protect the important and reliable mast producing trees.

Many local observers were disturbed in the 1970s and 80s when the Forest Service initiated an extensive road building and clear cutting campaign on the Chattahoochee National Forest. Thousands of acres of Oaks, many of which were just beginning their most productive phase of acorn production were cut and sold. Such a glut of Oaks was sent to market that the price of high quality Red Oak boards locally was little higher than framing lumber in the mid 1980s. Absolutely no thought was given to mast production or the effect that this removal would have on wildlife. A study commissioned by the Forest Service



(Continued on page 18)

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Sudden Oak Death Update

By Sarah Linn : Board Member
Jim Sullivan : Board Member

The autumn 2005 issue of “Forest News” included an article on *Phytophthora ramorum*, the microbe that causes Sudden Oak Death. Some of us optimists hoped for effective action by the US Department of Agriculture to stop the spread of this potentially devastating pathogen. We are disappointed.

Current federal regulations merely require annual inspection of nursery facilities; meaning that the vast majority of nursery stock might be grown or arrive and be shipped out, never subject to any inspection or regulation at all.

Even this requirement has shortcomings that render it ineffective. For example, only 2% of stock is visually inspected – even less is subject to the laboratory tests necessary for a definitive diagnosis.

In addition, no standard is set for the timing of these surveys, either with regard to season or to recent application of fungicides. Inspection could take place in a season in which symptoms might

...Only 2% of stock is visually inspected – even less is subject to the laboratory tests necessary for a definitive diagnosis...

not be visible. Also, most nurseries regularly apply fungicides, usually with the appropriate goal of controlling symptoms of relatively harmless fungi. However, fungicide application can mask *P. ramorum*, without killing the microbe, which will simply reemerge later.

The inability of this protocol to stop the spread of *P. ramorum* is amply demonstrated by the fact that at least four nurseries in Georgia received infected stock under the current federal regulatory scheme.

The states are powerless to restrict incoming shipments of potentially infected plants. The Plant Protection Act of 2000 prohibits states from superseding any regulation issued by the US Secretary of Agriculture to regulate interstate movement of plant material. This is the political crux of the problem and needs to be addressed while efforts to control the potential spread of SOD in Georgia continue.

To address the SOD problem within Georgia and give consumers an alternative Georgia’s Sudden Oak Death Advisory

Committee, Green Industry Association, Department of Agriculture and Forestry Commission, together with the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service have taken the initiative to create the “Georgia *Phytophthora ramorum* Certification Program”. While this voluntary certification program cannot prevent SOD from being imported into Georgia, it establishes stringent Best Management Practices and record-keeping requirements that will go far to reduce the risk of it being released into our environment. Georgia’s Certification Program requirements are far stronger than the regulations in place for shippers in the areas where the Sudden Oak Death pathogen is already established.

Many popular plants are potential hosts of *P. ramorum*, including rhododendron, pieris, viburnum and camellia. Retail nurseries commonly import varieties of these plants from large wholesale nurseries on the west coast where this pathogen originates. Because the visual symptoms of this pathogen are similar to other common fungi, and can be masked by fungicides, even a responsible and reputable nursery might unwittingly offer infected plants for sale.

We can protect our trees and our forests by buying only locally grown native plants. If you simply must have a plant imported from another region, take advantage of the protections offered by the Georgia certification program – make sure the plant came from a certified nursery. The nurseries that go to the effort and expense to become certified are helping to protect our forests, and we should reward them with our business.

For more information on Sudden Oak Death and other forest health challenges go to www.georgiainvasives.org/sod/. ♦



Photo by Tom Govus

Cow Parsnip Heracleum Maximum is a beautiful, giant member of the carrot family that is considered critically imperilled in Georgia by Nature Serve.

Forest Service Compromises to Settle Timber Sale Appeal

The USDA Forest Service and several forest conservation groups including Georgia ForestWatch have agreed to settle appeal of the White Bull timber sale in the Highlands Ranger District of neighboring North Carolina.

The compromise agreement entailed dropping objections to a vast sale that initially included more than 400 acres of national forest in exchange for the Forest Service agreeing to a variety of steps urged by the five conservation organizations.

Central among these concessions:

- Agreeing to delineate an additional 706 acres of ancient old growth forest in sensitive areas of the Whiteside and Fodderstack mountains watersheds (the Forest Service had failed to designate this “large-patch old growth” acreage, as required under the current forest plan in North Carolina.)
- Working with one of the appellants, the Southern

Appalachian Biodiversity Project, Asheville, N.C., to protect suitable green salamander habitat in some of sales areas.

- Closing gates to all roads used for the sale on weekends and evenings to help prevent establishment of illegal off-road vehicle trails.
- Abandoning two sales areas located near the Ellicott Rock Wilderness area, a key factor behind the involvement of Georgia ForestWatch in this appeal.

Other appellants included the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition, the Chattooga Conservancy, Wild South and an Asheville resident. The Asheville office of WildLaw coordinated legal matters involving the appeal. “We should credit Highlands District Ranger Erin Bronk with her willingness to work with us and meet us halfway on this issue,” said Joe Gatins, president of Georgia ForestWatch. ♦

Oaks, Acorns and Wildlife, (continued from page 16)

in Indiana in the mid 1980s and conducted by Professor B.C. Fischer found what many have observed, which is that clearcuts result in the regeneration of a forest that has far fewer Oaks than the forest that was cut. This reckless management policy is what gave birth to Georgia ForestWatch. A successful lawsuit by the Sierra Club and Georgia ForestWatch in 1999 halted this unwise program. Since that time there have been no timber sales on this particular forest.

The Forest Service concluded and began implementation of its new Land & Resource Management Plan in 2004. This plan will guide the management of the Chattahoochee-Oconee for the next 10-15 years and emphasizes forest

health and the restoration of forests to their “ecological potential.” The first large project announced by the Forest Service under the new plan is the Brawley Mountain Project, our lead story in this newsletter. Among the many flaws identified by Georgia ForestWatch in this project is the failure to identify important mast producing Oaks and the plan to actually remove most of the mature mast producing Oaks from the project area. This unwise proposal indicates how important it is for an organization like Georgia ForestWatch to continue monitoring our forest and the proposed actions of the Forest Service. ♦

Georgia ForestWatch Outings: GET OUT!

Wayne Jenkins will lead an Old Growth hike on March 18, 2006 into the upper Mill Creek watershed in the Ed Jenkins National Recreation Area. The hike will be a three mile loop with a moderate difficulty level. On the hike we will see rare, easily accessible old growth and hike into the upper ends of several rich coves with huge poplar and oak species.

Jim Walker will lead a hike on April 8, 2006 on Brawley Mountain in the Toccoa Ranger District. The hike will be about seven miles long with a moderate difficulty level. The first 3.2 miles will be on the Benton MacKaye Trail from Wilscot Gap to Brawley Mountain. The return trip will be off-trail through the Forest Service's proposed "Woodland Restoration" project area, but the terrain is not too challenging and for the most part the forest is relatively open.

Howie and Lavonne Markel will lead their annual Wildflower Walk on April 15, 2006 at the Lake Winfield Scott Recreation area. The walk will be a five mile loop at a moderate difficulty level with a casual pace. There should be numerous wildflowers in bloom.

Jess Riddle, Georgia ForestWatch's old growth savant will lead a hike on April 22, 2006 to Till Ridge Cove and Wolf Knob. The hike will be comprised of a morning and an afternoon hike. The morning hike will be two miles round-trip at a moderate difficulty level and the afternoon hike will be one mile round-trip at a strenuous difficulty level. The morning hike will be to Till Ridge Cove, which has long been noted as one of the most botanically rich coves in north Georgia. The afternoon hike will be the old-growth stand on Wolf Knob. This uncut stand of over 40 acres includes trees over 300 years old (verified by coring).

Our hikes are lead by knowledgeable volunteers, are open to the general public and usually visit areas with exceptional qualities. Please rsvp to info@gafw.org if you are interested in participating in any of the hikes or have further questions. You can be added to our email Hike/Issues Alert list by sending us your email or by calling 706/635-8733.

To join or make a donation, go to www.gafw.org and click on "Ways to Give" or use this form and mail to the address below.

Georgia ForestWatch Membership Form

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(please print)

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<i>(Please circle one)</i>	Individual
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Georgia ForestWatch Budget 2005

Income		Expenses		Net Income	Total Assets
Earned Income	\$7,252.87	Program Expenses	\$70,717.93	\$94,484.26	\$146,074.76
Membership Dues	\$18,447.00	Administrative	\$30,702.18		
Contributions	\$65,204.49				
Grants	\$105,000.00				
Total Income	\$195,904.36	Total Expenses	\$101,420.11		

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