

Georgia Forestwatch

FOREST NEWS

Protecting and Restoring Georgia's Native Ecosystems

New Forest Plan, Public Desires at Loggerheads

Analysis shows Georgians want more protection, not less

How the US Forest Service plans to use the land and manage the natural resources of the 865,044-acre Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest for the next two decades and how Georgians would like to see these vital public resources cared for do not mesh, according to a recent analysis of scores of public comments. A clear majority – or 78 percent of 1,700 Georgians who commented on the draft plan in 2003 -- asked for greater environmental protections, according to the Southern Appalachian

Forest Coalition, which includes Georgia Forestwatch. The recently released final plan is based largely on the draft, which many Georgians said threatened the state's drinking water, waterways and recreational opportunities. Georgia Forestwatch is assessing the new 1,800-page plan and related documents, and this process could take several weeks. Please stay tuned for more news about the plan and how you can help ensure that it ends up protecting the environmental riches found only in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest.

In this issue:

- Reading the New Plan.....2
- GFW Staff Update.....2
- ORV Trail Closures.....3
- Roadless Watch.....3
- New ORV Task Force.....4
- State Water Plan Update...4
- Critter Corner.....5
- 2003 Highlights.....5
- 2004 Events.....6
- Award Winning Volunteers.....6

View the plan online at www.fs.fed.us/conf or call (770) 297-3000 to request a copy.

The new management plan does not provide a clear guarantee of protection from logging and road building in roadless areas, such as Kelly Ridge's Double Spring Knob, pictured here.




Photo: Jess Riddle

Georgia Forestwatch
15 Tower Rd.
Ellijay, GA 30540

706-635-8733
www.gafw.org

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Ellijay, GA 30540
706-635-TREE (8733)

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Forest News edited by Debbie Royston.

Layout by Lynn Cumiskey.

Staff

Deborah Royston, *Executive Director*
Katherine Medlock, *Staff Ecologist*
Erica Stewart, *Office Manager*

Board Members

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District Leaders:

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Bob Smiles 404-259-4947

Brasstown Ranger District:
Howard Markel 770-781-5418

Chattooga Ranger District:
James Sullivan 706-886-8265

Cohutta Ranger District:
Wayne Jenkins 706-276-7913

Oconee National Forest:
J.P. Schmidt 706-542-3489 (w)

Tallulah Ranger District:
Joe Gatins 706-782-9944

Toccoa Ranger District:
Dennis Stansell 706-747-5892

GFW Editorial

New Forest Plan: Reading Between the Lines

By Debbie Royston, Executive Director

Georgia's public lands belong to all of us. Managing them in a way that pleases us is a difficult balancing act, to be sure. Case in point: Developing the newly released Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan took more than seven years! Yet, during that time, the public clarified its desires for these public lands: Protect wildlife and its habitat, provide intact natural places to visit and pass on to future generations, preserve rare species, ensure clean water, and emphasize wilderness and other qualities that private lands cannot supply. The public specifically asked for the plan to protect the sensitive land areas that drain into the Chattahoochee, Conasauga and Etowah rivers and other waterways that provide drinking water to millions of Georgians and habitat for a growing number of threatened and endangered species. Yet, the plan fails to outline how this will be accomplished. The public was unequivocal about protecting our last remaining roadless areas. Though the Forest Service has said there will be no permanent road construction, the plan does not limit temporary road construction within these vulnerable areas. What's more, the plan leaves these areas open to timber harvesting and off-road vehicle traffic. The point here is that Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest belongs to the people. The US Forest Service should heed our demand and manage the forest for the national treasure that it truly is.



"Let us leave a splendid legacy for our children ... let us turn to them and say, this you inherit: guard it well, for it is far more precious than money... and once destroyed, nature's beauty cannot be repurchased at any price."

- Ansel Adams, American photographer, 1902-84

Please Welcome Erica Stewart!

Erica Stewart of Blue Ridge joined GFW in January as our new office manager. Previously, Erica managed business offices for Mountain Concrete Pumping Co. in Ellijay and Georgia Highlands Hospital in Blue Ridge. At Georgia Highlands, she also taught independent living skills and planned and managed group activities for patients. Erica attends Toccoa Falls College in Epworth, Ga., part-time. She replaces Jennifer Rodriguez, who left Georgia Forestwatch in December in order to focus on her studies at Kennesaw State University. Welcome Erica and best wishes Jennifer!



USFS Closes Two Off-road Trails, Vows to Address Destructive Impacts

You DO make a difference!

Your concerns and those expressed by others regarding undesirable off-road vehicle impacts on our public lands have prompted the US Forest Service to act. Recently, the USFS temporarily closed two notoriously degraded off-road trails in North Georgia and unveiled its plans to develop policies and tools to address harmful effects of unmanaged off-road vehicle activity throughout our national forestlands.

Rich Mountain Road, Anderson Creek trails closed during 2004

The gates allowing access to nearly 15 miles of off-road vehicle trails in North Georgia are locked and will be for at least one year. But keeping ORVs off the highly popular Rich Mountain Road and Anderson Creek trails while it assesses damages and considers repairs promises to be a tremendous challenge for USFS officials who manage the Toccoa Ranger District, where these trails are located. On Jan. 21 – one week after the Rich Mountain Road closure -- ORV riders reportedly were still using the road. Meanwhile, the USFS said the Road would remain closed for up to one year while the agency conducted an environmental assessment. In 2003, Georgia Forestwatch sued the USFS for keeping the Rich Mountain Road open and thereby failing to protect the wilderness values of nearby



The US Forest Service recently closed nearly 15 miles of off-road vehicle trails in North Georgia, including five miles of severely degraded trails at Anderson Creek pictured here. Unmanaged off-road vehicle use in our mountains damages slopes, moist soils, and sensitive plants.

Photo: David Govus

Rich Mountain Wilderness (RMW). Virtually impassable by any vehicle -- other than all-terrain vehicles or extremely modified trucks and jeeps -- the Road stems a hydra of illegal trails into the RMW and has led to excessive sedimentation of nearby trout streams. Georgia Forestwatch dismissed its lawsuit in January, after the USFS agreed to close the Road and keep it closed until it completed an environmental impact study, among other things. In November 2003, the USFS closed five miles of ORV trails at Anderson Creek for up to two years while it makes repairs. How do unmanaged off-road vehicle trails affect forest resources? See our special report online at <http://www.gafw.org/orv.htm>. And, stay tuned to find out what you can do if lawmakers introduce ORV legislation that could result in even more illegal ORV use, as they have for the past three years.

Roadless Watch

Quick. What is the most widely supported federal rule in U.S. History? If you said the Roadless Conservation Rule, congratulations! You're correct. More than 1 million people -- including hundreds of eminent scientists and religious leaders -- urged the US Forest Service to adopt the rule, which seeks to provide permanent protections for an estimated 59 million acres of national forest lands that have no or very few roads, including roughly 68,000 acres in the Chattahoochee National Forest. The USFS did as they asked three years ago yet the Bush administration delayed implementation of the rule and has recently started dismantling it. Meanwhile, members of Congress continue to seek passage of the National Forest Roadless Area Conservation Act, which would essentially turn the roadless area protection rule into law. Specifically, the Act would restrict commercial logging and road building but allow appropriate management activity for fire hazard prevention, existing oil and gas production leases, habitat for imperiled species and public safety. The Act would not close existing roads or prohibit access for hunting and fishing. Watch for more information and tips on what you can do to help keep our last remaining wild forests intact and roadless forever.

Task Force **Takes on ORVs**

Halting illegal ORV use, getting problem areas closed, promoting adequate funding of law enforcement efforts and educating the public are a few ways that Georgia Forestwatch's new ORV Task Force expects to help protect both our natural environment and the safety of ORV users.

Consider these facts:

- The average adult-size all-terrain vehicle now weighs 550 pounds.
- The risk of injury to riders of four-wheel ATVs today is nearly as great as it was when highly dangerous three-wheelers were banned in 1988.
- Between 1982 and 2001, at least 4,541 adults and children were killed by ATVs.
- Between 1982 and 2001, 1,714 ATV-related fatalities involved children under the age of 16; of those, 799 were under age 12.

Source: Natural Trails and Waters Coalition.

For more information, visit www.naturaltrails.org.

For more information about GFW's new ORV Task Force, please call us at (706) 635-8733.

- Katherine Medlock

We're Looking for a Few **Good Board Members**

Georgia Forestwatch is currently seeking new board members! If you or people you know are interested in public lands issues, want more effective environmental safeguards, and would like to play an active role in helping Georgia Forestwatch move ahead on these issues, please contact us at **(706) 635-8733** or info@gafw.org.

Everybody's Water, Everybody's Plan!

Will Georgia's water remain a protected public resource or will it be sold to the highest bidder? Georgia Forestwatch is one of many organizations working with the Georgia Water Coalition again this year to help develop the new state water plan and to ensure that Georgia's water remains a shared natural resource. **How you can help:**

- * **Join** the Coalition by calling 1-866-88WATER or going online at www.georgiawater.org.
- * **Contact** your city council and county commission about passing a resolution in support of the Coalition (see list of local governments that already have at <http://www.gwf.org/gawater/cityresolutions.html>).
- * **Write, call and meet** with your state representatives, who will be considering water management issues during the current session of the Georgia General Assembly.

What else you can do:

Sign up to receive electronic Action Alerts from Georgia Forestwatch at info@gafw.org if you have not already done so, and join the Georgia Environmental Action Network (GEAN) at www.actionnetwork.org/gean/join.html to get important legislative alerts and the opportunity to make your voice heard during pivotal environmental policy debates.

"Clean, available water is needed for too many reasons, in too many places, to be sold to the highest bidder. This approach pays little regard to water's role as a natural habitat, as a recreational treasure, and the sustaining force behind Georgia's farms, many of Georgia's existing businesses, and our quality of life." **-Georgia Water Coalition**

GFW 2003 Annual Report

2003 was another productive year for Georgia Forestwatch! We owe many thanks to our members for their hard work and support. Without you, the following list of accomplishments would be significantly shorter:

- ~ Led the public through the National Forest plan revision comment process.
- ~ Mobilized our membership to defeat two local anti-wilderness resolutions.
- ~ Defended Chattahoochee National Forest from off-road vehicle incursions and policies that would allow ORV use on public roads.
- ~ Defended Roadless Area Conservation Rule.
- ~ Hosted the Athens, Ga., Clean Air Workshop.
- ~ Completed Kelly Ridge Roadless Area Salamander Survey.
- ~ Completed third phase of Chattahoochee National Forest old growth research.
- ~ Led Old Growth Virtual Tour Road Show across North Georgia.
- ~ Continued to provide leadership for Wild Georgia Coalition and produced important educational Wild Georgia brochure for outreach.
- ~ Hosted various outings and an Annual Membership Workshop.
- ~ Provided state and regional leadership in forest defense.
- ~ Provided state leadership in acquiring funds for Georgia's Land and Water Conservation Fund.
- ~ Educated and mobilized members to take action against the Healthy Forest Initiative and other harmful national policies.
- ~ Identified a serious threat to hemlock trees in the Chattahoochee National Forest and successfully petitioned the US Forest Service to fund work to track it.
- ~ Helped build a broad-based framework for ecological restoration of our public forests.

Many, many thanks to the following Georgia Forestwatch contributors. Your donations make our work possible.

Brewer Foundation
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Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere
The Sapelo Foundation
Turner Foundation

The full 2003 Annual Report is available online at www.gafw.org.
To receive a copy by mail, call us at (706) 635-8733.

- Compiled by Jennifer Rodriguez

Martin Garners Regional Leadership Award

Congratulations to former Georgia Forestwatch Executive Director Brent Martin, who recently won the Southern Environmental Law Center's prestigious James S. Dockery Jr. Environmental Leadership Award. Martin ran GFW during 1998-2003 and "built the organization into one of the region's premier forest-protection groups," says SELC.

- Katherine Medlock



Drawing by Steve Sierigk, (c) 1986, Acorn Designs

The barred owl shown above is an opportunistic hunter whose prey ranges from meadow voles to blackbirds to crayfish and everything in between.

Mythical, Opportunistic Barred Owl A Top Predator in Georgia Forests

Found across most of eastern North America, this hauntingly beautiful creature prefers deep, moist forests, wooded swamps, and woodlands near waterways. While primarily nocturnal, the barred owl's loud "hoo, hoo, too-HOO" -- which can often be phrased as "Who, cooks, for-you?" -- is heard night and day. Other vocalizations include "hoo-hoo, hoo-WAAAAH" used in courtship. Many myths surround the barred owl and most involve witchcraft, magic, and evil occurrences. Some people still believe that if a barred owl calls near a house, an occupant of that house will die. Though none of this has any factual basis, barred owl calls can still send a chill up a spine!

- Katherine Medlock

Georgia Forestwatch Events 2004

Old Growth Virtual Tour
Athens-Clarke County
Library April 8, 10:30 a.m.

Wildflower hike Saturday, April 24

Aquatics workshop Saturday, July 17

All outings are a perk for GFW members. To join, see form below. As additional events or outings are planned they will be posted on the Georgia Forestwatch web site:

www.gafw.org

For more info call 706.635.8733



Cantaberry Owner Donates Time and Profits to GFW

When Lisa Burnett offered to hold our annual volunteer banquet in December at the small downtown Ellijay restaurant she owns and operates, we were delighted. She's a fabulous chef, and the Cantaberry's warm, cozy setting promises all who enter a memorable evening. Imagine our gladness when Lisa also offered to donate her personal services and her profits! This outpouring of generosity is not a first for the local restaurateur, who routinely caters events for Georgia Forestwatch at cost. **Thank you, Lisa**, for your perpetual kindness and support!

Top Volunteers of 2003 Honored

We make a living by what we do but we make a life by what we give. If this old saying is true, then Georgia Forestwatch volunteers must have *some* life! More than 50 individuals routinely and lavishly give us their time, energy and expertise. Selecting the top four, which we do every year, was really tough. But we did it, and here they are:

Joe Gatins of Clayton

Joe's efforts to protect and restore North Georgia's native ecosystem are practically legendary and include battling the construction of electrical transmission facilities through sensitive public lands in Rabun County, Ga. Joe also serves wholeheartedly as the volunteer leader for the Tallulah Forest Ranger District.

Dorothy Goss of Ellijay

Dorothy's willingness to help out at a moment's notice is an inspiration to us all. Her donation of time and organizational expertise over the years have improved our operations and made our office run smoother than we ever thought possible!

Carole Ligi of Ellijay

Carole is another taskmaster who frequently graced Georgia Forestwatch's offices during 2003. Carole is a welcome breath of fresh air. Her faithful, behind-the-scenes support keeps us productive and on track.

Jim Walker of Ellijay

Jim's wonderful habit of roving the North Georgia forests and reporting his findings help GFW do what it does best: Protect the forest by continually monitoring its conditions.

Without Joe, Dorothy, Carole, Jim – and other committed GFW volunteers -- many of our achievements in 2003 would not have been possible. **From the staff and board - Thanks, y'all!**

GEORGIA FORESTWATCH MEMBERSHIP FORM

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
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| Extra Generous | \$100 | \$150 |
| Gilded | \$200 | \$300 |
| Life | \$350 | \$500 |

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