Georgia Forestwatch

FOREST NEWS

Protecting and restoring Georgia’s native ecosystems.

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Arisaema triphyllum
Jack in the Pulpit

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GFIF Forest News ~ Spring 2002
GFW Editorial

by Brent Martin, GFW Executive Director

Over 150 years ago, Henry David Thoreau lamented the decline of what he referred to as the "huckleberry commons." What had happened, he asked, to the Sunday blueberry pickers that roamed the countryside in search of wild fruits, sharing a basket, enjoying one another’s company, without care for property boundaries? The answer, Thoreau observed, lay in real estate speculation and the fencing off of the Massachusetts countryside. The commons had been privatized, the wild landscape tamed into a cordoned off real estate market, where the highest bidder decided the fate for the many inhabitants, great and small, dependent upon the land. This trajectory, of course, has continued, with our only commons (our public lands) being squeezed tighter and tighter by a rising number of interest groups.

For example, the ORV users emerged again this year in the state legislative session to try once again to get a bill passed to open public roads to off road vehicles. No other than State Representative Ralph Twiggs was there to play the role of handmaiden in insuring that non-street legal vehicles that do not meet federal emission or safety standards, and which do not require insurance or tags, could run wild on our taxpayer funded roads and taxpayer owned forests. It was also clear to me that Twiggs was targeting our national forest lands. In a conversation I had with him the week before he introduced his bill, he stated that he was really just trying to get them back on the "government land." This small and extremely vocal group had convinced him, as they did last year, that their interest in the commons was important enough to sacrifice the interests of the many in their favor.

GFW members once again rose to the occasion. Our calls, visits, letters, and assistance from Neill Herring helped defeat the bill by a slim margin, but a defeat nonetheless. This year, our defense of the forest commons will be more important than ever. The Forest Service will hold extremely overdue public meetings later this year on a proposed ORV policy (a policy that was due this past December and which could have circumvented any of Twiggs’ efforts!) and extremely overdue public meetings on our new forest management plan will occur in August (Draft EIS due out in September). Depending upon our input and presence at these meetings, we stand to gain either important wins or losses in how our great forest commons is managed for future generations.

Regardless of the outcome, I don’t think we’ll make Sunday blueberry pickers out of the ORV riders, though I wouldn’t mind going on a long hike with a few of them sometime and picking a few. No, we will forever be perceived, it seems, as those pesky treehuggers out to lock up our public lands, out to protect the huckleberry commons for the mere sake of the huckleberries, with no regard for their interest and right in ripping up streams, degrading hillsides, and violating the countryside in everyway imaginable. And they would be right. I hope to see you all in August.
D.C. Update

On a recent visit to Washington, D.C., I met with the staff of two Georgia senators and four representatives to discuss funding for acquisitions on the Chattahoochee and Oconee national forests, and the problem of illegal off-road vehicle (ORV) use on public lands. Both our senators and Rep. Deal support a $3.2 million appropriation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to buy land in order to protect important resources adjacent to the national forests that are at risk of development. The Chattahoochee-Oconee national forest has prioritized areas along the Chattahoochee, Jaks and Oconee rivers, and an area on Yonah Mountain in White county, but given the escalation of land prices and the pace of construction in north Georgia, this appropriation is woefully inadequate. Nonetheless, all citizens should thank the members of Congress for their leadership on this, and request more funding next time around. If you have knowledge of private land adjacent to the forest at risk of development, especially with streams, let Angela Martin on our staff know. She did a great job working with the forest service and laying the ground work for this request. Incidentally, the LWCF is a special federal fund from off-shore oil leases that ought to be providing $900 million annually for land acquisition, but congress raids the money to pay for other budget items and only a small amount is spent as intended. Remind the policy makers of this travesty in your communications.

The ORV problem is more complex, and many national and grassroots groups are working on it at all levels. In Washington, a group of activists from around the country met with legislators, their staff and even Mark Rey, the undersecretary of Agriculture, to discuss the scope of the problem, which encompasses snowmobiles in Yellowstone and Jetskis on remote lakes, and to request increased funding for law enforcement. Closer to home, a group of Georgians recently met with the regional forest service in Atlanta to request souped-up enforcement, to which they responded favorably, but it will require more money. Please ask your congressional representative to support a $10 million earmarked appropriation for ORV enforcement above the baseline funding, so that USFS can keep the illegal users out of wilderness areas, off the Appalachian Trail, and out of all the other places that they do not belong.

Randall White is Chair of American Lands Alliance and serves on the GFW board.

Georgia Forestwatch Begins Second Phase of Old Growth Research

GFW has begun its second phase of old growth research on the Chattahoochee National Forest, with none other than Rob Messick kicking this phase off by cataloguing potential sites across the forest. Jess Riddle will be starting in June and will be adding to his forty-one locations identified and surveyed last summer. This is a critical time for identifying old growth on the Chattahoochee, as the Forest Service is required to protect existing old growth in the new forest management plan. The draft for this plan is due out in September, so our research from last summer and this summer will be included. Jess always needs volunteers, so if you would like to do some rugged backcountry walking (and crawling) and learn more about surveying old growth forest please email katherinem@ellijay.com and let us know. Jess will be working Monday through Friday and is in a different part of the forest each week.
FIELD NOTES

Chattooga Ranger District
~By James Sullivan, Chattooga District Leader
This spring we toured the Locust Stake ATV Trails system in the headwaters of the North Fork Broad River. Before 1986, this area was managed intensively for timber production, but the streams were protected pretty well, especially where steep slopes were involved. When the Locust Stake ATV area opened in 1986 the destruction of the headwaters began. In a short 16 years the machines and their riders have entrenched some of the trails more than 10 feet! We found a huge amount of sediment in the river and one short tributary was truly mangled by a legal designated trail. There is so much exposed and churned-up ground in this watershed that it delivers a new load of sediment every time it rains. This will go on forever if the trails stay open. I suggest that everyone should take a day and hike around the Locust Stake ATV trails. It’s not a pretty site. It will make you angry. Maybe some of that anger can be put to work to stop this abuse of our public land.

Armuchee Update
~By Angela Faye Martin, Armuchee District Leader
Tornadoes ripped through the Pocket Recreation Area, the most visited portion of the Armuchee District last month, leaving injuries and closed roads in the wake. The district plans to carry out mitigation work so that the area can be reopened to the public who love to drink water from the springs there while munching on cress. Staff Ecologist Katherine Groves & I will accompany Armuchee-Cohutta FS staff to address damage collaboratively. Human caused maladies include illegal four-wheeler/motor bike damage to the Hurricane Creek Area. The illegal trails were discovered while Brent & were leading an outing for the Georgia Botanical Society. No mitigation of the trails was evident but FS staff was promptly notified and we are confident that given the areas botanical significance (smooth horsetail, bellwort, blue star, paw-paw & more) that closure and enforcement will be expedient. To reach me regarding the Armuchee call 706.635.TREE
~Elmer Butler & Dudley Sisk survey Locust Fork ATV Area Chattooga R.D. photo by James Sullivan

Is the Fisher Coming Back?
During October 2001 a species was reintroduced into the Tennessee area that had been iminated in the area for more than 200 years. Eleven female and 9 male fishers were successfully captured by the Ojibwa Indian tribe on the Chequamegan National Forest of northern Wisconsin and set free in the Catoosa Wildlife Management Area. These few animals carry with them the ambitious plans of many biologists and different conservation organizations. Hopes are high that all the females successfully mated and will have offspring. Populations might also increase when, next autumn, 20 more fishers are captured and released in the area. What effects do scientists hope that this will have on the general ecosystem of the Catoosa Wildlife Management? How was this accomplished?

Among these was the fisher, along with its smaller relative the marten. As Bill Ruediger, from the Forest Service's Endangered Species program said, “The real problem was the total lack of information...there was almost no one working on midlevel carnivores.”

Morgan Simmons, reported in an article for the News Sentinel, a Knoxville newspaper, (dated 12/31/01) addressing the return of the fisher to the Catoosa that “fishers were once found as far south as the highlands of Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia. [Bruce] Anderson [TWRA noname and endangered species biologist] said records from Cumberland County show that fisher pelts were used to pay public officials during the late 1700s.”

Simmons also retells the story of one deer hunter in the Catoosa Wildlife Management area that witnessed a fisher hunting down a gray squirrel. He saw it chase and finally catch it’s prey. It is particularly fascinating that he was able to see that, since fishers are very secretive hunters.

What expectations do biologists have for these beautiful eluding hunters? Simmons mentions, “Biologists are hoping that fishers will help balance Catoosa's ecosystem by feeding on species like skunks and snakes that prey heavily on ground-nesting birds.” They hope the reintroduction of this animal that once was native even down to the northern mountains of Georgia will help control populations, especially squirrels and other rodents, which they prey heavily upon.

The fisher will enhance the ecosystem of the Catoosa and we hope that they will continue to do well and survive in these new lands, where their ancestors once roamed freely, but were extinguished steadily by the logging of old-growth and loss of habitat, problems that many species still face today.

~Jennifer Rodriguez is Georgia Forestwatch Bookkeeper, Office Manager & all around pro.
**Benthic Ecology: Darters & Mussels**

There is an amazing diversity of fish, particularly in the southeastern U.S. This region of the country has a very high rate of endemism. For example, the Conasauga logperch and the Etowah Darter are found nowhere else in the world. These are tiny fish, so people often wonder why they are important. The darters are a highly advanced group of fish, they are in the perch family and they have developed highly specialized characteristics. They no longer have a swim bladder, which is the organ that regulates a fish's buoyancy, so they can rest on the bottom and "dart" in between the rocks. They usually don't get more than 3-5 inches long. However, in the spring, the males put on a brilliance of color that would rival any saltwater aquarium fish. The brilliant Kelly greens, bright reds, yellows, oranges, intense blues and stripes of white or black are truly amazing! Most darters are insectivores; they eat the insects that live in the water. A few species are specialized to eat other things including snails. These little guys are the jewels of freshwater! Darters are part of the food chain that creates the living portion of an extremely complex ecosystem on which we are dependent for fresh drinking water. Their presence or absence can be a clue to us about the health of our waterways. They are also important because they are beautiful little gifts from nature that can delight and awaken wonder in us all.

Many darters, and other fish as well, are important for another reason. They are the symbiotic partners for freshwater mussels. First, let me explain that freshwater mussels are the most endangered group of organisms in the U.S. today. They are beautiful in their own right with bumps and ridges of greens, yellows, browns, and blacks. When the mussel dies and leaves the shell behind, we get a peak at the inside and there is a brilliance of pearly white, iridescent purple, peach or pink! Mussels are filter feeders. That means they filter the water for small organisms or pieces of organic material. They can filter an amazing amount of sediment from the water. They are nature's way of cleaning up the rivers. However, they can also be buried by excessive amounts of sediment. Mussels are disappearing more rapidly that we can keep up with. Soon, most species will be gone forever. Freshwater Mussels have a very complicated lifecycle. The males release sperm into the water column and the female must filter it out (just like she filters her food!). So, even the relatively simple act of fertilization is fraught with hazards. However, that is not the last time that a mussel will face danger in its life. The female nurtures her eggs and fertilizes them with the sperm that she has filtered. The result of fertilization is called a glochidia. A glochidia is a very small clam shaped larva that will need to parasitize a fish for the next two or three weeks. So, how do they get from inside Momma mussel to the gills of a fish? Don't worry, Mother Nature has provided for them! Female mussels have evolved several ways by which to get their glochidia to the gills of a fish (often a darter, but many host fish are unknown). The mussel, sitting in the substrate, extends part of her body or a package of glochidia and mucous, which has evolved to work as a fishing lure. The mimicry is amazing! They really look like little fish, worms, or insects. When a fish comes to take a bit, she swells her glochidia in the fish's face. It gets a mouthful of glochidia! The glochidia don't harm the fish, but they do live off of its tissues for about 2 or 3 weeks. Then they will drop off, sink to the bottom as juvenile mussels, and then begin life as a filter feeder. This partnership is a symbiotic relationship and it is often species specific. So if the darter that a particular species of mussel is removed, the mussel will no longer be able to reproduce. So darters and other fish are also very important to the survival of mussels. And their survival is very important to us!

~Katherine Groves, Georgia Forestwatch Staff Ecologist

~ Fun darter sites to visit ~
www.conservationfisheries.org
www.flmh.ufl.edu/fish/Organizations/
http://www.nativefish.org/
http://tech.nscdiscovery.org/ee/fisheries.htm

**Darter Survey Update**

The field portion of the GFW darter survey was completed by Dr. David Ethier in April. With the help and coordination of scientists from the Georgia Natural Heritage Program, the Fish and Wildlife Program, the Forest Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the University of Georgia, it was a great success. We have been amazed at how well people have come together to work for a common cause. We would also like to thank the National Forest Foundation and the landowners for their support. We also had some much needed field help from some of our volunteers! Thanks to everyone involved!

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David A. Ethier taken on Earthday 2002

Bryan Davis, Katherine Groves, Dr. Ethier & Jim Walker survey the seine in Mountaintown Creek. Photos by Penney Farlow
Georgia Forestwatch Opens Oconee Office
By Katie Rodgers

As many of you know, Georgia Forestwatch has opened a new office located in Athens. The Oconee office officially opened on April 15th and was created to attend to the unique needs of the Oconee National Forest and areas surrounding it. The Oconee has a remarkable piedmont environment with a range of ecological attributes. It is home to the Monticello Glades, a rare piedmont wetland, which houses species such as the beautiful atamasco lily, the rare Oglethorpe oak, and the dwarf palmetto. The piedmont is also home to the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. The woodpecker is currently managed for and can be found in the southwest portion of the Oconee National Forest. Mafic rock outcrops can also be found on the Oconee. These outcrops, located in southern Putnam County, consist of magnesium and iron. They contain rare plant species, due in part to the absence of farming in this area. The area was not farmed because of its inherent rockiness and basic soils. The forest also consists of significant cultural and historical areas such as Scull Shoals. Scull Shoals was a 19th century industrial mill town, located on the Oconee River. The once thriving town fell victim to flooding during the latter part of the century and simply never recovered. Scull Shoals is now an archaeological site. As you can see, the Oconee National Forest contains a wealth of noteworthy ecological and historic sites.

As the Oconee Program Coordinator, I will be working with Georgia Forestwatch staff and members to create programs specific to the Oconee. We will continue monitoring the plan revision process on the Oconee. We will also emphasize outreach and education. Because the University of Georgia is located in Athens, the opportunity for educational outreach is immense. We will also explore air and water quality issues, as they are prominent concerns of people living in this area. If you’ve ever been to Athens, you know of the poor air quality that plagues this extraordinary city and others surrounding it. The Oconee River, which supplies the city’s water along with the Bear Creek reservoir, is also in need of attention. During summer months it is easy to smell the stench of the river as you drive along the Athens bypass. Another area we plan to explore is land acquisition. As you know, the Oconee is an extremely fragmented forest. Therefore, land acquisition will play an important role in promoting the health of the forest.

So far, we have received great support for our new Oconee office and I can only imagine this will grow. We need your continued support in a variety of ways. Your financial support will go to ensure the Oconee office remains a viable part of the organization. We also need to rouse your spirit of volunteerism. We need office volunteers to help us expedite essential mailings. We also need your help to spread our message by tabling events and festivals. Beyond this, we need volunteers to monitor the aforementioned issues in their area. The stronger force we have on the ground, the easier it will be for our office to keep on top of issues facing this area.

If you would like to become a part of the Oconee force, please call me at 706-316-3110.

Katie Rodgers has a BA in Environmental Anthropology from the University of Georgia. While in school, Katie interned with GFW and co-wrote “Streams of Diversity”. She worked briefly as the Outreach Coordinator for GFW after graduating. Katie has returned to GFW in order to help open the Oconee office while doing work that she feels is truly worthwhile. In her spare time (what spare time?) Katie enjoys writing, hiking, travelling, and making crafty little things.
WILD GEORGIA WEEKEND

The coalition for Wild GA, a group of over 70 diverse organizations, who have signed the GFW Conservation Alternative, recently hosted the WILD GA weekend. The coalition consists of conservation organizations, businesses, concerned citizens, recreationists, members of the faith community, and the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition (SAFC), which is a regional conservation organization comprising 17 grassroots groups in six states. The weekend began in Atlanta and was followed by overnight campouts and hikes in the Chattahoochee Nat. Forest. Following closely on the heels of SAFC’s ‘Return the Great Forest’ campaign held in Asheville, NC in April, the Wild GA events focused media and citizen attention on their Conservation Alternative. The Conservation Alternative outlines special areas of concern, mentioned in the document ‘Georgia’s Mountain Treasures’. These areas that WILD GA and SAFC feel are deserving of higher levels of protection in the present Plan Revision Process.

The launch of this co-effort by SAFC and WILD GA was held in the Fellowship Hall of the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church in downtown Atlanta. Brent Martin, executive director of GFW and chair of the SAFC steering committee, welcomed everyone and shared his concerns about Atlanta’s rampant growth and impacts on the region. He made the points that the public lands of the Chattahoochee Nat. Forest must be protected if the citizens of northern Georgia are to have clean water to drink, healthy areas to recreate, and intact forests with thriving natural communities. “The National Forests of the Southern Appalachians may be the only deterrent to the merging of the rapidly growing cities of Atlanta, Chattanooga, and Knoxville.” said Martin, not so jokingly. Taylor Barnhill, Outreach Director for SAFC spoke on the ‘Return the Great Forest’ campaign and its hundred-year-old conservation roots, which link mountain protection to the leadership and vision in the cities of Atlanta and Asheville. Mr. Barnhill was followed by Tom Darden, Biological and Physical Resource Director for Region 8 of the US Forest Service. Darden emphasized the role and importance of close collaboration with conservation groups and the Forest Service during the Plan Revision process. He also thanked the various groups and citizens represented by SAFC and WILD GA for their participation in that process, though tedious and lengthy it may be.

Hugh Irwin, Conservation Planner for SAFC, followed with a stunning PowerPoint presentation explaining the scientific foundation for the ‘Return the Great Forest’ campaign and the Conservation Alternative. Jennifer McCabe, Regional Conservation Director for the Wilderness Society spoke next, sharing her efforts and pleasure in working with various groups and individuals on forest conservation issues. The successful coordination was abundantly clear from the next two presentations. Reverend Eugene Boger, the pastor of Poplar Springs Methodist Church in Atlanta, invited all faiths to consider their responsibilities in protecting the mountains, rivers and forests as required in the various teachings of each faith’s holy texts. Next, Adrienne Sabir-Hudson, Director of the Nur Academy for Muslim children, movingly shared her faith’s conservation teachings. She was followed by the beautiful celebratory song and prayers of her students who stole the hearts of the audience. This was a fitting close to a program intended to launch a regional and Georgian vision for forest protection of our public lands. For more information concerning the Conservation Alternative go to SAFC.org.

Happenings...
Newtown Florist Club, a Gainesville area environmental justice organization, joined GFW’s Jennifer Rodriguez and James Sullivan on a hike at Dukes Creek Falls in early April. A great treat was had by all not to mention the fresh air that the National Forest affords. Brent Martin was elected as Chair of the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition in January. Brent said of the new appointment, “The regional forest plans are imminent under the current administration and it is my hope that my grassroots experience with Georgia Forestwatch will be an asset the coalition during the upcoming challenges.” New Georgia Forestwatch board additions include, Jen Geigerich, Executive Director of Georgia PIRG and Michelle Smith a long time GFW ally and activist friend. Both are gifted and knowledgeable and we are all excited to join forces with them. Bob Kibler was reinstated at the helm as the Chair of the GFW Board of Directors and Randall White took an appointment as Chair of the American Lands Alliance. GFW’s Angela Faye Martin said of the transition that, “Bob & Brent have a symbiosis and a shared honesty that makes them an unbeatable duo in the realm of forest protection and organizational success.” Randall White led GFW through a phase of tremendous organizational growth and we are grateful. Randall remains on the board.

James Sullivan (often referred to as the father of Forestwatch) has rejoined the board. His experience as District Leader of the Chattooga gives the board added perspective from the district level. “Hemlock woolly adelgid has made its way to Georgia,” reports GFW Tallulah District Leader, Mort Meadors. Accounts of the pest infesting hemlocks at Ellicott rock Wilderness have foresters and activists very distressed. For more on Hemlock woolly adelgid on the web:
www.ento.vt.edu/~sharov/hwa/
www.lib.uconn.edu/CANR/ces/forest/hwabrief.htm
We want to extend gratitude to all who contributed to the GFW Spring Appeal! (as of print time)


~UPCOMING EVENTS~

June 4
Athens Membership Meeting

June 8
Stream Ecology Workshop

June (date to be announced)
GFW Member Plan Revision Workshop

August 3
Freshwater Snorkel

October 11-13
GFW Annual Retreat

for info: 706.635.TREE (8733)

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Corrections for Winter 2002 consist of the omission of one source reference in B. Martin's article on Kelly Ridge Roadless Area. The said information regarding timber production was gleaned from John Petric, USFS Gainesville rather than Talullah Ranger District officials.

All illustrations in this issue by Angela Faye Martin, pen & ink.

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