Georgia's Roadless Areas at Risk
Road Construction, Timbering Allowed Under New Proposal

Until very recently, more than 55,000 acres of Georgia's last wild places were the absolute last place you'd expect to see road construction and timbering. The Roadless Area Conservation Rule enacted in 2001 served to protect these and nearly 60 million acres of remote public lands nationwide from these and other extractive activities. All that changed last month when the Bush administration effectively repealed the roadless rule and, instead, proposed a new rule that offers no national protections for roadless areas. The latest proposal allows governors of each state to petition the administration for roadless protection. In effect, the proposed rule would allow governors to "opt-in" for roadless protection; it also allows governors to "opt-in" for increased resource extraction. The petition process is difficult and — even if a pro-protection petition is heard — the result could be no permanent protection. The administration can reject or ignore any state's petition. Absent official roadless protections, decisions on road building and logging fall to forest management plans. The newly released forest management plan for the Chattahoochee National Forest fails to protect Mountaintown, Kelly Ridge and other Roadless Areas in Georgia from road construction and logging. Roads built in national forests are used primarily for industrial purposes, such as logging, mining, and oil drilling. These roads damage watersheds, destroy wildlife habitat, and ruin scenic vistas. Scientific studies show that roads allow for the spread of both native and exotic pests and pathogens, and that they increase the chances of wildfires. Please take the time to write the agency charged with managing our national forests, the USDA Forest Service, and remind them that the roadless rule stands as the most widely supported federal rule in U.S. History, and that you and millions of other Americans continue to want all roadless areas protected. Please see page 3 for more information about the proposed rule and where to send your comments. The Forest Service is required to review all public comments before it decides anything. These lands belong to you, and how you want them managed is what really counts.
GFW Editorial

Your Land, My Land, Our Say!

By Debbie Royston, Executive Director

It's not like we didn't see it coming. Since 2000, the Bush administration has done nothing but give lip service to the Roadless Area Conservation Rule while consistently working to undermine it. Still, the repeal of one of the most popular and far-reaching conservation initiatives since Teddy Roosevelt is shocking, even for an administration that has weakened so many environmental protections in the past. Having repeatedly failed to defend the roadless rule in court — in fact, agreeing with the rule's opponents by already exempting Alaska's magnificent forests from protection — the administration is now throwing the door wide open to unlimited exploitation of national forests in every state — threatening more than half a million acres of our beloved Southern Appalachians — despite widespread support from all walks of life — both men and women, Republicans and Democrats — for a strong federal policy that permanently protects roadless areas. Incredulously, the administration continues to turn a deaf ear toward the public's demand for securing these places — natural areas that provide us with clean air and water, hunting and fishing, recreation, and solitude. Meanwhile, the voices of industry and special interests are being heard loud and clear. It is time, again, to let the administration know that we want these national treasures — our last wild places — to remain roadless and intact forever.

Sign up Today for the August 28th GFW Outing!

Hike Slaughter Creek Trail with Georgia Botanist Richard Ware

For more than 30 years, Richard Ware has studied books and taken field trips in order to learn as much as he could about the plants that grow only in Georgia. Join Richard and GFW outings leader Parrie Pinyan on Aug. 28 to get up close and personal with the trees, bushes and wildflowers that live along Slaughter Creek Trail located within the Brasstown Ranger District near Suches, Ga. Richard is a past president of the Georgia Botanical Society and currently chairs the Tipularia Board of Editors (botanical magazine). Mr. Ware leads several workshops and outings for the Georgia Society every year, including a botany workshop and a fall color hike. One of Mr. Ware's favorite pastimes is looking for rare plants and then working to protect their habitats. Richard and his wife Teresa count themselves lucky to have found several rare and endangered plants in their native Floyd County and other areas of Georgia, as well. Richard has studied dendrology (the study of woody plants) at Shorter College, and he has also taken courses on how to identify wildflowers. To sign up for the outing or for more information, call or e-mail us at (706) 635-8733 or info@gfw.org.

About Slaughter Creek Trail
Length: 2.7 miles
Located partly on old roadbeds, the trail leads from Lake Winfield Scott campground to the Appalachian Trail at Slaughter Gap. This moderate blue-blazed trail enters the Blood Mountain Wilderness about 1 mile before reaching Slaughter Gap. Blazes will be farther apart on this section of trail.

Source: USDA Forest Service
The Bush administration intends to weaken the one rule originally intended to protect the last wild places in our national forests by giving governors the ability to “opt in” to a rulemaking that would foster roadless protections in their states. But these are federal, not state lands. In fact, more than 2.5 million citizens from across the country — including eminent scientists and religious leaders — have already told the Forest Service that they want to “opt in” for protection. At hearings across the nation, including in Georgia, large majorities have supported these important forest protections. While the administration argues that this is an effort to conserve roadless areas on national forests, it will make it increasingly difficult to protect roadless areas from resource extraction. The day this new policy goes into effect, not a single acre of the forests now protected under the roadless area conservation rule would be protected. These wild forests protect the right of any citizen to camp, fish, or paddle a canoe in a beautiful place. We should remember that ownership of these national forests is one of the special blessings of being an American. Help ensure protection of our roadless areas by sending your comments on the proposed rule via U.S. mail to:

Content Analysis Team, ATTN: Roadless State Petitions, USDA Forest Service, P.O. Box 221090, Salt Lake City, UT 84122;

faxed to (801) 517-1014.

Or you can e-mail comments to:
statepetitionroadless@fs.fed.us.

Comments also may be submitted online from:

The proposed rule is available at www.fs.fed.us.

Comments on the proposed rule must be received in writing by Sept. 14, 2004.
The Tallulah Ranger District aggressively is moving to implement the Chattahoochee National Forest's new Land and Resource Management Plan - and jumpstart the chainsaws on several major projects leftover from previous years:

..... **The Rabun powerline**: Following denial of the administrative appeals and the federal court appeal brought by the Chattooga Conservancy, Georgia Forestwatch and the Sierra Club, Georgia Transmission Corp. has begun work to clear this high-voltage powerline right-of-way, and open up the new roads permitted by the Forest Service to access pole locations. Rangers and Forest Service technicians monitor the work, but so does Forestwatch. To date, we've been able to point out several instances in which the utility did not appear to be following the Forest Service permit for erosion control on and near Glassy Mountain.

..... **Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) thinning and restoration**: The district just last month approved a non-commercial thinning of 85 acres of loblolly pine, primarily to reduce vulnerability to the pine beetle, and to help release native hardwoods and shortleaf pine. Companion proposals to "restore" 329 acres of nearby stands already damaged by the SPB (scattered across 16 different sites), and additional thinning projects, are pending further review.

..... **Salvage sales**: The district has approved two small timber salvage sales at opposite ends of Rabun County, following a quick, verbal scoping. This timbering is to remove shortleaf pines killed by the SPB, and beetle-weakened white pines killed off by a prescribed burn. GFW ground-truthed both projects.

..... **Road work**: The ranger district, in an unusual, political maneuver, convinced Rabun County Commissioners to abandon the county's remaining interests in portions of three old roadways in the Satolah area of the county. The roads were difficult to maintain, having been carved up by illegal use of ATVs. Now, the district comes forward with a proposal to obliterate one road, close another and "rehabilitate" the third. GFW is monitoring the work, particularly on Old Burrell's Ford Road, which forms the boundary of the Ellicott Rock Wilderness Extension study area (an inventoried roadless area of some 704 acres.)

..... **Daylighting and clearcutting for wildlife**: The Tallulah District is poised to issue a formal environmental assessment that would set out a "preferred alternative" for creating new, "high-elevation early successional habitat." This is Forest Service-esque for creating forest openings, both for non-game and game species, especially Ruffed Grouse. The district had been looking at the Lake Burton, Coleman River, and "Two Forks" areas to create such openings, both by "daylighting" the sides of existing forest roads and trails, and clearing new openings in the forest. One of these, the "Two Forks" project off of the Billingsley Creek Road extension, had elicited critical public comment since the proposed clearings bumped into and near several documented old growth areas.

..... **Poss land swap**: Georgia Forestwatch formally has asked the district to hold a full and open public hearing when it begins environmental review of a proposed land swap involving the Poss family development interests. The 166 acres of government land to be acquired in this exchange loom over Timpson Creek, near Tiger Mountain. The swap proposal already has generated growing public interest.

..... **Bridge work**: The Georgia DOT and the South Carolina DOT are planning for replacement of the bridges over the Chattooga River on US 76 and Route 28, respectively. Forestwatch has commented on both proposals in that they involved sensitive areas of the Wild and Scenic Chattooga River corridor. Local stakeholders in the Satolah area, additionally, vigorously have pushed for keeping one lane of the Route 28 bridge open during

*(see Tallulah District, pg.5)*
The new CONF Management Plan became affective April 1 of this year and the Districts moved quickly to implement it. On the Armuchee/Cohutta Districts we have received scoping notices covering the following projects:

...... Scoping date 4/26/04; Restoration of several stands of southern pine beetle killed pines, totaling 328 acres on the Armuchee District and 52 acres on the Cohutta District, using herbicides to prepare sites for the regeneration of longleaf pine on 104 acres and short leaf pine on 160 acres and oak on 116 acres. Also herbicides will be used to release pre-planted oak trees, which are now shaded by competing growth. The goal in these projects is to return these beetle destroyed stands to productive stands of mixed hardwoods or pines depending on site. These stands were originally clear-cut by the Forest Service about 20 years ago and re-planted or naturally re-seeded to pine species that latter succumbed to the native southern pine beetle. An estimate of at least 6000 acres of dead pines on the Cohutta District alone reveals the scale of the mistaken practice of adopting a commercial timber program on public lands and the daunting task facing the Forest Service in their attempts to return these stands to a healthy forest community. GFW District Leaders are curious to see if the various methods proposed by the FS will be successful. We believe the FS must define the present forest situation and monitor the results of their various treatments in order to know whether the desired goals have been met. In this notice we see the FS using herbicides to prepare and/or release sites by selectively killing unwanted vegetation and tree species, ie maple, sourwood, sweetgum etc., non-commercially valuable tree species, in order to release desirable existing trees or planted oak and pine species. Many readers may wonder why the FS cannot just allow Nature to heal these areas in it’s own sweet time but it seems the FS believes it can restore these areas and the new Forest Plan empowers them to try to do just that.

...... Scoping date 5/27/04; A Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Pinhoti Trail Extension Project will allow the FS to build another section of this long trail that begins in Alabama’s Talladega NF and will connect to the Appalachian Trail by way of the Benton MacKay Trail. Although I have not hiked the proposed route it appears on maps that the FS has done a good job in locating the trail away from springs and streams, important because hikers will share this trail with bikers. Two changes from the original decision improve this project by placing more of the trail on public land and lessening the impact of a parking lot construction by moving it to a site that would require less soil disturbance.

...... Scoping date 7/8/04; A low water crossing on FS road 3A washed out in 2003 and the FS proposes to raise the road level to accommodate a new, larger culvert. Though the FS notice says they will strive to minimize silt going into Rock Creek, we have requested that FS personnel be present while earth moving and repairs are being made.

...... Scoping date 7/8/04; Proposal for the use of prescribed fire on approximately 18,000 acres over the next 3-5 years. The Armuchee/Cohutta district will soon be conducting environmental analysis on these thousands of acres, ‘to reduce fuel buildup, to restore ecosystems and to improve wildlife habitat’ at a treatment rate of 3000-6000 acres a year. Historically the district claims to burn an average of 2000 acres per year and we have responded repeatedly to notices of these proposals with deep concern and specific questions, from the real ecological need for such a program to the negative affects on soils and local air quality. The GFW Board, Staff & District Leaders are working to understand the role of fire in our forest ecosystems and are formulating a more comprehensive policy to this complex issue. The comment period for this scoping notice ends August 6, 2004 and I would encourage concerned citizens to contact the district, questioning this large scale use of fire on our public lands. Also look for more information on the use of fire on the CONF in future GFW newsletters. Thanks!

~ Wayne Jenkins

(Tallulah District, con’t. from pg. 4)

construction, filing a petition with Gov. Sonny Perdue urging that position. (The bridge on US 76 involves building a brand new span somewhat upstream of the old bridge, which will remain open during construction.)

You, too, can stay on top of these Forest Service projects by getting on the mailing list to review ALL scoping letters. Write Ranger David W. Jensen, Tallulah Ranger District, 809 Highway 441 South, Clayton, Georgia 30525.

~ Joe Gatins
A Benefit hosted this summer at Tiger Mountain Vineyards in Rabun County netted Georgia Forestwatch more than $6,300—making it the single most successful fundraiser in GFW’s history! We are deeply grateful to winery owners John and Martha Ezzard and Bill and Leckie Stack for their hospitality, generosity, and friendship. We also want to thank the more than 200 individuals who attended the event, as well as those of you who could not attend but sent a donation anyway.

Many thanks also to GFW Tallulah District Leader Joe Gatins for spearheading the event and making it all happen. Last but certainly not least on our thank-you list are the following individuals who made everything possible by donating their time, energy and—in some cases—by giving items for the silent auction.


Thank You!

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