

# **Georgia ForestWatch**

## **Strategic Plan 2020-2025**

### **Vision**

Georgia ForestWatch envisions a future where people can enjoy forests that have reached their full majesty, where intact natural processes support healthy ecosystems and thriving biodiversity, and clean streams supply water to millions of Georgians. We believe this future requires the protection and appreciation of Georgia's national forests, and the watersheds, native plants and wildlife they encompass.

### **Mission**

Georgia ForestWatch works to enhance the health of Georgia's 867,000 acres of National Forest by protecting our forests and streams, advocating for natural processes and identifying opportunities to improve Forest management.

### **Background and Context**

Georgia ForestWatch (GAFW) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization established in 1986 that advocates for ecologically-sound and sustainable Forest management; increased protection of streams, rare natural communities and species, and old-growth forests; and expansion and designation of new Wilderness areas and full protection of existing Wilderness and Inventoried Roadless Areas. We educate Georgia citizens on the many practical and ecological values of their public forests, ultimately empowering citizens for greater appreciation and protection of their forests.

## Who We Serve

The GAFW stakeholders are essential in this Strategic Plan, and include:

- GAFW members, staff, Directors and District Leaders
- Foundations and major donors that contribute to GAFW
- Public Agencies with interests in our forests (U.S. Forest Service, Georgia Dept of Natural Resources, and others)
- Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC)
- Partner organizations, including endorsers of Georgia Mountain Treasurers
- The citizens of Georgia
- The flora and fauna which comprise the Forest ecosystem

## Opportunities and Challenges That We Face

GAFW and the Chattahoochee Oconee National Forest (CONF) in Georgia face many challenges and opportunities. These are closely linked and include:

### *(Challenges)*

- National policies and movements promoting the sale and lease of public lands for development or private use.
- Changes to and re-interpretation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) that aim to reduce the opportunity for public involvement and public oversight of Forest Service policies, practices and field activities.
- Forest Service land management goals that conflict with values of Wilderness, scenic forest quality, Inventoried Roadless Areas and old-growth forest.
- Reduced U.S. Forest Service resources to support sustainable management of the Forest.
- Physical and ecological risks to the Forest including climate crisis and the threats of invasive plants and disease.
- Increasing stress on the CONF due to public recreation. Increase of population in North Georgia areas bordering National Forest and urban sprawl toward the Forest. The CONF is now recognized as an “Urban Forest”.
- Shift in the focus of many philanthropic organizations from environmental impact to environmental justice.

### *(Opportunities)*

- Funds designated for the acquisition of additional Forest Service land.

- Citizenry in North Georgia that is increasingly concerned with issues of clean water, air, climate change impact, and the availability of forest for recreation.
- Growing public concern and environmental focus on the climate crisis.
- Government agencies increasingly turning towards partner organizations to accomplish basic work.
- Demographic change in Georgia and associated changes in how people communicate and participate in causes they care about.
- Increasing interest in and use of the CONF by the full range of diversity of the U.S. population.

**This Strategic Plan is designed to ensure that GAFW is prepared to face these risks and opportunities and to effectively address what may come next.**

## **Organizational Competencies and Assets**

GAFW's organizational competencies that will allow us to accomplish our Goals and Objectives include:

- Historical experience built on 35 years of operation and successes.
- Professional staff with knowledge, education, credentials and experience in forest ecology, environmental policy, public advocacy and non-profit organization management.
- Board of Directors and Advisors with depth of experience, knowledge and credentials in organizational leadership, conservation policy, environmental management, communication, financial management, fundraising and environmental law.
- District Leader Program with volunteers experienced and knowledgeable about local Forest conditions, history and ecology, engineering, environmental management and public advocacy.
- Network of community advocates and organizational partnerships passionately involved and committed to support GAFW in its mission and objectives.
- A well-established and dedicated volunteer contingent that supports the GAFW mission and its objectives.
- Established relationships with Forest Service staff.
- Familiarity with Forest Service practices, policies, and procedures and the history of management on the CONF.

## **Communication Policy**

Georgia ForestWatch recognizes the importance of having an effective and consistent communications policy. Georgia ForestWatch strives to be the leading advocate for the CONF, and to have up-to-date, science-based, factually-correct information. Communications will be crafted to be accurate, concise, respectful and nonpartisan. While key messages and target audiences will change depending on the type of event and campaign, communication planning will be proactive, strategic, disciplined and measurable, and designed to further the goals of this organizational strategic plan.

## **Goals and Strategic Objectives**

Our high-level Goals for GAFW fall into the categories of programmatic (Goals 1 and 2), outreach (Goal 3) and development (Goal 4). Associated Strategic Objectives listed for each Goal have related programs and “smart goals” that support us in achieving our Strategic Plan Goals. A Master Plan addendum to the Strategic Plan shall document the programs, smart goals and measures of progress and success associated with each Strategic Objective. The Master Plan and GAFW annual budget guide us in resource planning, setting program priorities, management of projects and communication plans.

Each Strategic Objective is designed to be measurable and will be monitored quarterly to measure our progress toward meeting these objectives. Responsibility for each Strategic Objective is assigned to either a GAFW staff member or a Board member who will be accountable for performance. Progress in achieving each objective will be reported by the assigned responsible person to the Executive Director on a quarterly basis and in turn reported to the

Executive Committee of GAFW, and the Board of Directors.

In order to effectively, efficiently and credibly accomplish these goals and objectives we as an organization are committed to utilize best available management practices and planning methods, science, technology and communication practices.

## **Goal 1**

**Positively influence the ecological health of the CONF ecosystems through advocacy, interface with the USFS and policy makers, and field monitoring.**

### **Strategic Objectives:**

- a. Monitor and review USFS project proposals and activities, providing written comments as needed and collaborating when possible, using science-based information and resources.*
- b. Monitor CONF conditions outside of project areas, reporting issues and concerns and suggesting solutions to the Forest Service.*
- c. Provide continuous recruitment and training of the GAFW District Leader team who support monitoring and response activities.*

## **Goal 2**

**Seek to increase CONF acreage under protective designations and encourage policies and regulations that foster ecologically sound forest management.**

### **Strategic Objectives:**

- a. Promote protections within the Forest Management Plan for Georgia Mountain Treasures including but not limited to protection of existing and recommendation of new Wilderness.*
- b. Be a leading voice in forest planning on the CONF by building a coalition of similarly minded groups and individuals.*
- c. Monitor and promote compliance with all laws and regulations guiding the management of the CONF by working with the USFS, the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) and other partners.*

*d. Seek to influence national and regional policy and Forest planning when these have potential to impact the CONF.*

*e. Defend the right of the public to be notified and to comment on USFS projects and to preserve environmental safeguards enshrined in NEPA.*

### **Goal 3**

**Improve and increase capacity for collaboration and collective action on Forest issues by educating and strengthening relationships with members, partner organizations and diverse stakeholders.**

**Strategic Objectives:**

*a. Seek out and participate in collaborative projects that promote positive relationships with the USFS, public, NGOs, and other state and local government representatives.*

*b. Increase the number and frequency of interactions with potential partner groups to identify areas of common ground and capitalize on partnership strengths and strategic action opportunities.*

*c. Develop regional and community advocacy groups and opportunities to influence Forest planning and decision-making concerning Forest issues.*

*d. Educate, inform and engage the public on Forest issues through newsletter, alerts, media relations, presentations, outings, volunteer opportunities and community events.*

*e. Recruit, prepare and engage volunteers at a range of commitment levels and maintain active associates ready to support Georgia ForestWatch outings, field projects, events, research, issue response and special needs.*

*f. Establish and develop working, collaborative relationships with the UNG and other educational institutions to promote environmental education programs and offer meaningful volunteer and internship opportunities with GAFW.*

### **Goal 4**

**Strengthen economic viability and sustainability of GAFW**

**Strategic Objectives:**

*a. Prepare and follow a sound financial development plan.*

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*b. Steadily increase membership and proportion of revenues from memberships and major donors.*

*c. Retain foundation partners and increase revenue from grants.*

*d. Continuously recruit and train Board Members, team leaders and associates who meet organization needs for expertise, experience, diversity and community influence.*

*e. Prepare and periodically update a Georgia ForestWatch staffing and succession plan, including assessing needs, and attracting, developing and retaining personnel (staff, contractors, interns) with required abilities and expertise.*

## **About GAFW's Strategic Planning Process**

GAFW's 2020-2025 strategic planning process began in November 2019 and included:

- review of the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan
- review of nonprofit models for strategic planning
- input from GAFW Board members and District Leaders
- discussions with key members and advisors of GAFW on past and future goals and objectives
- review of GAFW historical documents
- review of GAFW financial history
- review of commitments to key foundation donors
- understanding of current programs
- consideration of past successes
- organizational lessons learned

## **Strategic Planning Committee Members**

Jess Riddle, Executive Director

Marie Dunkle, Board

Sue Harmon, Board

Anne Heikkila, Board

Trushar Mody, Board

Melanie Vickers, Board

Tom Crawford, Board

Tom MacMillan, Board

Phillis Bowen, Board

Denny Rhodes, Board

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Patrick Hunter, (SELC) Advisor  
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