Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter ..... Spring 2005

Who's watching your forest?

The Clock Is Ticking for Georgia's Hemlocks

By Wayne Jenkins: Executive Director

Time marches on in its plodding, inexorable way and usually we are resigned to the fact, though perhaps a bit uncomfortable about it. After all, like the weather, there seems to be little we can do to about it. In the case of our native evergreen hemlock trees, time is not only moving on but also, running out.

As many Georgia ForestWatch members know, we are facing the virtual extinction of our native hemlocks by the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, across the tree's range in north Georgia -- perhaps in as little as the next decade. The miniscule exotic insect, which silently sucks the life out of this beautiful evergreen tree, showed up in the Chattooga watershed in 2002 and has been hopping westerly across the mountains, hitchhiking on the feet of small woodland birds, most recently appearing in Jarred creek in the upper Toccoa River watershed. So far, the pest has been found in the aforementioned Chattooga watershed, the Tallullah watershed, the Brasstown Creek area, Coopers Creek and now the upper Toccoa area. To date adelgids are yet to be found in the Noontootla Creek area, Mountaintown Creek or the Cohutta mountains but its most likely just a matter of time before the adelgids' cotton-like masses appear on the undersides of hemlock boughs across the hemlocks entire range in our state.

The loss of our hemlocks has been compared to past man-made eastern forest eco-disasters on the scale of the Chestnut blight, the gypsy moth infestation and Dutch Elm disease but little is certain about what will happen, especially to our cold mountain streams and rivers, which hemlocks benefit with their cooling shade. As anyone who has lived in north Georgia for the past ten-to-twenty years will tell you, things have been warming up. If this trend continues and many of our cold water streams lose the significant shading provided by hemlocks, some believe these streams will be significantly impacted by a rise in water temperature affecting crawfish, salamanders, trout and other aquatic species. Mountain streams will most likely receive increases in silt as the bank holding hemlocks succumb. Hemlock associated bird species such as Blackburnian, Black-throated green and Swainsons Warblers, Veery, Wood Thrush, Winter Wrens, Blue-headed Vireos, Louisana Water Thrush, Red-breasted Nuthatch and a suite of other birds will most likely suffer from the loss of hemlock stands. Black Bear, Bobcat, Red Squirrel, Red-backed vole and the Water Shrew are mammals also associated with Hemlock forests. It is obvious that we are now witness to a historical natural event of monumental proportions with unknown but potentially devastating consequences.

Since the accidental introduction of the adelgid into the eastern United States around 1950, hemlock stands covering almost half of the tree's natural range in the east have been severely affected. The states of New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsyl-

(Continued On Page 4)

In This Issue...

From the Director..... 2

Tallulah District hikes.. 3

Tallulah Ranger District Report 6

Forest Service Contacts 6

Georgia Forestwatch Membership Form 7

Chattooga Ranger District Report 8

Roads and the Forest 9

To Burn or not to Burn: That is the question 11

Good Hike, Bad News! Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Found in Brasstown Wilderness 12

Mark your calendars! ... 13

A message to GFW members from your Executive Director..... 14

From The Director

Forest Management & the new "Plan"

Wayne Jenkins

It's a new day for forest management on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. Maybe. The question that most Georgia ForestWatch members and many Georgians are pondering is whether the guidance and implementation of the new forest plan means the end of commercial logging as a management goal for our National Forests in north Georgia. When we study the new Land and Resource Management Plan (the Plan), which became the guiding light for management activities on April 1, 2004, ending a period of legal logging lock-down dating back to the *Sierra v Martin* decision of February 18, 1999, we are struck by the flexibility or open endedness of the language. The working concept driving the Plan is a philosophy called Adaptive Management. In Chapter 1, page 1, of the Plan, we find that Adaptive Management is *"practicing restorative ecosystem management with the understanding that we are students of nature, not masters of it"*. Wonderful. A lot like what we in the conservation community have been saying for years, simply put, **let nature lead**. The Plan goes on to say that the FS will *"use scientific knowledge and experience to design management strategies that allow us to progress toward ecological and socioeconomic objectives as we learn. The adaptive aspect of these strategies is the ability to test our assumptions as we learn from our work and the work of others in the field"*. Amen to that!, **"Test our assumptions"**. Further, *"Monitoring (and constant evaluation) is the heart of adaptive management."* Hallelujah! We will need to **monitor** and do good science in order to gauge our progress and achieve our goals. Though broad, I think most of us would accept these statements as positive and legitimate. We also know the "proof is in the pudding", or on the ground as it were, and Georgia ForestWatch will work to encourage and assist the Forest Service as it strives to *restore* our forestlands, whether degraded by past management actions, recreation, exotic species and/or certain natural calamities.

One such natural calamity struck our forest recently as the remnant storms from Hurricane Ivan dumped an estimated 9-15 inches of rain on the mountain counties of north Georgia causing over $2 million in damage to national forest roads and infrastructure. Culverts, roads and trails were washed out, bridges damaged and numerous landslides were reported across the forest. Even an island in the Jacks river was relocated downstream. One of the hardest hit areas was the Cohutta Wilderness and the northerly flowing Conasauga River, famous for its pristine water quality and aquatic bio-diversity. In less than 24 hours, approximately 9 inches of rain fell on the upper Jacks and Conasauga watersheds raising water levels to 18 feet (median water levels are 3 feet) and discharges around 20,000 cubic feet per second (median discharge is 100 cfs). This incredible amount of rain in such a short time overtopped and damaged two bridges and more importantly scoured the river and other nearby biologically important streams and displaced and/or destroyed populations of federally listed threatened and endangered mussels and fish. These areas of critical habitat must now be surveyed as soon as possible to determine the extent of the damage to these species. This incident clearly indicates the enormous value of having good species occurrence data as base line information so that when large scale changes occur on the landscape, be they human or natural, managers have something to compare present and future monitoring data to. Fortunately, in this case, the US Fish & Wildlife Service and the Forest Service have past species surveys for comparison. New surveys and funding are already planned for determining the impact of Ivan on these sensitive habitat areas and follow-up studies to determine if successful natural re-colonization occurs or if reintroduction will be necessary and feasible.

Georgia ForestWatch appreciates the swift and professional reaction of the Forest Service to this situation and we are anxious to hear the details of this biodiversity drama as it unfolds in these important rivers and streams. As stated in the forest "Plan" and as this event underscores, *"Monitoring (and constant evaluation) is the heart of adaptive management"*. ◆

Tallulah District Hikes

By Joseph Gatins: Tallulah District Leader
Contact: jgatins@alltel.net

Photo By Cynthia J. Stacey
Jesse Ray Owens

ForestWatch members and friends young and old – 28 in all – participated in a memorable hike along the Wild and Scenic Chattooga River on New Year's Day.

Little Eli Blackwell, 4, and not-so-little Jesse Ray Owens, 82 -- and many ages in between -- joined in what turned into a most relaxed, riverfront ramble to historic sites in the farthest eastern reaches of Rabun County and adjoining Oconee County, S.C. (The river serves as the state line in these parts.)

For many, Mr. Owens was the hike. He is a life-long resident of nearby Satolah, Georgia, who knew many of the local residents who inhabited this stretch of river bottomland when it was still being farmed, and who has an incredible memory of this place.

The intrepid band, basking in un-seasonal, sunny, 65-plus degree weather, started at the site of Old Chattooga Indian Town, near the confluence of the Chattooga's West and North Forks. The archeological record suggests the site was inhabited by up to 400 Cherokee up until 1740, but only sporadically thereafter until 1816, amid suggestions that the main population here crashed in response to smallpox epidemics in 1738-39.

From there, the hikers took in the remnants of the adjacent Russell Farmstead. Although the main house here was burned by arson in 1988, enough of 28 outbuildings (barns, spring house, root cellar, etc.) remain to give a good idea of what a thriving, working farm and stagecoach stop this once was.

The group finished its hike back on the Georgia side of the river at what remains of the once-equally thriving Nicholson Farmstead, which included a Methodist church, school, main house, corn cribs, pigpens and many other outbuildings.

But no ruins remain today on the Nicholson Tract, purchased from private owners at the turn of the (21st) century. Where the U.S. Forest Service on the South Carolina side opted to leave the outbuildings standing as an archeological record, the Tallulah Ranger District sold, removed or destroyed the Nicholson outbuildings after the main farmhouse there burned down in 2001 (also by arson.)

While a bit of clean-up still remains to be finished, the Nicholson sites are fast returning to nature. (For a peek at the old architecture, the old church is now located on the Covecrest retreat property off Bridge Creek Road, and one of the old corn-crib buildings was rescued and put back up on the Foxfire property in Mountain City.)

(Continued On Page 5)

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The Clock Is Ticking for Georgia's Hemlocks

(Continued From Page1)

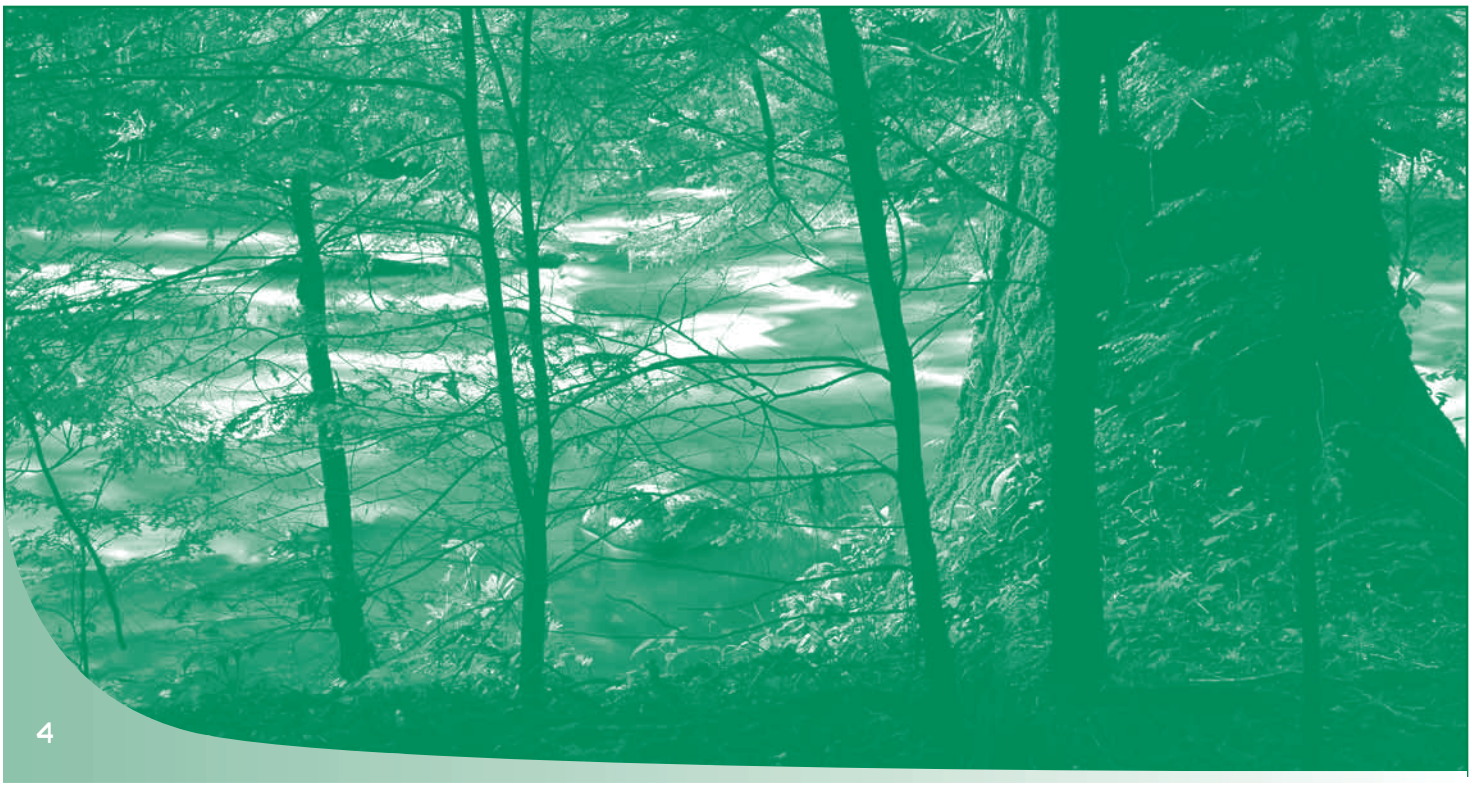
vania and Virginia have all sustained heavy infestations with the Shenandoah National Park suffering up to 70% mortality in some areas. North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Great Smokey Mountains National Park and now Georgia are facing the same grim results from the tiny bug with the enormous appetite. In many of these states, State and Federal agencies are working in various degrees on two fronts to combat the adelgid; chemical insecticidal treatment for saving trees in the short run and 'biological control' or the introduction of predatory beetles that prey exclusively on the woolly agelgid for long term control. Though some of the latest observations in the northern hemlock stands which have undergone treatment the longest appear promising the verdict is still inconclusive as to the overall permanent success of these efforts. But, as James Sullivan, Georgia ForestWatch District Leader, Board member and agelgid field researcher for the Georgia Forestry Commission remarked recently, "We know what will happen if we do nothing. We will lose our beloved hemlock trees!"

Here in Georgia the leadership of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests has recently released an initial plan for dealing with the adelgid for public comment and input. Initially however, there appears to be a huge problem. After a careful review and discussion with forest service personnel and the few laboratories producing the specific predatory beetles for release into infested stands of hemlock, it appears that other than the on-going beetle program in the Chattooga watershed of extreme eastern Georgia, there will be no beetles available for treatment of the many other adelgid impacted stands in north Georgia. This situation should be a call to action for all natural resource agencies in the state, the Forest Service, every conservation organization and yes, every citizen from the Governor on down. Our beloved north Georgia forests are under a full scale assault of historical proportions and for the cost of building less than one quarter mile of interstate highway, (estimated in 1996 dollars at about a million dollars a mile) we could be well on our way to developing the fully functional predatory beetle lab we need now and for the future. This is a call to arms! Georgians, save your hemlocks! Call your federal and state leaders. Tell them they must get involved. Discuss the plight of our stately hemlocks with your neighbors, relatives and co-workers.

We can find the resourses needed to do everything possible to fight this problem that threatens to devastate our mountain forests. And then, if we fail, we can tell our children and our grandchildren we cared enough to give it our best. Let's do this! The clock is ticking. ◆

To review documents mentioned in this article go to www.gafw.org and click on Hemlock Woolly Adelgid threat.

Photo By Charles Seifried: Old Growth Hemlock Bordering Appalachian Stream



Tallulah District Hikes

(Continued From Page 3)

The Forest Service also undertook extensive riverfront restoration along the bank of the Chattooga's West Fork at the Nicholson site, which appears to have been helped by the large deposits of sand and sediment brought in by Hurricane Ivan last year (15-16 inches of rain in 24 hours.)

That riverbank is showing vigorous, natural regeneration and growth of native switch cane (Arundinaria tecta) and native Spanish Dagger, (Yucca filamentosa.) A similar, but taller yucca, Spanish Bayonet, also grows nearby. But the giant native cane (Arundinaria gigantea) transplanted to this stream bank by ForestWatch in 2002 and the nursery-raised cane planted by the Tallulah District in 2003, both appear to be having a very hard time taking hold at this location. (ForestWatch is in touch with the district to suggest further transplantation efforts.) Both types of cane were used extensively by Cherokee, and are still used by Cherokee today to make a variety of native baskets and blowguns.

By contrast, the giant native cane is thriving along the riverfront areas of the Russell site, and obviously would be re-propagating itself across the wide sweep of the Russell fields if the Forest Service there was not maintaining most of the property as a wildlife opening (and seeing it bush-hogged periodically to keep it neat and tidy.) Unfortunately, the wildlife folks in South Carolina had planted long rows of Autumn Olive (Elaeagnus umbellata,) which, as it turns out, is a most troubling, invasive species. Its seeds are rapidly dispersed by birds, and there is already evidence of its spread across the river into the Tallulah District. (The Andrew Pickens Ranger District now reports that autumn olive is targeted for removal on national forestland and that the olive on the Russell property will likely be treated in the future.)

Also on the invasive front, the hikers found evidence that one of the many Eastern hemlocks along the Nicholson Tract, part of the West Fork, is now heavily infested by the Hemlock Wooly Adelgid.

Some dozen Forestwatch hikers (including several who took part in the New Year's Day hike), also got a good look at Forest Service management issues and the adelgid infestation during an introductory forest hike on October 30 of last year, to Holcomb Creek Falls and nearby Ammons Falls.

This Halloween hike to two of the sweetest cascades in Rabun County took the group through an impressive stand of old, large Eastern hemlocks, which are also facing a heavy infestation by the adelgid. The rough trail also had been blitzed by Ivan, with many blow downs criss-crossing the path and a large debris jam pushing hard against the footbridge below Holcomb falls.

(The Forest Service has since begun clearing the blow downs and has the location on its list of possible adelgid control sites. To its credit, the Forest Service previously had taken down numerous dead pines killed by the Southern Pine Beetle, which almost surely would have blocked the trail after Ivan had they been standing the night the big wind came through these parts.)

Photo By Cynthia J. Stacey: Jesse Ray Owens

The Holcomb hikers also got a bonus during this walk – a visit from a neighborly Black Rat Snake (Elaphe obsoleta) – that wriggled its way out of a nearby stand of native dog hobble (Leucothoe fontanesiana) and up one of the larger hemlocks as the hikers took pictures below. This is a "large, but harmless constrictor," (Stidworthy.)

Given the apparent demand, several hikes will be scheduled in the Tallulah in coming months, including treks to Rabun Bald and Three Forks (both to be listed as strenuous.) ◆

Tallulah Ranger District Report

Chipper-biomass project under study in Rabun County

By Joe Gatins: Tallulah District Leader

The Tallulah Ranger District hopes to initiate a small biomass project in 2005, according to Ranger David W. Jensen and district personnel.

As explained to Georgia ForestWatch in recent interviews, the district is in the process of studying proposals that would take small trees from stands decimated by the Southern Pine Beetle or in need to thinning, have them chipped and then possibly sell the chips to a local textile mill that would in turn burn them to make electricity.

As many as 85 acres of forestland would be considered initially, according to Ranger Jensen, all of it located in the southeastern end of the district. This area already is the site of a variety of thinning and restoration projects initiated since the advent of the new plan for the Chattahoochee National Forest.

Still to be evaluated and decided upon, is how the wood would be removed from the stands, where it would be chipped, and whether or not there is enough of a market for such chips to make the project financially rewarding.

The proposal is being undertaken under guidelines set out in the Bush administration's new "Healthy Forests Initiative," Jensen said.

Currently, the textile mill receives chips from mills in Sylva and Brevard, N.C.

Your national forest For sale or trade

Little-known to the public, but very well known to the U.S. Forest Service is the fact that various federal laws permit the direct sale or exchange of national forest property.

It also represents a trend that appears to be increasing on the Chattahoochee National Forest.

The USDA Forest Service currently lists five proposed land swaps on the Chattahoochee, totaling almost 700 acres, which would be exchanged for land the Forest Service deems more desirable. The dollar value of the private land must equal the value of the public land at issue.

But this does not, in all cases, mean the same number of acres. Initial evaluation of the so-called Poss swap in the Tallulah Ranger District, for example, would result in the trade of 160 acres of forestland for several private tracts totaling about 77 acres in size. The key factor is whether the value of the 77 acres is equal to the appraised value of the 160 acres of forest.

According to Ranger Jensen, the national forest hopes to bring the Poss proposal, which is being closely monitored in Rabun County, to public comment and review either in late Winter or early Spring.

In similar fashion – but this one is a direct sale, not a swap – the Chattahoochee National Forest has proposed selling off its old work

(Continued On Page 7)

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Tallulah Ranger District Report

Chipper-biomass project under study in Rabun County

(Continued From Page 6)

center on old US 441 to the highest bidder under an obscure pilot federal statute relating to the "conveyance of excess Forest Service structures."

The statute, apparently tacked on as a rider to an appropriations act in 2002, appears to permit sale of "excess buildings and other structures" and the land they sit on, as well as "such other land immediately adjacent to the building as the Secretary considers necessary." That is, the Secretary of Agriculture.

The proceeds apparently can be used for "maintenance and rehabilitation activities within the Forest Service region in which the building or structure is located."

In the case of the old work center in Clayton and a second work center property in the Brasstown District, the money would be used to help defray construction of a new combined work center, heliport and administrative office south of Clayton.

That's not the end of it, though.

According to Forest Service Chief Dale N. Bosworth, the department is contemplating other new ways of transferring public land back to private ownership.

The Bush administration, he told Congress almost one year ago, "will submit legislation proposing a Facilities Acquisition and Enhancement Fund. This authority will provide a useful tool for reducing our administrative site backlog through an authorization to dispose of lands and improvements in excess of our needs, and use the proceeds for infrastructure improvements," he said.

That Appalachian Interstate

The notion of a new interstate highway running up Southern Appalachia from Savannah to Knoxville is still alive in Congress despite the defeat of its primary sponsor, former Rep. Max Burns of Augusta.

Rep. Charlie Norwood, an Augusta Republican, has reintroduced the Interstate 3 legislation, which, if passed, would require the U.S. Secretary of Transportation to study the costs associated with designing and building this highway, and report back to Congress by December.

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.

(Continued On Page 8)

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

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Tallulah Ranger District Report

(Continued From Page 7)

Rabun Bald: Hike to the second-tallest mountain in Georgia (4,696 feet), going up the Bartram Trail and back down via the Three Forks Trail. This 7.2-mile hike is listed as strenuous, with a 2,000-foot elevation gain and a sometimes-steep, 2,500-foot descent. Meet at the Scaly, N.C. post office on Route 246/106 at 9:15 a.m., Saturday, April 2. First-come, first-served for 15-20 hikers. Sturdy footwear a must. Contact info@gafw.org or call our office at 706-635-8733 to reserve your hike.

Score one for Wilderness

The Tallulah Ranger District is closing and thoroughly blocking three old abandoned county roads in the vicinity of the Ellicott Rock Wilderness area.

This primarily is to repair the heavy erosion and sedimentation caused by vehicle and OHV traffic on these remote byways. The roads are to remain accessible to hikers after the work is done.

The district also advises that the work will not affect the Ellicott Rock Wilderness Extension Study area – one of the concerns Georgia ForestWatch had registered during the public scoping part of this project. ◆

Chattooga Ranger District Report

By Wally Warren: Chattooga District Leader

After serving as district leader since, well, since the beginning of time (at least Forest Watch time), James Sullivan has decided to step down. Two of us (Dudley Sisk and Wally Warren) are taking Jim's place. It may take more than two to fill Jim's boots.

We had a cordial meeting with Michael Gryson, the outgoing ranger for the Chattooga District, and John Westbrook, the district silviculturist. We were told that many proposed projects are in the offing. Since then the Forest Service has posted more specific announcements. Sometime in March or April the Forest Service will be releasing scoping notices for two pre-commercial thinnings related to the infestation of the native southern pine beetle. These two projects combined will affect about 500 acres. The FS will also be proposing an ecological restoration project on 200 acres. They plan to plant this land partly in shortleaf pine and oak.

Three recent scoping notices have been of special interest. The first, a proposed permit for another communications tower atop Currahee Mountain, near Toccoa Georgia. In our response, we did not object, given two conditions. First, in transporting the tower up the mountain, the contractor should not harm any rare plant sites. Stands of the imperiled and rare smooth coneflower, Echinacea laevigata, line stretches of Currahee Mountain Road, and other rare plants grow very near the actual communications site. Second, the Forest Service should require the removal of all towers whenever satellites or some other technology makes them obsolete. To our knowledge, no decision has been reached on this project yet.

The second notice concerned the placement of moldering privies near the Low Gap, Blue Mountain, and Whitley Gap shelters on the Appalachian Trail. These shelters are in the Raven Cliffs and Mark Trail Wilderness Areas. Even so, the shelters are heavily used, and the privies will both improve sanitation and protect the plants, soil, and water in their vicinity. We had no objection to the notice. District Ranger Michael Gryson approved the project in December.

The Forest Service has just released a third scoping notice. It proposes rerouting a .5 mile section of the Appalachian Trail between Hogpen and Unicoi gaps. Currently the trail climbs steeply to the top of Coon Den Ridge. The Forest Service would like to take the trail around the north side of the ridge, where there are dramatic views. We have yet to investigate this proposal on the ground.

In the last item of news, Allen Smith has been named Deputy District Ranger of the Chattooga Ranger District. For now, the district will not have a ranger. Smith will report to Dave Jensen, the district ranger on the Tallulah Ranger District. ◆

Roads and the Forest

By David Govus: Cohutta District Leader

America has long had a love affair with roads. With much of the growth of the United States occurring after the widespread ownership of automobiles, mass transit was, if considered at all, a mere second or third thought. Atlanta's near perpetual gridlock is testimony to a metropolitan area that was able to sprawl in all directions with constant road building and widening always seen as the only sensible transportation policy. Attempts to reduce congestion and improve air quality by adding on a layer of mass transit to this formless sprawl have gained little traction.

The lower 48 states of America have a landmass of over 3.2 million square miles and although much of the west was only settled in the last century it is generally accepted that the farthest one can get from a road in the lower 48 is 25 miles. This most remote spot is in the back country of Yellowstone National Park south and east of Yellowstone Lake. Yellowstone Park was fortunately set aside in 1876 before the rise of the automobile and has a sparse but sufficient network of roads.

One of many Hurricane Ivan caused landslides on the national forest

Photo By David Govus: Forest Service Road 64

America's fascination with roads extends to the National Forests. The United States Forest Service manages 303,125 square miles of public land which contain an unbelievable 383,000 miles of classified roads far exceeding the length of the interstate highway system. This results in a road density of 1.26 miles of road per square mile. This figure includes Wilderness Areas so the actual road density outside the Wilderness areas is even higher. To get a feel for this draw a square 2 inches on a side. In this example 2 inches represents a mile. Now fit a line 2.4 inches long inside the square to represent a 'road'. As one can readily see, even if you create many curves on the 'road' it is impossible to stay in the 'box' and to get very far from a 'road'. A reasonably fit human can walk a mile in 20 minutes. The vast majority of these roads are dirt/gravel and were built to extract timber. In many cases the cost of the road construction exceeded the value of the timber extracted and over the years the funds available for maintenance have never been sufficient for such a massive system. The result today is a badly deteriorating road system and a $10 billion maintenance backlog. This eye-popping figure represents the Forest Service's own in-house calculation. The best source for more information about the disastrous economics and cost of the Forest Service's ill considered road building can be found at the web site for the non partisan Taxpayers for Common Sense.

http://www.taxpayer.net/forest/roadless/index.htm

In addition to the harm to the taxpayer's pocket book that has and will be created by this overblown transportation system, roads have a well documented negative impact on the environment. Runoff from roads carries fine silt particles into streams impacting aquatic organisms. Roads fragment habitat and make breeding and therefore survival problematic for some species. Roads allow the rapid spread of invasive exotic species and pests. These and other environmental problems created by roads are well documented in a comprehensive bibliography assembled by the Natural Resource Defense Council that can be found at

http://www.nrdc.org/land/forests/roads/eotrinx.asp

In the late 1990s at the urging of the Clinton administration the Forest Service proposed two rule changes to address these road problems. One of these was the Roadless Rule which very wisely and with certain exceptions barred new road constructions in roadless areas. Despite the overwhelming support of the American public and receiving an unprecedented 2 million favorable comments, this rule has been completely gutted by the Bush administration. The other rule published in the Federal Register in January of '01 is known as the 'Roads Rule'. The purpose of this rule is spelled out in the preamble.

The intended effects of this final policy are to ensure that decisions to construct, reconstruct, or decommission roads will be better informed by using a science-based roads analysis; that the availability of road maintenance funding will be considered when assessing the need for new road construction; and that, instead of focusing on constructing new roads, emphasis will be given to reconstructing and maintaining classified roads while decommissioning unnecessary classified and unclassified roads.

This 'roads rule' also required that Forests undergoing Forest Plan revision perform a Forest wide analysis of their transportation system

(Continued On Page 10)

Roads and the Forest

(Continued from Page 9)

and to analyze the effect of individual projects on roads.

The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests has 1,200 miles of classified roads divided into 5 maintenance levels with ML 5 being paved (rare) , ML 1 closed and ML 2 passable by high clearance vehicles only. ML 3 and ML4 roads theoretically designate greater levels of comfort. The road density level on the Chattahoochee-Oconee closely mirrors that of all other Forests across the nation with a road density of 1.3 miles of road per square mile of forest. The Forest Service supervisor's office in Gainesville acknowledges a maintenance backlog of $10-12 million. Many of the important main system roads that the public has used for decades to access important areas of the Forest have deteriorated. FS road 28-3 which for years provided access to Nimblewill Gap and the approach to the terminus of the Appalachian Trail at Springer Mt. now requires a rugged 4 wheel drive vehicle and has been posted with a sign 'travel at own risk'. Literally thousands of tons of soil have washed off this road and into nearby streams with the once buried culverts now well above grade level. This is a road that 20 years ago was used by the rural mail carrier. When I asked officials in the Supervisors office what would be done with such a road the response was that the classification level would be lowered. This initiates a death spiral for roads as the spinning rough tread tires of 4 wheel drive vehicles loosen soil and facilitate further erosion. This also puts those forest users who choose to drive fuel-efficient vehicles at a disadvantage. The past few winters the main system roads across the Cohutta Mountains have been closed for the first time ever, restricting access to tens of thousands of acres of the Cohutta Wilderness and Lake Conasauga.

Increasing the pressure on the road system for the Chattahoochee-Oconee was the visit of Hurricane Ivan. Officials in the supervisor's office report that 35 to 40 landslides occurred as a result of Ivan. Georgia ForestWatch surveyors have examined a number of these slides and have noticed that many slides seem to be coincidental with clear cuts either above or below the road. Whether these events are correlated is a matter of speculation but it is certainly possible that the past ground disturbing activities associated with these cuts on steep ground created conditions that favored these slides. Officials estimate $2 million of damage on this national forest as a result of Ivan. Congress has set aside $47 million in a special appropriation for the Southern Forests to repair Ivan damage and the Chattahoochee forest is planning those projects at the moment. Several Forest Service officials expressed surprise at the level of damage that Ivan caused to the road system. One comment from a Forest Service official was that these roads have been here for 40 years "and nothing like this has ever happened." Forty years is a very short time period when it comes to weather cycles and all the evidence of global warming points to the likelihood of an increased number of violent weather 'events'.

Georgia ForestWatch has been interested in how seriously the managers of Chattahoochee-Oconee would apply the 'Roads Rule' in their decision making process. The initial results have been disappointing. The forest-wide roads analysis required in the recent forest management plan was farmed out to a private contractor, Science Applications International Corp. conveniently located in Shalimar, Florida. This report stretches to 600 pages and cost the taxpayers $80,000. If judged by it's weight, impressive but if by its usefulness as an analytical tool, the serious reader will find it lacking. Hundreds of pages are merely regurgitated material from existing Forest Service publications that bear little relevance to the issue at hand. Many other pages ramble on about cultural and socio-economic factors of North Georgia and appear to have been lifted from a state atlas. What little direction can be found consists of statements advising that the classification levels of deteriorated roads be reduced. Georgia ForestWatch has copies of this 'analysis' available on CDs if any member wishes to explore this important matter further.

The first use of the 'roads analysis process' as applied to a specific project on the Chattahoochee was equally disappointing. This was the decision to rebuild the unclassified Rich Mountain "road." The Forest Service, after years of work by Georgia ForestWatch, finally acknowledged its responsibility for this road which was unclassified, i.e. it had not been built to Forest Service standards and did not show up on their transportation atlas. Even though acknowledging that it was poorly designed and located, the Forest Service with the help of the Wilderness opponent, Rep. Charles Taylor of western North Carolina, who sits on the House Appropriations committee, received a special earmark for this unnecessary project. This project is estimated to cost between $250,000 and $500,000. This is exactly the wasteful type of pork barrel project that the Roads Rule attempted to curb.

The roads analysis on the Chattahoochee-Oconee does make the obvious point that traffic will continue to increase on the main system roads while appropriated maintenance funds will likely decline. The recently released federal budget confirms this as road maintenance funds were cut. It is clear that it remains important for an organization like Georgia ForestWatch to keep watching the Forest Service and trying to encourage them to make the politically hard but necessary decisions concerning their road system which they up to now are avoiding.◆

To Burn or not to Burn: That is the question

By Jim Walker: Toccoa District Leader

I had expected all the fall color to be gone by the end of October. I was wrong. It was November 18, and I was amazed to see on the steep mountain slopes by far the most brilliant color I had seen all season. Not solid color; most of the trees were bare. But scattered everywhere were intense spots of incredibly bright orange maples and deep red oaks that had, for some reason, ignored the calendar. Executive Director Wayne Jenkins, ForestWatch member Liz Andrews and I were driving up towards the Cohutta Wilderness on our way to Jacks River Fields campground, where we were to meet Forest Service representatives at the site of the proposed Flat Top prescribed burn to hear them explain why they wanted to burn that particular area.

We arrived slightly late to find at least 10 concerned citizens, Cohutta District Ranger Debra Whitman, three other Forest Service employees and a representative of the Nature Conservancy waiting for us.

Everyone got back in their vehicles for a short ride to the other side of Jacks River, and then we headed off on foot into the proposed 1,000-acre Flat Top burn area. What I hoped to see and hear was an on-the-ground show-and-tell of why this particular site needed to be burned. I had even brought along a copy of the Fire Regime Condition Class (FRCC) Field Method Guidebook (downloaded from http://www.frcc.gov/docs/Complete_Guidebook.pdf), in case someone was willing to show me how FRCC is determined in practice. No such luck. In spite of the emphasis placed on FRCC in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan, the concept does not seem to have much of a following among Forest Service employees.

The area we were hiking through did not look good from a pro-burning point of view. Not far from Jacks River, it was fairly wet, with lots of hemlock and laurel, no significant white pine encroachment and nothing that could be called fuel buildup. From conversation overheard along the trail, it seemed that almost everyone felt that fire would be totally inappropriate there.

Even the Forest Service agreed. Apparently, the 1,000-acre site had been drawn to take advantage of existing, easily defensible boundaries such as the Jacks River and roads. (Unfortunately, completing the enclosure would require using a bulldozer to clear a fire line between two roads, which would open up a dandy loop for illegal use by off-road vehicles. The area we were actually seeing, while within the boundaries of this prescribed burn proposal, was not intended to be burned. So instead of a look-at-this demonstration of the need for fire, the outing was reduced to a beautiful setting for a theoretical discussion of the issue.

Prescribed Burn in Pine Forest

When the group came to an open spot, we stopped to talk. The Forest Service gave a well-practiced presentation of the benefits of fire: fuel reduction, ecosystem restoration, wildlife habitat improvement and combating rampant white pine seedlings. With a range of several objectives, whenever any one of them was challenged, the fall-back position was "Well, that's not the only reason." When the floor was opened for questions, the concerned citizens, who were mostly local landowners and developers, were uniformly skeptical.

All of the Forest Service employees unfailingly responded very gracefully and patiently. I am always impressed by how willing they are to engage in public relations. I know that I would have very little tolerance for public input on my own work, no matter how well or poorly informed it might be.

As the discussion dragged on, with no one giving any ground, the concerned citizens melted away until only a few of us were left with the four Forest Service employees. We walked further up the creek, through some really nice, maturing second growth forest, to a small waterfall, and along the way we had an opportunity to talk one on one. It was especially inspiring to hear Mike Murphy, the district silviculturist, tell about the ten years he and his family spent as missionaries in Africa and Mexico, and from Ricky Hughes, the fire crew chief, I learned interesting details about the procedure for carrying out a prescribed burn. When we returned to our vehicles, everyone sincerely thanked each other for the time spent together in the forest on an exceptionally beautiful late-fall day.

Toward the end of January, I heard from Ricky that, due to lack of funds, the Cohutta District would probably not be doing any prescribed burning this year. ◆

Good Hike, Bad News! Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Found in Brasstown Wilderness

By Wayne Jenkins: Cohutta District Leader

Photos By Wayne Jenkins

Giant Waterfall Icicles in Brasstown Wilderness

On a crisp and cold December day, old growth sleuth Jess Riddle and I hiked into the Brasstown Wilderness in search of remnant oldgrowth stands. A bright blue sky, cutting wind and an inch and a half of fresh snow underfoot put us in a wintry frame of mind. Sprinklings of snow falling down the backs of our necks, dislodged from the hemlock boughs we pushed through, confirmed the season. Heading east through rhododendron whose drooping leaves were tightly rolled, like cigars, from the cold up the creek tumbling through the crease of Little Bald Cove we climbed, quickly warming to the work. After about an hour of steep effort, made more challenging by the slick snow cover over frozen, rock-hard ground, we approached the day's first series of rock ledges and cascades, wrapping horizontally around the almost vertical mountain slope. Large old oaks, hemlocks and poplars stood silently round about the base of a tall unnamed waterfall festooned with clear, giant, glowing ice-cicles. While exploring this newly discovered oldgrowth stand we were struck by an often repeated theme. Perched atop grey outthrust rock ribs of the mountain where huge hemlocks. We noticed so many of these 'Hemlock astride outcrop' formations that we wondered what had created them. The only explanation Jess could proffer concerned the protection from fire such a site might provide but I was not convinced, the area appearing too wet to burn.

We hiked away from the falls, picking our way along the base of a linear outcrop and soon entered a dry pine-oak-heath forest with obvious signs of fire. Slabbing horizontally around the ridge through dense mountain laurel we commented how thin and rocky the soils were with a paltry covering of leaf and needle litter in comparison to the rich, heavily mulched cove we had just left. The contrast was stark and I wondered to myself if maybe Jess was right about his fire protection theory and the rock topping hemlocks. The hemlocks stood just around the corner from the area that obviously had been affected by fire. Could there be a connection, an overlap of influences from one forest community to an adjacent one, though they are quite different? (This is one of the things I love about the mountains; more mysteries to ponder than I could ever exhaust in one short lifetime hiking, watching and thinking.) Young fire-intolerant red maple trees were invading the understory so it had been a while since the last fire. It would be good to revisit this site regularly in the future to see if and when fire might return to do its work. Slip sliding down into the next cove we pulled up short at two huge old growth trees thriving on a small fertile streamside flat. One, the second largest cucumber tree in Georgia and its companion, a hugh northern red oak, stood majestically a-center the cove. Jess and I stood back for a minute or so admiring these beautiful and nearly perfect specimens of their respective species. What is it about big ole trees?

Walking downstream and hitting the ubiquitous logging road (every cove needs one) we soon hit Bald Cove Creek and headed up the cove. The going soon became rough as the slope pitched up to an extreme and we lunged into a large stand of

(Continued On Page 13)

Mark your calendars!

Saturday, May 21, for Georgia ForestWatch's Wild and Woolly Wine Tasting & Native Plant Sale; 4:30 pm to 7:00 pm

As last year, this is to be held at Tiger Mountain Vineyards in Tiger (Rabun County.)

This is turning into a key (but affordable) fundraising event for Forestwatch members and prospective members and a social event ***not to be missed***. Pay $20 per person at the door for wine, bread, cheese, music and more.

Look for details in coming weeks.

You're Invited!

Good Hike, Bad News! Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Found in Brasstown Wilderness

(Continued from Page 12)

old rhododendron. Across the cove and through the evergreen understory we could see a grove of about 15 hemlocks backed by two cascades and a connecting rock wall. Craning our necks back to take in their full height they easily pierced the canopy of neighborly hardwood trees. As we struggled across the confluence of two creeks and up slope towards the base of these old giants Jess, as he had been doing all day, casually turned a few low hanging limbs of younger hemlocks over to inspect for Adelges tsugae, the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid and there they were. Just a few bluish-white dots, the protective egg sacs, where the slender green leaves join the stem, the hidden adelgid, quietly sucking the life out of its host tree. This was one of the main reasons we had come out today and we felt fairly sure that the potentially lethal adelgid had already arrived in this stand. But knowing didn't lessen the blow. To think that these beautiful trees, part of the greatest stand of hemlock biomass in Georgia, could all be dead in as little as five years is hard to believe and impossible to accept before it becomes reality. This wintergreen, one-of-a-kind old grove, will be forever changed in the wink of an eye. Our restless history staring us in the face. So this is what exotic species invasions mean!

We spent about an hour rummaging around at the feet of these threatened old giants, measuring and coring a few of the smaller hemlocks (they're easier to core yet one aged out to be 243 years old) exclamations of "wow!' and "this one over here looks biggest of all" ringing through the frosted air before realizing the day was moving on to dusk. It was slow going extricating ourselves from the living maze of tangled growth and downed limbs and trunks that barred our descent but we slowly slipped and slid our way down out of the cove toward the road back to the car. What a great hike! To be out with Jess in this most beautiful forest dressed up for winter in its fine hemlock-green cloak was a special treat. Despite the depressing confirmation of Hemlock Woolly Adelgids, I promised myself a return trip before summer's heat sets in. ◆

Georgia ForestWatch Outings! Mark that calendar!

The following hikes have been planned for the first half of 2005 and you are encouraged to "Get Out!" These outings will be lead by GFW District Leaders, staff or other knowledgeable volunteers and are a great way to get to know your forest better.

- 4/2 Rabun Bald: Lead by Tallulah District Leader Joe Gatins
- 4/16 Kelly Ridge: Lead by former ForestWatch Executive Director Brent Martin
- 4/30 Brasstown Wildflower: Brasstown District Leaders Howie Markel & Dennis Stancil
- 5/14 Southern Nanthahala Wilderness Extension. Brent Martin
- 5/28 Mulkey Gap to Skeena Gap: Jim Walker

For more detailed information please see our website at www.gafw.org and/or to reserve your hikes email info@gafw.org or call the GFW office at 706-635-8733 ◆

A message to GFW members from your Executive Director

The future strength of GFW, as an organization, will be as strong as its membership base. We must grow that base for stability and to achieve our goals of forest protection on the ground. You, fellow member, are key in achieving that growth! I am asking every GFW member to search, find, cajole and convince at least one person within your own circle of influence to join GFW. It's not difficult. Your personal circle most likely shares your values and interests. Just share with them why GFW is important to you, the work we do, the places you care about. When every present member successfully gains us at least one new one, will have doubled our membership and gained a more solid foundation for achieving our goal of greater protection of our beloved Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. Thanks for your efforts! ◆

Chattooga District Hike to Tray Mountain Wilderness

By District Leader Dudley Sisk

Photo By Jim Sullivan: Tray Mountain Trekkers

Fourteen folks turned out for a 'joint-hike" with Georgia ForestWatch and the Northeast Georgia Hiking Club. We met at the Courthouse in Clarkesville and drove north on Route 197, up the Soque River, through Batesville and up into the National Forest in the northern most portion of Habersham County. After a week or two of alternating weather patterns we had a beautiful day for this hike with clear skies for vistas and cool sunny weather for hiking. Everyone negotiated a variety of un-maintained trails (mostly abandoned logging roads) to hike deep into the Tray Mountain Wilderness and along the very headwaters of the Soque River, a tributary of the Chattahoochee River. We visited Wolfpen Branch and the North Fork of the Soque River. Our route took us just a few hundred yards from Chimney Mountain, the Appalachian Trail, and the 4430 foot high summit of Tray Mountain.

Lunch was enjoyed at a site with a southern view into the distant valley lying between Oakey Mountain and Mount Yonah. Besides a short discussion about public lands, national forests, "Wilderness" designation and the role Georgia ForestWatch plays in monitoring the management of our public lands… we celebrated hike member Delane's birthday with cake and song!

Departing the forest about half the group stopped off at Batesville Store for supper. It was a good day to be out and we are thankful to all who joined us. ◆

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(Continued On Page 16)

(Continued from Page 15)

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(Continued on Page 17)

(Continued from Page 16)

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(Continued on Page 19)

(Continued from Page 18)

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The Waterfall Foundation
Turner Foundation, Inc.
Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper

Businesses

Anderson Creek Retreat
Appalachian Associates, Ltd.
Grapes & Beans
Holly-Faith Apartments
& Duplex, Inc.
Lubo Fund, Inc.
Main Street Gallery - Clayton GA
Meadowbrook Farm
Medicine Bow Ltd.
Mountaineer Land Company
Patagonia
Reis Birdwhistell Photography
REM
Sam Williams Advertising
Scientific Games, Inc.
Splendor Mountain
The Printing Store
The Sentient Bean, LLC
Unique World Wines
Vibration Broadcast Promotions, Inc.

Thanks To All Our Forest Friends!

ForestWatch hires new Office Manager

Georgia ForestWatch would like to welcome James Leitess as our new Office Manager! We are pleased to have someone of James' talent, expertise and enthusiasm for the work with us and look forward to his assistance in more efficiently achieving our goals of forest protection. James's work on our membership database, website and bookkeeping have already eased the concerns of yours truly and allowed us to focus on other important tasks. That friendly voice you hear when you call the GFW office will most likely be his so introduce yourself and welcome him aboard.

Wayne Jenkins

Georgia ForestWatch Budget

Income		Expenses		Net Income	Total Assets
Earned Income	$6,003.00	**Program Expense**	$87,025.73	$(33,130.35)	$44,452.70
Membership Dues	$22,073.74	**Program Support**	$37,296.74		
Contributions	$20,615.38				
Grants	$42,500.00				
Total Income	$91,192.21	**Total Expenses**	$124,322.47		

706-635-8733
www.gafw.org

Georgia Forestwatch
15 Tower Rd.
Ellijay, GA 30540

Results of our Mixed Fall Appeal Program

Directors' phone appeal:	**$5,050**
Member's & Lapsed members appeal	**$8,788**
Subtotal:	**$13,838**
Anonynous friend of Georgia ForestWatch donation	**$10,000**
Total Income:	**$23,838**

Thanks Everyone!

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