FOREST NEWS

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter ····· Summer 2005

Who's watching your forest?

Tiger Mountain Fundraiser a success!

By Joe Gatins : Tallulah District Leader

ForestWatchers Taste Tiger Mountain Wine, Buy Native Plants

Mellow and family-friendly, the "2005 Georgia ForestWatch Wild and Woolly Wine Tasting and Native Plant Sale" brought hundreds of ForestWatch members and friends to Tiger, Georgia last month.

This second such "affordable fundraiser," organized with the kind help

Photos By James Sullivan

of the very nice people at Tiger Mountain Vineyards, was made even more interesting this year with replacement of the silent auction by a native plant sale.

Wayne and Lori Jenkins, Executive Director and Treasurer of Georgia ForestWatch, respectively, and owners of their own native plant nursery, and Helen Meadors, native plant person extraordinaire, made the sale a huge success. And Jack Johnston, a local naturalist from Rabun County, contributed a wide variety of rare native plants as well.

"It's really a good feeling to get the ForestWatch family together like this," said Wayne Jenkins, citing the contributions of the many volunteers and district leaders who pitched in to help, whether with the sale, crowd control, advertising or clean-up.

In something of a two-fer, the plant sale was located chock-a-block to the winery's tasting room, which many visitors found hard to resist, and the T-shirt, raffle and information desks, which also did a brisk business that Saturday. On the raffle table: A numbered print from local Rabun photographer Peter McIntosh, of the same Wildcat Mountain sunset that is in use on the ForestWatch thank you cards.

And the rains held off, too!

That made it easier for the Grass Roots Revue, an authentic,

(Continued On Page 4)

Tastin' the Wine and Cheese

In This Issue

From the Director..... 2

Get Out(side)!..... 3

TBS Honors ForestWatch Volunteer 4

ForestWatch Hiring 5

Talullah District Hike .. 6

Storms in the Cohuttas. 6

Historic Meeting - UGA..7

Government Contacts .. 7

ATV Update 8

Membership Form 8

Volunteers 10

GFW Negotiates Change to "early successional projects..... 11

Two Expeditions..... 12

Ramping up to Spring... 13

Board Trains with E.D. . 13

I-3 Update 14

Alphabet Soup 101 15

From The Director

Memorial Day 2005 found us, me and son Obie, immersed in a dark evergreen sea of hemlocks. We had taken this special day to be together and to explore the old growth forests along Conasauga creek, a north flowing tributary of the famous Jacks river of Cohutta Wilderness fame. A month earlier Judge Shep Howell had led Doug and Jess Riddle through the area and Jess' report just screamed to be followed up on. Never being able to spend enough time together, our modern curse, Obie and I seized the opportunity. We also wanted to be sure to see the big hemlocks before the woolly adelgid arrived to do its worst.

Parking at the gate on the old Forest Service road that runs up the west fork of the Jacks river, just past the dirt road to Jones Cemetery we walked the road for twenty minutes, talking philosophy and women, Alaska and futures. The moist, seventy degree air and clouds slow scudding from the northwest made the chance of rain impossible to predict. We might just get soaked. As we pass a large recovering clear-cut we take a few minutes to dive into the nearly impenetrable thicket of recovering forest to look at old stumps and try to determine what kind of forest was taken and what is coming back. It looks like it will be a long time before this forest ever returns to the mixed oak/poplar forest that was here. The poplars are back with a vengeance but the oaks will have to wait for who knows how long before getting back in beneath the poplars' dense cover

Obie Jenkins by an old Oak

Several years ago I had discovered a fine set of beaver dams and pond a short ways up this drainage, so we stopped to investigate, only to find them gone. No sign of the short stick dams or the backed-up pond remained. No beavers engineering the fine habitat only they can create - a shimmering opening in the midst of a green wood, standing dead snags and a fringe mix of dozens of wetland plants.

A mystery.

Had the series of torrential rains last September erased every trace of beaver ingenuity and labor? Had they been removed by the Forest Service, pesky beavers plugging culverts and flooding roads? Had they been killed out by coyotes or people? Washed downstream into the Jones Community or into the Wilderness itself? It was sad to find them gone but interesting to walk the pond bottom of cracked black sediment and see it rapidly converting to lush meadow. It occurs to me that perhaps an increase in beaver activity, even encouragement and re-introduction might go a long way toward creating the kind of early successional habitat that forest managers believe is in such short supply. Could this be the future of enlightened management for creating quality early successional habitat on proper sites in the Chattahoochee National Forest? Can we accept this keystone species as part of an integrated approach to early successional habitat creation on public lands? Can we let beavers do their thing on our public lands? If not here, where?

Wayne Jenkins

Getting a little turned around above the old pond site where several streams flow together, we stumble upon the clearly marked red blazes and chopped out eastern boundary of the Cohutta Wilderness. Consulting the quad-map we realize that by just following the boundary line north across a low gap would put us on the upper Conasauga Creek and hopefully in the big trees. So up the survey cut we go, past the garish red blazes and far too many little Wilderness signs nailed to the trees and through a nice second growth forest coming back strong.

Gaining the gap we plunge down the slope and in a short time see the green feathered crowns of what must be truly immense hemlocks penetrating the canopy of the surrounding forest and lining the creek. The straight, dark columns begin to stand out as we descend to the creek and we cannot help pushing our way through to the base of several large old giants to feel their presence and take their measure. We conclude this

(Continued On Page 5)

Get Out(side)!

By James Leitess : GFW Staff
Contact: info@gafw.org

Paddle, snorkel, hike, and camp with Georgia ForestWatchers

The summer 2005 outings and events schedule is full of opportunities to get outside, spend time with like-minded folks, and learn more about the rich ecology of our beautiful southern Appalachian region. Read on to get a glimpse of the many exciting snorkeling, canoeing, hiking and organization building events coming up.

To escape the heat consider joining us on the Conasauga river for snorkeling on Saturday July 9th with U.S. Forest Service Fisheries Biologist Jim Herrig. The area we'll be exploring has historically been considered a North Georgia jewel, known for the diversity of its fishes. Hurricane Ivan dumped a "microburst" of rain upon the upper watershed of the Cohutta mountains, so we're all curious to see how the wildlife and habitat fared. Wet suits, snorkels, masks and professional interpretation of the ecology provided.

On Saturday July 16 renowned north Georgia naturalist and educator Mark Warren will be leading a hike around the Amicalola river. He says "We'll talk about plants as plants, as food, as medicine, as craft material, wildlife, tracks, birds, trees, Cherokees, running water, history…" Sounds like a great time.

For those interested in seeing a true giant of the forest, join us on Saturday July 23rd when GFW member and volunteer Catherine Leitess will lead an easy/beginner hike to see the Gennett poplar. This is probably one of the shortest drives from Atlanta, and easiest hikes one can take to see a tree that is over ten stories tall, and requires three or four folks to encircle by linking hands. Great for kids!

On Saturday August 13th Mark Warren will be leading a canoe trip up Yahoola Creek; a rich and beautiful area made accessible by Dahlonega's recently created reservoir. Mark says "Dahlonega's new reservoir has opened up a wonderful inroad to wildlife viewing. By paddling up Yahoola Creek (virtually no current for quite a way) one has access to an unbelievable display of flora and fauna. A great plants class can be taught here, and we are almost sure to see beaver and otter and waterfowl." This is a "bring your own canoe" event, though if you don't own one, you can rent one from a local outfitter. Renters are responsible for contacting the office for info, and then for transporting their canoe to the reservoir.

Though not occurring during the summer, it's worth mentioning a special once-a-year event we have planned for

(Continued On Page 7)

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Gatins Work Honored

By Peg Griffith: GFW Board Member

The Turner Broadcasting System's WTBS station in Atlanta awarded GFW Board member and district leader Joe Gatins the Pathfinder Award for his service on behalf of the Georgia Environment. The award is accompanied by a $1000 gift to Georgia ForestWatch. The presentation ceremony at Fernbank Science center on June 7th included a video about Gatins' on-the-ground commitment to protecting the Chattahoochee and Oconee forests. Included in the video were interviews with GFW Executive Director Wayne Jenkins and fellow board member and District Leader James Sullivan. The video can be seen on the Turner Public Services channel on Saturday August 20th, at 8:00 p.m.

The Pathfinder awards honor twelve volunteers from organizations in the greater Atlanta community working in the areas of Education, Public Safety, Family and Children, the Environment, Health, and Poverty Issues.

Turner feted the honorees and their guests with great food, an open bar, and a jazz band before the ceremony which included twelve beautifully videotaped and produced vignettes of each volunteer and their work. In addition, each organization received an original painting created by 5th grade students working with Creating Pride, an Atlanta arts organization. Watch for the artwork on GAFW holiday cards this year.

Joe with student's painting

Please join us in congratulating Joe for his service to Forest Watch and the Georgia Environment.◆

Tiger Mountain Fundraiser a success!

(Continued From Page1)

mountain bluegrass band from the "bluegrass corridor" running through Rabun County from Macon County, N.C. to Oconee County, S.C., to hold forth for the crowd.

In something of a bonus, the gathering also was graced by the presence of the local naturalist whom many consider one of the prime movers in the forest conservation movement in these parts, Marie Mellinger.

She was recognized and honored by the crowd, led on by founding ForestWatch director James Sullivan: "What Marie has done for all of us is to introduce many people to our forest as a botanist and, in turn, brought a lot of people into the conservation community. And a lot of them have gone on to make important contributions, whether with Friends of the Mountains, or ForestWatch or the Georgia Botanical Society and other groups."

Also recognized that Saturday was the truly invaluable contribution of Tiger Mountain Vineyards, whose partners – Martha and John Ezzard and Leckie and Bill Stack – all pitched in to make the event enjoyable and successful. ◆

The Grass Roots Revue
Photo By James Sullivan

From the Director

(Continued from Page 2)

must be the origin of the term "tree hugger" and are proud to be so associated with these particular trees. "How long after the adelgid gets to the trees do they survive, Dad?" Obie asks. "About three to five years" is the sad reply, and I can tell he is stunned by the news. That something so grand and beautiful and alive could succumb so quickly is hard to imagine, or accept.

Shuffling further downstream, standing in the clear cold water, studded with numerous milky quartz rocks and small boulders stained a sickly iron orange which contrasts strangely with the encroaching lushness, we splash our faces and take stock of the surrounding forest. Hands on hips, looking up and around we see we have walked into another realm. The large vertical hemlock trunks anchor the clouded sky above and we are lost within the soft humming, gurgling, bird-song wild greenness of it all, drinking it in, together. We look at each other and say nothing. Problems and worries are momentarily released. Cares and concerns fall away and we are in it. Lost in place and time. Lost within beauty and natural function and flow and glad of it! Obie grins.

After a time, long enough to hold the memory of how the forest smells, sounds, looks, feels, we slowly begin to pick our way through rhododendron, up and out of the thickest growth along the creek-edge. Heading up, up, occasionally we break out into a partial opening with views down the cove and pick out more huge old hemlocks and an occasional large poplar or white pine. We will not visit each of them, it is time to head out, but it is grand that the sawyers bypassed this cove and let the forest continue to tell its centuries old tale. The going is rougher now, not really hiking but a kind of merging or slithering over, under and around the dense growth, looking for small openings that make twenty feet of progress easier. Suddenly we reach an old, totally overgrown road benched across the side-slope running parallel with and above the stream. A damn road! Its very presence takes an edge off the day and makes me mad. The forest above the road was harvested eighty years or so ago but at least the lower cove was spared. Why? Hemlocks were harvested back then for the tannin in their bark used for tanning leather, a large and important industry at that time. Oh well, let it go and retrieve what's left of the day.

We hike/clamber through the arm-thick rhododendron that took root years ago on top of the roads' upper cut-bank which have since fallen over, growing cross-wise to the road and making progress tedious. Despite the difficulty it is wonderful to be out with Obie, sharing this place. Along the roadway we can look out above the cove and see a giant here, then another there. It occurs to me what a great hiking trail this road would make if it could be brushed out and then I remember. All these old hemlocks, veterans of a thousand storms, survivors of a young Nation's voracious needs will most likely be dead within ten years. How about a memorial trail? A memorial to old growth and hemlocks! A hike through the drama of forest health and death. A chance to witness close up a kind of war only we can create when we introduce exotic species. ◆

GFW Hiring Scientist/Forester

Lyndhurst Grant Expedites Hiring of Scientist

By: Wayne Jenkins : Executive Director

We are thrilled to announce we are seeking to hire a professional forester. A recent grant award from the Lyndhurst Foundation of Chattanooga, Tennessee, enables us to fund this position for two years. The position will strengthen our monitoring of Forest Service projects, guide us in working with the Forest Service in defining appropriate "restoration" of forest stands, work to assist the agency in implementing proper monitoring of experimental projects, define and adjust the use of prescribed fire in the national forest.

The position offers an opportunity to engage, advocate, define and educate as we work to have Forest Service projects meet the needs of the environment and the people. This is challenging and stimulating work and the right candidate will need a Forestry degree, excellent communication skills, desire to work collaboratively and on multiple projects, attention to detail and a passion for forest ecology.

Interested parties are invited to summit resumes and/or call the office for more information.

A huge THANK YOU goes to the Lyndhurst Foundation for their support! ◆

Tallulah District Hikes

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

Pre-Hike Planning
Photo By David Aguar

Who would have thunk it – snow in Spring!

That, and a 34º temperature reading, is what greeted the small, brave band of ForestWatch hikers who trekked to the top of Rabun Bald on April 2nd.

The day started propitiously enough, with intermittent sunlight and a sweet rainbow framing the fabled mountaintop, the second highest peak in Georgia, at 4,696 feet of elevation.

But by midday, a blustery wind from the west was laying down a dusting of snow on the backside of the trees and it had turned downright dank and cold on the Bartram Trail, which this group took to the summit.

Perhaps because of this unseasonable snow, the only wildflowers in bloom turned out to be several clumps of Epigaea repens (1) *Lindera benzoin*, (2) and several *Triollium cuneatum* (3,) the latter barely beginning to emerge. Most of the other shrubs, trees and plants seen that day were either still green or just beginning to bud, including, *Fragaria virginiana*, (4) *Leucothoe fontanesiana*, (5) *Saxifraga michauxii*, (6) *Rhododendron catawbiense*, (7) *Rhododendron maximum*, (8) *Kalmia latifolia*, (9) *Chimaphila maculata*, (10) *Acer rubrum*, (11) *Quercus coccinea*, (12) *Pyrullia pubera*, (13) *Robinia hispida* (14) *Oxydendrum arboreum* (15) and *Tsuga canadensis*. (16.) (Many thanks to plant expert Ben Cash for species names. See below for common names.)

Of course, given the rapid spread of the infestation in these parts, the hemlocks were heavily infested by Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.

But there was a bonus at the summit, where the ForestWatchers from Georgia met a ForestWatcher from South Carolina, Richard McAdams, and his two dogs. That made for a nice harmonic convergence.

The hikers, all six of them, then quickly got off the mountain and repaired to a local eatery in Clayton, where they found warm soup, hot coffee, tea and good conversation, much of it turning on plans for the Georgia ForestWatch native plant sale and wine tasting planned for May 21. Everyone was thinking it would have warmed up by then.

Common plant names: (1) Trailing arbutus, (2) spicebush, (3) trillium, (4) wild strawberry (5) doghobble, (6) Michaux saxifrage, (7) Catawba rhododendron, (8) rosebay rhododendron, (9) mountain laurel, (10) pippsissewa, (11) red maple, (12) scarlet oak, (13) buffalo nut, (14) bristly locust, (15) sourwood, and (16) Eastern Hemlock. ◆

Storms and Forest Change in the Cohuttas

By Jess Riddle: Volunteer and Ecologist

A recent hike along East Cowpens Trail and adjacent coves in the Chattahoochee National Forest's Cohutta Wilderness highlighted some of the natural processes changing the area. This article focuses on hurricanes and unseasonal cold snaps, two forces whose impacts are writ large on the landscape.

The East Cowpens Trail passes near the top of Cowpen Mountain (elevation 4,151') before following the crest of a large, surprisingly level ridge for close to four miles. A series of sheltered, northeast facing coves border the latter section of trail. Those coves bear evidence of the strong storms that passed through the region in the past year. Hurricane Frances turned the small streams that form in and usually gently drain the coves into substantial torrents. Typically narrow enough to easily step across, the streams now flow through rocky jumbles over 10' across. At other points along the streams, they eroded away adjacent slopes, undercutting trees and exposing roots as much as five feet above the level of the stream. Clear evidence also remains that theses features are the work of recent storms and not existing features. At least one landslide, clearly exposed and not covered with new growth, lies at the top of a cove's rocky channel. Uprooted trees with undecayed bark lie on the rocks and parallel to the small branch draining another cove.

A less violent, but probably equally unusual storm struck the area on April 24th. Had the storm occurred in the winter, the weather would have produced no remarkable lingering effects. However, in late April the tender new leaves of many species were susceptible to damage by the snow and ice associated with the storm. Around 3,000' elevation, where more precipitation fell and leaves were less well developed, many herbaceous plants were killed back and the tuliptrees lost a large proportion of their leaves. Since tuliptrees form much of the canopy in the coves along the East Cowpens Trail, even in June the sparser foliage made the forests feel more open and afforded exceptional visibility for the season. The higher

(Continued On Page 11)

Outings and Events

Continued from Page 3

early fall 2005 … Georgia ForestWatch's annual weekend-long retreat at Camp Wahsega . In prior years this retreat was very popular, and provided a unique opportunity for members, District Leaders, volunteers, staff and friends of the organization to get together, hike, listen to the voices of contemporary leaders in the conservation movement, and share time together in the woods we all care about. The planned date for this event is Friday evening September 30th through Sunday October 2nd, and includes meals from Saturday breakfast through Sunday breakfast.

Camp Wahsega is a short drive north of Dahlonega, providing a fairly central gathering place for all Georgia ForestWatchers. More details will be forthcoming on our website and in periodic emails as event details are firmed up. This retreat has had over 50 folks in prior years, making for a great gathering. Hope to see you there this year!

All outings are limited to 12 participants except the Bear Creek hike. Please contact the office to assure your spot in the outing. Contact info for the GFW office: 706 635 8733 –or- info@gafw.org

Detailed information for all GFW events can be found at www.gafw.org ◆

Historic Meeting - UGA

By Wayne Jenkins: GFW Executive Director

After two months of calling, planning, emailing and finger crossing Georgia ForestWatch staff and Wayne Berisford, University of Georgia (UGA) entomologist, were able to pull together 22 of the most informed and involved individuals in the challenge of controlling the threat of Hemlock Woolly Adelgid in Georgia. Gathered together in the beautiful conference room at historic Conner Hall on the UGA campus were representatives of the US Forest Service, USDA Extension, Georgia Forestry Commission, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, UGA, Young Harris College, Clemson University, Georgia Wildlife Federation, Georgia ForestWatch, private forestry and staff representing Senators Saxby Chambliss and Johnny Isakson.

We heartily thank all those attending for helping move this important issue forward!

The adelgid is poised to decimate our native Hemlock trees within the decade and we have few options or tools

(Continued on Page 10)

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ATV Update

By David Govus: Cohutta and Toccoa District Leader

Once again Georgia ForestWatch, with the help of many others, has waged a successful campaign to block pro-ATV legislation put forward in the recently ended session of the Georgia General Assembly. This year's bad ATV bill was House Bill 518, which set out to legalize the operation of ATVs on public roads in state and federal parklands. To accomplish this HB 518 would have had the state of Georgia ignore Federal safety and emission requirements that all motor vehicles must meet to be registered (tagged) and operated legally on public roads. The Federal government appropriately determines what type of motor vehicles are 'street legal' as once a motor vehicle displays a state issued license plate it may travel unimpeded across the country.

The casual observer might find it odd that several Georgia legislators would promote a bill that would put Georgia out of compliance with federal law. In fact HB 518 represents the sixth year in a row that an attempt was made to put ATVs on some or all of Georgia's public roads. HB 1222 in 2000 and 1613 in 2002 would have allowed ATVs on all gravel roads in the state of Georgia. HB 260 in 2003 was a duplicate of HB 518 and would have legalized ATV use on public roads in "state and federal parkland". The promoters of HB 518 and 260 intended to create license plates to allow ATVs on the 1,200 miles of Forest Service roads in north Georgia on the Chattahoochee National Forest but apparently didn't know or care about the distinction between National Parks and National Forests.

A sponsor of HB 260, then Rep. Jack White of Gilmer County, was quoted in the Ellijay Times Courier in February of 2003 concerning HB 260

"Currently, citizens from other states, who have tags on their ATVs may drive on Georgia's public, unpaved roads, while Georgia citizens may not...

"This bill is about treating our own citizens with equality by allowing them equal access to roads that out-of-state residents can already use."

White, who was also a member of the House Motor Vehicles Committee said, "By allowing these vehicles to be tagged, the state will bring in needed new revenue to help balance a tight budget."

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

Georgia ForestWatch Membership Form

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ATV Update

He also emphasized that ATVs are legal and safe for use on public, unpaved roadways.

Attorney General Thurbert Baker has issued a letter declaring that "the operation of ATVs on public roads does not violate Georgia law."

His letter mentions that the Off-Road Vehicle Act of 1975, established specific operating restrictions for ATVs, ensuring their safety on public roads.

White and Forster were joined by Ralph Twiggs (D-Hiawassee), and Craig Brock (R-Chatsworth) in a bipartisan effort to allow ATVs on public, unpaved roads.

They added that H.B. 260 would help reduce incidents of trespassing and fraud, while granting equal access to forests for the disabled who cannot get access by walking."

Many of the above assertions have proven false.

The idea that a disabled person would be better able to operate an ATV than a handicapped equipped 'street legal' vehicle on a public road is absurd. White and his fellow sponsor Rep. Ron Forster paraded a Tennessee license tag around the state capitol claiming that it was an ATV tag. Georgia ForestWatch ran the tag number and it was determined that the tag was issued to a street legal motorcycle. The revelation of the true nature of the "Tennessee tag" did not prevent the supporters of HB518 from unveiling the very same tag in 2005.

HB 1294 introduced in 2004 was the most outrageous of all the ATV bills . As originally drafted HB 1294 would have allowed ATVs on every road in Georgia paved or unpaved with the exception of Interstate Highways. This bill would have also legalized ATV use on road right-of-ways and medians. Imagine ATVs barreling down West Paces Ferry road in front of the Governor's Mansion, or in the grassy medians of divided highways. Unbelievably, this bill was offered despite a string of tragic car/ATV collisions in Georgia that killed dozens and culminated in the death of 5 children riding on one ATV in Coffee County in September of 2003. These children died while riding on a public road in a collision with a car. Apparently the authors of 1294 believed that by legalizing ATVs on public roads and requiring helmets these accidents would stop. Those readers not familiar with the workings of the Georgia General Assembly might find this surreal but it is all too true. Georgia ForestWatch immediately organized a massive protest to this bill and the sponsors quickly backed down. Joey Ledford the 'Lane Ranger' wrote in the Atlanta Journal at the time about HB 1294

It was a tragedy that devastated a South Georgia community last fall -- five kids killed and a sixth seriously injured when a car collided with an all-terrain vehicle on a country road.

Bad judgment abounded. The driver of the car, who faces vehicular homicide charges, allegedly had been drinking. The ATV should not have been on or near a public road, especially at night. It should not have had a 14-year-old driver, and it definitely should not have been carrying passengers.

Now there's a bill in the Georgia Legislature intended to bring some order to the chaos that is ATV use in Georgia.

"Understand that I'm in the funeral business and this is not the first ATV fatality I've had to witness," said its sponsor, Rep. Chuck Sims (D-Douglas). "I've had several."

Sims' initial attempt to regulate ATV use was greeted with howls of protest from environmentalists and property owners because it granted users legal access to public roads. But Sims said a new version that faces a Friday deadline for clearing a key House committee is gaining support.

"We don't want anybody [on an ATV] on the public roads at all," he said.

The origins of this struggle over ATVs on public roads in Georgia dates back to the mid 80s when ATVs first appeared. Forest Service officials, alarmed at the spread of illegal user-created ATV trails , their ability to travel cross country and the resource damage they cause, created a series of designated trails for ATV users . At the same time, to promote safety and prevent ATV access to non-designated parts of the forest, the Forest Service restricted use of the 1,200 miles of Forest Service roads in the Chattahoochee National Forest to licensed motor vehicles only. ATV enthusiasts soon found a way to thwart this policy as many of the counties in North Georgia began illegally selling license plates to ATV owners. Forest Service Law Enforcement officers complained of this illegal activity and pointed out that if ATVs had license plates why were they not driven on I-75. In the spring of 2000 several Georgia ForestWatch members with the assistance of Mary Maclean Asbill, then of the Southern Environmental Law Center, initiated a campaign to force the Revenue Department of the state of Georgia to order their tag agents, the counties, to halt the illegal practice of selling tags to ATVs . Milt Dufford, then head of the Motor vehicle Division of the Revenue department acknowledged that the practice of selling tags to ATVs was illegal, but balked at halting the practice because it

ATV Update

would cause a 'firestorm'. He eventually was forced to halt the practice. Several Forest Service officials instead of congratulating Georgia ForestWatch complained that this action would result in bad legislation though it is hard to imagine how the situation concerning ATVs on the Chattahoochee National Forest could have gotten much worse. ATVs were openly riding on Forest Service roads, had carved over 1,000 miles of illegal trails (by the Forest Service's own estimates), created enormous resource damage, and had already been involved in numerous fatal collisions with automobiles in prior years.

Since 2000 Georgia ForestWatch with the invaluable aide of lobbyist Neill Herring and many other conservationists have built a coalition of landowners and environmentalists to block attempts to allow ATVs to roam freely over the public roads of Georgia. In South Georgia, with little public land available, ATV trespass and resource damage nearly always occurs on private land and access to public roads enables this trespass. Many South Georgia legislators are landowners or farmers and they understand this issue.

ATV sales number over 750,000 per year and some figures indicate they are increasing at a rate of 15% per annum, so there is little reason to think that there will not be continuing attempts to place ATVs on public roads in Georgia. Despite the fact that the manufacturer's of ATVs do not certify ATVs to the federal Department of Transportation as being street legal (because they are not) and that owners are cautioned to 'never ride on a public road' the state of West Virginia recently authorized ATV use on all roads in the state paved or unpaved without a painted centerline (nearly all rural roads). The bill that authorized this was championed by a coalition of ATV dealers determined to increase 'riding opportunities'. The manufacturers of these machines, aware of the legal liability of such a proposal actively opposed the legislation, but to no avail. ◆

Historic Meeting - UGA

(Continued from Page 7)

at our disposal for combating this voracious exotic insect. Chemical control (imidacloprid) is effective for the short term but expensive and potentially harmful to nearby aquatic habitats. It is crucial that the long term strategy for adelgid control, the use of specific predatory beetles to suppress adelgid populations to levels that allow hemlocks to grow and reproduce, be implemented as soon as possible.

The UGA meeting, held May 26, was convened to ascertain the possibility of establishing the third regional laboratory for rearing the needed predatory beetles. At this writing the University has identified a facility best suited for beetle production and is analyzing renovation expenses, operating costs and funding.

We are encouraged by the deliberation and attention to detail the university has exhibited since the meeting and look forward to supporting their efforts when a final decision is made. The secret to success in dealing with challenges of this magnitude is the passion and spirit of collaboration each participant brings to the effort.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

– Margaret Mead

Our Strength is Volunteers!

By James Leitess: GFW Staff

The work of Georgia ForestWatch rests on the shoulders of our many dedicated and knowledgeable volunteers. This season we have a new face on the Board of Directors and a returning "Volunteer of the Year" in the Ellijay office joining our family of grassroots supporters.

New to Georgia ForestWatch's board this year is Peg Griffith, a long-time Sierra Club National Service Committee member, avid hiker and birder, and resident of Ellijay, Georgia for the past two years. Peg has already shown leadership and detail-oriented project management skills within the first couple of months of her tenure. A principal of Griffiti.com, a media and design firm, Peg brings knowledge of marketing, messaging, process and communication to ForestWatch.

Peg Griffith, New GFW Board Member

Returning to the office is Carole Ligi, Volunteer of the Year for 2003. Carole is one

(Continued on Page 15)

Storms and Forest Change in the Cohuttas

(Continued from Page 6)

light levels also benefit the forest floor plants that survived the ice and the less-affected tree species. The oaks and hickories gained that advantage by leafing out later, and since yellow buckeye allows leafs out first, the species already had adaptations to deal with the situation. The ice also damaged leaves of White ash and other species, but their far lower population densities make the effect on the tuliptree more pronounced.

This difficult year for the tuliptrees may foreshadow a gradual diminishing of their importance in the Cohuttas. Intense railroad logging of the mountain range in the 1910's through 1930's produced disturbance and high light levels that allow young tuliptree forests to thrive. However, even with the huge seed source of the present canopy, many of the coves north of Cowpen Mountain are devoid of tuliptree seedlings and saplings. The tuliptrees' own canopy inhibits their seedlings, and the well-developed understory of sugar maples causes even greater problems. Sugar maples produce unusually dense shade for a broadleaf tree, and are well adapted to surviving underneath a closed canopy. Consequently, as the tuliptrees currently in the canopy die off over the next few hundred years, the sugar maples will ascend to dominate the forest canopy. However, storms with stronger winds than those described above could easily alter this process. Ironically, Sugar Cove, a mile to the east and known for its mature sugar maples, provides the best local examples of that process. Storms of the past decade in the cove have removed clusters of trees leaving trunks piled across the trail and creating opportunities for the next generation of tuliptrees. Hence Sugar Cove may eventually become known for its abundance of tuliptrees in an area with sugar maple-dominated coves.

These processes are fascinating to observe and ponder, and key to understanding how our mountain forests adapt to manmade and natural disturbance. ◆

GFW Negotiates Change to "early successional" projects

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

Georgia ForestWatch successfully resolved its appeal of three "early successional habitat" timber sale projects in the Tallulah Ranger District early this month.

It was a matter of giving a little to get a little more.

As resolved by the Southern Environmental Law Center on ForestWatch's behalf, the USDA Forest Service is now free to cut the timber that it has been proposing to cut under these projects for almost the past three years – all told, a total cut of about 90 acres scattered across three sites in the Tallulah Ranger District: Along Flat Branch, above Hellhole Branch and along the Billingsley Creek Road "extension."

ForestWatch, in turn, secured assurances that the Forest Service will adhere to the best management practice that require a 25-foot no-cut zone adjacent to most of the Flat Branch brook trout stream in the project area. Inexplicably, the Forest Service had originally decided this 25-foot buffer should be breached!

In addition to the above assurances, the Forest Service agreed to:

- Take appropriate steps to guard against illegal ATV traffic along Flat Branch and Billingsley Creek roads.
- Ensure adequate monitoring of the work along Flat Branch and Hellhole Branch, before, during and after the timber harvests.
- Work with ForestWatch during the "layout" of these timber sales.

Previous comment from ForestWatch and other partner conservation organizations had convinced the Forest Service to abandon plans for a larger cut above Billingsley Creek Road – which would, in the words of the government, have reduced "big old trees in an area that has some old growth character."

ForestWatchers far and wide should be on the lookout for similar projects in their own districts as the new land and resource management plan for the Chattahoochee National Forest calls for creation of varying degrees of "early successional habitat" in almost all areas of the forest.

The plan defines this type of management as "a vegetative condition typically characterized by low density to no tree canopy cover and an abundance of herbaceous and/or woody ground cover. This condition may include early successional forest (described elsewhere in the plan as a tree stand of 0 to 10 years old), maintained openings, pastures, balds and open woodlands."

The Forest Service generally views this as a reason to cut timber.. ◆

A Tale of Two Expeditions

By Jim Walker: Toccoa District Leader

7 Days on the Benton MacKaye and 1 in Washington, D.C.

Washington DC, May 20, 2005. I am walking from the metro stop to the Russell Senate Office Building in the rain. The wind is driving the rain at such an angle that I have to hold my umbrella in front of me instead of over my head, which makes it hard to see where I am going. Occasional gusts from a different direction turn the umbrella inside out, just like you see on the weather channel. I am thinking about the last time I was walking in the rain. That was three weeks ago, in the middle of a seven-day hike from Springer Mountain to the Ocoee River on the Benton MacKaye Trail.

In some ways, I was more uncomfortable then. My pack was a burden, especially since I had just picked up new food supplies from a cache I had left near the trail a couple of days before I started the hike. I was more worried about a bear getting into it than a human, and sure enough, the pile of heavy rocks I had placed on top of the cache was scattered about. The metal canister had lots of deep scratches and even a half-inch hole punctured in it, but apparently the bear lost interest. Fortunately, I had been careful to leave only well-packaged food with no smell inside. Loss of the food cache would have been a major setback for the expedition, but in Washington all I am carrying is a clipboard with information about the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.

During the hike, the weather, if no more unpleasant than now, was certainly more prolonged. The first day, April 23, was cold and windy; the second was much colder and absurdly windier. It snowed for about an hour that morning, and by mid-afternoon what little accumulation there was had not melted. I hid behind a rock to eat my lunch, but the incessant wind easily found me. It was the only time I thought, "Maybe I don't really have to do this."

Day three brought some respite. The sun finally came out, and it got warm enough to lie on the ground briefly for lunch until the clouds returned and a cool breeze hurried me on my way. The next day, crossing Rocky Mountain, the dense, soupy cloud might have given me a peaceful, separate-reality kind of feeling, but the awful wind was back, trying to drive me crazy. When I came down the mountain far enough to get some shelter from the wind, the rain started and continued the rest of the day. I was fairly well prepared with rain gear for the weather then: rain pants, rain jacket and pack cover; now this small, flimsy umbrella is all I have to keep me presentable for a meeting with members of the Senator's staff. By the time I get inside the door of the office building, I am only wet from mid-thigh down, which doesn't seem too bad.

I felt much more comfortable in the woods than here in the capital of the United States of America. At least on the hike I had a clear goal and the skill and experience to reach it. My goal here in Washington is to persuade Georgia's Senators and Representatives to appropriate more money for a beetle-rearing lab in Georgia to help save our hemlocks from Hemlock Woolly Adelgids, which does not seem very likely, given all the other issues they have to worry about. One of the folks I met in Washington said, "If it doesn't shoot, we can't get any money for it."

Out in the woods, I was alone, on my own. Thankfully, here in Washington I have the support of Georgia ForestWatch and all of you readers and others who responded to the GFW alert requesting that you let our Senators and Representatives know how important it is to you to try to save our hemlocks. They must have received quite a few messages, judging from my meetings with congressional aides. Of course, I am confident that even if I were here as an individual I would be treated politely and respectfully. But with the support of GFW and all of you who wrote or called your Senators and Representatives I feel sure that I am meeting people with a higher level of influence, who are paying attention and really seem to share our concern for hemlocks.

As expected, the immediate results of my visit are nothing more concrete than, "Fiscal Year 2006 is already set; we'll see what we can do in FY 07." Nevertheless, I am encouraged. At best, saving the hemlocks will be a long, hard process, and so will the struggle for adequate federal funding. The effect of public opinion and the shared concern of our congressional delegation for doing whatever is possible to prevent this catastrophe are evidenced by the fact that the recent summit meeting at the University of Georgia on Hemlock Woolly Adelgid biocontrol (see UGA article on page 7) was attended by representatives of Senator Chambliss, Senator Isakson.

Our hemlocks are just too beautiful and ecologically important to let them go without doing everything we can to save them. On my 90-mile hike, I seldom went very far without seeing hemlocks, and some of the most beautiful and popular areas I passed through are dominated by them, such as Three Forks on Noontootla Creek, the banks of the Toccoa River at the swinging bridge, along the South Fork of Jack's River, Bear Creek in the Cohutta Wilderness and the lower

A Tale of Two Expeditions

north slopes of Big Frog Mountain in Tennessee.

It continued to rain, at least lightly, for the last three days of my hike. Only on the last afternoon did it ever get warm enough to put on shorts. With the sun finally out and knowing that the last 10 miles would be all downhill and with the exception of a few minor bumps, I was feeling good about my week in the woods and, at the same time, looking forward to getting home. So, my frame of mind was quite positive when I had the most impressive wildlife close encounter of the trip.

On the steep upper slope of Big Frog, a mama bear and her three cubs passed within 30 feet and never even saw me. They had their heads down grazing in the tender young forbs for several minutes as I watched silently. When they got a little farther away, I spoke to the mother bear, "Bear, why don't you see me?" She turned around, sat up like a dog and looked at me for a moment before the four of them bounded off across the slope. A few miles farther down, I saw another mama and one cub, so in seven days I saw more bears than people on the trail.

The Chattahoochee National Forest is big. Parts of it have been pretty badly messed up by clear cuts, but much of it is healthy mature forest. In spite of increasing recreation pressure, it is not crowded yet, at least during a recent cold, rainy week in April, even along a major trail, much less in the many thousands of acres away from roads and trails. This is God's land and your land, and I recommend getting out to see it, particularly the cool places in the dense shade of old-growth hemlocks, before, God forbid, all we have are dead trees, a reminder of what once was. ◆

Ramping up to Spring

By Peg Griffith: GFW Board Member

Devils Den Cove Hike Log

Frost and even a little late snow did not stop GAFW Executive Director Wayne Jenkins from leading 5 hikers on a brisk trek into Devils Den Cove on April 24th to view wildflowers and sample a few ramps. Ramps are delicious but pungent members of the garlic family found in rich coves of southern appalachian forests. Chopped ramps eaten raw, pickeled or added to scrambled eggs, are a seasonal delight that locals have known about for years. Now the chefs of finer restaurants in New York and Los Angeles use them in souffle', soups, and with lamb.

Ellijay resident Michael Griffith, an excellent chef and Sierra Club outings cook, enjoyed sampling ramps with Jenkins in Devils Den, only to later discover them on the menu at a four star restaurant in Manhattan. "They're kind of oniony-garlicy tasting", said Griffith. "You want to use them sparingly. And it's best if everyone in your group eats them – if you know what I mean."

The group also visited a huge, steep field of moss-covered boulders, and viewed the remnants of an old log cabin of chestnut logs mouldering back into the earth. ◆

Board Trains with E.D.

By James Leitess: GFW Staff

On April 14th through 17th three Georgia ForestWatch board members and Executive Director Wayne Jenkins participated in a four day workshop at the Center for New Beginings in Dahlonega, Georgia. The workshop was led by the Institute for Conservation Leadership (ICL), an organization dedicated to helping environmental organizations like ForestWatch increase their capacity and effectiveness. Funding for the workshop was provided by a grant received in 2004 from the Greater Atlanta Community Foundation to increase ForestWatch's organizational strength.

Board members and staff from many southeastern conservation organizations attended, creating a focused and inspirational environment. Georgia ForestWatch board member and Treasurer Lori Jenkins said, "It was energizing to be in a group of dedicated folks who share similar values and are working for similar goals."

Also attending was ForestWatch board Secretary Joe Gatins, and new board member Peg Griffith. According to Lori, the "board learned how to better work with Wayne, GFW staff and other volunteers via clarification of roles and with communication techniques and planning models. We strategized new fundraising directions and planned how to achieve them. "

Georgia ForestWatch is a member of ICL and recommends their workshops for other conservation organizations. According to the ICL website (www.icl.org), "Building connections between groups with similar goals, and supporting groups progress with fundraising, board development, and other activities" is part of their mission. ◆

I-3 Update

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

The political juggernaut behind the push for that new interstate highway, I-3, has picked up steam since our last edition. For those first hearing about this topic here, I-3 would ram through north Georgia and Southern Appalachia on its way from Savannah to Knoxville.

Both houses of Congress have approved a highway construction bill that would require the federal government to study the feasibility of this interstate and report back to Congress by the end of the year on possible routes and preliminary costs. At this writing, the legislation was in conference, but expected to be signed by President Bush once a compromise bill was hashed out.

Some have asked how this affects Georgia ForestWatch.

A quick look at a map shows that the preferred route put forward by U.S. Rep. Charlie Norwood, R-9th district, would run from Savannah to Augusta to Toccoa and from there straight up the heart of the mountains via the Clarkesville, Sautee, Helen and Hiawassee areas, and from there through the Nantahala National Forest, (apparently skirting the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Joyce Kilmer Forest) to Maryville and Knoxville, Tennessee.

Norwood¹s proposal would aim to bypass towns, but try to use existing highways and highway corridors whenever possible.

The general routing will no doubt affect national forestland one way or the other and that¹s why ForestWatch is involved. It should also be remembered that the rules change when it comes to using the national forest for utility easements and powerlines and federally financed highways making it somewhat easier to run a road on federal, rather than private, land.

Increasingly involved are a host of other conservation and watchdog groups as well as a smattering of community coalitions and alliances that are springing up all over north Georgia western North Caroloina to deal with the situation.

So stay tuned and get ready for a long haul on this road. Websites to check for updates include ours, www.gafw.org, and that of some coalitions just in their birthing stage, such as www.stopi-3.org.◆

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Alphabet Soup 101

By James Leitess: GFW Staff

NEPA, NFMA, and SOPA etc...

In the fourth paragraph of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), signed into law by President Richard M. Nixon on January 1, 1970, our government resolves to "fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations."

Towards this goal of shared responsibility, over one dozen ForestWatch members and interested citizens attended a workshop at ForestWatch's office in Ellijay to learn how to participate effectively in the management of our National Forests within the system of laws and regulations that have evolved from this and other landmark federal policies.

Starting at 9a.m. on Saturday May 14th, attorney Sarah Francisco presented a day-long "Effective Participation in National Forest Projects" Workshop. Sarah works for Southern Environmental Law Center, a long-standing Georgia ForestWatch ally that helps protect the 4.6 million acres of national forest land in our southern Appalchian region. Attendees for the event included GFW members, District Leaders, volunteers, Board members, and one person who was so impressed with the presentation and participants that he joined GFW on the spot. All told, a full house of concerned citizens eager to learn how to participate in the complex process that is the management of our National Forests.

Sarah Francisco

Southern Environmental Law Center

Sarah's presentation materials can be found on www.gafw.org by going to the events page and clicking on the "5/14/05 NEPA" link. Materials include an in-depth MSPowerpoint presentation plus several MSWord sample letters and Adobe Acrobat versions of the governing documents such as the Forest Plan (itself a compilation of 6 documents). This information is posted for those interested in seeing if they want to take their involvement to the next level, as there is never a shortage of projects or need for greater citizen involvement.

The main thrust of Sarah's presentation was supposed to be at a general layperson's level, but most workshop attendees have worked with the U.S. Forest Service for so long that discussions frequently took place at a level or two deeper than this beginner could follow. What I was able to understand from this technical workshop was Sarah's description of forest management as a triangle that starts with (1) the Forest Plan, which then proceeds to (2) analysis and decision making, and finally (3) monitoring and feedback. The feedback stage brings us back to (1) the Forest Plan making a closed circuit.

What's missing from the paragraph above is the alphabet soup of NFMA, NEPA, EA, CE's, FEIS, SOPA, etc… Whoaaa! All of these acronyms are significant though only time and exposure can help one come to grips with what has evolved into a complex web of regulations, legislation, decision making processes, mandatory comment periods, conflict resolution structures, and timelines. Even though the material and processes appeared incredibly complex, and there seemed to be about five different ways for activists to approach most challenges, I was encouraged that at least we have some kind of regulatory system for managing our common resources; the alternative being an unmanaged commons.

Again, if you're interested in finding out more, check out www.gafw.org. Sarah's materials and some Googling on the Internet will go a long way towards making you a more effective citizen participant in managing our National Forests. ◆

Our Strength is Volunteers!

(Continued From Page 10)

of the voices you're likely to hear welcoming callers and helps with correspondence and other necessary office duties. Carole has been taking a crash course in modern office technology, becoming savvy with email and "Googling" just about anything.

Thanks for your efforts Peg and Carole! ◆

Calendar of Events

▶7/2 Hike - Brasstown - Jess Riddle leader

▶7/9 Snorkeling - Conasauga - Fisheries Biologist Jim Herrig leader

▶7/16 Hike - Amicalola - Naturalist and educator - Mark Warren leader

▶7/23 Hike - Bear Creek - Easy hike to giant Gennet Poplar - Catherine Leitess leader

▶8/13 Canoe - Dahlonega Reservoir/Yahoola Creek - Mark Warren Leader

▶9/30-10/2 Fall Retreat at Camp Wahsega

For greater detail check out the outings and events article on page 3, or visit us at www.gafw.org. ◆

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