Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Fall 2006

Georgia ForestWatch Turns 20

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From The Director

Twenty years of struggle

Wayne Jenkins
Executive Director

Before my initial exposure to ForestWatch, before becoming the Cohutta district leader, post Shep Howell and joining the board of directors and well before stepping into the position of executive director there was a wave of road building and clear cutting that swept across the beautiful green landscape of the Chattahoochee National Forest. Concerned Georgians were perplexed as to how to deal with it. Anger, loss, and feelings of powerlessness have historically been great motivators in our democracy and those earliest ForestWatchers, out on the ground, seeing the wholesale destruction of their public forests, clear-cut by clear-cut, got to work to first understand how a federal agency could do such a thing and what they could do to stop it. That concern and passion by a relatively few Georgians did eventually stop what the agency itself admits in hindsight was bad policy and bad management. Amazing when you consider these folks where mostly untrained, working full-time jobs and volunteering countless hours for taking on a Federal agency. Where does that kind of moxie and faith in the notions that things can change and we can be part of that change, come from?

I've often wondered about our motivations for protecting the important things in our lives, our families, homes, places of worship and other places that are special to us. Those special places we have a relationship with. I recall such special places my wife and I frequented early in our friendship. Much of that time together took place in lush forested mountains and we had our favorite spots for fishing and hiking, camping and picnicking; secret emerald coves and high wooded ridges where we never saw a soul, shimmering little highland streams echoing with bird song as they made their descent to valleys below. Some how we came to feel these beautiful places belonged to us, as indeed they do.

I now believe that this lies at the heart of what moves us into greater concern for protecting and advocating for conservation. Somehow we have inculcated our special places into ourselves, made them our own and in a certain sense become that place. These experiences and places shape us, becoming part of who we are. And we cannot forget them.

And, inevitably, something happens, as it did in our special grove; a mud bleeding road is built, the giant white pines are cut, the clear stream is violated with silt. A special place that had become personally hallowed ground becomes just another clear-cut, defiled, unrecognizable. And we are left with loss, sadness and anger. This process or some similar experience underlies the attitude and empowers the energy behind almost every conservationist I have met and impels them to act.

The idea of taking action is we want to celebrate now, at our upcoming retreat and throughout the coming 20th year of our work together. We wish to honor acts of refusal to stand by and let a wrongs go unaddressed and unchallenged. And it is those people, those champions of action based on sensitivity and concern for the land, which cannot advocate for itself, that we want to honor. For it is only people, usually working together, that can make democracy work and protect the public legacy.

So, here's to ya – the early pioneers of the Georgia ForestWatch movement in this state! Andrea Timpone, Chuck McGrady, Jean Sokol, McGrady, Bob Kerr, Ron Tipton, Peter Kirby, James Sullivan, Brian Hager, Nell Jones, Dennis Stansell, Mort and Helen Meadors, Bob Kibler, Brent and Angela Martin, Don Davis, Shep Howell and countless others who sacrificed and gave so deeply of themselves and their time to struggle to right a wrong, to protect our national forests in Georgia.

Lastly, deep, heartfelt thanks to all the steadfast members and board directors, district leaders and staff, foundations and financial supporters whose continuing efforts make ForestWatch what it has been, is and shall become. It is that spirit of selfless giving that we will use to protect our children's and grand children's forests. Go now and see how your forest is doing.

The defense of public lands: The birth of Georgia ForestWatch

by Bob Kibler and Charles Seabrook

As Georgia ForestWatch approaches its 20th anniversary, we cover the history of the organization in a five-part series beginning with this issue.

In the 1970s, a fervor for environmental stewardship was sweeping the nation. Congress created the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1970 and a few years later adopted landmark legislation to protect our air, water and land.

Just as strong was the sentiment for protecting our natural heritage. In 1973, the momentous federal Endangered Species Act was adopted.

But of all the bedrock environmental laws passed during that decade, the one that would be of paramount importance to the future of then-unborn Georgia ForestWatch was the National Forest Management Act of 1976. A decade after its passage, the law and its aftermath helped birth the organization.

In essence, Georgia ForestWatch was spawned as part of a legal settlement between the U.S. Forest Service and seven conservation organizations that challenged the agency's first-ever comprehensive management plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. The Forest Service had devised the plan as part of the 1976 act's mandates.

In the settlement, the conservation groups' pro bono lawyers inserted language into the agreement, requiring the Forest Service to publicly disclose on an annual basis its logging, clear-cutting and road-building plans for the coming year.

To engage the Forest Service and dog its activities on the ground – and to ensure that the agency was sticking to its promises – the conservationists formed a new organization, Georgia ForestWatch.

It was a historic step because it was a move away from a timber-first policy and a nudge towards a forum for public forestry, said Walter Cook, a retired University of Georgia forestry professor. "It's one of the best things to happen to forestry in this state," he told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* in 1987.

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Contact Information
Georgia ForestWatch

www.gafw.org

15 Tower Rd. Ellijay, GA 30540
706-635-TREE (8733)

Georgia ForestWatch is a 501(c)3 Nonprofit educational corporation.

Forest News edited by Wayne Jenkins
Layout by Kathy Herrygers and Eleanor Thompson

STAFF
Wayne Jenkins, Executive Director
Kathy Herrygers, Office Manager
Shawn White, Forest Ecologist

BOARD MEMBERS
Joe Gatins, President
Peg Griffith, Secretary
Sarah Linn, Treasurer
Claudia Burgess
Kees de Vente
Andy Edwards
David Govus
Ida Long
James Sullivan
Charles Seabrook

ADVISORS
Marshall Burke
Butch Clay
Martha Ezzard
John Fritchie
Bob Kibler

DISTRICT LEADERS

Armuchee Ranger District:
Bob Smiles 404-259-4947

Brasstown Ranger District:
Howard Markel 770-781-5418
Dennis Stansell 706-747-5892

Chattooga Ranger District:
Wally Warren 706-778-2635
Dudley Sisk 706-754-0955

Cohutta Ranger District:
Wayne Jenkins 706-276-7913
David Govus 706-276-2512

Oconee National Forest:
Larry Winslett 404-375-8405 (w)

Tallulah Ranger District:
Joe Gatins 706-782-9944

Toccoa Ranger District:
Jim Walker 706-273-3465
David Govus 706-276-2512

The Birth of Georgia ForestWatch

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This is the story of how Georgia ForestWatch came to be. It's a story of dogged persistence on the part of the conservation organizations to stop destructive logging, road-building and other practices that seriously threatened the ecology and natural splendor of the forests.

The conservationists persevered in the face of frazzled nerves, sleepless nights and sometimes flaring tempers. There were some dramatic moments, as when they had only minutes to make a midnight deadline.

But luck, determination – and the 1976 law – were on their side.

In the law, Congress directed the U.S. Forest Service to curtail clear-cutting, provide for biological diversity, protect streams and water quality, limit uneconomic timbering and provide for public input.

Responding to those mandates, the Forest Service in 1980 began drawing up its first-ever comprehensive management plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee forests, outlining in detail how it would abide by Congress's intentions for the forests. The final plan would integrate management of timber, wildlife, road-building, wilderness and other facets of the forests and would guide the agency in Georgia over the next 10-15 years.

The conservation organizations eagerly awaited the so-called Land and Resource Management Plan. The Forest Service had developed it with absolutely no public input. In October 1984, the groups got their first peek when the Forest Service released the draft plan -- a ponderous, 750-page document – for public perusal. The public would have 60 days to comment.

The conservation groups quickly went to work. Recognizing the plan's great importance for the forests for decades to come, they joined together in a coalition to dissect the bulky document, understand its implications and write up their comments. In the coalition were representatives from The

Sullivan family photo

BIG BURN: A young Jim Sullivan, now a Georgia ForestWatch board member, looks over a forest stand in White County that had been clear cut and burned by the U.S. Forest Service, circa 1987-88, shortly after Georgia ForestWatch is formed.

Georgia Conservancy, the Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club, Friends of the Mountains, Georgia Botanical Society, Atlanta Audubon Society, and the Georgia Council of Trout Unlimited.

The members agreed to meet in either Atlanta or Gainesville once every week or two. Often, the group, sitting around a big table, was in session late into the night. Almost immediately the coalition came to a stark realization – scrutinizing the plan and producing comments would be a daunting task. For one thing, many of them had little experience in analyzing Forest Service documents. They would have to quickly familiarize themselves with nearly incomprehensible Forest Service jargon.

"We really felt overwhelmed," said James Sullivan, who represented Friends of the Mountains.

Hanging over the group was the deadline. They well knew that if they were to have standing for possible legal challenges to the final plan, they must submit their comments before the cut-off date.

Given the laborious task ahead of them, the coalition requested and obtained from the Forest Service an extension of the comment period to 90 days. To help them wade through the massive plan and absorb its many nuances, they hired consultants familiar with Forest Service lingo and technical data. One of them was Randall O'Toole, an Oregon activist who already had been involved in legal challenges against the Forest Service in that state.

The coalition, though, was not entirely devoid of its own expertise and savvy leaders. Far from it. Some of the members had butted heads with the Forest Service in the past. For instance, Friends of the Mountains, a grassroots organization also represented by Andrea Timpone, had battled the agency in the early 1980s over herbicide use, clear-cutting and a misbeguided Reagan administration-notion to sell national forest land.

Another coalition member and veteran of environmental battles was Bob Kerr, then director of the Georgia Conservancy, who brought his considerable political and negotiating clout to bear. "Bob was sort of a father figure to us," said Peter Kirby, then a staff lawyer for The Wilderness Society's national office in Washington. Kirby himself contributed pro bono legal advice to the coalition.

But the coalition's acknowledged leader was Chuck McGrady, an Atlanta-based lawyer and conservation chair for the Sierra Club's Georgia chapter. He is credited with keeping the group focused and united in the face of headache-causing tension and seemingly insurmountable disagreements among members.

"He had a good sense of humor, which helped ease tensions," said Sullivan. "He was good at keeping things flowing. That was especially important for this group, which was a bit unruly. Everybody liked him and respected him."

Working alongside McGrady was Jean Sokol, a staff member of the Wilderness Society's Atlanta office. The coalition's only non-volunteer member – though she contributed many uncompensated hours – Sokol was a tireless worker who did much of the group's grunt work. Later, she became Mrs. Chuck McGrady.

For the most part, the differences in the coalition arose over what the members deemed to be of primary concern with the new Forest Service plan. The Wilderness Society, led by Ron Tipton, focused on roadless areas, which could become future wilderness areas. The Georgia Conservancy was most concerned over rampant logging. Friends of the Mountains zeroed in on the use of herbicides on public forest land. Other members concentrated on wildlife and botanical issues.

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Of stewardship projects and "internal scopings"

by Joseph Gatins : Tallulah District Leader

Any member of Georgia ForestWatch who has engaged the U.S. Forest Service to provide public comment on various projects on the national forest is familiar with this general drill: A local ranger office or the forest supervisor's office issues a written "scoping notice," seeking public comment on a specific proposal; the public responds; the Forest Service issues a decision on what it intends to do; the public and conservation and advocacy groups may or may not be able to appeal the decision, depending on the environmental specifics of a project and its complexity; often, projects are "categorically excluded" from public appeal under the fine print of Forest Service rules; finally, the agency proceeds with the project, often with little change from the original proposal.

...depending on the ranger's view of the importance of the action, the district says that "internal scoping" is appropriate for certain routine actions...

Under the general tenets of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA,) the Forest Service must involve the public in this exercise and actively seek the public's input on the outcome. Similar public involvement is required of so-called "stewardship projects" that recently have come into vogue on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. The latter have been heralded by Forest Service personnel as a way of collecting timber sale proceeds at the local level, instead of seeing them forwarded to general funds in Washington. This makes it possible to spin off a variety of other potentially useful local projects – road obliteration and invasive plant controls often are mentioned – that otherwise could not be financed by the agency.

That's how the public is supposed to remain involved, in theory. How the stewardship projects are proceeding in practice, however, is something else.

A stewardship contract proposed for the Flat Branch timber sale on the Tallulah Ranger District was quietly approved by the Forest Supervisor and the Regional Forester in late summer of 2005 – without any notice or input from Georgia ForestWatch or any other forest conservation organization or the public at large. (The agency did work closely in this case with its usual outside partners, the same ones who often support timbering in the national forest: The Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the Ruffed Grouse Society, the National Wild Turkey Federation and the like.)

As the details dribbled out this past summer, one of the "spin-off" projects from this stewardship sale involved reconstruction and repair (not obliteration) of more than 3.5 miles of isolated Forest Service roads near the Southern Nantahala Wilderness – to be accomplished without any public review at all.

The latter is being pursued under what the Tallulah District and this national forest call "internal scoping," i.e., private review of a project only by Forest Service staff.

The ranger's office defends such privacy as necessary and useful to help avoid unnecessary paperwork for minor work, such as replacement of campsite privies, for example.

The district bases its actions on the fine print of the Forest Service Handbook, which it asserts gives the local ranger vast discretion to determine the appropriate level of analysis and public involvement. Depending on the ranger's view of the importance of the action, the district says that "internal scoping" is appropriate for certain routine actions.

But the work on Abe Gap surfaces as anything but a minor project. It will cost $22,000 to accomplish the proposed repairs to the main roadway and several spur roads that lead to wildlife openings. Abe Gap Road is a lonely, narrow and unpaved track connecting Patterson Gap Road (above Camp Ramah Darom) and Coleman River Road, in such terrible shape that it would make more sense, as far as Georgia ForestWatch is concerned, to obliterate that part of the road that is not necessary to reach the hunter openings.

No way, Tallulah Ranger David W. Jensen says.

Georgia ForestWatch, working closely with the Southern Environmental Law Center, has filed written objection to

private reviews as occurred in the Abe Gap Road case, and sought to guarantee full public involvement of all stewardship proposals on this forest

"We firmly believe that this process does not comply with the spirit of NEPA or with the NEPA regulations and policies," the SELC said. "On its face, 'internal' handling of 'scoping,' which is inherently an open and public process, is improper.

As for stewardship projects generally, the agency's own handbook requires the Forest Service to collaborate in stewardship project planning and requires that such collaboration begin "at the project design stage."

At this writing, the agency has not answered in writing, but did come up with one concession regarding the Abe Gap Road project – the spur roads to wildlife openings will be gated to try to deter unwanted and illegal vehicle traffic to the sites.

Just goes to show it would have been preferable to involve all interested organizations from the get-go.

ForestWatch Twentieth Anniversary Fall Retreat sells out!

Thanks to a hugely successful response to our mailings and alerts, the 2006 Georgia ForestWatch Fall Retreat has sold out! The retreat will be held at the Cohutta Lodge and Restaurant near Chatsworth, Georgia, over the weekend of September 29th and will feature a variety of fun and educational presentations including:

- Chattahoochee Forest History with Forest Ecologist Shawn White
- Southern Appalachian Aquatic Diversity with Aquatic Biologist Jim Herrig
- Georgia's Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Crisis with James Sullivan
- NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) Procedures with Wally Warren and Dudley Sisk
- Our Native Medicinal Plants with author Patricia Kyritsi Howell
- Invasive Plants in Georgia with Botanist Mincy Moffett
- Archaeological Investigations in the Ruins of Union County with Carey Waldrip
- Eugene Odum's work with biographer Betty Jean Craige

To our members and friends who are registered to attend the retreat, please accept our sincere thanks and we look forward to celebrating this special event together!

To those who are unable to join us this year, we'll look forward to having you join us for next year's retreat! And CONGRATULATIONS to the Retreat Committee and Office Manager Kathy Herrygers for their hard work and success in planning this event!

U.S. Senate

Senator Saxby Chambliss
U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510
202-225-6531
-or-
Regional Representative Ash Miller
c/o U.S. Sen. Saxby Chambliss
100 Galleria Parkway
Suite 1340
Atlanta, Georgia 30339
770/763-90900
Fax: 770/226-8633
E-mail: Matt_Sawhill@chambliss.senate.gov

Senator Johnny Isakson
U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510
202-222-7272
E-mail: http://isakson.senate.gov/contact.cfm
-or-
Field Representative Frank M. Redmond
c/o. Sen. Johnny Isakson
One Overton Park
3625 Cumberland Blvd.
Suite 970
Atlanta, Georgia 30339
770-661-0999
Fax: 770-661-0768

U.S. House of Representatives

Congressman Nathan Deal
P.O. Box 1015
Gainesville, GA 30503
770-535-2592
E-mail: http://www.house.gov/deal/contact/default.shtml

Congressman Charlie Norwood
1056 Clausen St., Suite 226
Augusta, GA 30907
706-733-7725
E-mail: http://www.house.gov/writerep

Congressman John Barrow
320 E. Clayton St., Suite 500
Athens, GA 30601
706-613-3232 Fax: 706-613-7229
E-mail: http://143.231.169.140/barrow/contactemail.asp

The Birth of Georgia ForestWatch

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There also was fear that the coalition's "big three" – the Georgia Conservancy, Sierra Club and The Wilderness Society – would dictate the final response to the Forest Service.

But, McGrady, as facilitator, mustered his considerable leadership and organizing skills to keep things on track. He urged coalition members to sponsor workshops and public meetings and other programs to educate the public and motivate it to voice its own concerns over the Forest Service's plan.

As the January 31, 1985, deadline for comments approached, discord arose anew as coalition members debated whether to submit comments jointly or separately. Most of the members chose the latter route, although The Wilderness Society and the Georgia Conservancy decided to file theirs together. They barely made the deadline -- they dropped their comments into the post office box at the Atlanta Hartsfield International Airport only a few minutes before midnight of the final day.

"In fact, nearly all of us sent in our comments on the last day of the comment period," Sullivan said. "We were working right up until the end because there was so much we had to look at."

In their comments, coalition members stated that not enough forest land was being set aside for roadless and wilderness areas. Also, they said, the plan leaned heavily towards excessive logging and lacked sufficient safeguards against clearcutting, roadbuilding, and herbicide use. For one thing, the plan proposed removing 81 million board feet of timber per year and even increasing logging levels over the next several years.

"It just didn't make a whole lot of sense to us," Sullivan said.

Now, with the coalition's comments in the Forest Service's hands, it became a waiting game to see if the agency would absorb the comments and re-work its management plan to address the groups' concerns.

One bright spot appeared during this time – the public had come through. The Forest Service had received more than 2,000 written public comments on the management plan. The agency, it was revealed later, was taken aback by the public outpouring.

"The Forest Service, too, was treading on unfamiliar ground," said Kirby.

Finally, in September 1985, the Forest Service released the eagerly awaited "final draft" of its first-ever management plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee national forests. Those who didn't like the plan would have 45 days to file an appeal.

The coalition members, in fact, were appalled over what they saw. Disappointment was profound. "We considered it a very bad plan," Kirby said. In most respects, it was almost identical to the draft plan released nearly nine months before. It was as if the coalition's comments had mattered little in the final writing.

In short, the conservation groups feared that if the plan were implemented as written, the forests would be as vulnerable as ever to destructive logging, clear-cutting and other practices.

Once again, the coalition rolled up its sleeves and went to work. A momentous decision had to be made – whether to appeal the plan or simply sit down with Federal Service officials and plead for better treatment. Once again, tension arose over what route to take. Kerr of the Georgia Conservancy wanted to negotiate with the Forest Service, to see if an agreement could be reached. Friends of the Mountains, however, was adamant – it would appeal and go it alone if the others bowed out.

The wrangling over what to do came to a head on Oct. 27, 1985. At a coalition meeting in Gainesville, McGrady called for a final vote. It was time to fish or cut bait, he said. Using all of the facilitator skills at his command, he called first on Friends of the Mountains. He already knew, though, what the Friends' choice would be – to file an appeal, no matter what. But by letting Friends announce first, McGrady hoped other coalition members would follow suit.

It worked. The vote to appeal the Forest Service's plan was unanimous. "The others fell in line like dominos," Sullivan said.

Now, the coalition truly would be sailing into uncharted waters. The formal notice of appeal – a procedure required by federal law before filing an appeal itself – that the coalition submitted to the Forest Service was the first of its kind in the nation.

Despite the bold move, though, McGrady and Kirby, the coalition's lawyers, knew that the group was treading on thin ice. They worried whether the coalition's case was strong enough to convince an administrative law judge that the Forest Service should re-work its management plan.

They fretted, too, that another required follow-up document, the "reasons for appeal," would lay bare the coalition's weaknesses.

Then, Lady Luck smiled. To the utter surprise of everyone, even before the appeal had started winding its way through the Washington bureaucracy, the Forest Service sent word that it wanted to negotiate a settlement.

Coalition members were jubilant. "We knew that we didn't have the expertise to go to court if it came to that, so we were very happy," Sullivan said.

Added Kirby: "We had drawn up a 5-page 'reasons for appeal' document, but we never had to submit it."

It was learned later that the agency's unexpected move came about primarily because it, too, was venturing into unknown terrain. The agency was wary that the appeal might open up a can of worms and set a national precedent that would jeopardize management plans for other national forests.

Now, the coalition was on a playing field tilting more in its favor. During the settlement negotiations, Forest Service officials themselves made a suggestion that later would prove to be the impetus behind launching Georgia ForestWatch. The officials opined that the way to make sure the agency was true to its word was to monitor its forest management, project by project, on the ground.

McGrady and Kirby immediately realized the potential. But if ground-level surveillance were to be effective, the group had to know what the Forest Service was up to. Accordingly, the lawyers added a paragraph to the agreement, requiring the Forest Service to meet annually with coalition members – or the "appellant groups" – to disclose specific plans for logging and other activities in the forests. The appellants, through their on-ground eyeballing, could then determine if the Forest Service were following acceptable courses of action.

"Public participation would be guaranteed," Kirby said.

The "Settlement Agreement" was submitted on April 1, 1986, a date McGrady chose as an in-house joke.

The coalition's triumph, however, was muted: It had achieved only a "modest victory" on other issues, such as persuading the Forest Service to preserve additional acreage and reduce logging and herbicide use.

But at least they were in a better position now to keep the Forest Service in check.

Now, a structure had to be set up by which the groups would carry out their watchdog activities. Sokol, Kirby, Timpone, Brian Hager of the Sierra Club and Nell Jones

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District Offices of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests

Acting Ranger, Tina Tilley
USFS Armuchee & Cohutta
Ranger Districts
401 GI Maddox Parkway
Chatsworth, GA 30705
dwhitman@fs.fed.us
706-695-6736

Ranger, Alan Polk
USFS Brasstown Ranger District
1181 Highway 515
P.O. Box 198, Blairsville, GA 30512
apolk@fs.fed.us
706-745-6928

Ranger, Dave Jensen
Deputy Ranger, Scott Hill
USFS Chattooga Ranger District
200 Highway – 197 North
P.O. Box 1960
Clarkesville, GA 30523
shill02@fs.fed.us
706-754-6221

Acting Ranger, Scott Hill
USFS Oconee National Forest
1199 Madison Road
Eatonton, GA 31024
bnightingale@fs.fed.us
706-485-7110

Ranger, Dave Jensen
USFS Tallulah Ranger District
825 Highway 441 South
P.O. Box 438
Clayton, GA 30525
dwjensen@fs.fed.us
706-782-3320

Ranger, Alan Polk
Deputy Ranger, Tina Tilley
USFS Toccoa Ranger District
6050 Appalachian Highway
Blue Ridge, GA 30513
ttilley@fs.fed.us
706-632-3031

Forest Service Contacts

Kathleen Atkinson, Forest Supervisor
USDA Forest Service
Chattahoochee – Oconee National Forests
1755 Cleveland Highway
Gainesville, GA 30501
katkinson@fs.fed.us
770-297-3000

Charles Meyers, Regional Forester
USDA Forest Service – Region 8
1720 Peachtree Rd., Room 760-S
Atlanta, GA 30367-9102
404-347-4177

Ann Veneman
Secretary of Agriculture
James L. Whitten Bldg.
1400 Independence Ave.
Washington, DC 20250

Update: Brawley Mountain Project

by David Govus : District Leader

In December of 2005, the Forest Service announced a proposal to significantly alter the existing environment in the Brawley Mountain Area and requested comments on said proposal. Brawley Mountain is a ridgeline with several peaks just above 3000 feet in elevation lying to the southeast of Blue Ridge Lake. The Forest Service owns approximately 4000 contiguous acres in the area. The Benton Mackaye Trail follows the ridgeline through the area. The Forest Service proposed to harvest timber on over 700 acres, clear cutting nearly 200 acres and reducing the forest canopy by 30-70% on the remaining 500 acres. The timber cutting was to be followed by extensive herbicide use and intentional burning. The ostensible reason for this drastic action was to create "open woodland" and thus hopefully create conditions favorable to the migratory Golden Winged Warbler. The Golden Winged Warbler is locally rare at the southern end of its range but is not threatened or endangered. Georgia ForestWatch conducted ground surveys of the area and discovered several hundred acres of rich mature mast bearing oak forest and many acres of forest that fit the Forest Service's definition of old growth. A team led by Georgia ForestWatch district leader Jim Walker filed 45 pages of comments on this proposal in February and suggested a drastic reduction in the scope of this radical experimental plan. For a more detailed discussion of the Brawley Mountain proposal, see the article by Jim Walker in the Spring issue of the Georgia Forest Watch newsletter: http://www.gafw.org/06springNewsletter.pdf.

Georgia Forest Watch's complete comments on Brawley Mountain may be found at http://www.cartecaytranslations.com/brawley.htm

In early August, Georgia ForestWatch members met with the Forest Service and learned that the agency had re-examined the Brawley proposal. Additional surveys and tree corings by the Forest Service confirmed Georgia Forest Watch's contention that there was a significant amount of old growth in the area. The Forest Service seems concerned with the other issues raised in the comments submitted by Georgia Forest Watch and indicated that they would be announcing a much smaller, revised project. Georgia Forest Watch will be watching. We hope to see a much smaller project that does not involve clear cutting mature oak forest and is at a scale commensurate with its experimental nature.

GATC schedules trail partner day

The Georgia Appalachian Trail Club invites Georgia ForestWatch members to take part in its first Partnership Trail Maintenance Outing, Saturday, October 21. Wear your work clothes (best to wear long pants rather than shorts) and bring your lunch and water bottle. GATC will furnish tools but you should bring your own work gloves.

For more information and details, contact Eddi Minche at (770) 760-0759 or at mcminche@mindspring.com.

Keep it wild with Keeping It Wild

The Atlanta-based "Keeping It Wild" campaign is hosting a gala dinner, 6:30-9 p.m., Saturday, October 21, in Atlanta. The keynote speaker is Charles Jordan, the first African American to head The Conservation Fund.

Georgia ForestWatch is a partner in this effort, spearheaded by the Atlanta office of The Wilderness Society. For more information and to make dinner reservations, contact (404) 872-9453, ext. 22, or see www.keepingitwild.org.

Charles Jordan, Keynote Speaker

Upper Chattooga Update

Forest Service efforts to begin detailed analysis of whether or not boating should be permitted on the 21 miles of the Chattooga River's headwaters have lumbered apace in recent months.

- **Public meeting in Highlands.** More than 100 residents of north Georgia, western North Carolina and South Carolina's Upcountry attended the July 27 meeting, largely used to permit the Forest Service to disclose that it had hired two consulting firms to help with the multi-year study, now projected to cost American taxpayers better than $1 million. The agency refused to take or answer general questions from the assembled audience.
- "**Expert panels.**" On or before October 1, the Forest Service is expected to name the boaters and anglers who would conduct several test runs on the headwaters while the selected fishermen cast their lines. Georgia ForestWatch has asked pointed questions about how the Forest Service expects to guarantee objectivity of such trials and noted that it sets up a needlessly artificial conflict between boaters and anglers. Such trials also do not take into account the wishes and needs of hunters, hikers, photographers, nature lovers, swimmers and campers who also have a huge stake in the management of the Upper Chattooga above Route 28.
- **Public counts.** The Forest Service will accept comment from the public at large over the next 12 months regarding existing use of the river – user conflicts, parking lot gridlock, resource damage, etc. Details, including copies of all handouts distributed at the Highlands meeting, can be found at: http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms/.
- The Forest Service also continues to accept **general public comments** about this part of the river, which can be filed at the same website above.
- **The court case.** As reported in the Summer issue of Forest News, the American Whitewater boater lobby group, and other boater groups and individuals are seeking to short-circuit the study with a favorable ruling from U.S. District Court in Gainesville to immediately open the Upper Chattooga to all manner of kayaks, inflatables, canoes, rafts and inner tubes. That case against the U.S. Forest Service was the subject of a hearing before Senior U.S. District Judge William C. O'Kelley on September 6, in which government lawyers argued for dismissal of the case, while American Whitewater's lawyers urged immediate opening of the river's headwaters. Judge O'Kelley took the case under advisement, noting at one point that he has been vacillating on his views of the matter. "I might have looked your way at one point," he told the American Whitewater legal team, "but I am not sure where I stand right now."

- **Impasse.** The highly aggressive legal stance assumed by American Whitewater – they're the ones, after all, who caused the study analysis to be undertaken – also played itself out in a contentious private meeting on August 30 with the Chattooga Conservancy at the conservancy's offices in Clayton. For details, see: http://www.chattoogariver.org/index.php?req=ban/. This meeting, it's reliably reported, dissolved into a shouting match, in which American Whitewater's executive director, Mark Singleton, stormed out of the meeting. The Conservancy had proposed partnering "with AW to advocate limited access" to the headwaters if the lawsuit was dropped. Singleton, asked for comment several days later, said he was presented with the conservancy's written position paper, "without discussion," upon arriving in Clayton. "This is not a tenable position for AW at this point," Singleton told Forest News.

Georgia ForestWatch urges its members to remain involved in this issue and help with the public surveys of the area. The position of Georgia ForestWatch remains as before: That the existing boating ban has served the river and the forest resource well, and that, absent proof to the contrary, the Forest Service should keep it in effect. The Forest Service study should proceed and ForestWatch urges its members to involve themselves in this important analysis.

Invasive plants increasingly threaten our national forests

by Shawn White : Forest Ecologist, Georgia ForestWatch

For many years, natural resource managers and state residents alike have introduced invasive, non-native plants (and sometimes other species) into Georgia. Reasons for this include erosion control, beauty, ease of growth, food and cover for game species and simple accident. In fact, Georgia's natural areas have been so flooded with these non-native species (also known as exotics) that most people do not even think of some of them as a problem.

The common honeybee *(Apis mellifera)* for example, is considered to be a native species, crucial in the process of pollination for most of the flowering plants in Georgia. The truth is that honeybees are an exotic species, spread throughout much of the world through exploration and colonization. European honeybees were such good pollinators that they quickly took over that role when introduced into North America in the early 16th century by Spanish conquistadors and missionaries, and have actually become a critical component of today's plant communities. We simply accept the honeybee as beneficial to society.

While it does not yet have a comprehensive, national plan to combat the problems posed by invasive species, the Chief of the U. S. Forest Service lists exotic species as one of the four largest threats to our national forests. Ironically, many of these were intentional introductions.

The list of exotics and invasives found in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests is far too large to be included here, but some plant species are more of a problem than others. In addition to the familiar Kudzu *(Pueraria montana)*, some of the biggest threats to our public lands in Georgia include Japanese Honeysuckle *(Lonicera japonica)*, Autumn Olive *(Elaeagnus umbellata)*, Lespedeza *(Lespedeza cuneata* and *L. bicolor)*, and Chinese Privet *(Ligustrum sinense)*.

Kudzu *(Pueraria montana)*

- Dense low-lying vine capable of climbing other vegetation or man-made structures
- Native to Asia; introduced to the U.S. in the late 1800s for erosion control
- Begins growing late in the season and stops growing early as well; during the summer it can grow as fast as one foot per day

Japanese Honeysuckle *(Lonicera japonica)*

- Dense low-lying vine capable of climbing other vegetation or man-made structures
- Native to Asia; introduced to the U.S. in the 1800s as an ornamental
- One of the first plants to start growing in the spring, outgrowing other plants throughout the summer, and growing much later into the season than most other plants

Autumn Olive *(Elaeagnus umbellata)*

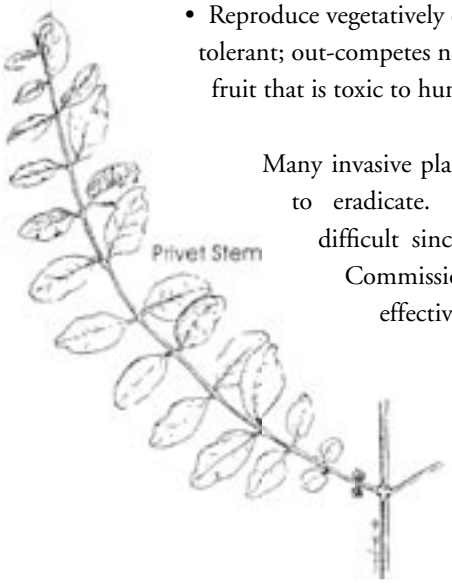
- Small shrub to medium tree
- Native to Asia; introduced to the U.S. in the 1830 as an ornamental; continued in cultivation for wildlife and erosion control
- Once established, autumn olive is quickly spread by birds into any nearby opening, where it will proceed to crowd out native vegetation

Lespedeza *(Lespedeza cuneata and Lespedeza bicolor)*

- Small shrub to medium tree
- Native to Asia; introduced to the U.S. in the 1830 as an ornamental; continued in cultivation for wildlife and erosion control
- Drought and shade tolerant; unpalatable to most grazers; produces chemical that inhibits other vegetation; can produce over 1,000 seeds per stem that can remain viable for up to 20 years

Chinese Privet *(Ligustrum sinense)*

- Dense woody shrub to small tree; grows in a wide variety of habitats
- Native to Asia; introduced to the U.S. in 1852 as an ornamental; still widely sold in the U.S. for its ornamental value
- Reproduce vegetatively or by seed; very shade tolerant; out-competes native vegetation; produces fruit that is toxic to humans



Many invasive plants, like Privet, are difficult to eradicate. Fighting Privet is very difficult since (as the Georgia Forestry Commission has identified) the most effective way to eliminate it involves herbicide application. But Privet often prefers moist, riparian areas, and streamside application of herbicides is highly frowned upon because of the damage these herbicides can cause to nearby vegetation (which leads to a whole suite of problems including sedimentation and warming of the water temperature), and to water supplies for humans and wildlife. Therefore, in these streamside areas the safest treatment for Privet is to simply keep chopping it down, which is challenging given current Forest Service workforce shortages and funding priorities.

Jim Wentworth, Central Zone Biologist on the Chattahoochee National Forest states that, "since invasive species control generally involves the use of herbicides which requires an Environmental Assessment, we have tried to include it as part of larger Environmental Assessments rather than stand-alone projects".

Cindy Wentworth, the botanist for the Chattahoochee National Forest and Jim's wife, explains that it would make sense to conduct a forest-wide environmental assessment, species-by-species.

Currently, however, "the invasives problem is being dealt with at the District/Zone level," she said. In the West Zone (Armuchee/Cohutta Districts) the Forest Service has been annually bulldozing fescue and autumn olive from wildlife openings and is considering herbicide treatment of wildlife openings and individual sites of non-native invasive species.

The Tallulah/Chattooga Ranger Districts have just released a scoping letter revealing a plan to treat invasives over 738 acres in 131 sites using herbicides. This work has been coupled with a project meant to enhance stands of shortleaf pine and a series of wildlife openings. The Oconee District, Cindy added, is doing mowing and burning, with "some privet and autumn olive eradication," and also "working on a proposal for additional control of privet, wisteria, and chinaberry."

There are also a few individual invasive control projects going on the Brasstown Ranger District including an area around Lake Nottely. This control program is being offered as a Stewardship project, where proceeds from a nearby timber sale go toward other work on the forest rather than being sent back to the treasury in Washington.

The common theme in many of these invasive histories is that they were introduced on purpose, with the belief that they would be beneficial. This should be a lesson to everyone; citizens, managers,

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Friends of Mountaintown Call On Congress

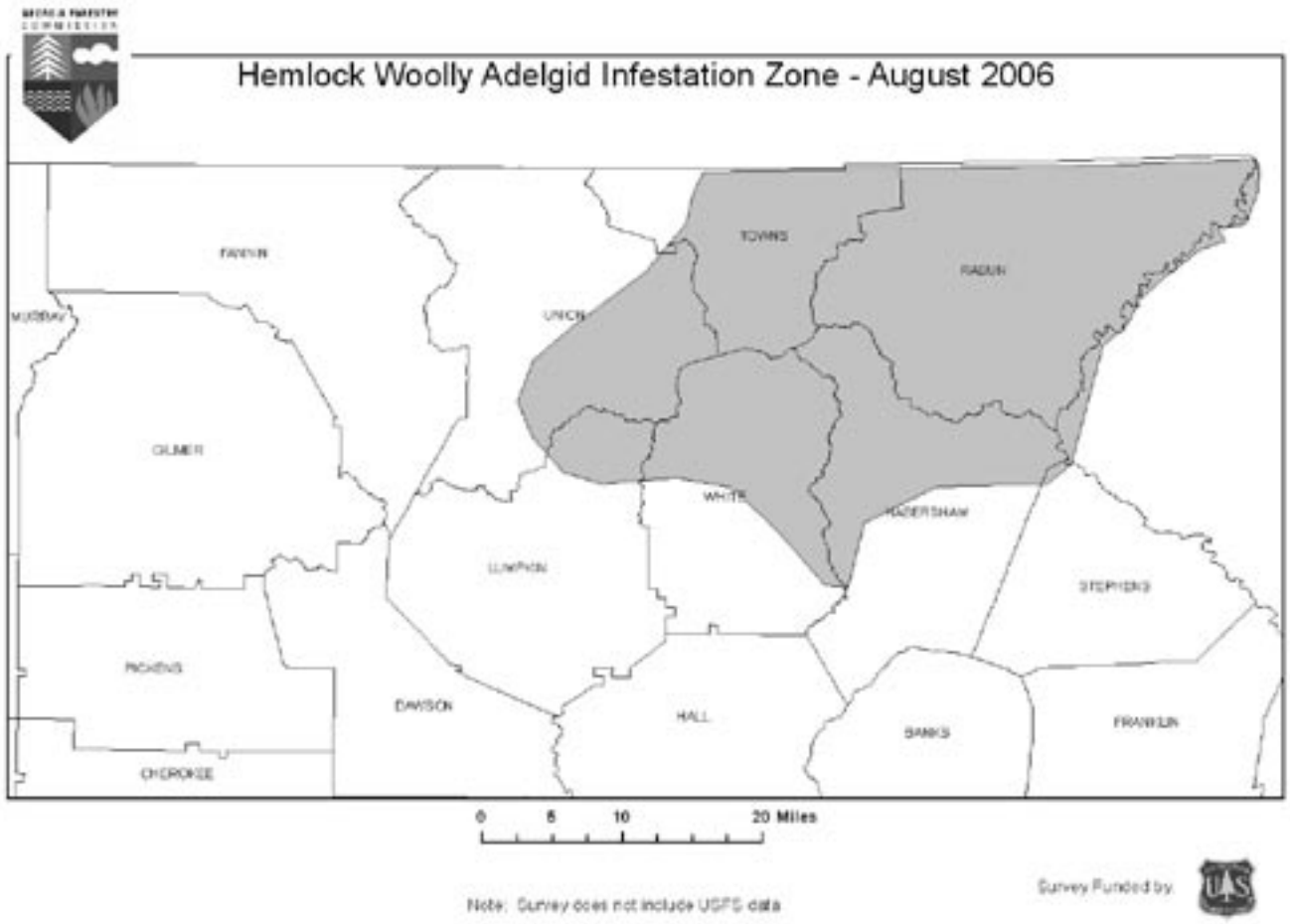
Two members of the Friends of Mountaintown grassroots community organization plan to visit the offices of Senators Isakson and Chambliss and of Representatives Deal and Norwood during the second week of September after the leaders have returned from summer recess. The "Friends" will be continuing to support HR 5612 as introduced by Representative Nathan Deal and Charlie Norwood and will be seeking the support and introduction of the same bill in Senator Saxby Chambliss' committee on Agriculture. The legislation, the Chattahoochee National Forest Act of 2006, which would protect the 13,000 acre Mountaintown roadless area and 8,000 acres of wilderness additions, was introduced June 14, 2006 and referred to the Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry on June 19, 2006. "Carrying the messages from the local people to our Washington representatives and their staff has been the key to our success so far," says Beth Pigott, a member of FOM. "Their response to our requests for help has been what every voter wants from their elected officials: to be heard."

Hemlock bio-control program advances at University of Georgia

After a long hot summer, the University of Georgia laboratory for rearing and researching biological controls for the treatment of Hemlock Woolly Adelgid infestations in Georgia is progressing. The bid for renovating and rebuilding the lab donated by the university – and to bring the facility up to par for operations this fall – has been awarded and will commence very soon. A lab technician responsible for operating the facility has been hired and will be overseeing the construction, hiring of assistants and the initial tasks of getting the rearing of a new control agent, the predatory beetle scymnus, underway. Also, application has been made to a major foundation to create a matching fund to jump-start Phase II of fundraising for operating the lab over the next several years. Phase I fundraising has generated committed and banked dollars amounting to $253,000 of the projected $287.500 necessary for the renovation and first year of operation.

The next step will consist of a planned media program with UGA's Development Department and coordination with the Save Georgia's Hemlocks partners for raising the funds for the 2006-07 season and beyond. "We are pleased to see the biological control program move forward," said Georgia ForestWatch president Joe Gatins, a long time member of the Save Georgia's Hemlocks taskforce. "We look forward to working to bring this vital issue to the citizens of Georgia to raise the funds this important research effort deserves."

For more information on Georgia's hemlock crisis go to: www.gainvasives.org/hwa/.



The Birth of Georgia ForestWatch

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of the Georgia Wildlife Federation, in large part, helped developed the framework for a new group that would perform the monitoring chores on behalf of the conservation organizations.

During that time, the Wilderness Society was providing most of the support for the working group. Sokol, the society's staff member, was devoting most of her time to launching the monitoring effort. "Without Jean's help, I don't think we would have succeeded." said Dennis Stansell, a Gainesville social worker who was one of the first volunteers in the new organization.

Sokol, in fact, was the first to suggest that the new group be dubbed "Georgia ForestWatch."

On an apple-crisp day in September 1986, ForestWatch's first band of volunteers assembled at the old Tumbling Waters Camp in the serene mountains of Rabun County to kick off their monitoring effort. A pivotal decision they made that day was that at least one or two volunteers would be assigned to each of the Chattahoochee-Oconee forests' eight ranger districts to keep a close eye on Forest Service undertakings. Also on that day, the volunteers underwent the first of several watchdog-training sessions. Some of the instructors were Forest Service employees.

"Actually, the Forest Service was a big help," said Sullivan, who was ForestWatch's first "district leader" for the Chattooga Ranger District.

Over the next several months, the voluneers would learn how to read maps and orient themselves in the woods; write comments; check the health of forest trees and streams; survey for rare species; understand Forest Service regulations and jargon; and make sure that "visual quality" regulations were being followed to protect scenic beauty.

Thus, Georgia ForestWatch was born standing up. It would become a force to be reckoned with as it matured into an independent organization to protect Georgia's national forests from wanton ruin.

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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Invasive Plants

(continued from page 13)

and scientists alike. Introducing a new plant species into any natural area can have unimaginable consequences. Ironically, past management trends have led to many of today's problems on public land and there is plenty of evidence exotics may be spreading faster than the Forest Service can respond to them.

Does this mean forest managers and the public should just give up? Absolutely not! Georgia ForestWatch will work with the public and our forest managers to educate, identify invasive sites on our forests, engage in reviews of proposed removal programs and analyze eradication effectiveness. Understanding the threat, we will vigorously resist management proposals that serve to promote – rather than eradicate – exotic invasives plant species on national forest lands.

**Illustrations are from Exotic Plant Guidelines: Cherri L. Smith, North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation, Department of Environment and Natural Resources. http://h2o.enr.state.nc.us/ncwetlands/exoplntg.pdf.*

Georgia ForestWatch
15 Tower Rd.
Ellijay, GA 30540

706-635-8733
www.gafw.org

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