Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter ····· Winter 2005/06

Who's watching your forest?

Restoration or Cut and Run?

By Wayne Jenkins : Executive Director

It occurs to me, after decades of concern and contemplation, self directed experience, and education in the forests, specifically our forested mountains of north Georgia, that how we have used and abused this natural treasure has been thoughtless, heedless and ignorant. Nothing new here! Our national history is replete with this style of natural resource use which underlies both our material success as a people and, in hindsight, reflects an utter lack of concern for the longer term, the next generation or our legacy to our children's children. Perhaps we are slowly becoming aware that nature can be used up and degraded to the point where we are all diminished. Perhaps, our present and obvious material wealth to the contrary, we are entering a period of resource scarcity. A time of 'not enough'. If so, we will look back and wonder, what were we thinking? Where was the leadership? How could we be so short-sighted? Shouldn't we take responsibility for the full results of our actions, both now and into the future?

When it comes to forests, often touted as "renewable" (they grow back) as compared to oil and other natural resources which appear to be finite, it seems especially thoughtless that 'short term profit' and 'returns to shareholders' have become the dominant consideration in forest harvest decisions. This has been especially true on corporate forest lands. Once the original trees are harvested the land is replanted into dense stands of single species that are managed like crops of corn in a farmer's field. In this way hundreds of thousands of acres of southern hardwood forests have been converted into pine plantations. These are harvested, replanted, harvested and replanted, while the soil base, supporter of all forest life, becomes less fertile and degraded, and expensive inputs such as fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides become necessary (these are also potential pollutants,) and the whole system runs down to the point that new forest lands must be found or the land becomes more valuable for new suburbs and shopping malls. That last scenario is transpiring right now in Georgia as corporations like Weyerhaeuser sell off hundreds of thousands of forested acres in middle Georgia and set up shop in South America. Similar treatment of "renewable resources" abound in our modern world. Consider how we treat farmland, our rivers and streams, the air. When we ponder what things are important, even hallowed or sacred it seems that these most basic natural gifts that support our lives, families and communities are taken for granted and worse, treated with a selfish short-term disinterest that we need to confront and change.

Our Southern Appalachian forests first suffered this short-sighted approach around the early 1900s. The forests of New England and the Great Lake States had already succumbed to the needs of

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From The Director

The Giving Season

Two disparate important historical and cultural aspects of our nation recently came together for me as I was pondering this Thanksgiving/Christmas season and those things I am most thankful for. This is always a challenge, first to simply take the time to think on these things and then to remember, there is so much; health, a loving and supportive family and friends, our democracy, living and working in north Georgia and on and on. It is the latter subject I wish to share, specifically this ForestWatch work I have been hired to pursue and am coming to understand as only an executive director of a non-profit can. You see, there is this forest, actually many forests on the public lands of north Georgia that have so captured a dedicated group of individuals' attention, interest and passion that their collective response has been to work diligently to protect and preserve it over the last twenty years. And that work has made a huge difference.

Georgia ForestWatch, as a non-profit, is one small working piece of a very democratic and American movement. Over 1.3 million non-profit organizations are now at work in the United States, most of them striving every day to make our society better in some way. These organizations have become so stitched into the fabric of our culture and consciousness that we may forget how important they are in addressing so many of the day to day challenges facing our people, especially in assisting the poor, the disadvantaged and least fortunate members of our society. From the Red Cross to CARE, from Habitat for Humanity to the Wilderness Society, from your local arts association, church, homeless shelter and SPCA, we can see, whether large or small, these non-profit organizations, so intertwined with our lives it is impossible to consider modern life without the their efforts.

But here's the piece we are most likely to forget. Whether the organization has a huge budget or small, an office with staff or none, exists to tackle some large challenge or addresses a temporary one and then dissolves, each and every one is based on the collective energy, determination, vision, time and genius of volunteers. In 2003 about 64.5 million Americans, nearly 29% of our population, worked without standard pay to address society's problems. These folks contribute countless hours each year to making our world better by tackling problems most of us are unaware of or have little time to confront. Their work helps to reverse the tendency of society to become selfish and grasping, keeping us mindful of our blessings and of those not as fortunate. I believe that this sector of our culture functions as our national conscious, connecting heart to hope, mind to meaning, preventing us from forgetting and inspiring many to roll up their sleeves and get to it. Not for profit, not for praise, not even for family or self but for the greater good. This Thanksgiving I say "thank you volunteers across this great nation!"

Wayne Jenkins

There is another vital piece to this good work, equally as important and powerful. Money. In 2004 charitable giving in the United States came close to a record $250 Billion. Nearly three quarters of these donations to non-profit organizations were not from foundations, not from corporations, but from individual citizens. The vast majority of gifts donated each year to charities and non-profits are small but many, dwarfing corporate and business giving and reflecting the generous nature and practice of the American people. The balance of course is that we are a wealthy nation and can afford this largesse but when we consider that over 70 percent of the American public makes at least one donation a year, it is clear that our generosity runs both wide and deep. These gifts enable charitable groups to be better organized and more effective in empowering volunteers and putting their energy and passion to work for the greater good. This Christmas season I say "thank you to those generous souls who donate to the causes they believe in!"

Now here's the piece that brings this all down to the personal for me. Over the last year I have had the honor and privilege to be paid to organize and work for just such a group of folks. Smart, energetic, passionate people whose focus on protecting the national forests of north Georgia coincides with my own. Some of these folks I have known for years. Some are brand new to the work and issues we at Georgia ForestWatch struggle with each day, some are members I have never met but they all care deeply and give richly of their time, talents, money

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Fall Member Retreat Report

By Sarah Linn : Board Member

ForestWatchers new and old gathered at Camp Wahsega for a weekend filled with education and camaraderie with nature and like-minded souls. Despite dismal forecasts, we had beautiful weather after the rains of Friday night. I suppose retreat planners Kees de Vente, David Govus, Peg Griffith, James Leitess and James Sullivan had even worked that out!

We kicked off the weekend with a bountiful potluck supper, headlined by David Govus's venison, wild boar and boar stew, and Michael Griffith's fabulous homemade pies! The board welcomed its new members to their first meeting, while the others visited in the covered picnic area. We bunked in the Camp's rustic streamside cabins.

Melissa Walker, Author of"Living On Wilderness Time" led a popular discussion centered on "what does wilderness mean to me?"

Wayne kicked off Saturday's events with a wrap-up of his first year as Executive Director, and an outline of some of the coming challenges. Then came the difficulty of choosing between concurrent activities! Naturalist Mark Warren took a group to learn lore of local plants and how to use them. Claudia Burgess led a hike, and botanist James Sullivan led a group outside for a discussion of forest restoration issues, pointing out interesting native plants (and unfortunately some exotic invasives) along the way.

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Restoration or Cut and Run?, (Continued From Page 1)

a burgeoning nation and the magnificent southern mountain forests fell with dramatic environmental consequences. Cut and run! So much soil and debris washed into then navigable and important waterways from the profligate timber harvests that Congress was impelled to act and on March 1, 1911 Congress passed the Weeks Law. The law authorized the federal government to purchase lands for stream-flow protection, and to maintain the acquired lands as national forests. A 1924 amendment to the Weeks Law, popularly known as the Clarke-McNary Act, authorized purchases of forest land for timber production, in addition to stream-flow protection. Incredible efforts were made to stabilize the land and reforest it with the goal of managing the timber for a growing nation using methods that were scientific and sustainable. In time this first "restoration" of the forests re-clothed the steep mountain slopes, protecting the land and headwater streams. More recently, during the 1970s, a "commercial" silvicultural model was adopted across our country on the publicly held National Forest lands. The harvest technique called "clear cutting," which required extensive road building for accessing the stands to be cut, spread across the landscape with obvious negative impacts: eroding roads, stream siltation, spread of exotic invasive species and in many cases a net loss to the citizen tax payer whose dollars where spent for building the roads and administering the timber sales. After this recent second harvest, many areas were replanted in fast-growing pine species that have subsequently been devastated by the native southern pine bark beetle. On many other sites, the forest has been left to regenerate but in many cases the healthy and normal species mix which occurred on these sites prior to timbering is now over simplified to one or two fast-growing species. The legacy of this harvest of second growth forests on public lands has left thousands of acres of forests in a degraded state of overly dense stands of various species which do not approximate the function, structure or original appropriate forest community type.

The new Land Resource Management Plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests addresses this issue through a management prescription (9H) named "Management Maintenance & Restoration of Plant Associations to Their Ecological Potential." Presently, it is unclear what exactly "restoration" means for the degraded forest stands of the Chattahoochee forest, but on-going discussions with the forest service leadership indicate a willingness to approach this question collaboratively and scientifically and we welcome the opportunity and challenge. We hope that this approach will be similar in approach and outcome to the fine restoration work going on now on the Bankhead National Forest of Alabama. Recently ForestWatch staff and board members attended the first Southern Appalachian Restoration Conference hosted by the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition. I came away with renewed hope that our cut-over forests can and should be restored and discovered that many of these issues have been addressed and resolved on a 160,000 acre private forest in south eastern Missouri. Beginning in 1951, St. Louis businessman Leo Drey began to acquire lands in the Ozarks in an effort to demonstrate that taking better care of forests would produce lasting and economically beneficial results. For more than half a century, Pioneer Forest has restored its Ozark woodlands through conservative, natural forest management, and has preserved ecologically important areas and notable landscape features. This approach to uneven aged forest management as opposed to the recently popular even-aged, clear-cut approach more closely mimics natural processes and yields a standing forest and harvestable timber while improving stand quality and production. There are many challenges to implementing a more complex management and harvest regime on national forest lands, especially on our rich and diverse southern mountain forests but to just walk away from the results of our recent past forest management is not much different than the earlier cut and run history of a century ago. The forest service can do better; concerned citizens should expect it and we should do what we can to support efforts to finally define sustainable management of our forests.# ◆

From the Director, (Continued From Page 2)

and interest to protect our forest heritage using the vehicle of the non-profit organization to leave the world a little better place than they found it. It's amazing when you think about it. That an idea, a concern, a shared passion and love for very special places can bring such a group together for one cause. Thanks ya'll! 05's been a good year for our forests and a good year for Georgia ForestWatch, because of you! ◆

The Role of Fire in the Southern Appalachian Mountains

By Jim Walker : District Leader

The conference on the Role of Fire in the Southern Appalachian Mountains: Impacts, Response and Appropriate Use, which was hosted by the Western North Carolina Alliance and held at the University of North Carolina – Asheville (see the review of the presentation on Human Fire Evidence in the Autumn 2005 issue of Forest News), though highly informative, well organized and generally worthwhile, was also somewhat disappointing..

The brochure advertising the conference asked the questions, "What is the appropriate role of fire in the Southern Appalachian Mountains? Certainly, fire management here should be approached differently from that of the western U.S., but how does fire behave in the numerous and diverse forest communities found in these Southern Appalachians?" However, instead of a narrow focus on fire in the Southern Appalachians, differentiating our area not only from the western U.S., but also from southeastern flatland, I saw a lot of pictures and heard a lot of talk about fire in the coastal plain. Venus fly trap responds amazingly well to fire in pocosins (swamps or marshes in the upland coastal region). Very interesting, but how is that relevant to fire management in the mountains?

While the public sees mostly big western wildfires on TV, 45% of wildfires take place in the 13 southern states. These fires account for only 6% of the area burned nationally, but 62% of prescribed burning is done in the south, all of which says absolutely nothing about the number or area of wildfires and prescribed burning in the Southern Appalachians.

I was also disappointed by the lack of diversity in perspectives. Most of the presenters were fire ecologists or fire managers working for federal or state agencies. Hugh Irwin, from the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition, only briefly mentioned unanswered questions regarding Southern Appalachian fire ecology, while introducing his intern, Megan Manner, who, working with the Cherokee National Forest, using GIS and regression analysis, created a model for predicting the spatial intensity of burns ignited from helicopters along ridge tops.

Not surprisingly, most people who earn a living setting and managing fires think that prescribed burning is a good thing and should be used more widely and more frequently. If fire is necessary in the coastal plain, it is probably needed in the mountains also. But only "probably," because much less is known about fire in the mountains; it has not been studied much, and much less prescribed burning has been done there, so not much data is available on which to base conclusions.

I have to admit that the constant refrain, "More fire, more

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Eleventh Circuit Court to Hear Georgia Power Appeal

By David Govus : Board Member / District Leader

In December of 2004, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia ruled in favor of the Sierra Club, Physicians for Social Responsibility and Georgia ForestWatch against Georgia Power Company's Plant Wansley located southwest of Atlanta on the Chattahoochee River. The lawsuit alleged and the court found that Plant Wansley in the previous several years had violated its opacity limit over 3,800 times and continues to do so. Opacity limits are designed to control how much soot is discharged into the air and are mandated by the Federal Clean Air Act and Georgia's State Implementation Plan or SIP. The fine particles of soot released into the air have in the past decade been identified as a very significant health hazard. An article in the Washington Monthly had this to say about soot…

" In scientific circles, there is little debate about the gravest environmental health threat in America. It's not asbestos, mercury, PCPs, smog, secondhand smoke, or any one of dozens of toxic chemicals that man spews into the air, land, or sea. In terms of its sheer human toll, the worst pollutant today is fine particle pollution, sometimes described shorthand as "soot."

These microscopic particles, a mix of solid particles and liquid droplets in the air, measure less than 2.5 microns in diameter, roughly one-30th of the width of a human hair. They can be emitted directly from diesel engines and wood fires or created indirectly in the atmosphere by the interaction of ammonia, water vapor, and other gases with sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide, two pollutants primarily released by industry and cars. These minute particles drift down to earth and are breathed in by humans—where they can penetrate deep into the lungs, causing havoc in respiratory and cardiovascular systems.

Hundreds of studies have documented that when fine particle concentrations rise, so too do emergency room visits, heart attacks, asthma, and even lung cancer. The link between fine particle pollution and mortality is well-enough established that the Environmental Protection Agency now assumes in its cost-benefit analyses that fine particle pollution can cause premature death. Each year, particle pollution sends more Americans to early graves than homicide, breast cancer, prostate cancer, AIDS, drunk driving, or

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Fall Member Retreat Report, (Continued From Page 3)

After lunch, James Johnson, Forest Health Coordinator for the Georgia Forestry Commission, spoke about current forest threats, including hemlock woolly adelgid. Then again, the dilemma of choosing between three interesting concurrent events! Ecologist Katherine Medlock led a stream survey of aquatic micro invertebrates and examined samples by microscope, botanist Tom Govus led a plant and tree identification walk around the camp, and Jess Riddle gave a talk on old growth stands in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.

Following dinner, we had an intriguing visit with Melissa Walker, author of Living on Wilderness Time, who in her 50's set out to explore America's wilderness areas alone, to learn more about nature and about herself. She shared some of her experiences, but focused more on helping us to consider our own relationship with nature and the forest. She generously donated copies of her book to ForestWatch, which many of us eagerly bought and have since enjoyed reading.

Then it was up the hill to the bonfire and traditional mountain music by the Yeller Cats! Apparently ForestWatchers are not enthusiastic buck dancers, but we do have impressive in-house musical talent in James Sullivan and Wayne Jenkins, who brought out their guitar and dobro after the Yeller Cats packed it in.

Joe Gatins updated us on I-3 on Sunday morning, then Sarah Francisco from the Southern Environmental Law Center spoke on the Forest Service Land and Resource Management Plan. Afterwards, brave (and fit) souls went out with Jess Riddle for an Old Growth Hike while the rest of us loaded up and headed home.

Keynote Speaker James Johnson spoke to a committed and engaged crowd of ForestWatch members

Music by the campfire: (l to r) Wayne Jenkins & James Sullivan

I'm a newcomer to Georgia ForestWatch, but felt completely welcomed and included at the retreat. I continue to be amazed by the wealth of knowledge and experience of my fellow ForestWatchers, and grateful for their eagerness to share. The retreat weekend was an invaluable learning experience as well as a chance to get to know these folks better. Many thanks to the retreat committee for such a thoughtfully planned weekend. Count me in for the next retreat! ◆

Stop I-3 - Reprinted from Gainesville Times

By Debbie Gilbert : Reporter for The Gainesville Times

As the federal government sinks deeper into debt, opponents of a proposed new interstate highway through the Southern Appalachians are urging Congress not to spend money on the project.

More than two dozen environmental groups in Georgia, Tennessee and the Carolinas have joined a coalition to fight Interstate 3, which would run from Savannah to Knoxville, Tenn.

In August, President Bush signed a massive federal transportation package that includes $1.32 million for a feasibility study on I-3.

But shortly after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast on Aug. 29, the Stop I-3 Coalition issued a statement asking Congress to redirect that money toward rebuilding New Orleans' infrastructure.

"We are mounting an enormous letter-writing campaign among all our affiliated groups, including the 300,000-member National Parks Conservation Association," said Elizabeth Wells of Cleveland, spokeswoman for the coalition.

"This is going to be a hot political issue in the next election for these four states," she said. "We're calling on (politicians) to do the right thing and take care of our country's emergency needs."

The bill proposing I-3 was sponsored by U.S. Rep. Charlie Norwood, R-Augusta, and supported by Georgia's Republican senators, Johnny Isakson and Saxby Chambliss. But many Georgians have called the project unnecessary and fiscally irresponsible.

"Because of the difficulty of construction in the mountains, we've heard an estimated cost of $27 million per mile to build this road, which means a total of about $50 billion," said Wells. "This is a large amount of money to spend when (the United States) has so many other concerns."

Recovery from Hurricane Katrina is expected to cost at least $200 billion.Other recent natural disasters, including hurricanes Rita and Wilma, have further strained federal resources.

Looking for places to cut spending, critics have zeroed in on the $286 billion highway package. They argue that it's loaded with pork-barrel projects, such as an infamous $223 million "bridge to nowhere" that would connect Alaska with a tiny, barely inhabited island.

But no member of Congress wants to cut projects in his own district. John Stone, spokesman for Norwood, said the congressman will not consider unilaterally giving up funding for the I-3 study.

"Taking just one project off the list wouldn't save any money," Stone said. "But a House study committee of about 70 fiscally conservative Republicans is looking at taking all of the earmarked projects and putting them on hold for a year, which would save about $24 billion. They're saying let's just do it across the board, and Rep. Norwood is in favor of that."

But the idea may not have enough support to pass Congress, Stone acknowledged, "especially since some of these projects are already under way."

As for the I-3 study, few details are known yet except that it will be directed by the Federal Highway Administration. Karlene Barron, spokeswoman for the Georgia Department of Transportation, said Georgia will not be handling the study because the route includes three other states.

"We are working with (the federal agency) to develop the proposed scope of work, to look at what steps would need to be taken in order to get the project done," Barron said. "But things are very preliminary. This study is only to determine how much the project would cost and if it is even possible."

She said the highway administration will put out a request for proposals, asking consultants to submit bids for doing the study. But no timeline has been set.

If the study eventually concludes that I-3 is feasible, and Congress decides the new interstate is in the nation's best interests and worth paying for, then the Georgia DOT will be heavily involved.

"We would be responsible for the construction and maintenance of the Georgia section," Barron said. "It certainly will be a big job."

Georgia also will have to pay one-fifth of the cost, she said, because states must match 20 percent of the funding for federal highway projects.

Since the majority of I-3's road miles will be in Georgia, several billion dollars may have to come out of the pockets of Peach State taxpayers.

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Stop I-3 Coalition: www.stopi3.org

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Eleventh Circuit Court to Hear Georgia Power Appeal, (Continued From Page 6)

terrorism. This spring, the World Health Organization reported to little notice that 288,000 people die prematurely each year in the European Union because of particle pollution. Somewhat dated estimates of deaths in the United States are lower—but still dismayingly high. In 2002, Dr. Joel Schwartz of the Harvard School of Public Health testified before Congress that particulate pollution was causing "100,000 early deaths per year—which is more than AIDS, breast cancer, and prostate cancer put together." Even Bjorn Lomborg—a statistician who made a name for himself as a debunker of environmental alarmism—places the death toll in the United States at a staggering 135,000 premature deaths per year. "

Georgia Power refused to do the right thing and correct the problem and is appealing the verdict to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit. Georgia Power's behavior is not surprising as it has fought every attempt to clean up its aging power plants. Georgia Power claims it has spent hundreds of millions on pollution control in the past decade and it has, but not before it has been dragged kicking and screaming to the table by lawsuits and regulations. A detailed study by the US Public Interest Research Group released in 2001 has documented the tens of millions of dollars that Georgia Power has spent on public relations to paint itself as a "green" company and equally vast sums spent on political donations to thwart attempts to control emissions from electricity generating plants. Georgia Power in 1999 spent over $48 million on public relations and political activities according to this report. This excellent study can be found at:

www.cleartheair.org/relatives/18220.pdf.

Oral arguments in the case are scheduled for Tuesday January 24 at 9 AM at the Elbert Tuttle U.S. Court of Appeals Building in Atlanta. Arguing for the Sierra Club, Physicians for Social Responsibility and Georgia ForestWatch will be Robert Ukeiley who initiated the suit while working for the Georgia Center for Law in the Public Interest and is carrying on years later as a sole practitioner located in Bera Kentucky. Ukeiley will be opposed by a fleet of the finest lawyers money can buy.

Colleen Kiernan and the Sierra Club have led this effort and deserve much credit. Georgia ForestWatch has joined as a plaintiff in this case as many of our members live down wind of Plant Wansley and they all like to breathe. Interested members of he public are encouraged to attend. ◆

The Role of Fire in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, (Continued From Page 5)

fire, more fire," was impressive, if not quite totally convincing to me, at least not in the mountains. Beth Buchanan, USFS Southern Region fire ecologist, quoted Cecil Frost, a well-known fire expert: "The continent-wide loss or depauperization of the pyrophytic herb layer following 20th century fire suppression is one of the unrecognized ecological catastrophes of landscape history." But again, where is the differentiation between the eastern and western U.S., between southern mountains, piedmont and coastal plain, or fine-scale differentiation between moist coves and dry, south-facing ridges?

Perhaps the most gung-ho advocate of more burning at the conference, Marshall Ellis, who is in charge of fire management for North Carolina State Parks, was also, in my opinion, the most thoughtful. He stated that today's ecosystems have undergone changes, some of which are irreversible. Therefore, natural fire regimes are not coming back and must be replaced by artificial ones, i.e., prescribed burning. According to Mr. Ellis, effective prescribed burning requires a good plan, and a good plan requires information. It must be site-specific, taking into account fire ecology, season, frequency and intensity, as well as constraints, such as air quality and public understanding and support. It must be designed to achieve explicit management goals. And the results must be monitored, documented and understood in order to keep fire managers honest. He recommends experimenting, but carefully, in small units. And see the results before repeating the actions.

Now there is some advice that applies equally to mountains, piedmont and plain, eastern and western U.S.

In spite of my criticisms, the conference was very helpful to me. I learned a lot, and it certainly increased my appreciation of the ecological role of fire. I particularly want to thank Bob Gale, ecologist for the Western North Carolina Alliance, for all the work done in organizing this conference.

The primary lesson I took from the conference is that not nearly enough is known about the role of fire in the Southern Appalachians. While I remain highly skeptical for the need for widespread burning in the North Georgia mountains, the scale of prescribed burning currently conducted by the Chattahoochee National Forest does not seem inappropriate and could even be expanded somewhat, provided that all burning is done in strict compliance with Mr. Ellis' criteria and recommendations. Burn to learn. ◆

Poss Swap Dropped

By Joe Gatins : District Leader

U.S. Forest Service moves to pull the plug on Poss swap

In a surprising decision, The USDA Forest Service is taking steps to stop a controversial proposed land exchange in Rabun County.

"I have come to the judgment that the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests is no longer willing to entertain this proposal," Acting Forest Supervisor Andrew Colaninno, said in a Nov. 30 letter to developer Ed Poss.

Colaninno cited two reasons for the decision: Upon closer review of the situation, the public land at issue "possesses attributes that make it manageable and desirable as part of the (national forest.) Second, given the overall balancing of benefits and costs involved with this proposal, I can not see where this exchange would be in the long-term public interest," Colaninno said. (See other excerpts from letter at www.gafw.org.)

Forest Service spokesmen subsequently suggested that the Poss real estate interests might reserve the right to appeal the decision, but it was uncertain at press time what might happen next.

What is certain is that the Forest Service decision to halt the exchange represents a stunning reversal to a land swap that seemed to have been heading toward routine approval.

As detailed by the Forest Service in September, the project called for specific exchange of 166 acres of national forest abutting Tiger Mountain, owned by all Americans, for 96.7 acres of private land in Rabun and White counties owned or controlled by the Poss real estate interests, with headquarters in Clayton.

The proposal attracted immediate attention, with more than 65 individuals and five conservation groups filing letters that opposed and/or questioned the worth of the project, or suggested alternative methods of securing the private land at issue, most of which lay in ecologically sensitive Chattooga River watershed.

Ed Poss, broker for Poss Realty in Clayton filed a counterpunch in the form of a petition signed by more than 80 individuals, including several of his sales agents. "The trade will have a positive influence on the county," the petition said. "It will increase jobs – grading contractors, builders, electricians, plumbers, heat and air contractors, appliance companies, surveyors, furniture stores, etc. It will also create taxes for the county and our schools."

But opponents, including many individuals, Georgia ForestWatch, the Georgia Wildlife Federation, the Chat-

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Email: http://143.231.169.140/barrow/contactemail.asp

tooga Conservancy, the Georgia Chapter of the Sierra Club and perhaps most importantly the Rabun Board of Commissioners, took strong stands against the swap. In many cases, the letters also made plain that they were appealing for help to Rabun¹s elected representatives in Congress.

In the latter case, the board of commissioners wrote a strong and unanimous letter of opposition, reflecting a growing, broader concern over virtually unchecked ridgeline and mountaintop development in Rabun County.

"Our objection arises out of our understanding that this proposed land exchange, if consummated, will 1) result in a net reduction of approximately 88 acres in the total Forest Service land holdings in Rabun County and 2) transfer title to approximately 166 acres of existing Forest Service land in Rabun County to a private individual to be used, most assuredly, for a non-public for profit commercial land development project," the board's letter said. "Both of these potential outcomes are diametrically opposed to the stated objectives of our Comprehensive Plan concerning the desired future land use in Rabun County."

What was the problem, one might ask. Aren't such exchanges pretty much routine, often viewed as win-win for the national forest and private landowners and local governments?

Not this time. Citizen opposition ranged from the expected – not in my back yard, please – to the somewhat unexpected. Georgia ForestWatch was in the thick of this, urging the Chattahoochee National Forest supervisor's office to either abandon the project or find a suitable alternative to the uneven exchange. (Under existing law and Forest Service rules, the acreages involved in such swaps can be significantly different, so long as the overall dollar value of the exchange, as provided by professional land appraisers and a cash sweetener from the private landowners, is the same. The cash kicker can go as high as 25 percent of the overall value of the exchange.)

Among the alternatives: Trying to use the Land and Water Conservation Fund to purchase the private land at issue, most of which lies in the headwaters of the Wild and Scenic River. Or convincing all parties to negotiate firm and enforceable development limits on the public land that would go into the private land base in Rabun.

Other points raised by the opposition included "viewshed" and potential erosion issues: The ridgelines in question on the 166 acres of Forest Service land on the backside of Tiger Mountain command good views of the Bridge Creek Road area below Glassy Mountain to the south and west and as far as Standing Indian Mountain to the north (in North Carolina.) Development of the mostly steep mountain land, which is already "somewhat eroded," according to Forest Service documents, could damage the higher-level waterways and hillsides that run downward into the Timpson and Tiger creek watersheds (and eventually to Lake Burton and the Tallulah River.) All four watersheds are already exhibiting signs of stress from highway widenings and land development.

But the real kicker in the file is that at least some in the go-go development community of Rabun County didn't agree with the swap either. "I agree that the Chattooga watershed must be protected," Jane Bingham, a local real estate broker, said in a letter to the Forest Service, "but we've got to find a better way than slowly bartering away the forest which has made this area the tourist destination of North Georgia.

"I am a Realtor, but my first priority is to the save the beauty of our heritage for future generations to enjoy," said Bingham, a former president of the Rabun Board of Realtors and former board chair of the Rabun County Chamber of Commerce.

In that regard, the Forest Service now appears to agree. ◆

The proposed Poss exchange is only one of four such exchanges currently being proposed on the Chattahoochee National Forest. See table below:

Swap	National Forest	for	Private Land
Poss	166 acres/Tallulah District		96.7 acres
American Nat. Resources	155 acres/Oconee District		209 acres
Patterson	5 acres		19 acres
Citron	90 acres		66 acres

Big Oak Found on Retreat Hike

By David Govus : Board Member / District Leader

One of the events scheduled during the Georgia ForestWatch fall retreat yielded quite a surprise. As part of the program Jess Riddle led a hike into a section of old growth forest on Montgomery Creek, in the headwaters of the Etowah River, not far from the retreat at Camp Wahsega. This section of old growth was discovered by Jess in 2002 when he was conducting a three year survey of old growth across the Chattahoochee National Forest for Georgia ForestWatch. This old growth area lies on the very steep slope below Coppermine Gap and stretches southwest below Winding Stair Gap, Deerlick Gap and over into the headwaters of Jones Creek. This area turned out to encompass more that 1,000 acres and is the largest contiguous section of old growth discovered on the Chattahoochee National Forest.

Jess and his band of intrepid hikers descended into the old growth area down the steep slope from Winding Stair Gap and after slabbing east around the slope came across a perched bench, or flat, of rich black soil. Growing in the middle of this relatively level area was an enormous Northern Red Oak tree (Quercus rubra.) This huge tree measured 16 feet, 5 inches in circumference and will perhaps be recognized as a state champion tree. One can only imagine the huge trees that must have occupied the rich bottomland coves of North Georgia prior to the European conquest and the advent of timber cutting. Much of the old growth found in the Georgia ForestWatch survey has been discovered in steep inaccessible areas that naturally have thin relatively infertile soils. These characteristics of course are what saved them from timber harvest.

Several hundred year old Northern Red Oak Tree, Photo: David Govus

The accompanying photo was taken on a recent hunting trip by two Georgia ForestWatch members who, armed with the GPS coordinates of the tree, hiked to it through the gorge of Montgomery Creek . These hunter/surveyors initially passed through several 30 year old recovering clear cuts on the lower reaches of Montgomery Creek containing several small clearings filled with a poor covering of fescue and foxtail that are styled as wildlife openings by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. These openings are created and maintained by the Georgia DNR in cooperation with the Forest Service allegedly to increase numbers of 'desired' species of wildlife. Generally the desired species are 'game' species, i.e. those species hunted. On this trip our surveyors found no animal 'sign' or tracks in this lower area and little mast (acorns.) Upon arriving in the old growth area and particularly in the proximity of this massive oak there was a great deal of mast and 'sign' and well worn deer trails.

One other point about this area is that due to Jess's work this area which was originally labeled 9.H (open to vegetative manipulation…timber harvest) in the draft forest plan was changed to 6.B (old growth) in the final forest plan. This should provide permanent protection. ◆

Georgia ForestWatch HWA Campaign Update

By Wayne Jenkins : Executive Director

At the end of October Georgia ForestWatch, UGA and our many other HWA Campaign partners received the sobering news that the National Forest Foundation would not be assisting us with matching funding for the proposed predatory beetle rearing lab for experimental treatment of hemlocks infested with the hemlock woolly adelgid here in Georgia.

Subsequently a follow-up meeting held at UGA confirmed everyone's determination and resolve to continue and

to re-double our efforts to raise the needed monies. Despite the daunting goal of $250,000 for the initial up-grade of an existing facility donated by UGA and first year operating costs no one felt that we could walk away from this challenge. Too much is at stake.

Presently, various groups are soliciting funds for the lab and at last count donated and committed monies had topped $40,000. We need a little over $80,000 to bring the lab into operation and about that much more for equipment, hardware, fuel etc... The lab manager and two assistant's expenses will be covered by a combination of funds from the USDA Forest Service and Georgia's Department of Natural Resources.

The Georgia Forestry Commission continues to play key roles in assisting with the lab, education and mapping the spread of HWA.

Conservation groups in Georgia will be meeting soon to plan the next phase of fundraising. Other groups concerned with this issue are urged to contact the Georgia ForestWatch office for information and how you can play a role in this important effort.

Individual donations can be made to Georgia ForestWatch through Paypal on our web-site at www.gafw.org, by mailing a check to our office or by credit card by calling 706/635-8733.

Write 'HWA Lab' in the memo spot if sending a check. Thanks!

Helping One's Neighbor Across the NC State Line

By Joe Gatins : District Leader

Tallulah District Report

Georgia ForestWatch is lending a helping hand to other conservation organizations in appealing a large timber sale just across the North Carolina (and Tallulah District) boundary line in the Highlands Ranger District.

One central contention of the appeal is that the Nantahala National Forest did not properly map old growth areas in the proposed sales units. Another is that the proposal does not sufficiently protect rock outcrops and the rare salamanders that like to live there.

ForestWatch was instrumental during the initial scoping period in persuading the Forest Service to drop one small sales area altogether -- it was chockablock to several archeological sites well known to the Highlands district; the area was to be served by an old road (i.e., an avenue for illegal ATV use) that the Highlands district had just recently decommissioned and turned into a trail; and, as it turned out, there wasn't enough mature timber in that area to make a sale worthwhile Seems like the left hand of the USDA Forest Service had not checked in with its right hand in that case.

Nevertheless, the "White Bull Sale," as it is called, still involves pretty intense logging of about 300 acres of land, including use of herbicides, most of it in the Chattooga River watershed and some of it adjacent to Ellicott Rock Wilderness Area.

One of our partner organizations, the Chattooga Conservancy, has the lead on this appeal, with the Southern Appalachian Biodiversity Project, the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition, Wild South and an Asheville resident joining ForestWatch in the appeal effort. The Asheville office of WildLaw is handling legalities.

Georgia ForestWatch and members living in the Tallulah District also are much involved in another Forest Service project – this one a tri-state study (North and South Carolina and Georgia) to see if kayaking should be allowed on 21 miles of the upper Chattooga River (above the Russell Bridge on state Route 28.)

Boating and floating of any sort had been banned on that mostly narrow section of river since the mid-1970s, both to protect the fragile and wild nature of that part of the river corridor and to avert "user conflicts," largely between boaters and fishermen.

But an appeal of the new forest plan for the Sumter National Forest, which manages the corridor, by the American Whitewater kayaking lobby group, led the chief of the Forest Service to order up a two-year study of the upper Chattooga and what limits could or should be placed on its limits.

So far, the study has resulted in monthly meetings with the public in efforts to understand the scope of the study. Still up in the air at this writing is whether the Forest Service will allow "test runs" of this part of the river by the boaters, a notion that ForestWatch opposes.

As for other, more routine Forest Service activities in the Tallulah District, one of the most active districts on the Chattahoochee National Forest, it's much a matter of waiting for "other shoes to drop" in 2006.

Approved on the Forest Service books, but still pending action, are a variety of thinning projects on damaged loblolly and shortleaf

Helping One's Neighbor Across the NC State Line, (Continued From Page 5)

pine stands in the southern end of the district; work on several "early successional habitat" logging projects, and more detailed review of what could become a major timber sale below Rabun Bald, in the Warwoman watershed. Stay tuned for more on the latter.

Finally, an administrative note. Buffeted by federal budget woes and declining manpower, the Tallulah and neighboring Chattooga ranger districts are studying how best to merge some or all of their operations, including administrative offices, work centers, visitor centers and a heliport.

In play: Whether to close the separate, respective district offices in Clayton and Clarkesville in order to merge them into one combined office on one of three possible sites along U.S. 441. ◆

New Faces at ForestWatch

Please welcome a new face (and a new voice at the other end of the telephone) at the home office in Ellijay, Kathy Herrygers, office manager. Kathy, a New England native, is something of a "halfback," having moved to Gilmer County recently from Florida, where she and her husband were software managers in the telecom industry. She's also the key office contact for e-mail alerts (info@gafw.org), so get ready to hear a lot more from her.

There's also been turnover and expansion on the board of directors, with former president Larry Sanders and treasurer Lori Jenkins stepping down. Addition of four new board members, in turn, brings the board complement to nine, a nice workable number.

But first a small word about the departing board members -- and a big thank you, too. One cannot underestimate the value of the contributions that both brought to the organization in the past year. Facing uncertainty and rapid turnover of both staff and board members, Larry and Lori stepped up to "get her done" at a time few others were able and willing to do so. Larry stepped in as president, Lori as treasurer, and both worked admirably with the new executive director, Wayne Jenkins (yes, they are still related) to right the ship that is Georgia ForestWatch. In particular, Larry, a staff attorney for the Turner Environmental Law Clinic at the Emory University Law School, brought his expertise to bear on a variety of legal issues while Lori, an art teacher in the Fannin County school system and veteran of other non-profit organizations, whipped the finances into shape as never before.

ForestWatch thanks you both. And the forest thanks you.

Now, here's a thumbnail sketch of the new faces on the board:

▶ Claudia C. Burgess. An avid outdoorswoman (hiker, biker, kayaker) and intrepid hike leader. Managing attorney for the Georgia Legal Services Program in Dalton, which provides education and legal representation for low-income clients in civil matters.

▶ Andy Edwards. Dean of Math and Sciences at Reinhardt College in Waleska (where he's been for the past 30 years.) Former commissioner of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. Been hiking these mountains for decades.

▶ Sarah A. Linn. Self-described recovering lawyer, from the corporate and banking world in Charlotte. Now owner of her own tree care business in Rabun County, specializing in hemlock preservation. She loves getting out in the north Georgia forests, particularly with her dog Murphy.

▶ Ida Marie Long. Long time volunteer leader with the Boy Scouts of America and – this is of immense value to ForestWatch -- owner of an accounting services company in Ellijay, which specializes in accounting issues for non-profits.

The board turnover resulted in a slight shuffle in the ranks of ForestWatch's officers, with Joe Gatins taking on the president's job for the coming year, Sarah assuming the treasurer's post, and Peg Griffith stepping in to be the board's secretary (and she really knows how to keep meeting minutes!). Together with Kees deVente, David Govus, and Jim Sullivan, it's expected this new board will provide both strong leadership and direction to all forest affairs in north Georgia.

There's also another new face (but one well-known to ForestWatch members,) bringing his expertise to bear on matters of money. Bob Kibler, the long-time former board member and ForestWatch president, steps in to head the organization's fundraising committee. A key post. ◆

GFW Helps "Keep It Wild!"

By Wayne Jenkins, Executive Director

Late in 2004 Georgia ForestWatch was asked to be a part of an idea, a special program conceived by Frank Peterman of the Wilderness Society and Kathryn Kolb, well known Atlantan nature photographer, to raise public awareness about the importance of Southeastern wild lands, honor the contributions of African American conservationists, and re-energize and build partnerships among diverse communities engaged in natural

Participants greeting a rare American Chestnut Tree

lands protection in Georgia and the Southeast. The idea was an important one to Georgia ForestWatch for several reasons. The forests we work to protect belong to all Georgians yet we seldom encounter African Americans or other minorities enjoying their forest. There are many myths and misunderstandings as to why this may be but whatever the reasons the part we chose to play in Keeping It Wild was a natural for us. We offered to take folks hiking.

Interest in the original concept and desire to bring together folks with shared concerns but little chance to share them with each other built a foundation of partners for planning a series of events for achieving that goal. Along with the Wilderness Society and Georgia ForestWatch, Clark and Emory Universities and Morehouse College plus sponsorship from the Turner Foundation, Town Creek Foundation, the Len Foote Hike Inn and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy brought together the needed resources and creativity for birthing Keeping It Wild.

Launching the program in the summer of 2005 with an exhibit of Katherine Kolb's most beautiful and compelling photographs of wild nature throughout the southeast hosted by the Fernbank Museum of Natural History in Atlanta. A gala dinner at Clark University followed in October with a wonderful mix of attendees, great food and the special treat of a moving, passionate and sometimes hilarious message by Congressman John Lewis. One of the many insightful and inspiring ideas Congressman Lewis shared with the rapt audience was that eventually we will except clean air and water, greenspace and clean land as a fundamental civil right necessary for pursuing a healthy life, physically, mentally and psychologically. All indications are that many of the introductions and shared conversations at Clark University that evening are the beginning of growing and ongoing discussions and relationships that will deepen and strengthen the conservation and protection of important Georgia landscapes.

The ongoing series continues with in-depth seminars, meetings, and hiking tours. The hiking part is where we come in and it has been wonderful to share the work of ForestWatch and some of our more accessible old growth areas with several groups over the last few months. Everyone participating has loved the experi-

Wayne sharing forest lore with an attendee

ence and we look forward to leading hikes and special snorkeling outings in the Conasauga River in 2006. If you would like to know more about the Keeping It Wild program go to www.keepingitwild.org. To be added to Georgia ForestWatch's email alert system for hike announcements and other timely conservation information pertaining to our National Forests in Georgia e-mail us at info@gafw.org or call 706/635-8733 and ask to be put on the Alert list. Thanks to Frank and Katherine and all those hardworking folks behind the scenes that made Keeping It Wild's first year such a resounding success!

◆

Calendar of Events

▶12/31 - GFW President and Tallulah District Leader Joe Gatins will be leading a hike in the Warwoman area of north east Georgia

▶1/7 - Hike along the right fork of the Nottely River with GFW District Leader James Sullivan and fellow forest watchers.

▶1/21 - GFW Executive DIrector Wayne Jenkins will lead a hike into the Brasstown Wilderness to visit Georgia's largest old growth stand.

▶3/18 - GFW Executive Director Wayne Jenkins will lead a hike to visit old growth stands in upper Mill Creek in the Ed Jenkins National Recreation Area.

New outings and events are added to the calendar on a regular basis, so visit us at www.gafw.org/hikes.htm for more info, or make sure we have your email address so you can receive our calendar updates and activist alerts.

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