Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Fall 2007

Snorkeling with the Wild Fish in the Conasauga

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From The Director

Toward understanding a time of "blessed unrest"

Wayne Jenkins
Executive Director

Do you sense change in the air? Is your cynicism meter registering a little lower these days? Are you feeling like maybe we, as a nation, may be finally turning an environmental corner towards greater awareness, more protection, creating a greener world?

I remember clearly the angst and hand-wringing we all experienced during the era of increasing road building and clear cutting in North Georgia from the 1960s to the mid-1990s, which spawned ForestWatch. More recently, the plethora of frontal, sideways and behind-the-scenes attacks on environmental law and regulations by the Bush administration have been appalling and depressing, especially for those following the fine details.

But an awakening seems to have occurred. News relating to global warming and climate change everywhere is covered daily. Some politicians even appear to be taking environmental issues seriously. Is our long period of darkness coming to an end? Are the recent go-enviro claims by everyone from Wal-Mart to BP more than just greenwash public relations? Should we be more hopeful?

Only time will tell if the roots of this latest "greening" run deep. The complexity of our environmental problems and sheer inertia of human cultural history seem to be working against progress toward maintaining a just and livable planet. Not to mention the well funded organized resistance to change, ensconced at every level of government, plus basic ignorance by the average citizen of natural systems, human impacts, loss of diversity etc., etc., etc.. Is the present discussion and popularity of a supposed green movement a faddist flash in the pan? Are we grasping for hope?

A recent reading of Paul Hawken's *Blessed Unrest,* (Viking Press,) sheds some sorely needed light on the subject of meaningful hope for our future. This far-ranging account is breathtaking in scope and depth, taking on the largest problems of our time and daring to explain their interconnectedness, complexity and underlying causes. And it is those underlying causes rather than just the surface symptoms that Hawken claims are being addressed by hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions of organized groups around the globe. And the reason we should have hope. In any area you can imagine, from protecting the lands and lifestyles of indigenous peoples to sustainable agricultural practices to environmental protection of all sorts, issues of war and peace, women's rights, children's rights, on and on and on, there are groups of caring, passionate and smart citizens together toiling away to address their particular piece of the challenge. Hawken refers to this almost invisible movement as the Earth's and human society's immune system.

The intriguing sub-title of "Blessed Unrest" is "How the largest movement in the world came into being and why no one saw it coming." Addressing this issue gave the author the chance to lay the historical foundation and human basis for "the movement." In his easy-flowing, articulate and inspiring style, Hawken somehow pulls together the multitudinous threads of spiritual and philosophical teachings, historical perspective, expanding ecological knowledge and dogged human effort to explain where today's global though unassimilated response to our present human condition came from, evolved -- and where he believes it is going.

Hawken's curiosity and surprise at the scope of these efforts led to writing his latest book and the organizing of yet another non-profit and website for "serving the people who are transforming the world." Go to www.wiserearth.org for a better understanding of who is doing what and where.

Need to rebuild your foundation of hope? Read "Blessed Unrest." And when you're done share it with someone else. One by one, we all have a part in addressing the big question of our time: How will we live fairly on our beautiful planet?

Georgia ForestWatch history, Part 5:
Like a phoenix: ForestWatch survives a major transiton

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The following is the fifth and last of a five-part series covering the history of Georgia ForestWatch over the last 20-plus years.

Georgia ForestWatch, whose flame burned bright during the Brent Martin years, was facing possible collapse and extinction in early August of 2004.

Martin, one of the forest conservation group's early board members and its first executive director, had resigned a year earlier. The key staffers he had nurtured had also moved on – Katherine Medlock, the organization's first staff ecologist; Jennifer Rodriguez, its tireless officer manager; Jess Riddle, an old-growth expert wise beyond his years; Kate Prodger, a former staffer based in Athens.

Four key members of the board of directors also had stepped down one-by-one over the previous four months. Then, as if to cap it off, Debbie Royston, Martin's successor, turned in her walking papers, taking a fifth board member with her.

"These were very stressful times," said Lynn Cumiskey, the board's secretary who had just assumed the additional position of acting president when Royston announced her move. "That whole year (after Martin's resignation) was a very trying time. Transitioning to a new Executive Director and working to secure new funding sources in a time of economic and political uncertainty was a huge challenge."

The stark question now was: Could ForestWatch keep its flame burning or would it all turn to ash? Would it, like so many other small, non-profit conservation groups, quietly fade away?

The awful possibility had arisen earlier that year. Money to pay the bills and staff was drying up. The board was in disarray. In an effort to conserve dwindling resources, both Royston and a new officer manager went to part-time status. The situation had prompted Royston to warn at the time that, "a lot of things have fallen (and are falling) through the cracks …"

"It was such chaos," Royston recalled in an interview this month, referring to a variety of "internal conflicts" she felt she inherited – and

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Note: New District names reflect continuing consolidation of districts and offices.

Cover photo: Georgia ForestWatch photo. Shelby, the 8-year-old granddaughter of ForestWatch members John & Edna Garst, was one of several children participating in our annual Conasauga Snorkel outing in July.

Hemlock research moves forward

by Wayne Berisford, Tom Coleman and Mark Dalusky :
Department of Entomology, University of Georgia

Attempts to establish long term control of the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid in the Southeast have focused on the release of predatory beetles in the hope that they will establish and reproduce in sufficient numbers to reduce populations below a lethal threshold. Four species of beetles are currently available for release in the United States after passing a rigorous U.S. Department of Agriculture quarantine program. These include three ladybird beetles, Sasajiscymnus tsugae from Japan, Scymnus sinuanodulus and Scymnus ningshanensis (both from China) and Laricobius nigrinus, a fungus beetle native to the western U. S. and Canada. Sasajiscymnus was the first predator approved for release, is relatively easy to rear and can produce large numbers of offspring. Therefore, it has been the most frequently released predator. However, many release sites have not been monitored and those that have been evaluated have not provided good evidence of survival and reproduction in Georgia.

Ecology of HWA in Georgia

We have been recording the relationship of hemlock trees and HWA within infested areas since 2005. Information on the development of different HWA life stages is critical to timing of predator releases to insure that the beetles have an adequate supply of food for adults and larvae. Our data show that various events such as budbreak on hemlock and the appearance of HWA eggs occur about two weeks prior to the same events in Virginia and about three weeks earlier than those in New England. We are also gathering data at different elevations in the state which should help us to consistently collect high quality food for the predators and to make predator releases at the proper time.

Predator Release Site Monitoring

Several predator release areas have been monitored for evidence of beetle establishment. Some were experimental caged releases and others were open field releases aimed at establishing reproducing populations. Two additional releases of Laricobius adults occurred during winter/spring of 2007 with beetles from the UGA lab. Initial releases of Sasajiscymnus in field cages showed that the adults fed heavily on HWA and visibly reduced HWA populations. Most of the adults released were recovered after about 6 weeks but there was no evidence of reproduction by the beetles. We have also monitored several experimental “free release” sites (no cages) for Sasajiscymnus, Scymnus and Laricobius for other research groups. However, we did not confirm establishment of any species at this point. Results from this year are considerably more encouraging. Recent caged releases of Sasajiscymnus adults provided by the Young Harris lab produced numerous eggs and larvae that developed into adults. Although this is not unequivocal proof of establishment, it is certainly a step in the right direction. Caged releases of Scymnus sinuanodulus resulted in both heavy feeding on HWA by adult beetles plus considerable reproduction. However, reproduction only occurred when mated females were released. Releases of young, unmated females did not produce progeny even though males were also released.

Field Insectaries

Field insectaries have been established in the Chattahoochee National Forest for Laricobius with the objective of eventually collecting beetles for release in other areas. The insectaries were initially stocked with reared beetles from the UGA and Clemson labs and later releases were made with field-collected beetles from Washington State. Three additional sites were established in fall/winter of 2006/07 using adults and eggs from UGA. If successful, beetles produced by this method should provide individuals for release that are adapted to our field conditions. We do not have sufficient data at this time to confirm that the beetles have established at these sites. However, initial checks showed larvae present on most branches sampled. Sampling will resume when new adults emerge from pupation sites in the litter/soil in the fall.

Nontarget Impact of Insecticide Treatments

A study is currently being conducted in cooperation with the U. S. Forest Service to assess potential nontarget impacts of imidacloprid (Merit ®), the insecticide being used to protect selected hemlock stands across the national forest. There is some concern that soil injection treatments with Merit for protecting hemlocks from HWA along streams may adversely affect aquatic insects, fish, etc. We treated hemlocks along mountain streams down to the water line. Regular samples of water and aquatic insects have shown no insecticide residues and no impact on aquatic insects for more than a year after initial treatments. It appears therefore that it may not be necessary to leave hemlocks untreated simply because they border streams.

Predator Rearing Lab Activities

The HWA Predator Lab renovations were completed and the lab was stocked with supplies and equipment in December 2006. Two species of predacious beetles are currently being reared at UGA.

Laricobius

Laricobius nigrinus was the first predator to be reared at UGA. The initial lab colony consisted of beetles supplied by the predator lab at Clemson in December, plus wild beetles collected in Washington during February. Egg production in the lab was high and initial field releases of Laricobius eggs larvae and adults have been made. Egg hatch in the field has been confirmed and the first larvae have been found. Mature larvae have dropped in the field and in the lab prior to pupation and entering into their spring/summer resting period in the soil. They will emerge as new adults in the fall. We are currently holding ca.14,000 larvae. Initial experimental field releases of larvae have been made to follow their development under natural conditions. These investigations will determine if field releases of young larvae is a viable option compared to holding them to maturity and through pupation in soil at the lab. There is normally high mortality (50-90%) in the lab during that stage. Field releases of eggs and/or larvae could substantially increase the production of Laricobius beetles if field mortality in the soil is comparable to that found in the lab.

Scymnus

A "starter colony" of Scymnus sinuanodulus was provided by Dr. Mike Montgomery at the U.S. Forest Service lab in Hamden, Connecticut. Egg deposition was high and the first new adults have been collected from lab rearing cages. Experimental field releases in cages have also produced eggs and larvae. Operational field releases will begin as soon as sufficient numbers of adults are available. We expect to receive an additional Scymnus species, S. ningshanensis, from the Connecticut lab soon.

Our primary objectives are to initiate colonies of adelgid predators, Laricobius and two Scymnus spp. and to produce large numbers for field release and establishment in Georgia hemlocks. We have the additional objectives of assessing methods for reducing or bypassing high lab mortality of Laricobius and determining the fate of predators released into the field. Various lab and field experiments are on-going to address production challenges, field survival and reproduction, adult, larvae and egg releases and field rearing as techniques for controlling HWA.

Plans for 2007-2008

Laricobius We expect to increase production of Larcobius in the lab several fold next year compared to 2007. Production was limited this year due to a late start and the learning process involved in rearing a new organism. Although our first year of work is not complete, we expect to continue to assess L. nigrinus egg and larva releases next year. Some initial questions have been answered, but our work has spawned new thoughts and problems. We feel that egg releases are beneficial for selecting for a field adapted beetle, and initial open and caged releases suggest that it may be a viable method for introduction. However, our regression work needs to be validated to facilitate branch releases. Initial data from larval releases are promising but we feel additional work should assess the soil, the environment, temperature and moisture, during the summer months.

Scymnus - We received 200 S. sinuanodulus in early March from Mike Montgomery. Adult egg laying is still ongoing with several more weeks expected. Over 600 adults have been collected from the first three rearing tents. We estimate another 400 adults will emerge from tents already established. We have conducted limited field releases of S. sinuanodulus in screen cages. Egg deposition was evident in all cages, but larval density has not been determined. Next year we expect to incorporate S. sinuanodulus into more of our release and research programs once colony numbers have increased sufficiently.

Lab Funding and Other Support

We sincerely appreciate the financial support that we have received from a variety of private, state and federal sources. We are particularly grateful to the Georgia Forestry Commission for the collection and delivery of HWA-infested hemlock limbs to provide food for the predators. We have received a two-year challenge grant from the Turner Foundation for $75,000, which requires matching funds from private sources. We have matched $47,700 so far thanks to $10,000 donations from The Lumpkin Coalition, Turner Enterprises, The Brigadoon Foundation, Georgia Wildlife Federation and $7,700 from Georgia ForestWatch. We will need an additional $27,300 in order to receive the entire amount in 2008. You can assist our efforts by mailing a check to:

Georgia ForestWatch – Save Our Hemlocks
15 Tower Road
Ellijay Georgia 30540

Or by contacting Georgia ForestWatch at 706-635-8733 or through our website at www.gafw.org/membership.htm. ■

Grassy balds of the Southern Appalachians

by David Govus : Co-district Leader

The grassy balds of the Southern Appalachians have long been a puzzle to observers. Literally hundreds of mountains scattered across North Georgia and Western North Carolina bear the name bald though in fact very few of these mountains are open today. This phenomenon is not evident north of Carolina despite the fact that logically, as the climate became more extreme, one would expect more rather than fewer bald place names. Botanists have recently been satisfied that there is no climatic or soil-associated reason that these mountains should have ever been bald in this climatic epoch, an era that saw the development of the forests as we see them now. This reasoning is validated by the fact that nearly all the bald named mountains are now forested with the exception of a few mountains in the Smokies, Unicoi and the Great Craggy Mountains, as well as Siler Bald in Macon County, N.C., which have been maintained by regular mowing. The elevations of even the highest 6ooo foot plus high mountains in the Southern Appalachians do not begin to approach a tree line dictated by climate. Pondering this reality, many observers have proposed the idea that the balds are ancient works of Native Americans and point to a well publicized myth of the Cherokee Indians that the balds are the imprint of a giant flying creature that touched down on the mountain tops that stretch back to the dawn of time. To many this explanation seems doubtful as the Cherokees who inhabited the entire southern Appalachian region from Kentucky to the piedmont of North Carolina and down to Georgia for 400 years prior to the arrival of Europeans probably never numbered over 30,000. To anyone familiar with the rapid vegetative growth in the Southern Appalachians clearing and maintaining hundreds of balds would have been an impossible task.

A recent public planning meeting in Clayton held by the Forest Service to discuss the agency's ideas for future forest management featured a large map projected on the wall emphasizing all the mountains in north Georgia with bald in their names. Dozens and dozens of mountains and ridges featuring bald in their names from Big Bald in the Cohuttas to Big Bald again in the Rich Mountains to Brier Creek Bald and Bald Ridge above Helen to Rabun Bald near Clayton. All of these mountains are forested today. The clear inference from the Forest Service was that these mountains had been cleared from time immemorial by Native Americans. This then leads to the conclusion on the part of the Forest Service that it was not only ecologically proper to cut timber on the mountain tops but necessary to maintain communities dependent on 'early succession' that had developed over thousands of years as native Americans maintained these openings.

The most exhaustive investigation of the origins of the grassy balds was performed as a doctoral thesis by Philip Gersmehl, a geographer, in 1970 while a graduate student at the University of Georgia. Gersmehl in nearly 300 footnote-packed pages examined the balds from every angle. He consulted weather records, botanical observations, historical accounts, soil types, evaporation rates and the origins of Cherokee myths. He

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Peter McIntosh photo

Evidence points to forest clearing and grazing as the cause of hundreds of grassy balds across the Southern Appalachians, most of which are reforested today. Siler Bald, seen here, is kept open through regular mowing.

Retreat reminder: You are invited!

A quick reminder to all ForestWatchers and friends. You're invited to the 2007 Fall Retreat to be held October 19-21 at Camp Ramah Darom in Rabun County.

This is the site of the old Tumbling Waters camp, where ForestWatch got its beginnings better than two decades ago and still is located adjacent to some drop-dead gorgeous national forestland.

We want everyone who can to join us for this retreat at the height of the leaf season. There'll be plenty of time for some R & R, and time for regrouping and reflection, as well as an interesting program, including:

- Jim Herrig, aquatics expert, on the fabled diversity of the Conasauga River.
- Quentin Bass, noted archeologist, speaking and presenting on projectile points.
- Ila Hatter, interpretive naturalist, on medicinal and wild edible plants and wildcrafting.
- Wayne Jenkins, executive director, Georgia ForestWatch, with a program update.
- Dr. James T. Costa, director Highlands Biological Station, on social habits of insects.
- Hikes with botanists Tom Govus and Jim Sullivan and a tree identification contest hike.
- Saturday night Contra Dance with Sweetwater Jam band and beginner-friendly caller, Walter Daves.
- Viewing of a special film on 100 years of Forest Service history.
- Sunday hikes (to waterfall or timber sale) with district leaders Joe Gatins and Honor Woodard.
- Special programs by Jennie Hobson for young ForestWatchers and limited day care for children.

Please register now as we need to give Ramah Darom a headcount on October 4. See www.gafw.org for details, or call Kathy Herrygers, office manager, at 706-635-8733.

Ramah Darom photo

Returning to our roots for this year's retreat, the old Tumbling Waters camp resurrected as Ramah Darom.

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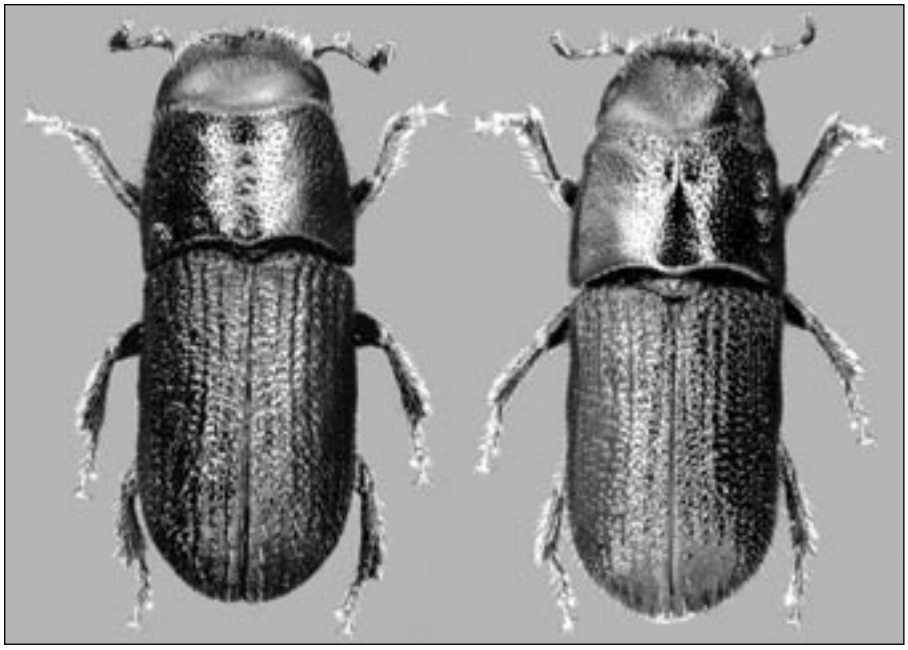
Is collaboration paying off on the Conasauga District?

by David Govus : Co-district Leader

Last September, the U.S. Forest Service announced plans to commercially thin some 375 acres in the Johns Creek area on the Armuchee section of the Chattahoochee National Forest west of Dalton and requested comments from the public on this proposed activity. In addition to thinning, the Forest Service also contemplated burning the area on a three-to-five year rotation and planting native grasses in the thinned, burned understory. The stated purpose of the project was to create a more open grassy forest that would favor certain species of wild life, primarily quail. The forests in the project area are for the most part planted non-native Loblolly Pine plantations approximately 30-40 years old. It is unclear what type of native forests existed in the Johns Creek area prior to European settlement and for that matter it is difficult even to determine what type of forest existed when the Forest Service clear cut the area 30 some years ago. One fact is certain – and that is that these dense Loblolly plantations exist and are off-site (not native,) are a prime target for a Southern Pine Beetle infestation and presently offer little in the way of wildlife habitat. The Armuchee section of the Chattahoochee National Forest is not in the Blue Ridge Mountains but rather lies in the Ridge & Valley physiographic province, which receives less rainfall than the Blue Ridge and may have been more likely to be affected by naturally occurring fire.

With these parameters in mind, Georgia ForestWatch volunteer forest monitors visited the site last fall and commented formally on the proposed project. Our comments supported the concept of increasing quail populations but posed the question of whether there was an existing native population really existed to increase. The idea of thinning Loblolly plantations and burning them was given conditional support with the caveat that a rigorous monitoring program be instituted to determine the effects of this thinning and burning on both the flora and fauna of the area. In the survey of the area, Georgia ForestWatch discovered several areas (or stands as the Forest Service describes them) proposed for thinning that were natural mature mixed shortleaf pine-oak forests. We recommended that these areas were healthy forests and should be left alone.



Univ. of Florida/David Almquist photo

Dendroctonus frontalis, a.k.a. Southern Pine Beetle, the reason why ForestWatch supports thinning of overstocked pine stands and the conversion of non-native pines into healthy forest mixes appropriate for a particular site. Shown here larger than life, these adult beetles, male on left and female on right, are only 2-4 mm long.

In early April, ForestWatch met on the site with several Forest Service personnel including the new Ranger of the Conasauga River District, Michelle Jones. We examined the loblolly plantations to be thinned and were surprised to learn that the Forest Service was expecting to get $1,000 per acre for the thinned trees. Apparently, because the Forest Service loblolly had grown slower than commercial loblolly plantations, this denser grained wood brings a premium. In other words, by not following the aggressive regime of commercial timber growers, the Forest Service had actually, through default, added value. A case where no action was better than active management. We then moved to the mature shortleaf-oak stands and were gratified to hear Ranger Jones, after listening to our objections, state that these beautiful stands of old shortleaf pines and oaks would be spared.

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Ranger Jones formally announced her decision on this project in a Decision Memo in mid-May. We were pleased to see that her formal decision mirrored her verbal decision in the field. In addition to this, the decision also announced that every effort would be made to spare any mast-producing trees, particularly oaks and hickories, found in the loblolly stands scheduled for thinning. This is a major shift in Forest Service policy, as it was not many years ago that the Forest Service was actually seeking out stands of mature oaks to clear cut. For the past several years, Georgia ForestWatch has been emphasizing the importance of mature mast-producing oaks for wildlife and in this decision and the recent proposal concerning the Etowah watershed it appears that the Forest service has been listening. We are also gratified that the agency, at least on the newly re-named Conasauga River District, seems to be focused on moving non-native forest stands, such as loblolly pine, into healthy forest mixes appropriate to site. It appears that we are entering a new era in forest management on the Chattahoochee national forest that includes collaboration and we applaud forest management leadership and district personnel for their efforts to sensibly address real "forest health" problems. ■

OBITUARY

Robert Zahner, conservation leader

Robert Zahner, 83, of Highlands, N.C., died Sept. 1 in a rustic house on Billy Cabin Mountain overlooking the Nantahala National Forest landscape, which he'd built with his own hands 50 years earlier.

Zahner, a forestry professor emeritus at the University of Michigan and Clemson University, was a noted conservationist and conservation leader, and a good friend of Georgia ForestWatch. His forte was dating old growth trees, which he defended from depredation with vigor and unfailing good humor.

He had an equal passion for defending and protecting native plants, particularly on fabled Whiteside Mountain, which was the subject of a telling book authored by Zahner, "The Mountain at the End of the Trail: A History of Whiteside Mountain."

Zahner was a veteran of World War II, serving in the Army Air Corps.

A memorial service is being planned for Sept. 30 at the Highlands Biological Station's amphitheater. Details will be announced later.

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, or call our office at 706.635.8733 to use your credit card. Thanks!

Georgia ForestWatch Membership Form

Name: _____
(please print)

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

(Please circle one)	Individual
Sugar Maples	$25
Buckeyes	$50
White Oaks	$100
Butternuts	$250
Hemlocks/Life	$500
Any Other Amount	$ _____

– Contributions are tax deductible –

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15 Tower Rd., Ellijay, GA 30540

We accept MasterCard, VISA and American Express credit card info:

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Signature: _____

Like a Phoenix

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Georgia ForestWatch photo

Lori and Wayne Jenkins with son Obadiah (left) in Homer, Alaska on a much deserved vacation. Lori and Wayne both stepped up to serve Georgia ForestWatch in 2004-2005, as the group's treasurer and executive director, respectively.

got blindsided by – upon taking the job. "Clearly the old Georgia ForestWatch we all knew and loved had to be renovated but how, when it was a constant struggle just to maintain status quo? It was a right-foot, left-foot time for the staff and board.

"Of course, so much was at stake in our forests," she added. "So we focused on our mission and new ideas for keeping ForestWatch strong. We offered 'virtual tours' of the forest in libraries across North Georgia, we recruited people who are now ForestWatch leaders, we became more creative with our fundraising by getting the Tiger Mountain wine tasting and the directors' challenge going."

In response to the gathering storm clouds, though, on July 10, 2004, the board and Georgia ForestWatch's district leaders gathered together in Atlanta on an urgent mission – to try to resuscitate the struggling organization and craft a plan for its future. Crucial to its future – if there was to be one – was finding more stable and reliable sources of income and attracting new members. At the same time, however, they had to consider the fate of the organization if their rescue effort was unsuccessful -- the possible dissolution of Georgia ForestWatch, or a return of the organization to an all-volunteer status and operating on a bare-bones budget. The precarious situation still stood a month later, when on August 10, the board of directors met at the office in Ellijay, primarily to figure out where ForestWatch would head without an executive director. Many e-mails flew back and forth, and phone calls sizzled the wires to many ForestWatch members' homes as the directors sought help in rescuing the organization.

The intensive effort brought quick results. David Govus, a long-time district leader from Gilmer County, stepped forward to assume one of the board vacancies. So did Lori Jenkins, also of Ellijay, a middle school art teacher and former executive director of several non-profit arts associations. Joe Gatins, a new district leader from Rabun County, filled another slot. At the same time, Larry Sanders, a staff attorney with the Turner Environmental Law Clinic at Emory University, agreed to fill the vacant president's position. With Jenkins as treasurer and Gatins as secretary, a new executive team was now in place.

Remaining unfinished at the August 10 meeting were the pressing needs of securing new funding and new members – and a possible reorganization of the group.

Answers to those needs, though, were not long in coming. At its first meeting 15 days later, the new board quickly concurred that ForestWatch's mission of protecting and preserving Georgia's national forests was of utmost importance, and that it should be kept afloat. Spurring on the board was a heartfelt letter from Brent Martin. "It is not too late to turn things around," he wrote. "The mission of the organization is too big and the history of the organization too significant to let it crumble. I hope each of you will give your all to turning this thing around."

That ForestWatch would indeed keep going was settled. Now, the board's first important order of business was filling the executive director's chair.

One option was proposed by board member Larry Winslett – he would voluntarily take over on a part-time basis and handle the duties of an executive director from his home in

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Conasauga River District: Project update

The recent forest-wide consolidation of six ranger districts into three larger districts has merged the original Armuchee and Cohutta districts into the newly named Conasauga River District. These changes are predicated on, "… saving tax payer dollars as the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests have some of the highest administrative/office costs of any forests in Region 8," according to a Forest Service representative. We are usually pleased when the agency strives to save money but have deep concerns that the size of the new districts, working from single offices, will be more difficult to manage due to greater travel distances.

The new Ranger for the Conasauga district, Michelle Jones, lately from the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia, hit the ground running since arriving late last year. Jones held several sit down meetings and field visits for moving the Large Scale Assessment collaborative process forward, which she inherited from the district's former ranger. (See Is collaboration paying off on the Conasauga District? page 8.) Recent conversations with ranger Jones indicate that she will soon release an Environmental Assessment (EA) on this large-scale endeavor.

In a somewhat surprising move this summer the district tackled a project that has long needed attention, the spreading invasive privet at the lower end of Hurricane Creek cove. The upper cove contains nice mixed hardwoods, rich cove wildflowers in spring and the only known stands of horsetail, equistum species in the Chattahoochee. ForestWatch, believing that certain situations involving small patches of invasive species should be removed before getting too out of hand, thought this location provided good chances of success. We had been requesting action at Hurricane for three years, offering to mount a "Privet Pull" with ForestWatch volunteers. We congratulate the district for finding the resources to begin the removal process and offer our assistance for monitoring and future removal of this exotic scourge.

On the ATV front, the district is finally working to close an old trail section at the Houston Valley Off Road Vehicle (ORV) Area that runs through a beaver pond. This is a very popular illegal play spot within Houston Valley and will be a challenge to keep closed. The district is commended for stepping up to the challenge. We also hear that written citations (tickets with fines) for illegal ATV use are on the increase in parts of this and other districts.

Ranger Jones recently led a from-the-top-down hike and analysis of trail impacts and stream health of the Mountaintown Creek trail and trout stream and expects to issue a scoping proposal soon for mitigating some of the impacts here. We are curious to see what is proposed.

Lastly we should soon see public notice on proposals for future use of prescribed fire on the district, always a controversial subject. An interesting recent development in the burn-don't burn debate, we have caught wind of and something we have pushed for many years: the completion of Fire Plans for Wilderness Areas. It seems ironic and simply wrong that, simultaneously, as the agency strives to increase the use of prescribed fire across the landscape, claiming that over fifty years of fire suppression have done great harm and that returning to a more natural fire regime would be beneficial, that no naturally occurring fires are allowed to burn. Hmmmm… "Why not?" you might ask. It is because of the lack of a comprehensive Fire Plan that would guide such decisions. Allowing non-threatening naturally occurring fires to burn within Wilderness and other areas would provide the "living laboratory" situation needed for informing a proper use of prescribed fire across the landscape. Completion of these Fire Plans may be an important step in the right direction. ■

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Chattooga River District: Project update

by Joe Gatins : Co-district leader

The new Chattooga River Ranger District (now covering national forestlands in goodly parts of Stephens, Habersham, White, Rabun and Towns counties,) is staying busy with a variety of project proposals. Your district leaders, Dudley Sisk, Honor Woodard and Joe Gatins are keeping tabs on these.

- Warwoman-area "thinnings." These projects have been on the shelf for better than a year, as the U.S. Forest Service figured out how to deal with severe erosion problems along Tuckaluge Creek Road. We met with George Bain, the acting forest supervisor, and Ranger David W. Jensen last month to hear about agency plans to turn this into a "stewardship timber sale," which could allow timber contract proceeds to be used to upgrade or relocate the road. Georgia ForestWatch will be monitoring this closely as fixing the road would open a much larger part of the Warwoman area to logging under a separate, 5-year timber "restoration" plan being developed by the agency.

- Outfitter proposals and special permits. As everywhere across the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, the Chattooga River district is entertaining a variety of proposals to rent use of these national forestlands by for-profit outfitter guides, overnight hiking companies, wilderness therapy camps for troubled teens and bike, motorcycle and off-road enthusiasts. Anyone of these by itself might not amount to much, but the cumulative effect is likely to accelerate resource damage on the ground. Georgia ForestWatch has asked the forest supervisor's office in Gainesville to develop a detailed, comprehensive and uniform plan for dealing with these requests.

- Warwoman prescribed burn. The district has proposed a prescribed burn of 230 acres in the Sarah's Creek area, to be conducted by October 1. Georgia ForestWatch responded with a variety of suggestions for improving the project, including rethinking or moving the northernmost bulldozer line. Maps suggested this fire line was to be on top of the boundary line for the Sarah's Creek Inventoried Roadless Area. ■

Buy ForestWatch Raffle Tickets –

Support forest conservation and maybe win a prize

We're now selling tickets for the 2007 ForestWatch Raffle. This year, rather than have the raffle take place entirely within the Fall Retreat, we've been selling tickets at outreach events. Now tickets are even available on our website in blocks of 3, and you're welcome to buy tickets at the ForestWatch office, 15 Tower Road in Ellijay.

Thanks to two generous donations, we're proud to offer outstanding prizes. First Prize, again this year, is a ride in a vintage bi-plane with loyal ForestWatch member, pilot Cal Tax. Second Prize, provided by the Buford REI store, is a rugged high-end daypack filled with all the essential gear for hiking.

The drawing will take place at the Fall Retreat in October. Retreat attendees will be able to buy tickets until shortly before the drawing. There is no need to be present to win and membership, while certainly encouraged, is not required. Buy as many tickets as you like! The price of a single ticket is $10, or buy 3 for $20.

For more information, contact Lori Martell, outreach director, at lmartell@gafw.org or call 706-635-8733.

To purchase raffle tickets via PayPal on the website, type the following into your web browser: http://www.gafw.org/membership.htm

Sandi Tax photo

Grassy Balds

(continued from page 6)

visited dozens of balds and pored over modern topographic maps as well as historic maps and came to the conclusion that the balds were a result of European style forest clearing and cattle grazing. Among the important bits of information Gersmehl brought forward to support his conclusion was the simple observation that in 1800, contemporary maps of the southern Appalachians showed one mountain with bald in the name and that was Roan Mountain which is a combination of a grassy bald and a heath bald. There are a handful of mountain peaks in the Southern Appalachians which because

... "many observers have proposed the idea that the balds are ancient works of Native Americans and point to a well-publicized myth of the Cherokee Indians that the balds are the imprint of a giant flying creature" ...

of their thin and rocky soil do not support trees but rather heath species such as Rhododendron and Mountain Laurel. These are in no way similar to grassy balds which in most cases feature rich dark soil. Big Bald in the Rich Mountains for example has large white oak trees on the summit, a predictable indicator of rich soil. Roan Mountain was also the farthest north of all the balds and close to an area that saw European settlement by the 1750s much earlier than the more southern mountains. Gersmehl goes on to note that by 1850 with the removal of the Cherokee and the complete settlement of every valley in the southern Appalachians, there were bald place names scattered all over the southern mountains. Gersmehl investigated the origins and purposes of the Cherokee myths concerning the balds and concluded that the myth of the great winged creature was not put forward until the 1870s by which point the Cherokees after having suffered conquest and removal had lost continuity with their past and in fact these types of myths in many cases were never intended to be explanatory.

Gersmehl does not discuss the importance of cattle raising in the southern mountains in the 1800s but the practice of transhumance, the seasonal transfer of cattle between grazing grounds, is well documented. Cattle would be driven to the mountaintops for the summer not just to seek high-altitude, human-created pasture, but also to preserve valuable land below for crops and hay in an era when local populations did not import their foodstuffs from around the globe and had to provide their own with primitive methods and much lower yields than today. In an era of limited transportation, no refrigeration and little money, cattle played a crucial role in the economic life of the southern mountaineer. Large herds of cattle were driven down from the mountains and to distant urban areas as the source of city dweller's fresh beef returning scarce hard money to the drovers. Georgia allowed free range for cattle, and landowners were expected to fence their crops and gardens to keep cattle out as opposed to the modern practice of fencing cattle in. Free range was not abolished until 1950 in Georgia. The important role that cattle played in the economic life of the southern mountains is more than enough reason to justify the backbreaking work that it took to clear and burn the summits.

Examining the named balds of Georgia on a topographical map, one can easily see that most of the balds had broad flat summits or connecting ridgelines while nearby steep narrow peaks do not bear the bald name. One can logically conclude that if the native Americans, who did not raise stock of any kind, were to clear mountain tops for ceremonial purposes or for observational purposes then steep peaks would be just as likely to have been cleared as broad flat peaks.

The Southern Mountain forests were surveyed by W.W. Ashe and H.B. Ayers in 1905 for the U.S. Geologic Survey and this survey became the basis for the creation of National Forests in the East in 1911. Ayers and Ashe in their written report to the Secretary of the Interior identified woods burning and cattle grazing as two of the most destructive practices affecting the Southern Appalachian forests at that time. It is ironic that over a hundred years later the United States Forest Service should be promoting the result of these harmful practices as a desirable management outcome. Georgia ForestWatch intends to continue to monitor these proposed activities and engage the Forest Service in a dialogue over the proper ecological stewardship of Georgia's high elevation summits. ■

A living stream: ForestWatch hosts two Conasauga snorkel outings

by Charles Seabrook : Board Member and Lori Martell : Outreach Director

This summer, 50 lucky folks came eye-to-eye with a startling variety of fish, the most colorful fish you'll see anywhere outside a coral reef or tropical river. The first outing included ForestWatch members and friends, and the second group involved members of our partner organization, Keeping It Wild.

We converged at the "snorkeling hole" in the Conasauga River, where we met U.S. Forest Service Biologist Jim Herrig. Jim taught us about the remarkable river we were about to enter. Altogether, more than 90 fish species live in the 90-mile-long Conasauga. The river originates from small springs and seeps at an elevation of about 4,000 feet in the Cohutta Wilderness of the Chattahoochee National Forest in North Georgia's Fannin and Gilmer counties. About 10 miles of the Conasauga flows through Tennessee, including the Alaculsy Valley in the Cherokee National Forest. By the time it reaches the valley, it has descended to 1,100 feet, where it harbors a profound diversity of aquatic life.

Consider that the entire Colorado River system out West contains only 33 native species; the entire Columbia River system in the Pacific Northwest contains only 25 native species. This is true despite the fact that these Western river systems are enormous compared with the Conasauga. The Columbia drains 258,000 square miles; the Conasauga only 770 square miles.

While some of us finished squeezing into wetsuits, Jim was already in the water giving snorkeling tips and identifying fish for kids and adults alike. Jim has an uncanny knack for speaking through his snorkel, pointing out various species as he swims along. In less than an hour, we spotted more than 15 species in the remarkably clear mountain water. Among them were the:

- Blue shiner, a species listed as threatened on the federal Endangered Species list. The dusky blue, 4-inch-long creature with pale yellow fins needs exceptionally clear, silt-free water to lay its eggs in underwater rock crevices. The upper Conasauga, with its near-pristine waters, is the blue shiner's last stronghold.
- Bronze darter, whose brownish-yellow back features eight to 10 bluish splotches resembling a series of saddles running down its 3-inch-long body.
- Mobile logperch, which has a series of tigerlike dark stripes running down the length of its yellowish body. A close relative is the Conasauga logperch, an endangered species that also lives in the snorkeling hole.
- Alabama hogsucker, a black-and-white-striped bottom dweller. It was swimming with a closely related species, the black redhorse sucker, a long, slender fish with a dark olive-green back and golden-colored sides.

(continued on page 15)

Lori Martell photo

All the children that attended were thrilled with the experience. Declan, age 6, enjoyed seeing the fish while snorkeling and using the unique view tube he's seen holding here.

Lori Martell photo

Our good friend, Jim Herrig, aquatics biologist for the Forest Service, gave a pre-snorkel introduction to the fish of the Conasauga.

• Freshwater drum, whose mating sound resembles clicks that we could hear underwater.

Lori Martell, ForestWatch outreach director, spent much of her time in the fast moving water, called a riffle, at the upstreatm boundary of the pool, "As I neared the riffle I noticed the current moving faster. I came around a large rock and suddenly I was surrounded by fish and in very shallow, fast water. With the wetsuit on I floated right at the surface and watched the different behaviors of each fish. Some flip rocks seemingly too huge for their small size, some snack on aquatic plants growing on the rocks, some stay right at the water surface plucking at insects. The longer I stayed still, the more the fish began to ignore me and go about their lives. One even nibbled gently on my hand as I gripped a rock for support. Being in their world left me awestruck. This river must be protected – I want my grandchildren to snorkel in this pool!"

Georgia ForestWatch is helping to do just that, joining forces with Environment Georgia, the Southern Environmental Law Center and others. The Conasauga's headwaters has been nominated as an Outstanding National Resource Water, which would give the river the highest level of protection available under the Clean Water Act. After a briefing from their Environmental Protection Division, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources board will consider the proposal, open it for public comment in October, and render a decision in December. Keep your eyes open for the upcoming action alert on this issue and rally in support of this living stream. ■

Wayne Jenkins photo

Snorkeling the wild Conasauga River is a unique way to experience this living stream – don't miss next year's snorkel.

Georgia ForestWatch is hiring: We seek fulltime forest ecologist

Spread the word. We are currently looking to hire a full-time Forest Ecologist based out of our office in Ellijay, Georgia, to aid in our forest monitoring and conservation efforts.

Primary responsibilities:

- Coordinate our District Leader program to better prepare our volunteers to engage in the Forest Service's environmental review process and ultimately affect decisions and actions on the ground.
- Work collaboratively with Forest Service managers to define better methods for forest "restoration," and design forest health projects with a sustainable ecosystem approach over thousands of acres of degraded forest stands on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.
- Ensure proper monitoring of specific vegetation management at the project level, and decipher scientific literature relating to specific project goals in order to more effectively involve the public in forest management proposals.
- GIS analysis of specific project proposals for use in responding to the Forest Service review process.
- Develop new GIS technologies to better predict and design forest management goals that could be adopted by the U.S. Forest Service and other forest management organizations.

Qualifications:

Minimum: Bachelor's degree in forestry, ecology, conservation biology or closely related field. Must have extensive experience in GPS and some knowledge of ArcGIS 9.(x) technologies.

Preferred: Master's degree in fields mentioned above. One or more years of professional experience in the field of ecology or GIS technology, and a working knowledge of the Forest Service NEPA process and Forest Plans.

Salary: $29,000 to $34,000 depending upon qualifications.

Applications will be reviewed immediately and the position will remain open until filled. Applicants should send a cover letter, resume, and three professional references to: Wayne Jenkins, 15 Tower Rd., Ellijay, GA 30540, or email these items to wjenkins@gafw.org. ■

U.S. Forest Service edging closer to a boating/ no boating decision

We're not quite at the endgame of the boating issue for the 21 miles of the Upper Chattooga, but matters are somewhat closer to coming to a head.

As all ForestWatchers already know, the U.S. Forest Service last month came forward with six alternative proposals for managing the largely pristine and mostly still wild section of this Wild and Scenic river from the headwaters outside Cashiers, North Carolina, down to the Route 28 bridge on the border between Georgia and South Carolina.

Three of the alternatives maintained the boating ban that has been in effect for this reach for better than 30 years. The last three would permit boating, either on selected sections of these headwaters or along the entire stretch, with varying degrees of permissions granted to remove large woody debris that are a key factor in the aquatic food chain of this and other similar rivers.

We are confident that many of you made the decision to comment on these personally by the mid-September deadline. But not to worry if that one got by you. There are going to be further opportunities to comment: Next up, another day-long 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.) workshop, scheduled for Saturday, September 29, billed as an opportunity for further public discussion of alternatives, with the agency asking for comment on its environmental assessment of the situation and its efforts to arrive at a "preferred alternative."

Joe Gatins photo

The lovely headwaters of the Wild & Scenic Chattooga River – will they remain protected?

The alternatives workshop will be held at the Rabun County Civic Center, 25 Court House Square, in Clayton. Registration begins at 9 a.m. Check this link, http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms/forest/projects/chattcomments.shtml, to get a feel for the public reaction to the Forest Service proposals so far. According to a Forest Service spokesman, that should come sometime in November, with another 30-day deadline for comment. Merry Christmas!

Boating or no boating, that is the question. ■

Announcing ForestWatch calendar photo contest

Georgia ForestWatch is looking to its members to provide photos for a calendar/dayplanner that we are planning to produce for 2009.

We'd like a mix of nature, heritage and family-friendly "people photos," all of which must be taken on, or involve, the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests landscapes and its plant and animal life. We especially are looking for photos of ForestWatch members and local residents of Georgia visiting or engaging in appropriate recreation of our special forestlands. It'll also be useful if the photos match the seasons of the year.

So, tune up those digital cameras and get ready to submit some great color images. Photographers whose work is selected for the calendar will receive appropriate recognition and accolades, not to mention wider exposure.

Rules for Contest Participation

Submitting Entries:

- Submit no more than 5 images, between now and June 1, 2008.
- Entries need to be uploaded at http://www.gafw.org/contest
  - o No e-mail submissions will be accepted.
  - o No U.S. Mail submissions will be accepted.
- If there are people in the photo(s), a completed photo release must accompany the submission. A photo release form may be downloaded at http://www.gafw.org/contest. Entries containing people submitted without a release cannot be considered. If there are un-identified folks in the photo, please do not send it.
- Each photograph must have details imbedded into the file properties as set out on the website: http://www.gafw.org/contest.
- Format: Images must be submitted digitally in JPEG format, with a size of 1024x768 (or higher) pixels, and a resolution of 300 dpi.
- When saving your digital picture please save as your last name and first initial. (Example for single entry: smithr.jpg) For multiple entries, include numbers 1 through 5 following your first initial. (Example for multiple entries: smithr1.jpg, smithr2.jpg)
- Images must be in color.
- Minor digital enhancement for cropping, red-eye removal, and corrective functions are permitted, but images that have been judged to be altered in any significant manner will be disqualified. Please do not place borders, backgrounds, watermarks, dates, signatures or copyright images onto photos.

Usage agreement:

- By submitting photographs, contestants give Georgia ForestWatch permanent non-exclusive rights, including advertising, websites, promotions, publications, media relations and commercial resale use. Photographers whose images are used in the 2009 calendar will receive photo credit and other recognition. For other uses, photo credit may or may not be granted. Compensation may or may not be granted. Contestants retain their own usage rights, of course.

Winners:

- Winners will have their photos published in our 2009 calendar/dayplanner.
- Winning photographers will be honored on our website.
- Winners will be notified via e-mail or phone.

Questions:

- Contest-related questions may be directed to Outreach Director Lori Martell at lmartell@gafw.org, or call 706-635-8733.

Lori Martell photo

Got a great photo? Send it in! Above: Hannah plays in the hemlocks.

(continued from page 10)

Dahlonega. The other option – hire Wayne Jenkins, Lori's husband, as the new paid, full-time head of the organization. Recognizing the need for a full-time director, the board leaned toward hiring Wayne, and the vote for him carried the day. On that evening, Wayne Jenkins became Georgia ForestWatch's third paid executive director since its founding in 1986.

Then, almost immediately, through hard work and with a good bit of luck, things indeed began to turn around.

> ... as one member put it, "Jenkins appeared to have the yin and Gatins, the yang, to make for a complementary team effort" ...

Wayne Jenkins, a former organic farmer, with much previous ForestWatch experience both as a board member and district leader, proved adept at juggling issues with the U.S. Forest Service – and raising the money necessary to pay the rent, utility bills and his own salary. In short, he restored confidence in the organization and among its members and donors. Two foundations responded with substantial, emergency-type grants that put the organization back on solid footing and gave it some badly needed breathing room.

Lori Jenkins, meanwhile, also was pivotal in getting the board on sound footing – she reorganized ForestWatch's books and did a thorough review of its finances.

In turn, Wayne and the district leaders got back to the main business of monitoring the national forests and the activities of the Forest Service. During Wayne's tenure so far, Georgia ForestWatch accomplishments include:

- Arriving at a settlement with the Forest Service over the closure of the Rich Mountain Road.
- Close review of the Brawley Mountain and White Bull timber sales.
- Mounting quick, successful campaigns to avert a questionable land swap in Rabun and proposed divestiture of national forestlands across the state.
- Providing key support for the Mountaintown Scenic Area legislation and concurrent wilderness additions.
- Corralling key funding for the new predator insect lab at the University of Georgia, whose aim is to find biological controls that might work against the deadly adelgid infestation killing native hemlocks across North Georgia.
- Arduous work to forge a collaborative relationship with national forest managers as they sought to implement a new forest plan.

That plan, on paper, calls for forest restoration rather than timber production – a reversal of decades of past practices, which took some getting used to on both the part of Georgia ForestWatch and that of the old guard of timber managers still in the Forest Service.

Wayne Jenkins, in particular, proved to be the kind of diplomat necessary to doing this job, while Gatins, who succeeded Sanders as president during the summer of 2005, grew into the job of helping guide the organization.

As one member put it, "Jenkins appeared to have the yin and Gatins, the yang, to make for a complementary team effort."

The new board and staff (which included both a new office manager and a forest ecologist to replace Medlock,) continued ForestWatch's annual fundraiser – a combined native plant sale and wine tasting – and revived the fall retreat for members and volunteers.

They also revised and reshaped internal policies – in essence, an organizational renewal.

By the end of this October, Gatins will step down as president and focus on fundraising. Peg Griffith will become the new president and Ted Doll, a new board member from Sautee, joins Sarah Linn to round out the executive officers of the board.

And so, the doldrums of 2003-2004 have dissipated. Georgia ForestWatch is back on a steady course, pursuing its mission of protecting, preserving and restoring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.

Georgia ForestWatch is back! As one supporter put it, "Like a phoenix." ■

HemlockFest 2007! Coming November 2-4

Hemlockfest 2007 is on the way and promises to be bigger and better than ever! Hosted by the Lumpkin Coalition as a fun-filled weekend for raising monies to protect our beautiful mountain hemlocks, this year's event will feature Bluegrass, Celtic rock, and Jam Band musical performances. Special family and child activities will be provided plus food, drink, and T-shirts will be available for purchase, all with the goal of supporting the research lab at UGA. Hemlockfest 2007 will be held at Starbridge just one hour north of Atlanta near the historic town of Dahlonega on November 2, 3 & 4.

Tickets are: Single day ticket: Friday – $15; Saturday – $20; Sunday – $10
Weekend ticket (including camping) – $40
Students (with id) and seniors (65+) $5 less on chosen ticket
Children 15 years and under are free

The Lumpkin Coalition, a non-profit 501c3 charitable organization based in Lumpkin County/Dahlonega, has really jumped into the Save Our Hemlocks effort, raising substantial amounts of money for supporting the new research lab at UGA and for many other environmental and social concerns in north Georgia. Go here some great music and support a great cause, Save Our Hemlocks!

Donations and/or ticket purchase (100% tax deductible) may be made in the forms of check or money order to: Lumpkin Coalition, 3865 Dawsonville Hwy, Dahlonega, GA, 30533, or by credit card through Pay Pal at this website: www.lumpkincoalition.org.

For directions or further information (on the event, the bands, ticketing, where to make donations, how you can help, etc.) please visit www.lumpkincoalition.org or e-mail: info@lumpkincoalition.org. You may also call: Forest Hilyer at 706-265-5282 or Murray Lamb at 706-973-9067.

Lori Martell photo

Georgia ForestWatch welcomes the following new members

Garrett Chism
Mary Fenton Doyle
Gay and Lesbian Atlanta Fund
Marilyn Kemp
Lori and Brad Martell
Bobbie Reed
Rock-Tenn Company
Nick Tatom
Bechy Thornton
Hoodie Troutman
Caleb Walker

Breaking News!

USDA Forest Service informed us that David Carter is the new acting Chattahoochee-Oconee Forest Supervisor. More details to come.

To e-mail or not to e-mail?

You now have the option to receive the quarterly Forest News by e-mail only. If you would like to forego receiving a printed copy, please let us know at info@gafw.org and we'll put you on the e-mail-only list.

Similarly, if your e-mail address has recently changed, or if you are not already receiving our Outing Alerts and Action Alerts by e-mail, please provide us with your e-mail address at info@gafw.org.

Use of these e-mail addresses are guided by the Georgia ForestWatch privacy policy, found at www.gafw.org.

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