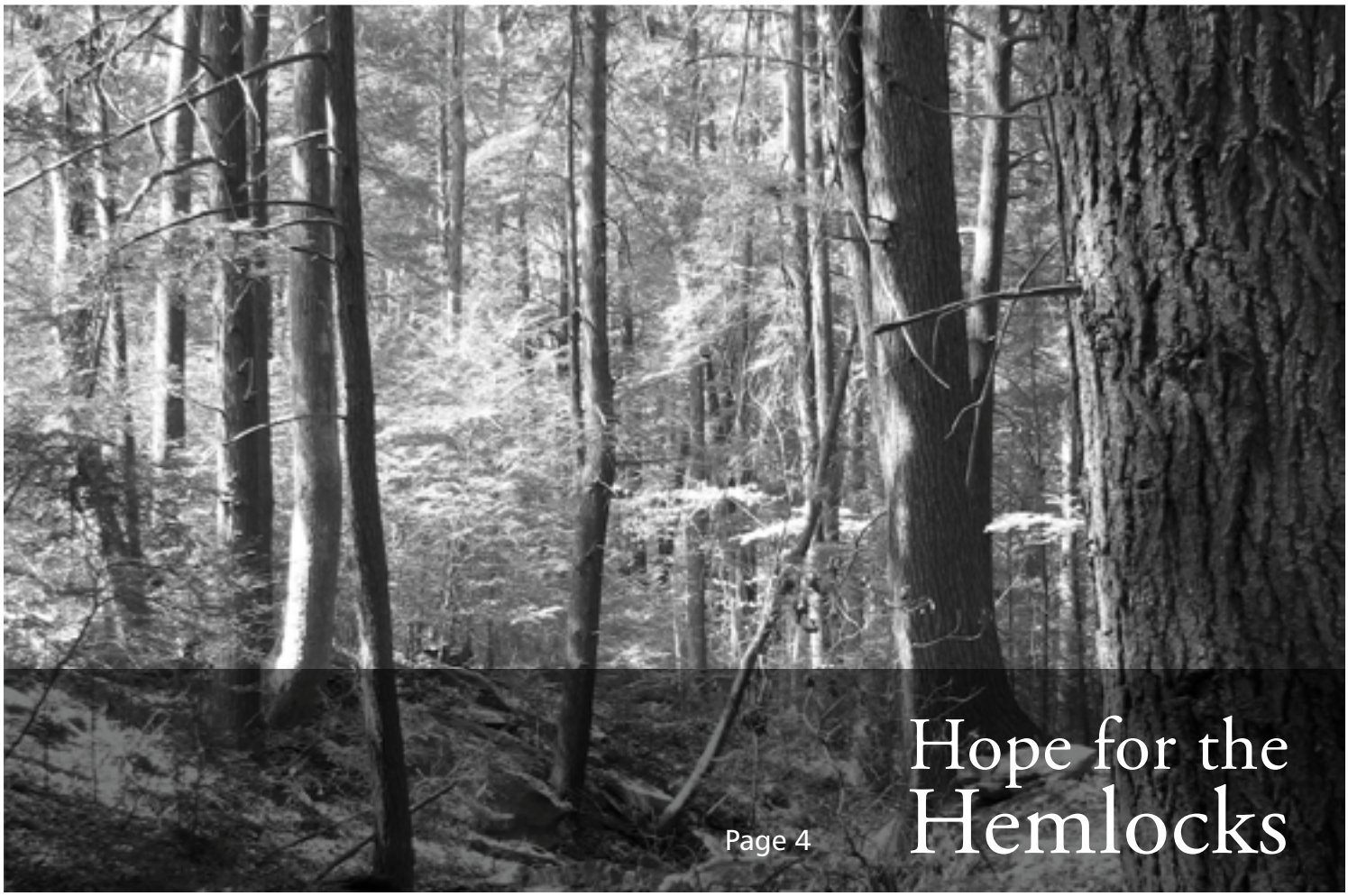
Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Spring 2007



Hope for the Hemlocks

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From The Director

The mountain hiking cure

Wayne Jenkins
Executive Director

You know how it is. The past few weeks have been really busy, stressful even. You're staring down the barrel of another week busier than the two you just survived. A little cranky, sluggish. You're grumpy and just not feeling too well. Maybe the flu is coming on. What to do?

Over 50 now, I've been here often enough to know what I need. What works for me to recharge the batteries, and gain a most-necessary attitude adjustment. Time to take a hike. Not just any hike, mind you, but a sojourn somewhere I've never been. New scenes to inspire and clear the mind. Usually not enough time for long distance travel to an exotic destination. Fortunately, I live fairly close to some of the most incredibly beautiful and diverse natural landscapes on the planet. And if you live in north Georgia, say between Atlanta and the Tennessee-North Carolina line, so do you. The Chattahoochee National Forest holds enough landscape of beauty and interest to fill a day or a lifetime of visits.

Having spent a bit of time over the last three decades rambling the coves, streams and ridges of what increasingly has come to feel like "my" forest, I always have places I want to go back to, unknown side coves to explore, forests that have grown older, whole mountains whose lonely summits require inspection. If my condition is particularly poor, I usually pick, as mentioned, somewhere new to visit. Always lifts my spirits to be somewhere "foreign" and unknown.

So last Sunday I lit out, driving through town and past all the folks in church, seeking God and sharing time together. That seems to work for many, but today I need something more tangible. Something apart from people and what we do, something "other."

There are some pretty big mountains in the Cohutta range between Chatsworth and Blueridge and their abrupt faces, rising to nearly 4000 feet, are the highest land between here and the Gulf of Mexico. Moist air welling up off the Gulf onto these escarpments must rise, cool and then drop more rain (between 80 to 100 inches annually) than that falling on the adjoining lower valleys, creating a kind of lush peak island affect. Deep black soils support some fine recovering second growth hardwood forests and one area in particular drew my attention. The largest contiguous block of old growth forest yet located on the Chattahoochee lies to the south of Grassy Mountain and wraps around to west and then north of the peak. Surely that might cure my modern cultural crud.

These mountainside faces of Grassy are fairly steep and getting into old growth is usually pretty challenging due to lack of roads, which explains one reason the big trees are still there. The day was perfect for hiking, clear blue sky and a little cool after what appeared to be more rain than the eight tenths I had gotten the day before back home. So I followed a motorcycle trail, reserved for off-road motorized cycle use that dropped from the road but then contoured across the mountain's south face, staying fairly high, crossing the heads of several streams. The bike crossings were making a mess of the spring heads and it seemed pretty irresponsible to have these kinds of trails here rather than on dry ridges. Never mind, the day is gorgeous, I'm in the woods and I'm already feeling that anticipation and expectation of a fine day out. The trail eases along just below beautiful grey rock faces spackled with black rock tripe lichens. Down slope, the world falls away steeply in a smooth concave sweep studded with hardwood forest.

Coming upon a sharp descent in the trail and wanting to maintain elevation and turn my back to the increasing whine of motor bikes heading up out of the valley below, I move off trail, creast a short narrow ridge and drop off into the upper cove of an area that is supposed to be old growth forest. On a more northwesterly facing slope now a cool gusty wind, the tail of the cold front that brought yesterday's rain, slaps me gently in the face. I'll be in and out of its soft buffeting all day while walking amongst tall swaying trees and scudding leaves.

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Georgia ForestWatch history, Part 3: Developing a unique identity

by Bob Kibler and Charles Seabrook
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The following is the third in a five-part series covering the history of Georgia ForestWatch over the last 20 years.

In 1994, after over-logging the national forests of the Pacific Northwest, ruining once-splendid landscapes and endangering animals such as the spotted owl, the timber industry set its sights on a new bonanza: the forests of the South. In the industry's eyes, Southern forests, after nearly a century of re-growth, were ripe for the chainsaw.

"Within 10 years, the South will account for about half of all lumber produced in the United States," University of Georgia economics forecaster Jeffrey Humphreys predicted in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution in October 1994.

That outlook sent shivers down conservationists' spines. They knew that there would be renewed pressure to log the South's national forests, including the Chattahoochee-Oconee in Georgia.

They girded for battle. By the time timber companies and the U.S. Forest Service began laying new plans for logging the region's public lands, a small army of savvy, dedicated tree-huggers had dug in to defend the forests from whining saws and snorting bulldozers.

Prime among the defenders was the relatively young Georgia ForestWatch, which had incorporated in 1993 as an independent, non-profit organization. Since its founding in August 1986, it had been on a roll, defeating several government plans to allow logging and road-building in environmentally sensitive areas of the Chattahoochee forest.

It also had played a pivotal role in 1991 in helping then-U.S. Rep. Ed Jenkins persuade Congress to permanently protect an additional 50,000 acres of the forest.

Now, in 1994, the lessons learned from those struggles would be of immense benefit for the skirmishes ahead. For the remainder of the 1990s, ForestWatch, in addition to waging other bitter battles to keep commercial lumberjacks out of the national forests, also would bird-dog the government's development of the second "Forest Land and Resource Management Plan" for the Chattahoochee-Oconee. From those efforts, the organization would emerge at the end of the decade as the premier organization – with a professional staff and a cadre of well-trained volunteers – guarding the natural splendor and ecological integrity of Georgia's national forests and advocating their preservation.

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

Cover photo: Hemlock forest near the Rich Mountain Wilderness in Gilmer County, still untouched by the adelgid. Photo by Lori Martell.

Hope for the hemlocks: UGA opens predator beetle laboratory

It was a long time in the making. But the end result – a new laboratory for the rearing of predator beetles aimed at controlling the most deadly pest killing native hemlocks across north Georgia – seemed to make the wait worthwhile. The lab gleams with new coats of paint; sophisticated, climate-controlled rearing rooms, and all necessary to fostering a rigorously scientific effort to try to counter the devastating Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.

More than 35 scientists, state and federal forest managers, and committed conservationists gathered for the lab's official opening in mid-March, and to thank all the individuals and partner agencies that came together to make the facility a reality.

"Never have I seen such a diverse group working so passionately toward a shared goal. We are well prepared now to do quality research," said Wayne Jenkins, Georgia ForestWatch executive director, credited by many as the key sparkplug behind the lab's establishment.

Georgia ForestWatch photo

Lab manager Tom Coleman discusses details with AP reporter Greg Bluestein

Georgia ForestWatch photo

Predatory beetle rearing cages in cool room.

Rearing and releasing the predator beetles is part of the regional effort to try to find suitable and successful biological controls so that the hemlocks, among the most majestic and longest-lived of all trees in the southeast, can continue to reproduce naturally. Unchecked, the adelgids successfully are decimating hemlocks in the Southeast, with its mild winters, in as few as three years.

The lab at UGA is concentrating its early efforts on rearing two species of predacious beetles, *Laricobius nigrinus* and *Scymnus sinuanodulus*. It soon expects to receive an additional Scymnus species, *S. ningshanenis*, and begin rearing it, too.

In Georgia, that effort is seconded by a companion rearing lab at Young Harris College, which has concentrated its efforts on another beetle species *Sassijscymnus tsugae*.

The beetles are released on infested hemlock stands on the Chattahoochee National Forest, under the joint direction of the scientists and the U.S. Forest Service.

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Bigger, better native plant sale, wine tasting slated for May 19th

ForestWatchers far and wide and members of the public who love native plants (with a little award-winning wine on the side) will want to mark their calendars for May 19.

All should attend our 2007 Wild and Woolly Native Plant Sale and Wine Tasting at Tiger Mountain Vineyards, Saturday at 2-6 p.m.

This event serves as one of the main benefits for Georgia ForestWatch each year – and with only a $20 admission fee, it's deemed an "affordable fundraiser." It also has turned into one of the premier events of the spring social calendar in north Georgia, and all for a good cause.

Under the guidance and leadership of event co-chairwomen Helen Meadors and Sarah Linn, also get set for a bigger selection of your favorite native plants, with handy directions for proper planting and care, as well as appearances from two plant experts.

Be on the lookout for special appearances by Peter Loewer, the noted gardener and author from Asheville, and Georgia ForestWatch member Patricia Kyritsi Howell of Mountain City, author of the well-regarded Medicinal Plants of the Southern Appalachians.

"We see this as a fun and worthwhile event, and hope everyone will come out for a visit that afternoon," Meadors said.

Tiger Mountain Vineyards, a noted farm winery in Rabun County, is located two miles south of downtown Clayton on Old U.S. 441. "Besides wine for tasting, we'll have bread, cheese and other assorted foods to eat," said Martha Ezzard, co-owner of the vineyards.

For further information, call (706) 635-8733 or contact info@gafw.org.

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Tom Coleman, the new lab's manager, hinted beetle releases were aimed at finding a proper balance in the hemlock ecosystem. "We're not going to eradicate it (the adelgid,)" he said. "We just hope to keep it at low levels where it's not killing our trees."

Jenkins said much the same: "We are all hopeful that this research will lead to successful placement and reproduction of a group of adelgid predators that can save these beautiful trees."

Jenkins also made a plea for continued financial support for the lab. "Now is the time to get our fundraising campaign in high gear," he said, referring to efforts to raise the additional $60,000 needed to match a generous $75,000 challenge grant proffered by the Turner Foundation. "The Turner challenge, matching each donated dollar for dollar, is a great opportunity for concerned citizens to help save these beautiful trees," Jenkins concluded.

DO YOUR PART In Saving Our Hemlocks

Make a donation to the Save Our Hemlocks campaign! All gifts are tax deductible and used 100% for supporting the HWA Bio-Control Research Laboratory at the University of Georgia.

Your donation will be matched dollar for dollar with a generous grant from the Turner Foundation. You can't beat that!

Go to http://www.gafw.org/membership.htm and make a donation using your credit card or call GFW's office @ 706.635.TREE (8733) for making a credit card gift by phone

Or mail a check to Georgia ForestWatch
15 Tower Road • Ellijay, GA 30540
Put "HWA Lab" in the memo area
THANKS!

An evening under the "green roof"

by Lori Martell : Outreach Director

One of Georgia ForestWatch's most loyal and longtime supporters, the Turner Foundation, hosted a reception for Georgia ForestWatch on February 28 – under the theme, See the Forest for the Trees. Laura and Rutherford Seydel, daughter and son-in-law of Ted Turner, graciously held the event in their new environmentally friendly home, EcoManor, located in the heart of Buckhead.

Lori Jenkins

From left: Laura Seydel, Turner Foundation President Michael Finley, Joe Gatins, and Wayne Jenkins address the crowd gathered in the EcoManor living room.

Guests included notables from Georgia's philanthropic community, successful business leaders and not a few of Atlanta's well-known power couples. Georgia ForestWatch staff, board members, advisors and district leaders mingled among the crowd, answering questions about programming and forest issues. Executive Director, Wayne Jenkins was pleased with the number of ForestWatchers in attendance, "I was reminded once again just how dedicated a group of volunteers we are blessed with!"

Nearly one hundred guests gathered in EcoManor's living room, where beautiful photographs of forest scenes by artist (and former Georgia ForestWatch board member) Kathryn Kolb were on display. The crowd enjoyed a gourmet spread generously donated by Whole Foods, while Jenkins and Georgia ForestWatch President Joe Gatins gave brief presentations.

The event provided guests with the opportunity to get to know Georgia ForestWatch in a relaxed atmosphere. While not a direct fundraiser, Gatins made it clear that we are looking to expand our donor base. He elicited chortles from the audience when he said, "We're looking for increased support. We take checks, cash, credit cards, and we know how do deal with gifts of appreciated stock!"

Everyone at Georgia ForestWatch is grateful to our hosts, Laura and Rutherford Seydel and the Turner Foundation for this important and fun evening and look forward to building upon the relationships that were sparked and strengthened throughout the evening.

For more information on EcoManor's green building features, check: www.ecomanor.com

For more information on Georgia ForestWatch programs, see www.gafw.org, or call 706.635.TREE (8733) or email to info@gafw.org and request an information packet. ■

President Bush and his forest legacy

by David Govus : Co-district Leader

As the Bush administration lurches through its final months, conservationists are assessing the damage done to the public's land and the policies that guide the management of those lands during the 74 months of the Republican administration.

The Republican Party for nearly a century had a legitimate claim as a political party that supported conservation. It was the first Republican President, Abraham Lincoln, who took the initial steps towards protecting any natural landscapes in the United States by protecting Yosemite. In 1872 it was a Republican President, Ulysses Grant, who signed the bill creating Yellowstone Park. In 1891 it was Republican President Benjamin Harrison who signed legislation that created forest reserves, the predecessor to national forests administered by the U.S. Forest Service. Republican President Theodore Roosevelt established Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge and over the course of his presidency, TR protected over 230,000,000 acres – an area equal in size to Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin combined. He quadrupled the land in national forests, invented the National Wildlife Refuge System, created fifty-five refuges, and proclaimed eighteen national monuments, including 870,000 acres of the Grand Canyon and 640,000 acres of Mount Olympia. Roosevelt even dispatched the Marines to protect Midway Island's albatrosses from poachers. In 1960 Republican President Dwight Eisenhower set aside the vast coastal plain now known as the Artic Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. In the 1960s, the efforts of Republican Congressman John Saylor made a large contribution towards establishing the Wilderness and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Acts. In 1970 Republican President Richard Nixon established the Environmental Protection Agency and appointed a tenacious Republican environmental advocate named Bill Ruckelshaus as its first administrator. In 1973 Nixon signed into law the Endangered Species Act, which had passed both houses of Congress with overwhelming bi-partisan support.

Until the Reagan administration, the Republican Party for the most part lived up to its role as a truly conservative party. Coupled with a belief in free enterprise and fiscal probity was the natural corollary that it was a conservative position to conserve and protect our natural resources in the broadest sense. Animals, plants and their habitats, ... all of it. The appointment of James Watt of Wyoming as Secretary of the Interior by President Reagan signaled a sea change by the Republican Party in its attitude towards the environment and conservation. Watt came to the job from the Mountain States Legal Foundation, an organization started by the conservative beer billionaire Joseph Coors, and funded by corporations interested in resource extraction. Watt was quoted as saying "we will drill more, mine more and cut more timber." Resource extraction became paramount. Watt appointed the notorious Ann Gorsuch, a fellow Wyoming native, as the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. Gorsuch immediately slashed the Agency's budget, barely concealing her desire to dismantle the agency.

Not believing in government, the Reaganites had no interest in governing well. Privatization ran amok, leaving the ranks of public servants diminished and demoralized. The scandalous behavior of Watt and Gorsuch forced both of them to resign within two years. But their intemperate behavior, coupled with Democratic control of both the House and Senate, fortunately resulted in little long term damage to the web of laws that had been created to protect our environment.

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President Bush

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Fast forward to the administration of George W. Bush. Bush, from Texas, and his vice President, Dick Cheney, from Wyoming, who selected two former alumni of the Mountain States Legal Foundation and protégés of James Watt for the most important natural resource positions in the federal government. Gale Norton was appointed Secretary of the Interior and Ann Veneman as Secretary of Agriculture. Norton, who as a lawyer for the Mountain States Legal Foundation argued that certain industries have a "right to pollute," selected the notorious coal lobbyist, J. Steven Griles as Deputy Secretary of the Interior. Griles and Norton aggressively pushed to open America's public land to resource extraction and to minimize the environmental review of such actions. Griles' most infamous act was to get the waste generated from mountaintop removal classified as 'fill,' thus relieving the coal companies from the obligations of the Clean Water Act. Griles astoundingly managed to draw a $250,000 a year salary from his former employers through his entire stint at Interior. Griles was finally forced to resign in disgrace but only after four years of damaging activity.

Then, on March 23, Griles pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice in a Senate committee's investigation, becoming the highest-ranking Bush administration official convicted in the Jack Abramoff corruption scandal. The former No. 2 official in the Interior Department admitted in federal court that he lied to the Senate about his relationship with convicted lobbyist Abramoff, who repeatedly sought Griles' intervention at the agency on behalf of Abramoff's Indian tribal clients, according to Associated Press news accounts.

Second in rank only to Norton, Griles effectively was Interior's chief operating officer while at the agency between July 2001 and January 2005, and its top representative on Vice President Dick Cheney's energy task force, according to an Associated Press report relating to the sentencing. Norton also resigned after four years and has taken a job as lead council for Shell Oil.

With the help of the former Republican Congressman Charles Taylor, the Bush-Cheney forces, also managed to whittle down some 90 percent of the $600 million that President Clinton allocated for land conservation and acquisition programs in his last year in office. Last fall Taylor lost his seat and Republicans lost control of the House. Bush's current budget only calls for $48 million to finance the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Forest Legacy Fund – making mockery of the White House's recent comparison of Bush with the great Republican conservationist Teddy Roosevelt.

Still at work for Bush -Cheney, meanwhile, is perhaps the most determined and craftiest anti-environmentalist, Mark Rey. Rey, a long time timber lobbyist, was appointed Undersecretary of Agriculture in October of 2001 and placed in charge of the Forest Service. He embarked upon a multiyear campaign to weaken environmental protection and public involvement in the management of the 194 million acres under the control of the Forest Service. Rey set out to accomplish his goals for the most part not by initiating new legislation (the misnamed Healthy Forest Initiative aside) but rather by making subtle changes to the rules and regulations that governed existing environmental laws. Obscure notices published in the Federal Register had major consequences for the conservation of the public's forest. Fortunately ForestWatch groups and environmental attorneys across the country were up to the challenge and have fought Rey's initiatives tooth and nail.

Rey's prime focus from the day he took office was the repeal of Clinton's Roadless Rule. In 1998 Forest Service engineers, faced with an $8 billion dollar maintenance backlog on the 384,000 miles of existing Forest Service roads, asked for a moratorium on road building. Faced with a petition supporting roadless area protection signed by more than 500 Forest Service scientists and managers, former Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck temporarily suspended road building in the wildlands in 1999. A full environmental impact statement and more than 600 public meetings later President Clinton permanently protected 58 million acres from road building with his Roadless Rule. Rey's solution was to rewrite the rule, turning it on its head, and in a bizarre twist of logic, handing responsibility for the fate of the unroaded forest that belong to all the people of the nation over to the governors of the various states. To make matters even more onerous the governors who did wish to protect roadless areas in their states would be forced to submit a costly petition to the Forest Service which might or might not accept it. In contrast to Clinton's extensive rule making process, Rey held no public hearings and completed no environmental review. So it should have come as no surprise to Rey that on September 19, 2006 his rule felt the "whip of an injunction" and "the lash of a judicial ruling," phrases that he himself had used to describe the frightening effect that environmental law enforcement had allegedly wreaked on rural communities. Federal Magistrate Elizabeth Laporte ruled that Rey ignored the National Environmental Policy Act as well as the Endangered Species Act when he refused to look at the environmental consequences of rolling back Clinton's Roadless Rule.

This legal setback coupled with the results of the November 2006 elections will ensure that Rey will be remembered as the undersecretary who failed to repeal the Roadless Rule. Bush's long campaign against the environment is winding down with a whimper instead of a bang.

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Postscript: As this issue went to press it was announced that the Bush /Rey attempt to roll back public involvement and environmental protection in our National Forests had received another setback. A federal judge in the 9th circuit ruled that the Bush / Rey 2005 rewrite of the rules guiding and implementing the 1976 National Forest Management Act was illegal. The National Forest Management Act of 1976 charged the Forest Service with creating a management plan every decade for each unit of the National Forest, to fully involve the public in the creation of these plans and to analyze the cumulative environmental impacts of these management activities. Bush/ Rey attempted to rewrite the rules implementing this law without public involvement or environmental review. This undercover attack on the original intent of the legislation when brought to the light of day and judicial review was thwarted. ■

Get out!

Join us on one of these FREE outings:

April 21 – Tray Mountain Hike
Under 3 miles – rated easy
Panoramic mountaintop views!

April 28 – Brawley Mountain Hike
7 miles – rated moderate
See mature moist forest before it gets cut!

Margery Diamond

Thirty hikers joined us on Joe Gatins' Historic Chattooga Stroll outing in February.

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

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(please print)

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Email: _____

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

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Growing Pains

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"I think 1994 really was when Georgia ForestWatch gained its own identity," said Rene Voss, who was the organization's first staff member.

That year, with the timber industry exerting big pressure on the government to log some of the last wild places in the Chattahoochee, ForestWatch and other conservation groups saw the drawing up of a new detailed management plan as a chance to protect tens of thousands more acres of the forest from logging and road-building.

Like the first comprehensive management scheme implemented in the mid-1980s, the second plan was required by federal law. It would guide Forest Service management of the Chattahoochee-Oconee forests for another 10-15 years, probably through 2015 and perhaps beyond. Georgia ForestWatch was well familiar with the planning process – the organization was spawned in 1986 as part of a legal settlement between the Forest Service and seven conservation groups that challenged the first plan.

When that first plan was publicly unveiled by the Forest Service in October 1984, it caught the conservation groups flat-footed. When they scrutinized it, they frantically realized that they would be hard-pressed to understand the confusing jargon and interpret what the 750-page document meant for the future of the forests. They had to scramble and burn much midnight oil to absorb the information, comment on it and urge the Forest Service to devise a more acceptable management blueprint.

The conservationists claimed that the first plan favored the timber industry because it left more than 70 percent of the Chattahoochee and 90 percent of the Oconee open to logging.

In 1994, the now independent Georgia ForestWatch and other groups vowed they would not be caught off guard again. This time they would be well prepared when the Forest Service launched its second planning process. The process was supposed to get underway in earnest in 1996, although the agency would be doing preliminary work prior to that.

The conservation groups decided early on that their main objective in the forthcoming plan would be the protection of tens of thousands of additional acres of the Chattahoochee-Oconee forests from logging and road-building – beyond the areas that already were protected to some degree. At that time, 124,000 acres of the Chattahoochee were permanently protected by Congress, either as wilderness areas or wild and scenic river areas. Another 83,500 acres received limited "administrative protection" as scenic areas, botanical areas and trail corridors.

A key strategy towards achieving the conservationists' new goals would be to draw public attention to the natural beauty of the north Georgia highlands and emphasize the need to preserve still-intact wild places threatened by eventual logging.

Georgia ForestWatch photo

Peter Kirby with blooming rhododendron in Cooper Creek Scenic Area.

The result was an 80-page booklet, "Georgia's Mountain Treasures: The Unprotected Wildlands of the Chattahoochee Oconee National Forests," published by the Wilderness Society in January 1995. It was the third in a series of reports as part of the Wilderness Society's Southern Appalachian Project. The two previous reports---one on the Nantahala and Pisgah national forests in North Carolina in 1992, and the other on the Andrew Pickens district of the Sumter National Forest in South Carolina – had proved successful in educating the public, politicians and even some government personnel about the need to sustain and restore the Southern Appalachian ecosystem.

The new report described and mapped forty-four wild areas – a total of 235,700 acres – of the 750,000-acre Chattahoochee forest that the conservationists wanted protected from further logging and road building. In essence, the report would serve as the basis for the conservationists' recommendations to the Forest Service. "In order to protect water quality, retain native plant and animal species and provide recreational opportunities, we are recommending that the wild areas detailed in this book be protected," the conservationists stated in the introduction. "We also are asking that these areas not be logged and roaded between now and when the new plan goes into effect so that options will not be lost."

Interim protection was important. Continued logging and road building until the plan was completed could disqualify potential roadless areas and take them out of the running for wilderness areas.

The 44 areas constituted some of the wildest and least disturbed tracts remaining in Georgia, the booklet noted. They ranged

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in size from 14,000 acres at Rabun Bald, the second-highest peak in Georgia, to 1,000 acres along Cooper Creek, a popular trout fishing spot. The tracts were crossed by few roads. They harbored century-old hardwoods, tumbling streams, stunning vistas, prime wildlife habitat and other natural assets. Most of them had been spared intensive logging since the early 1900s and harbored some of Georgia's last pockets of old-growth forest. Now, the conservation groups were asking the Forest Service to place the tracts in management categories that would protect them from future logging operations. Nearly half of the acreage, the conservationists believed, also qualified as roadless areas, an especially strong level of protection.

Fourteen environmental organizations had a hand in assembling and writing the report. In addition, former President Jimmy Carter and the Carter Center's Global 2000 program endorsed it. Peter Kirby, then director of the Wilderness Society's southeast regional office in Atlanta, led the ambitious effort to prepare the report. ForestWatch, through its district leaders, was singled out for its major role in mapping and describing the areas, much as it had done in 1991 for Ed Jenkins' wilderness bill. "A network of knowledgeable leaders from ForestWatch," as they were described in the preface, had scoured the woods for rare and endangered plants and old growth trees to determine places most at risk. More than 15 conservationists, about half ForestWatch volunteers, also were singled out by name for special acknowledgement.

The Forest Service's initial reaction to the report was subdued. When George Martin, the Chattahoochee's supervisor at the time, was asked if the agency would honor the groups' request that the 44 areas not be logged until the new plan went into effect, his answer was a flat "no." Five of the 44 areas, in fact, were scheduled for logging at that time. "We are not going to make any decisions on the allocation of lands [to various uses] until we hear from other members of the public," Martin said in an interview in January 1995. "We have to satisfy a lot of customers."

One of those "customers" was the Southern Timber Purchasers Council, which wanted to crank up the chainsaws and bulldozers in those areas as soon as possible. The council's spokeswoman, Deborah Baker, summed up the industry's attitude at the time: "All of these areas have been considered for wilderness designation in the past," she said. "If they are so great, why weren't they included then?"

To counter pressure from the timber industry to log the Chattahoochee, ForestWatch made another strategic move – bringing Rene Voss on board in early 1996 as a paid consultant with the title of "Campaign Director for the Planning Process."

"Rene really was Georgia ForestWatch's first employee," said Brent Martin, then the organization's president.

Voss at the time also was co-chairman of National Forest Issues for the Sierra Club's Georgia Chapter. He previously had been working, however, as an unpaid advisor to ForestWatch on appeals of Forest Service logging proposals. The decision to hire a staffer was clearly a departure from ForestWatch's status

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The mountain hiking cure

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It's early March. The leafless trees' upper branches still look pretty winterish but some tint of color appears to be rising up in the top-most buds. Despite being in full forest, the early spring sunshine warms the woods with a beautiful clear light and all is open for inspection. I can see the lay of the land in large sweeping gestures running smartly up toward the ridgeline and curving out in front and down into dark secret hollows below. Though the trees here are very tall and large they are not the huge trees most think of as old growth. Still, the land lays undisturbed by any sign of man. No roads or trails, or cut stumps to indicate past logging. Perhaps more significant, is the uneven-aged condition of this mixed hardwood forest. The trees that make up the top canopy layer are of different ages and beneath them is the next forest of various ages, waiting for a chance to gain the light. The majority of forests we see throughout north Georgia tend to be even aged, meaning the dominant trees or those comprising the canopy are about the same age. This is usually a result of a disturbance to the previous forest, which could be natural, say a large blow down or, more commonly, a timber harvest.

Picking my way slowly north across the steep west facing ridge, around more rock outcrops and large boulders and down into the heads of streams and up over intervening ridges is pleasant though hard work. These are some of the hidden places I really like. You can only get there on foot. They are rarely visited by people as evidenced by an almost complete absence of human trash. Their beauty this time of year is a simple wintry wildness of grey vertical trunks and rounded, smooth-grey rock thrusting from the rich soil, covered by a blanket of brown leaves under a bright blue sky. The spring green transformation is yet to begin but once underway, it will be shocking in comparison.

Based on a complex of guesswork on distance back to my truck, difficulty in getting there, personal stamina and the length of the day, a decision must be made at some point whether to continue sauntering or begin returning. With slopes this steep I usually give myself some margin for avoiding an unplanned night out and settle for exploration of one more cove. This one is wet but I cannot see a stream hiding under a boulder field, about two acres in size, filled with grey and mossy green stones from football to Volkswagen size. I dearly love these forested fields of rocks and pick my way carefully through. A twisted angle or busted knee here would surely undo my entire hard-earned attitude-adjustment. Finding a rather flat boulder about center of the "field," I climb on top and pause to take it all in. Intoxicating. What a world! The imagination is taxed to invent anything like it. Uncountable trees in every direction flowing over range upon range to the north. The Great Valley of Tennessee lies way down to the west with an increasing busy-ness but "up here" feels so apart, quiet and serene. Ah……the malaise has lifted.

I clamber steeply up the dividing ridge I just crossed and walk its spine up to the main ridge weaving again through rock outcrops and lone standing grey boulders. Gaining the main ridge running south from Grassy's summit, the outcrops jut sharply out of the earth to the east like fins on a fish and the more exposed forest becomes stunted into twenty foot tall, gnarled old oaks unworthy of men's saws. Things get thick as mountain laurel comes into the understory and I crawl, sidestep and push my way through. Suddenly, over, almost before it happens, a grouse disappears in an explosion of sound and chestnut-brown fluttering wings. Then glides out of sight. Nice! What a treat to get so close to this wild mountain bird. And now I'm soaring.

It's steep and further to the top than I thought but as my legs grow tired my brain seems amped with oxygen, my daypack lighter, my drinking water sweeter. It's all in my head of course but then again what isn't? And it was that change in the head I needed. That's why I came. The mountain hiking cure. I recommend it highly.

Georgia ForestWatch welcomes the following new members

Mark Bowden
Bill Calton
Darron Collins
Mark & Anna Lisa Derenthal
Joseph R. Hill
Jeff Hurley
Richard Kahn
Kennedy Lyon
Carole & James McCollum
Peter & Sally Parson
Bill Sapp
Mrs. Spain Willingham
Biff & Beverly Wilson

Growing Pains

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as a strictly volunteer organization, and at first there was some reluctance on the board to hire Voss. But after discussion, it agreed that Voss could be effective in trying to further the ForestWatch goal of limiting logging in the national forest.

Voss and ForestWatch board member James Sullivan subsequently wrote a grant to the Turner Foundation Inc., which awarded the organization a matching grant of $25,000. The funds were matched by a grant in kind from the Wilderness Society – Kirby arranged for Voss to have space and access to equipment in the Wilderness Society's Atlanta office. Voss was paid a salary of $22,000 and remaining funds went into operating expenses.

For the next two years, Voss, with the help of numerous other individuals, worked to try to achieve two major objectives – engage the public in the planning process and seek and advocate interim protection for the 44 areas described in Georgia Mountain Treasures.

One of the opportunities for public participation came in the fall of 1996, when the Forest Service, as an initial step in the planning process, conducted public meetings and hearings for the public to express what it valued in the forest and the special places they wanted protected in the second management plan. To help rally public support for more forest protection, ForestWatch hired Dana Smith, formerly with Greenpeace, for a three month-stint. Smith collected more than 1,000 individual favorable comments from schools, churches and elsewhere. In addition, more than a dozen organizations were enlisted as advocates for wilderness and other forms of protection.

In addition to that effort, Angela Fincher (who later married Brent Martin) and Shirl Parsons, who worked in the Wilderness Society's Atlanta office at the time, organized planning sessions and other meetings at various locations to keep conservationists and the public abreast of the planning process.

The result: The public input during the early comment period of the process was the largest for any forest in the Southeast.

While all that was going on, another major concern among conservationists at the time was how many tracts of the forest would the Forest Service include in the roadless inventory of the new plan. Roadless areas are undeveloped national forest lands that are the nearest candidate for consideration as potential wilderness. Federal law dictates that each time the Forest Service revises a forest management plan, it must consider and evaluate roadless areas that have potential for recommendation as wilderness to Congress. Even if the agency does not recommend an area in the roadless inventory as wilderness, the forest plan must provide a high level of protection from logging and road building for the area.

Jim Herd was the Forest Service officer in charge of the roadless area inventory in the mid-1990s. To the utter disappointment of the conservation groups, Herd came up with only a total of 11,000 acres deemed eligible for roadless area status. Although other tracts of the Chattahoochee forest satisfied the size and roadless area criteria – a minimum of 5,000 acres and less than one-half mile road per 1,000 acres – he had excluded many of them on the basis of the "solitude" (or sights and sounds) criterion. The conservation groups thought this rather ironic since several established wilderness areas in other public lands were close to major cities.

"Herd's attitude was ridiculous," Voss said. "It was obvious to us that he wanted to keep the roadless area inventory for the Chattahoochee as minimal as possible,"

ForestWatch itself came up with a total of 115,000 acres – all of them described in Georgia Mountain Treasures – that it believed qualified for roadless status. ForestWatch volunteers had verified most of the acreage by eyeballing and surveying it on the ground. The conservationists confronted the Forest Service with their findings. A major bone of contention was the question of what classified as a "road," Voss said. The forest service seemed willing to accept the loosest definition of a road in the forest, he said.

Slowly and painfully, the Forest Service was persuaded to accept some of ForestWatch's roadless recommendations. Ultimately, the agency included a total of 65,000 acres in the roadless area inventory of the new plan. "Persuading Herd to do that was a big pain in the butt," Voss said. "He was very stubborn; he didn't want to give us anything."

The larger roadless areas of the Chattahoochee in the new management plan included The Rabun Bald (Sarah's Creek), Mountaintown (Pink Knob), Rocky Mountain, Kelly Ridge, Patterson Gap (Joe Gap), and Springer Mountain (Lance Creek). Once in the roadless inventory, these areas could not be altered until the plan's completion. (See web link at the end of this article for a map of roadless areas.)

But tens of thousands of more acres, areas like Rocky Face and Worley Ridge, listed in Georgia Mountain Treasures, would not receive interim protection. ForestWatch and the other conservation groups, then, would have to continue challenging timber sales in the forest to protect these special places.

That set the stage for one of the conservationists' greatest victories – a favorable ruling in the lawsuit known as Sierra Club vs. George Martin. It ultimately resulted in the temporary discontinuation of commercial logging in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.

ForestWatch in 1995 had appealed seven major timber sales that were to take place in tracts of mature hardwoods – some

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Marie Mellinger (1914-2006)

by Charles Seabrook : Board Member

Marie Mellinger once said that she could never remember a time in her long life when she was not in love with nature. And she fervently showed it – in her passion for forests and mountains and swamps, and for the wildflowers and trees and birds and butterflies that inhabit them. She still had that abiding love when she died at her home in Clayton on Dec. 28, 2006 at age 92.

A self-taught botanist, her reverence for the natural world was infectious and spread to countless others. Atlanta Journal-Constitution garden columnist Lee May wrote of her in 1995: "She is a naturalist, a woman who can walk the woods and see what most people never would notice. Moreover, she can identify it, tell you what its botanical name is, whether you can eat it safely and, on top of that, appreciate its beauty and historical significance."

At the same time, she was a feisty activist, never one to back away from controversy. She never let up in trying to protect her beloved North Georgia mountains from ruin by loggers, developers and road-builders. A cadre of young environmentalists and naturalists rallied around her and her cause.

Said one of her disciples, Ila Hatter, who learned the art of "wildcrafting" from her: "Marie could be exasperating at times, and yet instill an enthusiasm for protecting wild places that few can match."

Marie helped block the construction of destructive roads in the Chattahoochee National Forest; helped preserve Hurricane Creek; and helped establish the Nantahala Wilderness. She helped then-Gov. Jimmy Carter in the 1970s halt construction of a dam at Sprewell Bluff on the Flint River. She helped found the grassroots organization Friends of the Mountains in 1983 when the Reagan Administration raised the specter of selling off national forest land. She was a great supporter of Georgia ForestWatch, and was an active member of the Chattooga Conservancy, collecting and selling native wildflower seeds to raise funds for the organization.

Every October, in fact, found her in the fields, woods and roadsides gathering seeds of sweet goldenrods, joe-pye weed, iron weed, butterfly weed and asters, which she packaged in little envelopes and sent to her many friends and gardeners at Christmas.

Marie was not a wealthy woman, but her gifts of seeds were priceless, straight from her heart.

Marie, however, had a running battle with highway and powerline workers, who whacked down her precious wildflowers or poisoned them with herbicides. "I just wish they would work with us in trying to save these beautiful wild plants along our roads," she said.

She was anxious to share her extensive know-how with others. She taught nature workshops at state parks, Foxfire and elder hostels. For 30 years she wrote a nature column for the Clayton Tribune and wrote 11 articles for Tipularia, the scientific journal of the Georgia Botanical Society.

> ... she regularly spiced her writings and talks – and ordinary conversations – with quotes from the great naturalists, expecially Henry David Thoreau ...

One of her crowning achievements was her work on the Atlas of the Vascular Flora of Georgia, which displays the county by county ranges of more than 2,700 native plants in the Peach State. For those of us who regularly botanize in Georgia, the atlas remains an invaluable tool.

But Marie also could go from writing scholarly articles to penning vivid poetry about nature. She regularly spiced her writings and talks – and ordinary conversations – with quotes from the great naturalists, especially Henry David Thoreau.

Perhaps Marie's greatest love, however, was the Georgia Botanical Society, which she joined in 1967 when it was a small group of professional botanists. She became its president for the first time in 1971. According to the society's newsletter: "She opened membership to anyone interested in native plants and the natural environment -- regardless of their academic credentials. Although these steps were said to have shocked some of the old-guard botanists, membership in the Society grew from less than 100 to several hundred members in five years."

As Ila Hatter said at Marie's memorial service at the Chattooga Conservancy in January: "A mighty tree has fallen, Marie Mellinger." ■

Does restoration forestry have to pay?

by David Govus : Co-district Leader

The U.S. Forest Service held an open house in the woods during the last week in February. A group of Georgia ForestWatch members attended. The reason for the gathering was to take a look on the ground at some projects proposed by the agency within the on-going Large Scale Assessment on the western districts of the Chattahoochee National Forest. For the past year, the Forest Service has been attempting to compile a list of projects that would meet with the approval of the various concerned stakeholder groups. The idea was to assemble a number of non-controversial projects (low hanging fruit) having to do with forest health and ecological restoration in a multi-thousand-acre package representing a menu of work for several years into the future. From the Forest Service's viewpoint this approach offers several advantages in that it might reduce the expense of environmental analysis and would allow for a more rational budgeting process. Georgia ForestWatch members have warily but hopefully attended many meetings on this topic in the past year desiring to see projects proposed that truly reflect forest health needs.

> ... the purpose was to examine sites for Longleaf Pine restoration and particularly some sites that Georgia ForestWatch had questioned as inappropriate for restoring this forest type ...

Georgia ForestWatch has a realistic and open-minded approach to this process. Collaboration, if possible, is always better than confrontation and Georgia ForestWatch realizes that the Forest Service, a vast 100-year-old bureaucracy, is most likely not going to become merely a custodial organization. Logging projects will be proposed and, eventually, performed and our idea is to encourage the Forest Service to select worthwhile projects or at least projects that do little harm. We do not wish a return to the bad old days from the mid 1960s to the mid 1990s when the Forest Service was clear cutting an average of 50,000 acres per decade and Georgia ForestWatch was continuously filing administrative appeals, and ultimately was a party to the lawsuit that halted the Forest Service's commercial timber program on this forest until the present. From our perspective the most compelling "forest health" issue, addressable by managing timber is the thinning of overstocked pine stands susceptible to the native southern pine beetle. Other examples of projects that we find worthwhile are thinning of planted, non-native Loblolly Pine and White Pine plantations, restoration of river cane and restoration of native Longleaf Pine.

The open house we attended was in the far southwestern reaches of the Armuchee District southwest of Dalton. The purpose was to examine sites for Longleaf Pine restoration and particularly some sites that Georgia ForestWatch had questioned as inappropriate for restoring this forest type. The first stop was to view a remnant stand of Montane (mountain) Longleaf Pine. Northwestern Georgia and Northeastern Alabama contain the only remaining examples of this rare forest type. Over most of its range Montane Longleaf and its unique suite of grasses and herbaceous plants has suffered from fire suppression and usurpation by planted Loblolly plantations. After several miles of back roads we arrived at a site that had a few specimens of this most interesting tree species. We were disappointed that the decision was made not to walk a half mile to see a stand that purportedly supported over 500 mature Longleaf trees.

We then loaded back up and the cavalcade moved to a site where a few acres of longleaf had been planted a decade ago. This small stand was suffering from encroachment by Virginia Pine. Since the conventional wisdom is that fire is necessary to protect the fire tolerant Longleaf from invasion by fire intolerant Virginia Pine we asked why this area had not been burned. The answer was that it was judged not cost effective to burn this area as it was too small. The Forest Service seemed to indicate that an 800-acre block was the minimum area that could be burned with their fixed costs. The question was left unasked as to why the effort was made to plant the stand if the necessary follow up treatments were not to be made.

Once again we loaded up and this time moved to a site that had been identified as a site for potential Longleaf restoration. This was a site that Georgia ForestWatch had questioned. We were looking below the road on which the fleet had parked at the site

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Whitewater drops case for now, big cat sighting sparks discussion

American Whitewater's lawyer-lobbyists and related boating groups and paddlers have dropped the federal court appeal in which they were trying to force immediate opening of the Upper Chattooga River to boating. But that significant event appears to have been overtaken and overshadowed in nearby headwaters areas by the sighting of a big cat – possibly an endangered eastern Cougar – in the Wild and Scenic river corridor.

The sighting by a U.S. Forest Service technician took place in the Rock Gorge inventoried roadless area, well within the river reaches targeted for whitewater boating by the boater

Courtesy of Thunderkawk Big Cat Rescue, Cocoa, FL

groups, adds a new wrinkle to the agency's study of the area and whether or not the boating ban for this stretch of the Chattooga, now in place for better than 30 years, should be overturned. (See map on page 18.)

The technician reported being stalked and chased into the river by a big panther to his superiors at the Chattooga River Ranger District office in Clayton, who then verbally notified Georgia DNR wildlife officials of the incident. The agency appears ready to chalk this up to a sighting of an exotic wild cat, possibly a non-native jaguar or leopard that might have been released into these parts. Or, maybe it was a big bobcat, as some have suggested?

Georgia ForestWatch formally has asked both the USDA Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to take appropriate steps to try to determine what kind of big cat this was under a five-year endangered species review currently being conducted by the FWS agency. The eastern Cougar is deemed an endangered species, meriting special protection and special habitat protection, in Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina.

As for the legal maneuvering, American Whitewater and other plaintiffs on February 8 dropped their appeal of the lower legal decision that had blocked the boaters from forcing immediate opening of the Upper Chattooga to boating. That earlier decision had reasoned that courts should not intervene in this matter until the Forest Service completed its study of possible boating on the headwaters. (Forest Service officials suggest it will be sometime this in April before the agency discloses any further details regarding the study.)

The Chattooga headwaters reach in question bisects the Ellicott Rock Wilderness and Rock Gorge Roadless Area, as well as the incredibly wild Chattooga Cliffs section above the Old Iron Bridge in North Carolina. These areas are among the few remaining wild places in the Georgia-North Carolina-South Carolina boundary area that still provide high-quality solitude and wilderness experience. It is used sparingly by hunters, hikers, sunbathers, photographers, swimmers, naturalists, scientists, anglers, picnickers, local families and heritage enthusiasts – all of whom access the area on foot.

Absent proof to the contrary, Georgia ForestWatch believes the area merits continued special protection. ■

Mike Bamford

Upper Chattooga likely to suffer from boating

by James T. Costa

There has been much discussion in recent days regarding the notion of opening the upper Chattooga River to boating. As a biologist and as a longtime resident of the Southern Appalachian region, I have studied the issue for the past several months in order to take an informed position on the potential impact that boating might have on the river and surrounding national forest.

My conclusion? The upper Chattooga watershed area is a unique biological and cultural resource that is likely to suffer significant degradation through the human impacts associated with boating. That the watershed is a valuable biological resource is beyond question. It is a rare example of a wild, high-gradient river coursing through a sizable tract of intact eastern deciduous forest.

Its "wilderness" designation in the Ellicott Rock Wilderness Area also makes the upper Chattooga a valuable cultural resource, an equally rare example of a vast and relatively unimpacted forest that now represents an island in a landscape in various stages of impact and degradation. As cultural resource, such wilderness areas give people the opportunity to realize profound solitude and contemplation.

Biologically speaking, the landscape of the upper Chattooga provides an astoundingly diverse mosaic of habitat types, from cove and upland forest to rock outcrop and spray cliff communities. The rugged and wet conditions that prevail in this area provide a haven for an assemblage of plant and animal species, including rarities such as tropical-affinity ferns. The area in general, but especially large intact tracts such as the Chattooga watershed, boasts peak or near-peak biodiversity in North America for many taxonomic groups. Most notably, the area is world-renowned for its salamander diversity, and that of its flowering plants.

Opening this area to boat traffic and, more importantly, the related human activity in shuttling boaters, in portaging and in picnicking, will have the inevitable consequence of introducing significant biological threats to the integrity of the forest, despite the best intention of many such users. This will occur through both direct degradation by establishing high-use trails (and the elevated incidence of litter and refuse associated with such trails), and the unintentional introduction of pest species that will secure a foot-hold in the forest.

Linsey Wisdom

Biologist, Jim Costa

Aggressive exotic pest plants like Japanese knotweed, plantain, privet and others tend to be dispersed along trails by human vehicular and foot traffic. Elevated human traffic in the upper Chattooga will almost certainly introduce such pests, ultimately creating "edge effects" via degradation that eats into the adjacent forest. At present, the upper Chattooga watershed can be seen as an ecological core area that acts as a refuge and source population. The fragmentation and edge effects stemming from intensive visitation and use will erode this core area.

A parallel degradation occurs with respect to the cultural value of the upper Chattooga watershed. This "Wild and Scenic River" area holds immense value for what it symbolizes and what it can offer low-impact visitors. The Wilderness Act of 1964 gained wide support because citizens and government leaders recognized that "wildness" and solitude were becoming scarce commodities. The spiritual and aesthetic benefits to be gained from such restricted-access areas are incalculable; opening the upper Chattooga to intensive boating use immediately undermines its value as a place of solitude and contemplation.

I have boated on other rivers in the Southern Appalachians. The outfitters I boated with were conscientious about litter and other matters, but the noise and well-worn portage trails made it clear this was no wilderness experience. Must we leave our footprint absolutely everywhere? I believe that an intent of the Wilderness Act and the Wild and Scenic River Program is to save us from ourselves as much as to preserve the biological integrity of our environment.

We are fortunate to have an abundance of rugged and exciting river stretches in our mountain region, nearly all of which are open to boating. It is far from unreasonable to ask that

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Upper Chattooga likely to suffer

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this now-pristine and biologically significant area remain closed to boating traffic and the related impacts associated with boating.

At a time when the natural landscape of the Southern Appalachians is experiencing accelerated fragmentation through development and recreational pursuits, it is only sensible to safeguard the integrity of the few genuinely large and intact tracts of land remaining. The biological and cultural value of such tracts as the upper Chattooga watershed demands that we act responsibly for ourselves and future generations. Once our forests and rivers are degraded, their recovery is an exceedingly slow process. ■

James T. Costa is executive director of the Highlands Biological Station and the H.F. and Katherine P. Robinson Professor of Biology at Western Carolina University, where he has taught genetics, biogeography, environmental biology, bioethics, evolution and conservation biology.

Does restoration forestry have to pay?

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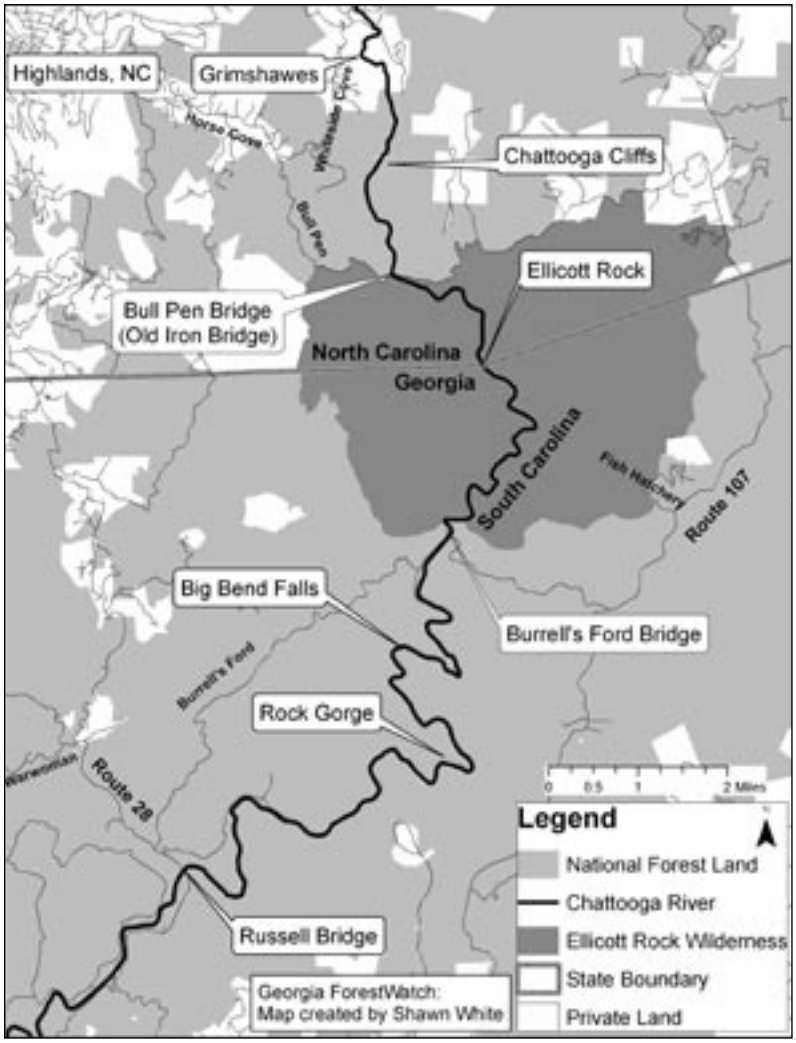
selected for timber harvest and restoration, a mature stand of native Shortleaf Pines and Scarlet and Chestnut Oaks. Above the road on an even drier site was a planted non-native Loblolly plantation. Since older forests are scarce on the Armuchee and restoring Oak-Pine forests is one of the goals of the new Forest Plan, this raised the obvious question of why this stand had been selected rather than the Loblolly plantation, here or elsewhere. One answer was that the computer query that selected the mature Shortleaf-Oak stand had as one criterion that the stand be classified as mature saw timber. A follow up response was, "how do you expect us to pay for restoration unless we have timber to sell?" We then raised the idea that mature Oaks were too important as a food source for wildlife to be sacrificed. The response from a Forest Service biologist was that "we have plenty of Oaks". No studies, no analysis, just simply "plenty" of Oaks. The non-native Loblolly stand apparently could not be considered for Longleaf restoration as it was not yet considered "mature saw timber." Most of these thousands of acres of public land in Northwest Georgia selected for 'projects' are in the 9H prescription. A prescription derives from the Forest Plan that the Forest Service is required by law to create every 10 years or so and is essentially a



Georgia ForestWatch Map

Georgia ForestWatch is working hard to ensure the Wild and Scenic Chattooga's 21 miles of pristine headwaters stays zoned to protect the area's special qualities.

zoning designation and gives guidelines and standards as to what type of activities that Forest Service can perform in a given area. 9H, the prescription covering the largest number of acres on our Forest, was widely viewed by conservationists during the planning process as the Forest Service's timber cutting prescription. Having said this though, the prescription headline reads "Management, Maintenance and Restoration of Plant Associations to Their Ecological Potential." It is difficult to imagine that the intent of this prescription can be met if management activity has as one of its criteria that a stand be "mature sawtimber" before it can be considered for restoration.

The meeting ended with the members of the Georgia ForestWatch delegation convinced that our ideas concerning ecologically correct restoration and those of the Forest Service differed significantly. The Forest Service's budgetary constraints coupled with their long term bias towards viewing the Forest as a timber and revenue source for the agency will be a significant hurdle to clear if the agency is to win full-fledged support for collaboration. ■

Chattooga River District Report

by Joe Gatins : Co-district Leader

Stekoa Creek. Georgia ForestWatch members in Rabun County have joined the push from partner organizations Chattooga Conservancy and the Rabun Chapter of Trout Unlimited to try to convince local, state and federal officials to finally do something to clean up Stekoa Creek. Key to the latest push is the public hearing set for 7 p.m. Thursday, April 12 in Clayton, where Georgia's Environmental Protection Division will take citizen comments on a proposal to vastly increase the capacity of Clayton's sewage treatment plant. Everyone agrees that Clayton must first repair and replace its aging sewer lines – before pumping more pollution into one of the Wild and Scenic Chattooga River's main tributaries.

Southern Environmental Law Center

Ugly mess. Gravel, mud and sediment scouring off Tuckaluge Creek Road in Rabun County have overwhelmed many silt fences put up by the U.S. Forest Service several years ago. The fences were meant to protect nearby Tuckaluge Creek from excessive sedimentation. Georgia ForestWatch has registered concerns over what will happen to this road and creek under a new timber sale proposed by the agency.

Warwoman logging. Clean water issues also dog U.S. Forest Service plans to initiate two major logging sales in the Warwoman watershed – with the health of Tuckaluge and Warwoman creeks and Buck Branch the main concerns. Forest Service officials report they are studying the issue closely and mulling the possibility of either paving or re-routing a steep, graveled roadway already dumping gravel, sand or mud into Tuckaluge Creek. Our legal partners at Southern Environmental Law Center are monitoring these developments closely.

Invasives control. Forest Service officials are trying to fast track a proposal to spray multiple sites in the district with potent herbicides to try to begin controlling the many invasive plants creeping onto the national forestlands in northeast Georgia. ForestWatch is monitoring this effort closely, to ensure proper application, to safeguard nearby waterways and to set priorities for treatment.

Coneflower. The new Chattooga River district is developing a coneflower management project on Currahee Mountain with the help and advice of Georgia ForestWatch board member Jim Sullivan.

Recreation. The district also is mulling the possibility of getting private concessionaires to operate many of the public's favorite campgrounds in the Chattooga River district (including Tallulah River, Rabun Beach, Lake Russell, Sarah's Creek, Willis Knob and Panther Creek campgrounds.) These changes are being driven by loss of resources from the Labor Department's "Senior's Program," which had provided oversight and maintenance of these facilities in the past. ■

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more than a century old. The tracts had been included in the Mountain Treasures report.

The appeal was denied, and, in April 1996, ForestWatch and six other groups filed Sierra Club vs. George Martin in federal court to stop the timber sales. The groups alleged in their lawsuit that the Forest Service, in proposing the sales, had violated three federal laws: the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918; the Clean Water Act and the 1976 National Forest Management Act.

"The clear cutting in this case involves the death of thousands of migratory songbirds and the discharge of hundreds of tons of sediment, rock and sand, choking our mountain streams," said the conservationists' lawyer, Eric Huber of Earth Justice Legal Defense Fund in New Orleans.

The lawsuit also alleged that the Forest Service violated the National Forest Management Act by allowing logging without first doing inventories of all of the some 60 species of plants and animals considered "sensitive." Sensitive species, such as brook trout and yellow ladies-slipper are those plants and animals that are declining in numbers, though they are not currently considered at risk for extinction.

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The Forest Service admitted that individual plants and animals would be killed, but argued that the proposed logging would not reduce the forest-wide viability of those species.

The U.S. District Court ultimately ruled against the conservationists. However, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in February 1999 reversed the district court. The appeals court discounted the water quality and migratory bird issues. But on the issue of inadequate compliance with sensitive species requirement, the court held firm and the suit was won.

As a result of that lawsuit, and follow-up litigation involving George Martin's successor as the Chattahoochee Forest Supervisor, all timber sales were then stopped in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. Since September 1996, there has not been a commercially driven logging program in these national forests. ■

All of Georgia's Inventoried Roadless areas can be viewed on Google Earth by going to The Roadless Area Database at http://www.roadlessland.org/. Scroll down to the Chattahoochee National Forest and select. If you do not already have this free software download, go to earth.google.com.

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