Georgia ForestWatch Newsletter

Summer 1993

ForestWatch Workshop Scheduled for September 17-19

Volunteer groups all around the country are getting involved in the management of our National Forests. There are active groups in Arkansas, Texas, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama and other states. Here in Georgia, ForestWatch is monitoring timber and road building activities in the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests.

When the Chattahoochee/Oconee forests plan was finalized in 1986, ForestWatch was formed to oversee its implementation. With Forest Service plans in hand, groups of volunteers take field trips into areas where timber cutting is planned and assess the area. They look for things such as nearby streams that would be affected by siltation from a cut or rare and endangered plants in the area that would be harmed. Also taken into account are the cumulative effects of logging in the surrounding area - how much logging has been done in adjacent compartments.

At the time the Forest Service decides to log an area, they are required to issue a scoping notice which tells what method of logging will be done and in what areas. Comments are allowed at this time. Later, a public meeting is held and concerns can again be expressed. Finally, an environmental assessment and decision notice on the project is issued by the Forest Service. During this process, which takes about a year, our volunteers have a chance to meet with the Forest Service and express any concerns they may have about the planned projects. If concerns are not addressed, the final decision can be appealed within 45 days after issuance. The purpose of ForestWatch is to allow citizens the chance to work together to influence Forest Service decisions early in the process in order to avoid an appeal.

Even though we do have botanists and biologists on our team, most of our ForestWatch volunteers are not trained in those disciplines. They learn from experience by going on field trips with others who have been doing this for years. We also have an annual training weekend each fall in the North Georgia mountains with experts in the fields of wildlife, recreation, water quality and rare and endangered species, among other topics. This year, our workshop is scheduled for September 17-19 at Camp Wahsega, near Dahlonega. The cost will be approximately $20 for the weekend. This includes lodging two nights, three meals and all materials. Campsites are also available. The deadline for registration is Friday, September 10. If you would like more information, please contact Shirl Darrow at (404) 872-9453. The low cost of the workshop is made possible by a generous grant from REI.

News From the Chestatee Ranger District

Dennis Stansell

Miriam Talmadge has written newspaper articles criticizing the USFS's timber program which were published in the Athens Observer, Cleveland Tribune and the North Georgia News.

On an August 1 field trip to the Cynthia Knob area of Suches, Jan Stansell was the first to spot two large colonies of isotria verticillata. Dennis was the first to find a yellow jacket's nest (the hard way). This area is in a stand adjacent to a stand proposed for logging. The whole area appears to be botanically rich and we will be returning there soon to more thoroughly survey the area for other important species. Monthly meetings with the Chestatee Ranger District's staff have been set for the second Wednesday of the month between 3:00 and 4:30 p.m to discuss issues, new information and to keep the lines of communication open. The next meeting on August 11th will focus on the recreation program. Anyone who is interested may attend these meetings.

August 22nd is the last scheduled field trip of the summer. The tornado and snow storm left hundreds of acres of downed trees on the Chestatee Ranger District. The harvest from salvage sales has totaled about 8 million board feet. The usual timber target is about 2 million board feet. Plans are to continue harvesting with no carry over.

Consequently, beginning October 1 about 2 million more board feet will be harvested unless action is taken to halt sales.

ForestWatch Reorganizes

A slight reorganization of our ForestWatch group has taken place over the last few months. ForestWatch has been a very effective at educating citizens about national forest issues and advocating reform of national forest management, and has grown in size over the last few years. Many felt that incorporation was a necessary step in our growth. The incorporation forced us to address our goals and mission in order to write the articles of incorporation and by-laws. Georgia ForestWatch, Inc. is now registered as a non-profit corporation with the State of Georgia. We will also be seeking 501-c3 status with the Internal Revenue Service so that contributions can be tax deductable. The ability to raise funds will be enhanced and other advantages of non-profit status will help us become even more effective.

The corporation now has a Board of Directors. These are the district leaders from the eight Ranger Districts on the Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forest, Peter Kirby, Director of the Southeast Regional Office of the Wilderness Society, and Shirl Darrow, Associate of the SE Regional Office of The Wilderness Society. Our officers are Shirl Darrow, president, and Susan Little, Secretary/treasurer.

Our statement of purpose presents the following objectives: (1) to promote and support the protection, preservation, and enhancement of biological diversity, areas of ecological significance and threatened, endangered and sensitive species within the national forest; (2) to support and promote the protection, maintenance and/or improvement of water and soil quality within the national forest; (3) to support and promote the maintenance or enhancement of populations of all flora and fauna native to the national forest; (4) to monitor compliance with all federal laws, rules, regulations, standards and guidelines relating to the national forest; (5) to enhance the public awareness of the United States Forest Service's land resources use and management; (6)to promote and support the protection and increase of wilderness areas within the national forest; (7) to promote and support low impact recreational activities within the national forest.

Many thanks to attorney Elizabeth Key of Vincent, Chorey, Taylor and Feil for tremendous patients and assistance in this process.

Is the Louisiana Waterthrush a Resident of your Ranger District?

No doubt it is. This neo-tropical migrant is probably a breeding resident of all of the Ranger Districts in the Chattahoochee and the Oconee National Forests. Humid deciduous forests with running water describes its habitat in Georgia. A very plentiful habitat, indeed. Its diet, however, may be a limiting factor in many areas, especially the Gainesville Ridges and Piedmont. Its feeding habits remind one of a tiny sandpiper, head bobbing and tail tilting. A most common feeding technique is to tour the edges of a small branch or creek and pull submerged leaves out of the water, rapidly dislodging any aquatic invertebrates from the leaf. Sedimentation of branches and streams has impacts well beyond the aquatic environment.

There are indications that the Louisiana Waterthrush populations are declining. A likely cause of this decline is destruction of winter habitat in the tropics. However, sedimentation of small water courses limit food available in most areas of the piedmont and mountains of the southeastern United States. The destruction of aquatic habitats is the result of poor agricultural treatment of riparian areas, poor treatment of riparian areas in residential development, road and highway construction(especially construction of culverts and bridges), and inadequate protection of riparian areas during timber harvesting.

On the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests, the greatest threat to the Louisiana Waterthrush habitat is poorly constructed and maintained roads. Sedimentation from roadbeds is occuring at unexceptable levels in many areas. Ditches are often pulled directly into streams and culvert areas are poorly designed and constructed. The fine examples of road construction at the Coweeta Hydrologic Laboratory in North Carolina are often sited by the Forest Service, but the engineering techniques are rarely put to use in the general forest.

The Louisiana Waterthrush would be a good addition to the management indicator species (MIS) list for any project that has a stream, which is most of them. While it is not on the forest-wide MIS list, it can added as a project MIS. This can be requested in the scoping process for any project.

Protection Proposed for Armuchee Areas

The Armuchee Ranger District, located at the western end of the Chattahoochee NF, is in the Ridge and Valley geographic province. There is very little public land in this province of Georgia, and the lands in the Armuchee RD offer the only opportunity for natural areas for wildlife and fish habitat, recreation, visual beauty and protection of diverse ecosystems. In this 70,000 acre district, only 350 acres are classified as unsuitable for timber production.

Congressmen Buddy Darden(D-7th) and Nathan Deal(D-9th) have written the Forest Service to request that three areas in the district be studied for protection in the revision of the Land and Resource Management Plan. The Forest Service has twice denied their request, and continues to prepare timber sales and road construction in these areas. In june, 1993 Congressman Darden added a measure to the House FY94 Interior Appropriations Bill which will deny funding for preparation of timber sales in these areas. This will protect these areas until they can be studied for their ecological value and their role in the Ridge and Valley ecosystems. These areas need to be protected permanently.

Proposed Johns Mountain Scenic Area 3500 acres. An outstanding area featuring waterfalls, bold springs,unusual topography and abundant recreational opprtunities. All but The Pocket campground and the 200 acre Keown Falls Scenic Area are open to logging.

Proposed Rocky Face Wilderness Area 6000 acres. Three of the most natural and undeveloped watersheds in the district are found here. There several areas in each waterhed with old-growth features. Back-country recreation opportunities are also outstanding.

Proposed Hidden Creek National Scenic Area 5000 acres. This is an area of great diversity. Diverse recreational opportunities include Hidden Creek Campground, back-country hiking, and a wide variety of hunting opportunities. The rich hardwood forests of this watershed hold an abundance of wildflowers, birds and unique scenic qualities.

A letter to Congressmen Buddy Darden and Nathan Deal in support of protection for these areas is needed. Let them know that there is widespread public support for these proposals.

ForestWatch Leaders

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Yes! I would like to become a member of Georgia ForestWatch.
Enclosed is my check payable to the Wilderness Society (write ForestWatch on check).

Membership Categories:

___$5 Forest Friend ___$10 Forest Best Friend ____$50 Forest Family ____$100 Forest Lover

___$_____Forest Fanatic

Name:_____

Address:_____City_____

State:_____Zip_____Phone (h)_____(w)_____
Send to ForestWatch, c/o the Wilderness Society, 1447 Peachtree St., N.E, Suite 812, Atlanta, Ga. 30309.
Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Calendar

22 August	**Chestatee District, Last summer field trip. Call Dennis Stansell (404) 535- 3398.**
26-28 August	**The Value of Old Growth Forest Ecosystems of the Eastern United States, A Conference. University of North Carolina at Asheville. Mary Kelly, Western North Carolina Alliance (704) 258-8737.**
11 September	**Chattooga District, Compartment 208 in Lake Russell WMA. Call James Sullivan (706) 886-8265.**
17-19 September	**ForestWatch Volunteer Workshop. Camp Wahsega. Call Shirl Darrow (404) 872-9453**

The Georgia ForestWatch Newsletter welcomes your submissions.
Send articles to Shirl Darrow in care of the return address shown below.

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The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the views of The Wilderness Society.