FORESTWATCH MONITOR

NEWSLETTER OF FORESTWATCH, INC.
MONITORING GEORGIA NATIONAL FORESTS
SPRING 1994

FOREST PLAN REVISION DELAYED AGAIN

The revision of the Chattahoochee/Oconee land and resource management plan, scheduled to begin this summer, has been delayed by a new directive from Acting Regional Forester Marvin Meier. The new directive, issued February 7th, calls for a regional approach to forest plan revisions in the southern Appalachian national forests. The need for this new approach is based on current budgets, the availabilty of better information (Geographic Information System, Ecological Classification System), and the need to adress similar physiographic areas with a consistent and coordinated approach.

A sub-regional assessment will be completed for the southern Appalachians concurrently with the completion of GIS and other inventories necessary for the revision. The ECS is not likely to be complete before the actual revisions begin in early 1996.

The new approach to planning is welcome, but a delay in the revision schedule at this time means that the very flawed and inadequate current plans may be in place until the next century! The current plan has a myriad of problems that include an timber sale program that cannot be supported by the forest without terrific damage to the diversity and integrity of the resource. Standards and guidelines on this forest have been inadequate to prevent soil erosion, sedimentation, forest type conversion and habitat fragmentation. The shrinking of roadless areas and potential old growth habitat will continue until the plan is revised.

We have been told, for over a year now, that the new plans would be right around the corner, and this type of delay is unacceptable. We encourage the new Regional Forester to act on the information that we have on hand now. The five year review of the plan demonstrated several areas in which change needs to be made. The changes in the allowable sale quantity, timber harvest standards and guidelines can be made without waiting for all this new information. Further amendments to the revised plan can be made as this information becomes available.

We encourage you to write to your U.S. Representatives and ask them to pressure the Forest Service to do the right thing and proceed with the plan revisions. Maybe a cut in the budget for timber sale preparation and administration would be appropriate.

SEARCHING FOR OLD GROWTH ON THE CHESTATEE RD.

On January 9th, six members of the Ens and Outs, a conservation group from the Atlanta Unitarian- Universalist Church, learned to identify characteristics of old growth forests on a ForestWatch field trip. We visited 4 stands in compartment 526. All the stands are in MA 16- known as general forest and subject to possible "maximum modification. They receive no real protection under the current forest management plan.

The walk began in a 14 year old clearcut stand dominated by tulip poplar sprouts. After 14 years the stand was still to thick to walk through and would not be producing any hard mast (acorns) for many more decades. Once a diverse, mast producing cove hardwood stand, it now looked like thousands of giant toothpicks, all the same size and shape.

As we arrived at our destination, the toothpick sprouts were replaced by very large oaks with flattened, spreading crowns and the smooth lower trunks characteristic of old growth. Looking up, we could see the openings in the canopy produced by windfall, and the skeletons of standing snags. There were layers to the canopy and it was hard to find two trees of the same size. Although winter had striped away the leaves, we could tell by the different bark textures that many different species of trees were present.

The wide variation in tree spacing allowed an easy walk through the understory vegetation. There was an ample supply of blueberries and other shrub level vegetation. Openings in the forest revealed large decaying logs, covered with thick green moss.. A few of these had become "nurse logs" with small hemlock, ninebark and other seedlings growing up through the green moss. This was reminiscent of a scene from a virgin temperate rain forest in the Pacific Northwest.

On our way out, we noticed a good example of "pit and mound" topography, created when a large tree was uprooted and pulled up a section of forest floor with it. This example was so old that no trace remained of the big tree that created it.

There are more of these reminders of what our forests once were. One of our objectives on the second Sunday field trips this year will be to identify more of these areas, beginning with compartments where logging is being considered. Once identified, we can work toward better protection of these and adjacent areas in the new forest plan. Second Sunday field trips meet at 1:00 PM the second Sunday of each month at Woody Gap. Woody Gap is located where GA60 crosses the Appalachian Trail near Suches. Call Dennis Stansell, 404-536-9669 evenings, if you are interested in participating.

by Dennis Stansell

AROUND THE DISTRICTS

BRASSTOWN DISTRICT

The Forest Service has withdrawn a proposal to harvest in compartment , sandwiched between the Blood Mountain Wilderness Area and Coosa Bald Scenic Area. The proposal was strongly opposed by Forest Watch.

Brasstown District leader Howard Markel is planning field trip to compartment near Mulkey Gap early in the New Year.

The Brasstown Ranger District office is moving soon to new quarters off U.S. highway 76 in Blairsville.

CHESTATEE DISTRICT

On August 22 Gregory Valpey and Dennis Stansell went to compartment 526 to determine the size of the large whorled pogonia, I*sotoria verticillata,* colony. 519 plants were counted. Another colony a half mile downstream had about 50 more plants. Bunch-flower and grass-of-Parnassus were also found. This area has many characteristics of old growth forests: pit and mound topography, large moss-covered downed trees(some were nurse logs), canopy gaps from downed trees, very large living and standing dead trees and many species of trees in many different age classes. By the way, this area is in management area 16 with a Visual Quality Objective of maximum modification, which means it is at risk to be logged.

Second Wednesday Meetings: An open meeting is held every second wednesday of each month at the Chestatee Ranger District office from 3:30 to 4:30 PM.

Sept. 8 General discussions about old growth, ecosystem management and recreation. The old fire tower on Black Mtn. is being evaluated for possible removal or renovation. Local govt. agencies and the USFS are concerned about radio relay capability for USFS and emergency services. Public input requested.

Oct. 13 Chestatee RD and Chattooga RD timber program combined. Ed Clutter, timber program on the Chestatee RD, has transfered to West Virginia. Peech Keller is now responible for the NEPA documentation for both districts.

Nov. 10 Timber program for FY 94 discussed. Continued salvage sales should need for green sales in FY94.

COHUTTA DISTRICT

The USFS is re-evaluating decisions previously made concerning compartments in the Mountaintown, Alaculsy Valley and Tumbling Creek areas. The previous decisions were not deemed to be too adverse. It is believed that the new decisions will be more conservative than the previous ones, but the final decision notices are not due for several months. The primary concerns that will be considered in the review of the decision notices are protection of all the interior Mountaintown area previously considered for wilderness; the protection of the crest of tumbling lead, considered an option for the Benton-McKaye Trail; and protection of cultural and visual resources in the Alaculsy area.

CHATTOOGA DISTRICT

Work has begun on mapping the the timber sales of the past three decades in 35 compartments in the Gainesville Ridges/Brevard Fault geographic province. Covering only about one third of the Chattooga RD this area produces from 70-100% of the timber off the district each year. The Forest Service could provide this mapping with their GIS programs, but will not have that capability until some unknown future date. The mapping will be done by hand from data in each of the compartment files. This will provide a graphic illustration of habitat fragmentation in the province. Information also included in the mapping will be stands that have been converted to loblolly pine plantations. The Chattooga District volunteers will be meeting the second tuesday of each month in Atlanta to work on this and other projects.

TALLULAH DISTRICT

Member organizations of the Chattooga River Watershed Coaltion have appealed all of the Timber Sale Decisions that have been issued this last fall and winter effecting the Chattooga watershed. The problems with these sales are numerous, and in many cases violate the National Environmental Polcy Act and the National Forest Management Act. The US Forest Service has again failed to address the issues of diversity and ecosystem management, and has failed to provide an adequate range of alternatives, including well designed uneven-age management alternatives. The cumulative impacts on the watershed were not adequately considered in all of the decisions.

It is clear that the US Forest Service in the Tallulah Ranger District is not interested in ecosystems, diversity and ecological processes in the watershed, but instead would continue to harvest timber, fragment ecosystems and suspend ecological processes.

ForestWatch Leaders

President-Shirl Parsons, (404) 872-9453
Armuchee RD-Brent Martin, (404) 876-7798
Brasstown RD-Howard Markel, (404) 320-6000 W
(706) 781-5418 H
Chattooga RD-James Sullivan, (706) 886-8265
Chestatee RD-Dennis Stansell, (404) 536-9669 W
(404) 535-3398 H
Cohutta RD-Shep Howell, (404) 387-5124 W
(404) 386-8754 H
Oconee NF&RD-Nathan Melear, (706) 769-8710
Tallulah RD-Mort Meadors, (706) 746-5799
Toccoa RD- Hillrie Quinn, (404) 355-7246

NEW FOREST SERVICE CHIEF

In December 1994, a new Forest Service Chief was appointed by the Clinton administration. The new chief, Jack Ward Thomas, was the Chief Research Wildlife Biologist and Project leader at the Forestry and Range Sciences Laboratory in La Grande, Oregon. Mr. Thomas was chairman of the panel of scientists that authored the controversial report of the northern spotted owl and was also involved in the development of the Clinton plan for the Pacific Northwest National Forests. Mr. Thomas is anxious to implement ecosystem management on all forests. It will be interesting to see how his administration develops. He received a standing ovation before he said a word at his address to the Washington Office employees after his appointment. His directive to the agency is to:

- obey the law.
- tell the truth.
- implement ecosystem management.
- develop new knowledge, synthesize research, and apply it to management of natural resources.
- build a Forest Service organization for the 21st century.
-trust and make full use of our hard-working, expert workforce.

NEW REGIONAL FORESTER

A new Regional Forester has finally been appointed to the Southern Region. Bob Joslin will be coming to us from Region 4, where he is currently acting Regional Forester. A graduate of Northern Arizona University in forest management, he has worked on forests in Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado and Kentucky. He was the Timber Staff Officer on the Rio Grande NF, Deputy Supervisor on the Daniel Boone NF and Forest Supervisor on the Kisatchie NF in Louisiana. In the Washington Office he was Deputy Director of Timber Management, before going to Region 4. He will not be arriving in the Southern Region Office until the Regional Forester position in Region 4 is filled.

GEORGE MARTIN, NEW FOREST SUPERVISOR

The Chattahoochee/Oconee NF has a new Forest Supervisor. George Martin has been in the Forest Service for 26 years, beginning his career in Mississippi. He nas been serving as deputy forest supervisor on the Cherokee NF in the mountains of Tennessee. He has also served in the Regional Office-Southern Region in the Fire and Aviation Group. Mr. Martin currently serves on the National Wildlife Coordinating Group and in the Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere program.

He sees moving into to the philosophy of ecosystem management as the number one challenge in administering the national forests, although he doesn't feel that we have a good handle on exactly what that means. The restructuring of the Forest Service under new Chief Jack Ward Thomas will be exciting and different according to Martin. He looks forward to working with the public as partners in managing the Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forest.

CHATTAHOOCHEE HEADWATERS PROJECT

In 1988, an appeal filed by Friends of the Mountains against a decision notice for timber projects in the headwater tributaries of the Chattahoochee River began a lengthy series of events and experiments in decision making on the Chattooga Ranger District. The timber decision was withdrawn, but it had already brought into focus the problems involved in this area receiving heavy recreational use.

Many of the traditionally used recreation sites on the river and its tributaries bear the impacts of both over-use and abuse. Unrestricted vehicle traffic in the stream-side areas of the Chattahoochee River and Low Gap and Jasus creeks was causing soil compaction, vegetation cover loss and sedimentation. Traditional stream bank campsites showed the same sorts of impacts. Recreational use was increasing in the forms of

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Enclosed is my check, payable the Wilderness Society (write ForestWatch on check).
Membership Categories:

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

___$_____Other Forest Fanatic

Name:_____

Address:_____City_____

State_____Zip_____Phone (h) _____(w)_____
Mail check and completed form 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.

hiking, dispersed vehicle camping, trout fishing, horseback riding, picnicking and mountain biking. The Chattahoochee River Road and Wilkes Creek Road had become a favorite drive-through sightseeing route, with stops to view waterfalls, tumbling creeks and stately forests with large white pine, hemlock and hardwoods.

In January, 1991 the Forest Service initiated a new decision-making process ment to inform and involve the interested citizen using the area. A meeting, which later broke into smaller working groups, was held at Gainesville College in April 1991. There was good representation from all of the user groups, from bikers to the timber industry. Soon after, an interdisciplinary team was formed that worked closely representatives of the user groups.

By August 1992, a desired future condition for the area was developed, and priorities were made for developing alternative management ideas. In April 1993, the environmental assessment process was begun for the first phase of the project, the management of the headwaters recreation site on the Chattahoochee River. A decision notice for the Headwaters site was signed in September 1993, and implementaion of the project in progress now.

Though a very lenghthy process, this was a pretty successful experiment. The work proceeded steadily from the first meeting to the beginning of implementation. ForestWatch needs to review the the decision notices and implementation to make sure that the priorities and desired future condition identified at the beginning are still the basis for the decisions.

NEWSLETTER NEEDS

* ARTISTS A new logo for the masthead and for ForestWatch stationery. Black and white line drawings, pen and ink, etc.

* WRITERS Forest Watch folks to pursue an issue and write about it! Articles about a special place, plant, animal, experience or anything that relates to our National Forests.

* HELP Getting the newsletter from the printer to the office, labeling and mailing. Help in putting the newsletter together would also be welcome. I am working on a Mac with Microsoft word 5 and Pagemaker 4.2. Give me a call! James Sullivan 706-886-8265. We would like to, and need to, put out 6 newsletters a year. Informed activists are effective activists.

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