Georgia ForestWatch

NEWS UPDATE

October 1997

LAND EXCHANGES: AN IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES

Exchanges of national forest land for private land of "equal value" has a long history. The Forest Service has several reasons for such trades. The Land Ownership Adjustment Plan, an appendix to the forest's Land and Resource Management Plan, states that 36,015 acres on the Chattahoochee and 9,487 acres on the Oconee NF are available for disposal by means of exchange. These lands are mixed with private land in unconsolidated small tracts. The vision of the Forest Service is to have national forest lands exist in large consolidated blocks. This makes it easier to maintain boundaries, prevent encroachment and maintain access. The intent of the Land Ownership Adjustment Plan, in part, is to "identify areas where national forest land should not be".

This summer we have become aware of several problems with the land exchange program in the Chattahoochee NF. First, land exchanges have been occurring without proper NEPA public involvement procedures. There has been essentially no scoping that would notify interested parties about any anticipated land exchanges. The process seems to be well along, with private parties' expectations of a successful exchange high, before notices are posted in legal notice sections of local papers.

Second, the suitability of land for exchange has not been established by the Forest Service prior to listing as available for exchange. The private parties, already engaged with the Forest Service about a particular piece of land, are responsible for contracting with approved botanists to do surveys for threatened, endangered, sensitive and rare plants. There were four surveys done on the Chattooga Ranger District this Summer. Two of these surveys identified populations of listed species, one federally endangered, the

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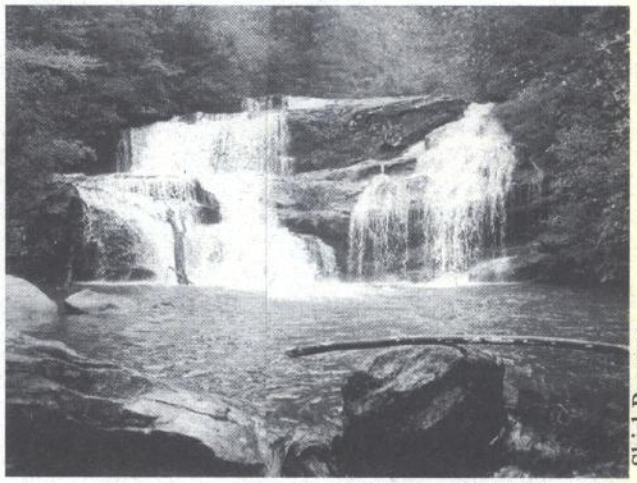
WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

25 Rivers Identified as Eligible for Designation

Georgia's Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests have long been know to contain some of the most spectacular wild and scenic streams and rivers in the State. We tried to picture some of these throughout this newsletter. Now, some of these streams have been recognized as containing the "outstandingly remarkable" features which make them eligible as candidates for a Wild and Scenic Rivers designation.



Shirl Parsons

Moccasin Creek - Eligible for WSR

The Forest Service is integrating this inventory with the Forest Plan revision process in order to make Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) recommendations at the same time, according to John Petrick of the Forest Service.

Georgia ForestWatch has played a major role in helping identify rivers that may be eligible. This Summer we submitted a report to the Forest Service which provided comments on the inventory process with detailed descriptions and photographs of 20 rivers. As a result of our report, 3 rivers were added to the list for eligibility: the Toccoa River, Canada Creek, and Moccasin Creek. Many thanks go out to volunteers Ed Nicholson and Sue Jamison for providing photos and text for our report.

According to Petrick, the 25 rivers on the eligible list will be analyzed and described in detail, including the identification of special places and values which make these rivers outstandingly remarkable. While all of these rivers are likely to receive some degree of additional protection after the new forest plan is completed, alternatives in the Forest Plan will provide a range of designations, including specific recommendations to Congress for WSR designation. Then it is up to Congress, with the public's input, to pass legislation that will designate these rivers as Wild and Scenic.

Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests Eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers

Chattahoochee National Forest
- Brasstown District
  - Cooper Creek
  - Corbin Creek
  - High Shoals Creek
- Chattooga District
  - Chattahoochee River
  - Davidson Creek
  - Dodd Creek
  - Dukes Creek
  - Goshen Creek
  - Panther Creek
  - Smith Creek
- Cohutta District
  - Conasauga River
  - Jacks River
- Tallulah District
  - Coleman River
  - Overflow Creek
  - Tallulah River
  - Moccasin Creek
- Toccoa District
  - Cochrans Creek
  - Canada Creek
  - Toccoa River

Oconee National Forest
- Cedar/Big Cedar Creek
- Falling Creek (Ocmulgee)
- Little River
- Murder Creek
- Ocmulgee River
- Oconee River

GEORGIA'S UNPROTECTED WILDLANDS

FIELD TRIP INTO MOCCASIN CREEK WILD AREA

Earlier this Summer, Georgia ForestWatch and The Wilderness Society arranged to bring together several key folks to discuss the protection of the Kelly Ridge-Moccasin Creek area as part of the forest plan revision process. This area is our highest priority for protection in the Chattahoochee NF.

Peter Kirby, René Voss, and Shirl Parsons were joined by Regional Forester Robert Joslin, Regional Recreation Unit Leader Dave Holland, Forest Supervisor George Martin, and Sherri Fallin from Sen. Paul Coverdell's office on a hike to the spectacular falls on Moccasin Creek.

The weather was good and the mood was upbeat as we discussed our desire to see the area protected as Wilderness. Although the Moccasin Creek area has not been included in the roadless inventory, the consensus of 22 of Georgia's conservation organizations is that the area should be studied for Wilderness designation during that process.

George Martin, our Forest Supervisor, has the discretion to include the Moccasin Creek area for wilderness study; however he has not indicated that he will do so, even though the Regional folks have no objection to pursuing this study.

If you would like to help, we ask you to do one of two things, or both:

Georgia ForestWatch and Forest Service Leaders at Moccasin Creek Trailhead

1. Write a letter to George Martin and ask him to include Moccasin Creek among those areas that will be studied for Wilderness in the Forest Plan revision. His address is: USDA Forest Service, 1755 Cleveland Highway, Gainesville, GA 30501.
2. Join our *GREAT PLACES OUTING* on January 23, 1998 to find out how you can help protect the Kelly Ridge-Moccasin Creek area.

For more information on the Great Places Outing, please contact Brent Martin at (706)624-0010.

TWO MORE TRACTS ADDED TO ROADLESS AREA INVENTORY

We are thrilled to report that 2 small potential Wilderness additions have been added to the Roadless Area Inventory.

The first is an area called Wilson Cove and is located near the northeast corner of the Brasstown Wilderness. The area is remote and steep and was part of the original RARE II inventory. It contains a north-facing cove and the headwaters of Wilson Cove Creek.

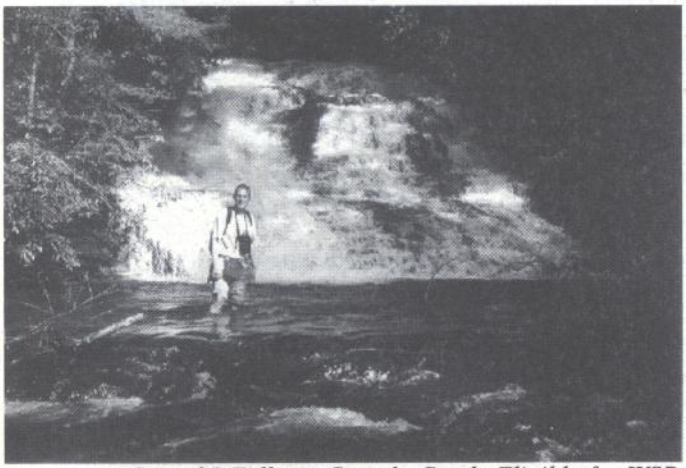
The second addition is actually an expansion of the Cedar Mountain Roadless Area, an addition to the Blood Mountain Wilderness. To give credit where it's due, Jim Herd of the Forest Service came up with this on his own. We thank him for doing the right thing. The area has now been expanded into the Desoto Falls Scenic Area, all the way down to Frogtown Creek.

Both additions add about 1,000 acres to the areas that will be studied as potential Wilderness during the Forest Plan revision.

Areas Rejected from Inventory

While the two additions are both good news, many areas which we believe meet the roadless criteria have not been included in the inventory. At this time these will not be studied for Wilderness.

These areas include Windy Gap (western Rabun Bald), Three Forks, Moccasin Creek, Buzzard Knob, High Shoals, Cohutta Extensions, and Rocky Face. Together, these areas cover over 32,000 acres of wildlands in the Chattahoochee National Forest that we believe should be studied for Wilderness.



Ed Nicholson

One of 5 Falls on Canada Creek, Eligible for WSR

Ed Nicholson

Overflow Creek in the Three Forks Area, Eligible for WSR

DISTRICT LEADER REPORTS

Armuchee District - Brent Martin

The Armuchee District continues to be assaulted by the Tennessee Valley Authority. Although ForestWatch and the Armuchee Alliance have so far succeeded in keeping the TVA out of the proposed Rocky Face Wilderness and off the east side of Rocky Face mountain, other lines are being planned throughout the district that will cross Johns Mountain and Taylors Ridge. Local citizens are organizing against the TVA with our assistance, and four community meetings in Gordon County have led to Congressional pressure for a TVA public hearing, which the TVA has agreed to. TVA activity in northwest Georgia is a result of the upcoming deregulation of the energy industry within the next year, which will allow the TVA to sell power across state lines and pass their enormous 28 billion dollar debt onto Georgia residents. They are also allowed to take "eminent domain" against citizens and agencies unwilling to sell their property to the TVA, an activity which has led to several instances of citizens having their property bulldozed against their will, and which we hope will not happen on our precious public lands.

The Kartah Dell timber sale is also proceeding on Taylors Ridge. This 347 acre sale was signed in 1992, and was purchased by Bowater Corporation, a British company which owns thousands of acres in the Armuchee District. The cut is being reseeded completely with pine, and involves several miles of new road construction, which we subsidize as taxpayers.

The good news is that we will most likely get some form of protection for our proposed Rocky Face Wilderness area in the new plan. The District Ranger has said as much, and did so in front of our past Regional Forester, Robert Joslin, and Forest Supervisor, George Martin. This is something we intend to hold the Forest Service accountable for.

Brasstown District - Howard Markel

Alert!!! Help Write Letters to Stop Two Terrible Timber Sales

Georgia ForestWatch's lawsuit is still in the hands of the Federal Courts and continues to delay logging on seven (7) logging projects in the Chattahoochee National Forest, including 3 timber sales in the Brasstown District in Towns County.

Although the Forest Service has suspended selling timber until the resolution of our lawsuit, one district, ***the Brasstown***, continues to prepare new timber sales. The ***Yellow Mountain Timber Sale***, directly adjacent to the Cooper Creek Scenic Area, and the ***Upper Hiawassee Timber Sale***, directly adjacent to the Mark Trail Wilderness, both threaten special areas which should be permanently protected from logging.

To help protect these areas, please welcome our newest District Ranger, Dennis Daniel, by sending a letter protesting this logging. Send copies to Congressman Nathan Deal and Forest Supervisor George Martin (see addresses below).

Tell Ranger Dennis Daniel:

* that you hike and enjoy the natural beauty of the Chattahoochee National Forest, and
* that you want wild and natural areas, such as those where these two logging projects are proposed, permanently protected from logging and new road-building, and
* to permanently withdraw the proposals for both the Yellow Mountain and Upper Hiawassee timber sales, as well as any other logging proposals in "*Georgia's Mountain Treasures, The Unprotected Wildlands of the Chattahoochee NF.*"

Send Letter To:
Dennis Daniel
Brasstown District Ranger
USDA Forest Service
P.O. Box 9
Blairsville, GA 30514

Send A Copy To:
Rep. Nathan Deal
United States Congress
1406 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20515

Send Another Copy To:
George Martin
Forest Supervisor
Chattahoochee National Forest
1755 Cleveland Highway
Gainesville, GA 30501

Chattooga District - James Sullivan

A popular destination in the district for many folks is the Raven Cliffs Wilderness Area south of Richard Russell Scenic Highway. The Raven Cliffs Trail travels 2.5 miles along Dodd Creek and ends at the base of spectacular cliffs. On some weekends there may be as many as 100 cars parked along the highway. The trail treadway is a mess, 6 feet wide over much of the trail, with tree roots exposed and lots of erosion. The camping areas are mud holes, with vast areas of devegetated ground. Sanitation is a problem as well. To this was added the impact of rappellers and rock climbers who flocked to the area when access to nearby Yonah Mountain was closed by private landowners several years ago. Climbers have littered and defaced the cliffs with duct tape, pieces of carpet, and discarded equipment and trampled the vegetation at the top and base of the cliffs. Campers have been degrading this area for decades. Of all the Wilderness Areas in the Chattahoochee National Forest, this is the most abused site.

The Forest Supervisor is now proposing to take actions necessary to begin to preserve the integrity of the area. Camping along the trail will be limited to 10 designated sites and group size limited to 6. These sites will be located away from the creek. The cliffs will be closed to climbing and rappelling. It is anticipated that access to Yonah Mountain will be established in the near future.

It is unfortunate that people, in the pursuit of a wilderness experience, destroy the very setting that makes that experience so rewarding. I would urge the Forest Service, as part of this action, to initiate a more aggressive educational program about low impact recreation. We can help by educating our friends, especially those just getting started in backpacking or climbing, and by calling the Forest Service and volunteering to work on the project.

Continued on next page

DISTRICT LEADER REPORTS (cont.)

Cohutta District - Kathryn Kolb

The Cohutta district is currently preparing an Environmental Assessment for the Rockflat Branch timber sale. This is an 88 acre sale that includes one 13 acre clearcut on Rockflat branch. The remainder of the sale will include thinning and shelterwood cuts near Mill Creek and Rockflat Branch. One of the cuts is in the proposed Grassy Mountain Old Growth area *(see Georgia's Mountain Treasures)* adjacent to the Cohutta wilderness and all of them are within the Conasauga river watershed. Hopefully we will gain interim protection for the forest until the plan revision is complete and not have to worry about this sale any time soon.

We are also working with the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition on a conservation plan for the Conasauga watershed. This has been somewhat difficult so far, as we have been having a hard time getting the Cherokee National Forest just across the state line to withdraw 650 acres of proposed timber sales. These sales, known as the Blue Ridge project and Halfway Branch sale, are entirely within the Conasauga watershed and include over nine miles of new logging road construction and reconstruction. There will also be intense burning afterwards in order to suppress hardwood growth and promote pine. You can voice your opposition to these cuts by writing: Anne Zimmerman, Forest Supervisor, Cherokee National Forest, PO Box 2010, Cleveland, TN 37320.

There will be a field trip to the proposed Cohutta Wilderness extensions on November 15th. Plan on meeting at the parking lot next to McDonald's in Ellijay at 9:30am. For more information, call Brent Martin at 706-624-0010. Kathryn Kolb will also be co-leading in the Cohutta district from now on with plans to eventually be the sole district leader. Her number is 404-373-9036.

Oconee District - J.P. Schmidt

Sue Jamison

Murder Creek at Old Steel Bridge, Eligible for WSR
Oconee National Forest

On the Oconee, we are in a holding pattern. After having invested our energy and hope in the Forest Plan revision process, we are waiting to see what comes out in the first round of alternatives. The most important change we seek is to have a number of areas removed from the timber base so these areas can be managed to preserve and/or restore rare native plant communities and old growth characteristics. At present, there are only three protected areas in the Oconee, the Murder Creek Research Natural Area, the Scull Shoals Recreation Area and the Hitchiti Experimental Forest—the rest of the National Forest is under "general forest management" which allows for timber harvest. Perhaps the most significant natural area on the Oconee is the Monticello Glades—a complex of unusual wetlands formed over an impervious hardpan on basic Iredell soils and home to many unusual plant species. One large glade and associated forests form a 1000 acre roadless area, a unique occurrence on the Oconee. This large glade (formerly Compartment 109) is currently under "general forest" management, but has been proposed for designation as a botanical area. A pine-beetle outbreak occurred within a pine stand near the center of this site in August. Rather than build a road to remove timber, Tony Tooke, the District Ranger, agreed to suppress the beetles by cutting and leaving the infected timber. Tony has likewise supported removal of the site from timber management.

Other continuing issues on the Oconee include prescribed burning and timber salvage of storm damage. Large areas of the Oconee are burned yearly to suppress hardwoods. In some areas this probably represents good silvicultural practice. However, where the desired outcome is eventual succession of hardwood, that is, oak-hickory forest over a relatively large area, burning is a setback.

Toccoa District - Dennis Stansell

With the exception of the Swan Drop Zone issue, the past few months have been relatively noncontroversial in the Toccoa Ranger District. Most decision memos/notices and scoping have dealt with salvage logging and recreational projects.

The U.S. Army's request to build a "drop zone" and conduct military exercises, maneuvers and war games presents an obvious conflict with virtually all recreational use on National Forest land, as well as an adverse affect on nearby private land. In fact, many people believe that use of National Forest lands by the Army should be either monitored more closely or Army use should be eliminated. As an example, ForestWatch members have found live rounds of ammunition and even a hand grenade simulator on National Forest land. Also, many forest fires have been started by military activities. Anyone who spends much time in this district will see evidence of discarded military items and garbage left behind by Army troops.

Recreation by horseback riders, mountain bikers, hikers and backpackers continues to increase since this district is the easiest accessed from Metro Atlanta. The Ed Jenkins National Recreation Area, which includes Springer Mountain, the start of the Appalachian Trail and the Benton MacKaye Trail, has become even more popular and use is steadily increasing. The Bull Mountain trail, also located in the NRA, is the most popular mountain biking trail in the forest.

While so many other uses threaten our forests, it seems incredible that most of the money and resources of the Forest Service promote and subsidize commercial logging. The type of citizen involvement in the Swan Drop Zone fiasco desperately needs to focus on commercial logging as well.

Contact your political representatives and the U.S. Forest Service and be part of the solution. Call Dennis Stansell at 770-536-9669 for information on district projects and field trips.

FOREST PLANNING UPDATE

PLANNING STATUS

Forest Planning is a long process ... and it appears to be getting even longer. While some progress has been made, the best estimate we have now is that Forest Plans in the Southern Appalachians, including the one for the Chattahoochee and Oconee forests, could take 'til the year 2001 to revise. We are hearing from various sources that the Forest Planning Regulations could also be changed between now and then as powerful forces in Washington, spurred by the timber industry, seek to eliminate key provisions, such as the "viability clause" that helps protect species in decline. As far as administration policy goes, things are beginning to move in the right direction, mostly because of the tremendous demand for recreation and general strong public support for forest preservation.

On the local front, the Forest Service has issued its list of "Significant Issues." This list was generated from the many public comments which were received from folks like you during last year's comment period. Included are over 2,500 letters that Sierra Club and Georgia ForestWatch helped generate. The Forest Service tells us that this deluge of comments provided overwhelming support for increased protection of our forests. While this doesn't guarantee greater protection because of political pressure from logging interests and inherent Forest Service biases toward logging, this overwhelming support cannot be ignored. Our "Significant Issues" are as follows.

Shared Issues for Southern Appalachians

- Old Growth
- Forest Health
- Special Areas and Rare Communities
- Terrestrial Plants/Animals and Their Associated Habitats
- Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive and Locally Rare Species
- Riparian Area Management, Water Quality and Aquatic Species
- Wood Products
- Recreation Opportunities and Experiences
- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Aesthetics and Scenery Management
- Roadless Areas and Wilderness Experiences
- Access/Road Management

Additional Issues for the C-O NFs

- Chattooga River Watershed
- Minerals
- Special Uses (Power Line Easements, Military Uses, etc.)
- Red Cockaded Woodpecker Recovery (Oconee only)

While these issues will determine how the Forest Service develops various alternatives for managing our forests, this process will take many months and will include little additional input from the public. The Forest Service is now in a technical mode and will remain so until some time in 1998.

Where the public can still have some influence is by assisting in the inventory processes and by helping to complete a document called the "Analysis of the Management Situation" or AMS. Inventories for scenery management, wild and scenic river candidates, potential wilderness, old growth, rare species and rare habitats are still being worked.

LAND EXCHANGES

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other "sensitive."

Third, there is no assessment of the ecological value of these lands in the landscape. Consolidation of lines on a map are the only point of view from which these lands are considered. In many cases, these "unconsolidated" lands are important wild environments in a matrix of agricultural and residential development.

The Forest Service needs to review its land exchange process and determine the suitability of lands before offering them for exchange. This would be a major change in the current Land Ownership Adjustment Plan, in which none of these issues are addressed. Call or write to Marcus Beard, Planning ID Team Leader, and urge him to add the land exchange process to the list of significant issues addressed in the plan revision.

> "There has been essentially no scoping that would notify interested parties about any anticipated land exchanges."

Marcus Beard
Forest Plan ID Team Leader
USDA Forest Service
1755 Cleveland Hwy
Gainesville, GA 30501

MOST NEW TIMBER SALES STILL ON HOLD IN THE CHATTAHOOCHEE NF

In case you didn't already know, the U.S. Forest Service in the Chattahoochee, and most of the Oconee National Forest, has not sold any timber in over a year.

On September 17, 1996, U.S. District Court Judge Frank Hull entered an injunction that stopped 7 Forest Service logging projects, including 4 that had already been sold of which 3 were being actively logged. However, the injunction was silent about any other timber sales that were in the pipeline or others that were under contract at that time.

While we were told that those timber sales under contract have gone forward, nearly all new timber sales are currently suspended. According to Marisue Hilliard, our Deputy Forest Supervisor, only one thinning project on the Oconee NF has been released and sold, presumably to improve habitat for the endangered Red Cockaded Woodpecker.

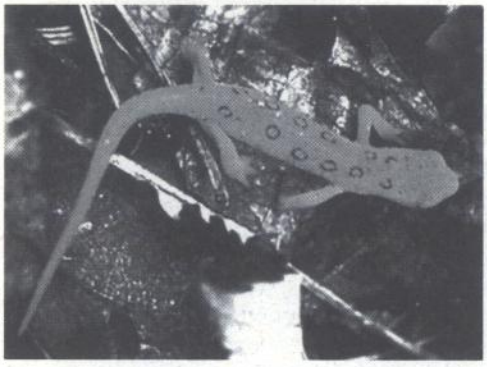
The far-reaching injunction issued last Summer may have discouraged new timber sales since it deals with flaws that are common in all timber sales across the forests, including: (1) virtually no forest-wide data on "sensitive" species populations, (2) inadequate population or trend data for Management Indicator Species, and (3) a complete lack of data for sensitive animal species in each of the timber sale planning areas.

The Forest Service is also in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) because it did not have this information at the time decisions were made. Conclusions made in biological evaluations aren't supported by adequate data making them meaningless and therefore arbitrary and capricious.

As a final note, our lawsuit has now been reassigned to Judge Thomas Thrash. The honorable Judge Frank Hull has been promoted to the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta where she will make a welcome addition to that Court.

Georgia ForestWatch's Conservation Work Made Possible by:

- The Turner Foundation
- REI
- Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition
- The Wilderness Society, and
- the Grassroots (members like you)



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Please consider donating or contributing to the following:

- **100% Recycled Paper** for Newsletter and Alerts.
- **Tree-Ring Borer** for inventory of old growth forest.
- **Trimble GPS Unit** for field verification and data gathering.

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GREAT PLACES OUTINGS

Over the next several months, Georgia ForestWatch will be hosting field trips to areas we are currently seeking protection for in the forest plan revision. These areas are also featured in our new full color brochure titled ***Georgia's Last Great Places***, an informative guide complete with photographs, made possible through a grant from REI, Inc. If you would like a free copy, or copies for distribution, please contact Georgia ForestWatch at (706)624-0010. Listed in the calendar below is an itinerary of upcoming trips. To register, or for more information, simply write or call and specify the trip you're interested in. Hope to see you in the woods!

Brent Martin
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304 North Wall Street
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Brasstown District:	**Howard Markel** (770)781-5418
Chattooga District:	**James Sullivan** (706)886-8265
Cohutta District:	**Kathryn Kolb** (404)373-9036
Oconee District:	**J.P. Schmidt** (706)613-8483
Tallulah District:	**Mort Meadors** (706)745-5799
Toccoa District:	**Dennis Stansell** (770)536-9669

EVENTS CALENDAR

October 25	**Great Places Outing - Proposed Rocky Face Wilderness** - Last large tract of unprotected land in northwest Georgia. Features: Pinhoti Trail, Swamp Creek Watershed.
Nov. 15	**Great Places Outing - Cohutta Wilderness Extensions** - Important additions to the much used Cohutta Wilderness. Features: South and West Forks of the Jacks River, Benton MacKaye Trail
January 23	**Great Places Outing - Proposed Kelly Ridge-Moccasin Creek Wilderness** - 13,500 acres of unspoiled beauty north of the Tray Mountain Wilderness. Features: Appalachian Trail
March 22	**Great Places Outing - Rich Mountain Wilderness Extension** - Important addition to the Rich Mountain Wilderness, part of the original Rich Mountain roadless area. Features: High Ridges, Scenic.
April 12	**Great Places Outing - Monticello Glades** - One of the Oconee National Forest's special places being proposed as an ecological restoration area. Features: rare plants and habitats.

Forest Plan ID Team Meetings: Every second Thursday of the Month. For location and more information, contact Marcus Beard, USDA Forest Service (770)536-0541.