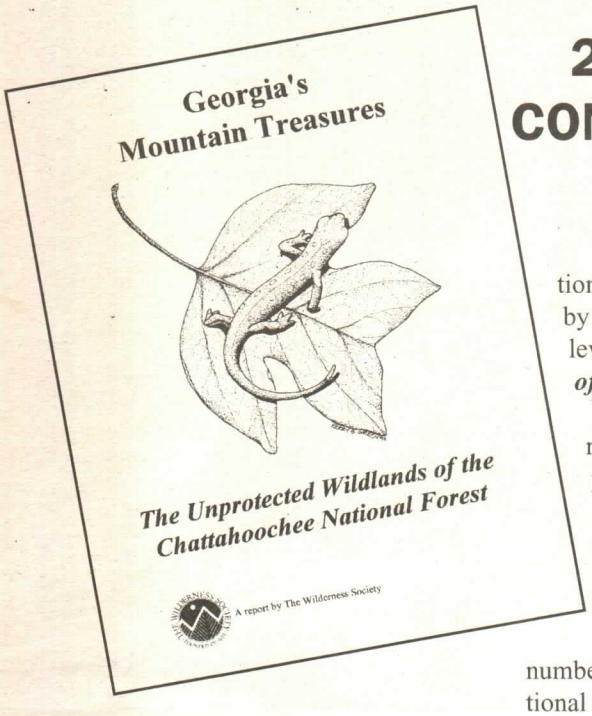
Georgia ForestWatch

March 1997

NEWS UPDATE



22 CONSERVATION GROUPS REACH CONSENSUS ON PROPOSAL TO PROTECT *GEORGIA'S MOUNTAIN TREASURES*

After almost 18 months of meetings and dialog amongst the ad-hoc Georgia National Forest Alliance, Georgia ForestWatch has facilitated a consensus proposal signed by 22 local, regional, and national conservation organizations that recommends various levels of protection for **Georgia's Mountain Treasures - *The Unprotected Wildlands of the Chattahoochee National Forest.***

This protection proposal includes recommendations for land allocations in the revision of the Forest Plan ranging in protection from wilderness, national recreation and scenic areas to primitive and old growth protection areas, and ecological restoration/diversity protection areas.

The chart below shows the number of areas, acres and percentages of national forest that would be added to lands areas already protected on the forest. Full implementation of this recommendation would bring the total protected lands on the Chattahoochee National Forest to 352,000 acres or 47% of the total forest acreage. To put this proposal in perspective, the recently revised plan for the adjacent Nantahala-Pisgah National Forests zones about half its land (of its 1 million acres of forest) into management areas closed to logging. **To receive your own copy of Georgia's Mountain Treasures, contact The Wilderness Society® at (404)872-9453.**

Organizations Supporting Consensus Proposal:

Armuchee Alliance ✳ Atlanta Audubon ✳ Chattooga River Watershed Coalition ✳ Friends of Georgia ✳ FSEEE ✳ Friends of the Mountains ✳ Georgia Appalachian Trail Club ✳ Georgia Botanical Society ✳ Georgia Canoeing Association ✳ The Georgia Conservancy ✳ Georgia ForestWatch ✳ Georgia Wildlife Federation ✳ Save America's Forests ✳ Sierra Club ✳ South Carolina Forest Watch ✳ Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition ✳ Southern Environmental Law Center ✳ Trout Unlimited ✳ Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper ✳ The Wilderness Society

Protection Category for Chattahoochee NF	Areas	Approximate Acreage	% of NF
Wilderness Area Recommendations	7	52,300	6.97%
Wilderness Additions Recommended	16	16,300	2.17%
National Scenic and Recreation Area Recommendations	4	20,400	2.72%
Old Growth Areas	15	61,100	8.15%
Primitive Areas	18	55,700	7.43%
Ecological Restoration / Diversity Protection Areas*	5	55,700	7.43%
Totals:			
Acreage		205,800	
% of Chattahoochee NF			27.44%

*This acreage is not included in the total acreage to be protected since some timber management is recommended for the purposes of restoring the ecological integrity of these areas.

New Roadless Area Designation to Delay Rocky Mountain Timber Project

We are pleased to report that the Forest Service's roadless team, set up last fall by Forest Supervisor George Martin, has accepted Georgia ForestWatch's new roadless proposal for a Rich Mountain Wilderness Addition.

This new 800 acre roadless area will be studied in the Forest Plan revision for wilderness. The area includes a pristine section of Stanley Creek and a popular hiking trail that follows the northern boundary of the current Rich Mountain Wilderness that leads to Indian Grave Gap.

Due to this new designation, the Forest Service will most likely have to put its Rocky Mountain Timber project on the shelf until after the forest plan revision, or abandon it completely. Georgia ForestWatch has been fighting this timber sale for nearly 4 years which has been proposed in the heavily used recreation area near Stanley Gap.

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REGIONAL SENSITIVE SPECIES LIST LIKELY ILLEGAL

BACKGROUND

For over 20 years, the Forest Service has been operating under regulations that were written by scientists to implement the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). These regulations require the Forest Service "to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species in the planning area."

The planning areas chosen by the Forest Service are individual national forests, such as the Chattahoochee National Forest or the Nantahala National Forest, and also include subregions, for example, the Southern Appalachians. The Forest Service also has procedures in their Forest Service Manual (FSM) which describe protection of these "sensitive species." Federal courts have upheld the viability requirements in the FSM which are meant to ensure that species living in national forests do not become listed under the Endangered Species Act.

REVISED REGIONAL RULES

While the Forest Service has never tried very hard to assure that viability is maintained and often lacks fundamental data about populations for these "sensitive species," new Regional sensitive species guidelines go even further and change the rules which require that viability is maintained in each National Forest. Instead, only species which have global or national viability concerns as determined by the Nature Conservancy are now maintained on the sensitive list, dropping many species which previously required inventories and monitoring.

For example, according to the global and national rankings, species such as the Cerulean Warbler, the Northern Pine Snake and the Rafinesque's Big-Eared Bat do not have global or national viability concerns. Yet their populations on the Chattahoochee NF are either declining or are so rare that any management that would adversely affect their habitat or their populations could jeopardize their continued existance on the forest or in the Southern Appalachians for that matter.

REGIONAL RULE IS ILLEGAL

This new Regional rule has resulted in an abridged list dropping many rare species that would otherwise require population monitoring on national forests. Without this monitoring, the Forest Service could not ensure the viability of all species on the Chattahoochee National Forest and would again be in violation of the NFMA regulations.

Cerulean Warbler *(dendroica cerulea) was dropped from sensitive list, even though its populations are declining*

This decision is quite concerning because it has been applied not only to Georgia, but also to every national forest from Texas to Florida up to Kentucky and Virginia. Since this new Regional rule is probably illegal, a court challenge to it will probably take place as soon as the Forest Service tries to implement it.

TVA SHIFTS POWER LINE WRATH

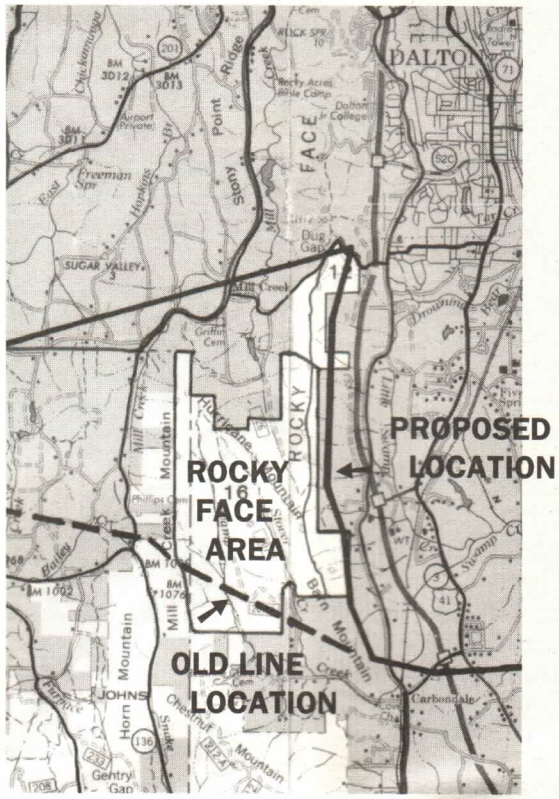
FORESTWATCH COMPELS TVA TO MOVE POWER LINE AROUND PROPOSED ROCKY FACE WILDERNESS, BUT PROPOSAL IS STILL PROBLEMATIC

Late last year we were informed that the Tennessee Valley Authority had changed their proposed route to build a massive 230 kilovolt power line through the middle of the proposed Rocky Face wilderness area and responded to Georgia ForestWatch's and the Armuchee Alliance's pressures. While it is somewhat refreshing to have a large federal bureaucracy like the TVA respond to our suggestions and requests, the new proposal still remains problematic for the Chattahoochee National Forest and the TVA.

As the adjacent map shows, the 260 foot wide swath that would be cut in the forest is now proposed to run high along one of the most visible mountain ridges in north Georgia, near Dalton along the I-75 corridor. Moreover, the line is proposed to traverse through a section of national forest which is zoned Management Area 12 (MA-12). This zoning, according to the Forest Plan, requires a management goal that "maintain[s] a visually appealing landscape" and requires the Forest Service to "minimize visual impact resulting from management activities." A visual quality objective of "retention" for the foreground and "partial retention" in the middle ground are the standards that were set in 1985, meaning that clearcuts or other large openings in the forest are not allowed in the MA-12 designation.

A swath nearly as wide as a football field is long, for nearly a mile through the national forest appears to be inconsistent with these standards. These requirements will, no doubt, be highly problematic for the TVA since the Forest Service would have to allow a violation of their own rules in order to allow the power line to be built through the national forest along its proposed route.

While the TVA can and does exercise condemnation of private lands over many objections from private land owners, the National Forests are managed in accordance with the National Forest Management Act which requires that, by law, all plans and actions by the Forest Service are consistent with Forest Plans.



DISTRICT LEADER REPORTS

***James Sullivan** with Georgia's most prestigious "Forest Conservationist of the Year" award for 1994 from the Georgia Wildlife Federation*

Armuchee District - Brent Martin

The southeastern USFS Regional Forester, Robert Joslin, visited the Armuchee on December 4 and met with Armuchee Alliance and Georgia ForestWatch members Don Davis and Brent Martin. District Ranger Joe King and Chattahoochee Forest Supervisor George Martin were also present. The meeting was arranged so that Mr. Joslin could see several areas that we are currently seeking permanent protection for on the district in the forest plan revision. The most positive result of the meeting was a statement by Joe King that the Rocky Face area would have permanent protection as a result of the current forest plan revision. However, it is unclear whether it will be protected as Wilderness or a National Scenic Area. Regardless of the designation, this will be a major victory for all who have worked to protect this important wildland. Thanks to those who wrote comments during the Forest Plan comment period to support protection. Joe King also stated that the Johns Mountain area would also be protected in some form. All in all, it looks like the new forest management plan for our district will include some significant changes.

Georgia ForestWatch and the Armuchee Alliance are also an integral part of the ongoing Ridge and Valley summit meetings that are being sponsored by the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition. These meetings have brought together several groups from Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee to work in a concerted effort to save the threatened Ridge and Valley ecosystem which is shared by these three states. We are currently working on a regional conservation plan that we can all promote as a team effort to save a significant part of this important bioregion. If anyone is interested in attending future meetings, please contact Brent Martin at 770-437-9858.

On a less positive note, the Armuchee District has been a real hotbed of activity since the notorious "logging without laws" salvage rider was signed in 1995. District Ranger Joe King has already sold nineteen salvage sales which include 1.5 million board feet of trees damaged by Hurricane Opal and Southern Pine Beetles. One of these sales actually occurred in the Hurricane Creek drainage which is one of three major drainages in the proposed Rocky Face wilderness area.

We are also facing the threat of a major TVA power line in the district. A long stretch of this proposed line is proposed to run the length of the eastern side of Rocky Face Mountain, which can be plainly seen as you drive north along I-75 to Dalton. Though the TVA agreed to reroute the line from its original proposed course (through the center of the proposed Rocky Face wilderness area), it will nonetheless have a significant impact on the visual and environmental quality of Rocky Face Mountain as well as the surrounding region. Call Brent Martin, 770-437-9858 for information on district projects and field trips.

Brasstown District - Howard Markel

Think wildflowers! Early Spring bloomers such as trout lily, bloodroot and trillium will soon be brightening Brasstown District as we look forward to hosting a wildflower identification walk on May 3rd.

Forest Service logging activities on the Brasstown District have continued to be primarily salvage of trees damaged by storms and by hurricane Opal in October of 1995. Most of these operations have been within cable distance of existing roads so that relatively little new haul road or skid trail construction has been necessary.

We were alarmed, however, by a Forest Service scoping notice issued last Fall proposing extensive logging in the Cooper Creek area (the Yellow Mountain Project). This project, if approved, could adversely impact tributaries of Cooper Creek, a major trout stream, as well as certain natural areas which have been proposed for protection in "Georgia Mountain Treasures." Timber cuts would be visible from the Yellow Mountain Trail in the proposed Coopers Creek Scenic Area extension. Needless to say, ForestWatch and interested individuals have expressed strong reservations about this project but comments to the Forest Service from others will be greatly appreciated and hopefully lead them to abandon this proposal in its early stages. Send your comments to: Stephen Bailey, USDA Forest Service, Suite 5, Owenby Building, East Main Street, Blue Ridge, GA 30513. Call Howard Markel at 770-781-5418 for information on district projects and field trips.

Chattooga District - James Sullivan

ForestWatch volunteers on the Chattooga RD continue to meet for field days on the second Saturday of each month. These field days are fun, scenic and educational. We have been monitoring the condition of many of the pine beetle salvage sale sites from the last two years, as well as regular logging activities. Recently, we have begun hiking some of the recreational trails on the district. We started with the Panther Creek Trail and Broad River Trail. On March 8th, we will be looking at parts of the Locust Stake ORV/ATV Trail system and the headwaters of the North Fork Broad River.

We have proposed a new area to be included in "Georgia Mountain Treasures" for protection in the forest plan revision. The Currahee Uplands area is located in the Lake Russell Wildlife Management Area and has the greatest concentration of PETS (proposed, endangered, threatened, sensitive) plant species in the Chattahoochee National Forest. The area has remnants of a savanna-like ecosystem with a large guild of prairie species. It has both granite and mafic outcrops in wet and dry situations and even some very unusual wetland areas. Ecological restoration and protection of unusual habitats should be the focus of management in this area. Call James Sullivan, 706-886-8265 for information on district projects and field trips.

Continued on next page

DISTRICT LEADER REPORTS (cont.)

Cohutta District - Brent Martin

The biggest news out of the Cohutta District is the recent Princeton study which lists the Conasauga River basin as one of the nation's top twenty-five hot-spots for endangered species. Thirteen species made the list, several of them listed as federally endangered, such as the Conasauga Logperch and the Amber Darter. Numerous federal and state endangered mussels also made the list.

Though a length of the Conasauga headwaters enjoys protection on federal land, primarily in the Cohutta Wilderness, the river is threatened where it travels through private land, particularly as it winds through Whitfield County, as Dalton Utilities draws 70 percent of its water from the Conasauga. Also threatening the Conasauga is a new TVA power line, which has already destroyed one of only two known spawning sites of the state protected Trispot Darter, also listed as a sensitive species. The line crosses the Conasauga River west of Eton near highway 225 and has a clearcut easement that is 260 feet wide. This is the same line which threatens the visual and environmental quality of Rocky Face Mountain in the Armuchee District.

Call Brent Martin, 770-437-9858 for information on district projects and field trips.

Brent Martin - President, GFW (on left) with fellow ForestWatch members Susan Evans and Peter Kirby

Oconee District - J.P. Schmidt

We believe major management changes on a number of relatively small but significant natural areas should be a definite outcome of the forest plan revision on the Oconee. These areas include glade sites near Monticello, several sites on Lake Oconee with unusual soils and botanical hot spots and well-preserved areas along Murder Creek. So far we are encouraged by strong assurances from District Ranger Tony Tooke to suspend any proposed actions in these areas for the duration of the forest plan revision. From when I began talking to him on this subject, his assurances represent a definite shift in position. I hope to get to know the best areas on the Oconee better this spring in order to recommend more areas for special protection.

We have outlined to Tony what kind of restoration/hardwood management we would like to see on several large areas of the Oconee including the Scull Shoals area. The Oconee District is currently soliciting comments on the Southern Pine Beetle Suppression Environmental Assessment (EA). We will urge dependence on the cut-and-leave suppression method as a means of decreasing disturbance of the forest and encouraging hardwood succession, especially within areas under restoration management.

Call J.P. Schmidt at 706-613-8483 for information on district projects and field trips.

Tallulah District - Mort Meadors

A recent public outcry ensued as a result of a plan for commercial salvage logging in the Tallulah District proposed within the Appalachian Trail and the Chattooga National Wild and Scenic River corridors. Not only is commercial logging prohibited by law and in the forest management plan in these areas, the District wanted to proceed with this project without even preparing an Environmental Assessment, meaning no right to any appeal. After pressure from the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, the Chattooga River Watershed Coalition and Georgia ForestWatch and numerous letters and articles in local papers and the Atlanta paper, District Ranger David Jensen had to drop those portions of the project within the AT and Chattooga corridors.

What is still troubling though is that Jensen did not drop the part of the proposal for commercial salvage logging in several designated roadless areas, including Wolf Knob (Patterson Gap), Kelley Ridge, and Sarah's Creek (Rabun Bald). Moreover, Jensen has also proposed building several miles of new "temporary" roads for logging access without specifying where they would be built or what limits would be placed on their length.

There is little indication why an 800,000 BF timber level was chosen which conveniently puts the project just below the 1,000,000 BF level that triggers environmental assessment (EA). However, as Georgia ForestWatch pointed out in our comments, the "extraordinary circumstance" of logging in any roadless area also triggers the requirement to do an EA, regardless of the size of the timber sale. Call Mort Meadors at 706-746-5799 for information on district projects and field trips.

Toccoa District - Dennis Stansell

Through intensive efforts primarily by local activists the "Swan Drop Zone" decision was reversed by the USFS Regional Office. District Ranger Stephen F. Bailey was instructed to obtain additional public participation. Consequently, a scoping notice dated February 20, 1997 to identify other possible sites for the parachute drop zone was mailed out. The original EA identified 23 drop zone sites but the District Ranger indicated that only the Swan area met specifications by the Army.

According to Forest Service information, a drop zone is designed to accommodate large helicopters dropping approximately 60 paratroopers per training exercise. The training would involve the firing of weapons. Weapons commonly used are large caliber automatic rifles, hand grenade simulators and mortars. The guns use blanks but are just as loud. At night flares are also used. The noise from these kinds of war games is incredible and creates an enormous disturbance over a large area of forest. The fact that the Chattahoochee NF is designated as an Urban Forest makes one wonder if any area is suitable for this magnitude of disturbance.

Only one area comes to mind that may be appropriate. It is the old Lockheed Nuclear Site in Dawson Forest. This is essentially a "dead zone" as far as recreation use goes and is not on national forest land. If you have concerns or ideas regarding the "drop zone" please write to the Toccoa District Ranger in Blue Ridge: Attn: Stephen Bailey, USDA Forest Service, Suite 5, Owenby Building, East Main Street, Blue Ridge, GA 30513 and copy your letter to US Rep. Nathan Deal, 1406 Longworth House Office Bldg., Washington, DC 20515. Call Dennis Stansell at 770-536-9669 for information on district projects and field trips.

FOREST PLAN REVISION UPDATE

From the Chattahoochee-Oconee NF's ECO-21 Newsletter, written by the ID Team:

The Forest Plan Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) will have a busy 1997. Listed below are the major tasks the team will be responsible for during the upcoming year:

Complete needed inventories prior to alternative development. This includes items such as wild and scenic river evaluations, the new scenery management system, ecological classification, etc. Our goal is the have these inventories completed by June 1997.

Finalize the Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS) including the process record for it. We currently have a Draft AMS which must be finalized prior to developing alternatives. Some of the areas to finalize include the supply and demand analysis, range current condition, goods and services, and running benchmarks.

Content Analysis of the Scoping Comments. Our scoping ended on December 2, 1996. We have received approximately 2,500 letters. A content analysis team is now going through these letters identifying individual comments. The objective of this content analysis is to determine the significant issues. The significant issues must be approved by the Regional Forester. Before the issues are recommended to the Regional Forester, we must have consensus with other forests in the Southern Appalachians and the forest's management team.

Mock up the Environmental Impact Statement. This outlines the entire EIS and gives the planning team a type of blue print to follow.

Management Prescriptions. Our objective is to develop a detailed proposed action to present to the public in 1997. This would be the start of alternative development.

Begin developing Alternatives. Under the current schedule this would begin around mid to late 1997. Coordination with other forests and completion of the AMS and inventories could cause this time frame to change.

Prepare the Draft EIS. Once alternatives are developed we can begin analyzing them in a Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

PLAN REVISION SCHEDULE SLIPS

The Regional office of the Forest Service has indicated that the schedule for new forest plans in the Southern Appalachian will slip:

	From	To
Draft EIS	**Jan. 98**	**Oct. 98**
Final Plans	**Dec. 98**	**May 99**

The reason given was a lack of manpower and budgets. Another reason sited was that the content analysis from public comments received last year was taking longer than expected.

At this time, the regional office is looking at the following schedule for various tasks:

- Regional guidance on old growth, sensitive species and roadless areas to be released in late April or May,
- Planners meeting in Knoxville, TN either April 1-2 or April 2-3, and
- Alternative development concurrently in all 5 NFs toward late Summer of 1997.

US ARMY PERSISTS IN ATTEMPTS TO EXPAND; MILITARY USE OF ED JENKINS NRA UNPRECEDENTED

The recent barrage of appeals filed by local residents in the Swan and Dial area of North Georgia, near the Ed Jenkins National Recreation Area (NRA), should have sent a clear message to the Forest Service and the US Army at Camp Merril. Out of 21 appeals filed, only 2 came from conservation groups. The rest were from citizens living in the Dial and Swan communities who often were only notified 2 weeks prior to the final decision that a helicopter drop zone was being built in their neighborhoods.

The USFS Regional Office wisely overturned the decision to proceed with the now infamous "Swan Drop Zone" otherwise the Army and District Ranger Stephen Bailey may have had their own little war on their hands. However, peace does not prevail in these small communities who have been notified of the Army's persistence to proceed with a large paratrooper helicopter drop zone somewhere in or near the Chattahoochee National Forest. Just in case they try to locate their expansion of operations near their community again, local residents have retained a prominent Atlanta attorney and are preparing to dig in for the long battle ahead.

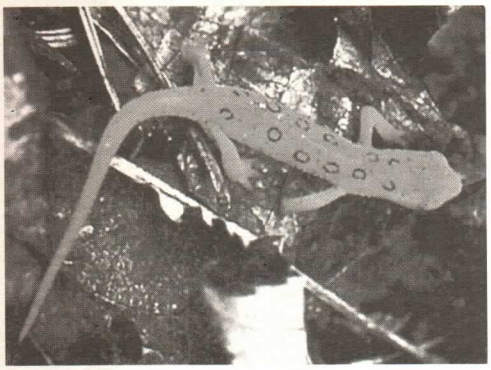
Although it may seem strange that the Army would be practicing war games in a National Forest that is so heavily visited prompting a designation as Urban Forest by the Forest Service itself, what is even more alarming is that the Ed Jenkins NRA is the only National Recreation Area in the country where there are any military maneuvers. This writer has personally experienced Army helicopters flying just above the treetops during a quest for solitude on the Toccoa River within the Ed Jenkins NRA. Two Army Blackhawk helicopters disturbed our camp on a weekend outing during a Summer evening, jolting us from a relaxing diner. According to other accounts, this and actual troop maneuvers within the NRA are not uncommon experiences for hikers, canoeists, or local residents which use the NRA for its designated purposes.

The NRA was established by an Act of Congress with the passage of the "Chattahoochee National Forest Protection Act of 1991" and establishes that the NRA will be managed "for the purposes of ensuring the protection of certain natural, scenic, fish and wildlife, historic and archeological, wildland and watershed values, and for the enhancement of the recreation opportunities associated with these values." One must question whether military maneuvers are compatible with those purposes and values.

Benton MacKaye Trail Bridge over Toccoa River in Ed Jenkins National Recreation Area

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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Life	☐ $350	☐ $500

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ForestWatch Wish List:

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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SPRING INTO THE WOODS

Georgia ForestWatch is preparing for our yearly spring wildflower walk which is currently scheduled for May 3rd. Please call us @ (404)872-9453 for confirmation and directions.

Our annual Spring trek into the woods is well worth your time. Join us in viewing one of the Chattahoochee's most remarkable treasures: its profusion of Spring wildflowers.

ForestWatch folks will help you identify wildflower species and will lead you to places where our mountain wildflowers are their most abundant.

At the beginning of May, many of the trillium species are blooming at their peak as are showy orchids, yellow lady slippers, blood root, mayapple, wild geranium, and other ephemeral herbaceous plants. Ephemerals are wildflowers that take advantage of the sunlight before hardwood trees and other competing plants put out their leaves shading the understory of the forest.

Plan on a fun half-day outing. Bring your lunch and your rain gear.

Georgia ForestWatch Leaders:

Campaign Director:	René Voss (404)872-9453
President:	Brent Martin
Vice-President:	Howard Markel
Acting Treasurer:	Shirl Parsons
Newsletter:	René Voss

District Contacts:

Armuchee District:	**Brent Martin** (770)437-9858
Brasstown District:	**Howard Markel** (770)781-5418
Chattooga District:	**James Sullivan** (706)886-8265
Cohutta District:	**Brent Martin** (770)437-9858
Oconee District:	**J.P. Schmidt** (706)613-8483
Tallulah District:	**Mort Meadors** (706)745-5799
Toccoa District:	**Dennis Stansell** (770)536-9669

EVENTS CALENDAR

March 13	**FS ID Team Meeting** - Gainesville, GA - New Supervisor's Office 1755 Cleveland Highway (U.S. 129 North), 10:00am (Thursday)
Late March or April	**Rockyface - TVA Power Line Public Meeting in Dalton, GA** Date not available at press time. We will alert you when we get a date, or call us at 404-872-9453 towards the end of March.
March 28	**Army Drop Zone Comments Due** - See article on page 5 and the Dennis Stansell's Toccoa District Report on page 4 regarding proposed expansion of military activities on the Chattahoochee NF.
April 10	**FS ID Team Meeting** - Gainesville, GA - New Supervisor's Office 1755 Cleveland Highway (U.S. 129 North), 10:00am (Thursday)
May 3	**Georgia ForestWatch Spring Wildflower Walk** - For more information call (404)872-9453.
May 8	**FS ID Team Meeting** - Gainesville, GA - New Supervisor's Office 1755 Cleveland Highway (U.S. 129 North), 10:00am (Thursday)

For more information about the FS Interdisciplinary Team (ID) Team Meetings, call the Forest Service at (770)536-0541. Ask for Marcus Beard, ID Team Leader or any member of the team for further information.