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Georgia Forestwatch

FOREST NEWS

Protecting and Restoring Georgia's Native Ecosystems.

DRAFT FOREST PLAN RELEASED

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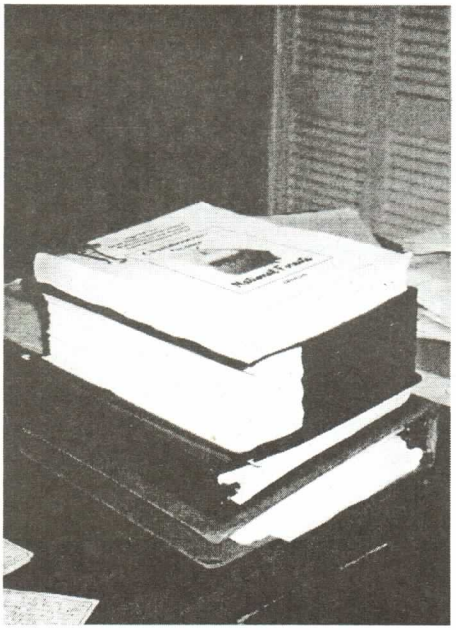
New GFW Tee's see pg. 8

After seven long years of meetings, analysis, and waiting, the Draft of the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest has finally been released. Georgia Forestwatch, along with many other conservation groups in the region have devoted much time and energy to the plan revision process, and we were all very disappointed with the changes that have been made. For example, as of August 2002, we had two new recommended Wilderness areas (Kelly Ridge and Mountaintown) as well as protection for the Conasauga River, which is widely considered one of the freshwater diversity hotspots of the country.



pictured above: "The Draft", all 1800 pages

Since August the Forest Service disengaged from public participation in order to complete the task of finalizing the plan. Little did we know that this also meant that there would be substantial changes that disregarded years of public input.

Both the Mountaintown and Kelly Ridge Roadless areas are now in a prescription called remote Backcountry recreation/non-mo

~ continued page 5

Georgia Forestwatch
15 Tower Rd.
Ellijay, GA 30540

706-635-8733
www.gafw.org

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15 Tower Rd.
Ellijay, GA 30540
706-635-TREE (8733)
Georgia Forestwatch is a 501(c)3 non-profit educational corporation.

Staff
Brent Martin, *Executive Director*
Angela Faye Martin, *Assistant Director*
Katherine Groves, *Staff Ecologist*
Jennifer Rodriguez, *Office Manager*

Board Members
Dr. Bob Kibler, *President*
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Mary Maclean Asbill
Kees DeVente
Jen Geigerich
David James
Larry Sanders
Jon Schwartz
Dudley Sisk
James Sullivan
Dr. Randall White

District Leader (DL) Contacts

Armuchee District:	Angela Faye Martin (706) 635-8733
Brasstown District:	Howard Markel (770) 781-5418
Cohutta District:	Wayne Jenkins (706) 276-7913
Chattooga District:	James Sullivan (706) 886-8265
Toccoa District:	Dennis Stansell (706) 747-5892
Tallulah District:	Mort Meadors (706) 746-5799
Oconee Nat'l Forest:	J.P. Schmidt (706) 542-3489

GFW Editorial

by Brent Martin, GFW Executive Director

Procrastination is the Art of Keeping up with Yesterday –
- Don Marquis

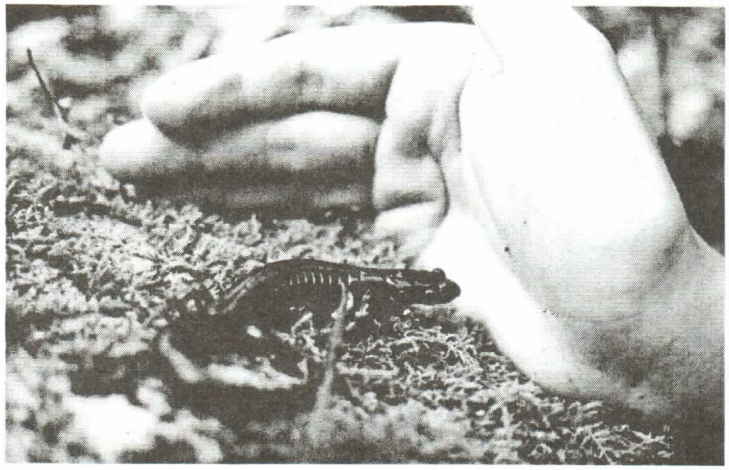
After seven long years of numerous public comment periods, dozens of public meetings, and thousands of hours of Georgia Forestwatch input and analysis (not to mention dollars), the Forest Service finally released Draft plans for five southern Appalachian forests in early April. At the last public comment period in September 2002 we had been told very little would change with the plans as they went to prepare the Drafts over the next several months and so we took them for their word. Granted, we wanted a lot to change – more wilderness recommendations, better riparian protection, a roads policy that decommissioned bad roads and prioritized maintenance, and much more, but we thought that we would at least see a Draft plan this April that was close to the one presented to the public last fall. After all, they had told us very little would change, and the plan that was presented last fall was the plan we had collaborated on for seven years. What a slap in the face.

photo Brent Martin & Bob Kibler

The Draft that was released for comment in early April has gutted the previous wilderness recommendations, ignored the roads policy and regional old growth guidance, placed close to two-thirds of the forest in management that could potentially have new ORV trails, and revitalized the antiquated language of timber targets. So much for past collaboration and public participation. It was almost as if the entire plan had been turned over to our state game agency, ORV user groups, and timber industry executives for them to rewrite, empowered greatly by the environmental views of the current administration. Regardless, our confidence and trust in the Gainesville office has diminished - a sad state of affairs after we have worked so hard to create a plan that we felt was moderate in its recommendations and in which over seventy organizations had built consensus for new wilderness and scenic recommendations.

Given the fact that the Forest Service is arguably one of the most politicized agencies in the Federal government, we shouldn't be surprised, I know. We expected some fallout from changes in administrations, and have witnessed it in other areas for some time now; however, this new Draft plan is our most drastic encounter with the fallout yet. So, back to square one for us on getting decent forest plans. And don't look to see a new plan implemented anytime soon. The Final is due out in the fall, and the plan is so full of appealable items that we will no doubt end up in court with litigation dragging on into the unforeseeable future. That's a tragedy, of course, but perhaps not as great a one as the lack of trust and confidence that will permeate public participation (if public participation survives) for many years to come. Regardless, our voices have been many on the fate of this forest, and our organization and knowledge have grown and will continue to grow for the years to come. So keep the faith, write the letters, and get into the forest as often as you can. *see page 7 for FS contact info*

Georgia Forestwatch Salamander Survey is now underway thanks to Patagonia for a grant to survey Kelly Ridge Roadless area. Salamander populations in the Southeast are on the decline and many of them are sensitive to timber harvesting and road building. We have contracted two herpetologists from UGA, Matt Elliott and Stacy Smith to survey the beautiful and remote Kelly Ridge Roadless area. Kelly Ridge is renown for it's salamander diversity and we are pleased that once Patagonia has stepped up to the plate to help GFW gain greater scientific understanding of the area. If you would like to learn more about salamanders, help the scientific community learn more about their locations in remote areas, and spend a day in Kelly Ridge, please call the office at (706) 635-8733 and ask to speak with Katherine, our staff ecologist, about volunteering for the survey. We plan on being in the field on April 24th and 25th and on May 17th and 18th. *picture of Kelly Ridge resident salamander by Matt Elliot (right).*



Forest Protections & Public Participation At Risk

This information is provided courtesy of the American Lands Alliance web site (www.americanlands.org) and the Heritage Forests Campaign web site (www.ourforests.org). Send your complaints to The White House, Senators Miller and Chambliss, and Representatives Deal and Norwood.

1.Roadless Area Conservation Rule

On December 12, 2002, in a 2-1 ruling, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the American people when it lifted an injunction on the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. The 9th Circuit Court ruled that the rulemaking process met all public participation requirements. The State of Idaho, Boise Cascade and other timber allies have filed a motion for a rehearing in the 9th Circuit, which would allow for a review of the decision in front of a larger panel of judges. This is unlikely since the opinion from the smaller panel of judges stated that the plaintiffs do not have a high likelihood of success. The U.S. Forest Service has publicly stated its intent to amend the roadless rule. In testimony to the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee in February 2003, Undersecretary of Agriculture and former timber lobbyist Mark Rey said an amended rule could be expected "within a few months." Given the Bush Administration's ongoing efforts to undermine protections for our last wild forests, any amendments they propose are likely to gut the roadless rule.

2. Putting Logging Ahead of Community Protection

The Forest Service and BLM are failing to focus fuel treatments near threatened homes and communities as called for in the National Fire Plan. Only 30% of the acres treated this year will be in the agencies' broadly defined wildland/urban interface. In addition, the agencies are using the fuels program to justify the cutting of large fire-resistant trees, including old growth. The administration is seeking to open these logging loopholes even wider in the Healthy Forest Initiative and would continue to put timber industry profits ahead of real community protection.

3. The Healthy Forests Initiative

This administration initiative unveiled in August would rollback environmental protections and public involvement by abolishing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements on fuel reduction and "forest health" projects. In addition, the plan would make permanent changes in forest regulations to abolish citizen appeals and to provide unlimited goods for services stewardship contracts that encourage logging. The administration intention is to pay for this program through increased logging, including logging of old growth forests. Elements of this proposal were included in two House bills, H.R. 5376 and H.R. 5319.

4. Stewardship Contracting

...continued page 6

Armuchee Tree I.D. Hike/ Workshop Participants

From left: Allan Wadsworth, Teresa Ware, Doug Riddle, Richard Ware, Parrie Pinyan, Katherine Groves, Frank Salerno, Angela Faye Martin, Bill Goldstrohm, Dudley B. Sisk, Jess Riddle, Robert Smiles, Marilyn Goodwin, Melanie Vickers & Allie Vickers
Not pictured: Roger Bradley, Warren Goodwin, Brent Martin, and Lynn Cumiskey

Georgia's Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) $$'s Slashed for 2004

After a few years of seeing increases to Georgia's Forest Service budget to buy key tracts in the north Georgia mountains, our 2004 budget stands to only see a $1 million allocation. Georgia's LWCF budget for 2003 was $3.2 million, which was to buy a key Yonah Mountain tract, as well as some key Conasauga and Jacks river tracts, but was borrowed for the fire efforts out west. The Forest Service is still, as of press time, anxiously awaiting repayment. The Forest Service's LWCF request for Georgia in 2004 is $6 million, but due to Presidential slashing of Land and Water Conservation dollars our Georgia allocation is only $1 million, and we might be lucky to see that. The total Federal LWCF budget has been cut almost forty percent from its $569 million dollar level in 2002, with the President's 2004 budget weighing in at $347 million. This budget affects all Federal land agencies, such as the National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service, but the Forest Service is being hit the hardest, with a 70 percent reduction in its allocation from $151 million in 2002 to $45 million in 2004. Please write your Congressional Representatives and ask them to work to get the full Forest Service request of $6,000,000 for Georgia. Private land is being developed rapidly and real estate prices are continually increasing in the north Georgia mountains. Due to these factors, it is important that the Forest Service in north Georgia gets as much of the LWCF budget as it can. The window is closing and we need to act fast.

~Brent Martin

Tallulah District Update

A lot is happening on the Tallulah district these days. The Forest Service is requesting comments on several proposals of interest. Included among them is a proposal to release a predator beetle as a biological control for the growing population of the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA). HWA is a death sentence for Hemlock trees and was discovered in the northeastern sections of the district about a year ago. As well, the district is proposing to do maintenance, restoration, and soil stabilization on several problem roads complete with a few small road closures. On the other hand, we have received a proposal to expand a wildlife opening within the Sarah's Creek Roadless Area. The opening would be expanded by 8.1 acres. Though the area has been damaged by Southern Pine Beetle, its roadless character should prevent it from being a target for intensive game management.
Finally, the Southern Environmental Law Center, on behalf of Georgia Forestwatch and the Chattooga Conservancy, submitted an appeal of the recent Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the North Burton Powerline special use permit on the Tallulah Ranger District. Georgia Transmission Company (GTC) submitted a special use permit to create a 115 kV transmission line over the top of and down the steep north slope of Glassy Mountain in 2000 and the EA and FONSI were released in February of this year. According to experts contracted by the Chattooga Conservancy, the line is unnecessary to meet energy demands. Additionally, it spans a beautiful waterfall and botanically rich northfacing slope.

~Katherine Groves

Draft Forest Plan is Released ...continued from cover

torized (12.A), which allows temporary road building, salvage logging, some ATV trails, and other forms of management. The Conasauga River has been allocated to a prescription called Dispersed Recreation with Vegetation Management (7.E.2) which is suitable for timber production and shifts the focus away from the most important resource in that area: the imperiled aquatic species. These changes were made without public participation or knowledge. After long years of collaboration, we feel that our trust and efforts have been betrayed. Frankly, we cannot sit by and let this butchered plan proceed. We hope that you will all agree that it is time to let our voices be heard, loud and clear.

We urge everyone to write comments, make phone calls, and e-mail. However, we must also point out that the changes in the prescription allocations are not the only inadequate portion of the plan. There are several problems that we have consistently pointed out over the years that have still not been incorporated into the plan.

1. For three years Georgia Forestwatch has collected data on portions of the Forest that contain Old Growth communities. We have given that information to the Forest Service on several occasions. The Forest has guidance documents that require the incorporation of that material into the plan revision process. Our Old Growth data has still not been incorporated into the plan.

2. Over 400,000 acres of the Chattahoochee- Oconee National Forest will be "suitable" for building new ATV trails. This is particularly disturbing since the existing trails on the Forest are unable to be maintained properly and are causing an erosion nightmare and stemming new illegal trials by the day.

3. For seven years we have been assured that this plan will focus on restoration and that timber production would be a byproduct of that restoration. The plan now designates rotation ages and allowable sale quantities that amount to an annual volume quota.

4. The monitoring portion of the plan is completely inadequate. In a document that is approximately 1800 pages long, the section devoted to monitoring the impacts of forest management is a paltry 10 pages that provides little to no guidance about how to effectively monitor management practices.

5. As mentioned earlier, the Conasauga River is a precious resource due to the number of imperiled species it contains, many of which are found nowhere else in the world. In addition to the Conasauga, there are other special watersheds in Georgia that have not been given any special designation or listing as a priority for conservation efforts. This is an oversight that could severely effect the long-term survival of several imperiled aquatic ecosystems.

6. Finally, you have heard us all say before that the Riparian prescription for the new draft does not provide adequate protection from the sedimentation caused by logging, road building, or other impacts. Unfortunately, that is still true.

It is time for us to demand proper protection for our National treasures. If you have been involved with this process in the past, now is your chance to renew your commitment. If you have never been involved with the planning process, now is the time to learn. Do not be intimidated by strange language or fancy maps. Remember that if you care, you count. Though many of the recent proposed changes to environmental laws are trying to take it away, it is still your right to have a say in how your public lands are managed.

~Katherine Groves, Georgia Forestwatch Staff Ecologist

National Forest Protections At Risk... *continued from page 3...*

In the unfortunate passage of the Omnibus Appropriations Bill for Fiscal Year 2003 on February 14, 2003, Congress approved many anti-environmental riders, including making the Stewardship Contracting program permanent for the next 10 years and extending the program to include the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

The program was prematurely made permanent without any evidence of the program's performance, the ecological impacts, or assessment of the intended local workforce benefits. The Stewardship Contracting program was formerly a pilot demonstration program with Congress approving a total of 84 pilot projects on National Forests since Fiscal Year 1999. According to the Pinchot Institute, the organization overseeing the program's evaluation, only 31 of the pilot projects have completed NEPA, only 22 have developed contracts, and only 11 have been awarded to successful bidders. Additionally, 13 of the pilot projects were so controversial that they were appealed and/or litigated.

5. NEPA Rollbacks Threaten 30 Years of Environmental Progress

In addition to the Healthy Forests Initiative, which proposes to abolish requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for fuel reduction projects, the administration's draft planning regulations would abolish NEPA analysis for forest plan amendments and revisions. This would end most public participation on National Forest issues because it was due to NEPA's requirements that the public has had an opportunity to comment.

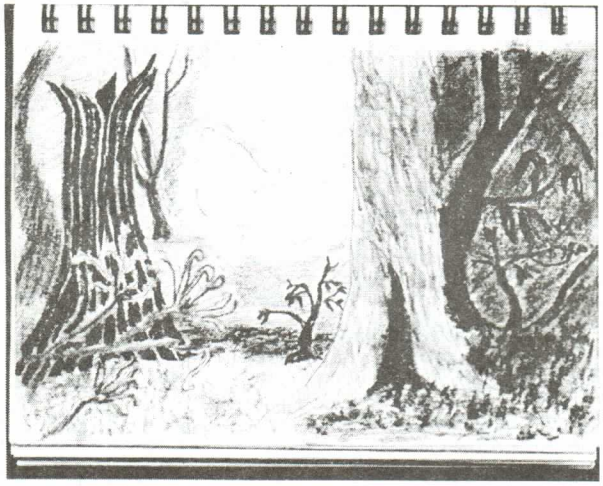
6. Undermining the National Forest Management Act

In 1976, the National Forest Management Act (NMFA) was passed to ensure that the cumulative effects of numerous projects across the landscape would not undermine the sustainability of our National Forests. The Bush administration has proposed changes to the regulations implementing NFMA that prioritizes logging, resource extraction, and "multiple-use" over sustainability. The revision would remove science and the public further from the Forest Service's decision making process, jettison species protections, open the door to uncontrolled logging, and give the Forest Service unprecedented discretion in creating and complying with management plans. The Bush administration's regulations were written without independent scientists and are in direct defiance of the recommendations of the last Committee of Scientists to consult on NFMA. The revisions undermine the very purpose of NFMA by largely removing science from the development and monitoring of the management plans and making the plans voluntary and non-binding.

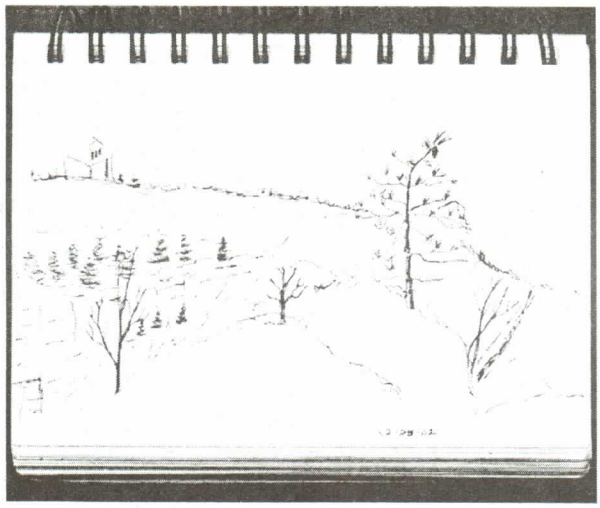
Ephemerata

Are You suffering from a need to see the forest for the forest plans? How's your love of detail and subtlety holding up? I use this space to feed our well of wonder, to replace long days of legalese and Forest Service terminology and analysis to allow our minds to percolate with life again like the limestone karsts of my favorite lands. Bring your brain back to columnular black walnut branches against spring's sharp chartreuse. Bring it to tiny night moths that witch hazel & serviceberry rely on for pollination. The terminology will take you away from your love of these things, if you don't take care. Bring yourself to dew dancing on maidenhair fern and read some W.B. Yeats if the case is dire. Remember, there is nothing more mighty than the delicate and few things more enduring than the ancient equisetum. When someone says "decay" say, resurrection fern. When someone says "early successional habitat" say, wind throw & blow down. When someone says "senescent", for heaven's sake say, Old Growth.

These are future Georgian's last forests and the need to be kept. Feed the wellspring of your mind with this infinitesimal land, watch the love of the rain falling, then get to work. ~ a.f.m. ~

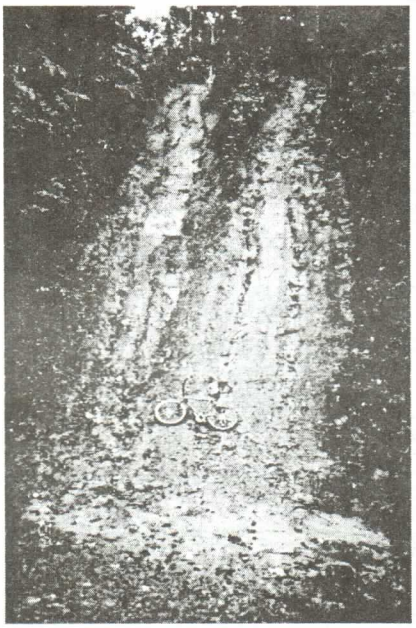


A Cuculiid pollinating shrubs in Grassy Mtn. Old Growth stand - field notebook 12/31/02 (below): View at Lula Lake Land Trust -A.F.M.



Off Road Vehicle Update - House Bill 260 Goes Down for Good

For the third year in a row Georgia Forestwatch has defeated an attempt by Representative Ralph Twiggs and newcomer Rep. Jack White to legalize off road vehicles on our National Forest roads. Despite promises from members of the Motor Vehicle Committee, it passed through and was sent on to the Rules Committee for a vote. It was defeated twice on a voice vote in the Rules Committee, and we considered it dead until Rep. White began waving around a tag that he said was from an ORV tagged and licensed in the state of Tennessee. Upon research we found that the tag had actually been taken off a street legal motorcycle and was being paraded around by White to hopefully convince his peers that these vehicles could be tagged in other states. We were also able to get the state of Tennessee to write a letter stating that TN did not license or tag ORVs. This miserable attempt at misrepresenting the facts by White cost us a great deal of time and energy to counter, but it paid off the last day of the session when we were able to suppress the bill from coming up for another vote. The Forest Service then took quick action to post on their website that they could not implement their proposed policy to allow ORVs on their roads, as the State had not passed a bill that would let them. If you haven't seen this posting yet, please take a look at www.fs.fed.us/conf/ The Forest Service places the blame for their decision on the state, which of course will encourage the ORV users' efforts in the Legislature for next year. We'll keep you posted. *-Brent Martin*



Illegal ORV ruts (above), Toccoa Ranger District (bike is for scale)

FOREST SERVICE CONTACTS

Ann Veneman, Secretary of Agriculture
James L. Whitten Bldg.
1400 Independence Ave.
Washington, DC 20250

Bob Jacobs, Regional Forester
U.S.F.S Region 8
1720 Peachtree Rd.; Room 760-S
Atlanta, GA 30367-9102
phone: 404-347-4177

Dale Bosworth, Chief
U.S.D.A. Forest Service
P.O. Box 96090
Washington, DC 20090-6090
phone: 202-205-1661

Kathleen Atkinson, Forest Supervisor (NEWLY ARRIVED)
U.S.F.S. Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest
1755 Cleveland Highway
Gainesville, GA 30501
phone: 770-297-3000

DISTRICT OFFICES OF THE CHATTAHOOCHEE/OCONEE NATIONAL FOREST

Ranger, Michael Gryson
USFS Chattooga Ranger District
200 Highway - 197 North
P.O. Box 1960
Clarkesville, GA 30523
706-754-6221

Ranger, Bill Nightingale
USFS Oconee National Forest
1199 Madison Road
Eatonton, GA 31024
706-485-7110

Ranger, Dave Jensen
USFS Talullah Ranger District
825 Highway 441 South
P.O. Box 438
Clayton, GA 30525
706-782-3320

Ranger, Cassius Cash
USFS Toccoa Ranger District
6050 Appalachian Highway
Blue Ridge, GA 30513
706-632-3031

Ranger, Debbie Whitman
USFS, Armuchee & Cohutta Ranger Districts
401 GI Maddox Parkway
Chatsworth, GA 30705
706-695-6736

Ranger, Alan Polk
USFS Brasstown Ranger District
1181 Highway 515
P.O. Box 198, Blairsville, GA 30512
706-745-6928

Visit the Forest Service's Chattahoochee-Oconee website: http://www.fs.fed.us/conf/

Where to send your personal comments to the Forest Service on the Draft Forest Plan:

Chattahoochee-Oconee
National Forests
Content Analysis Team
P.O. Box 221150
Salt Lake City, UT 84122
or: chattahoochee-oconee@fs.fed.us

Comment Deadline:
July 3, 2003

Send copies to your leaders:

Senator Zell Miller:
http://miller.senate.gov/contact.htm
257 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510
Phone: (202) 224-3643
Fax: (202) 228-2090
home:
100 Colony Square, Suite 300
1175 Peachtree St., NE
Atlanta, GA 30361
Phone: (404) 347-2202
Fax: (404) 347-2243

Senator Saxby Chambliss:
http://www.house.gov/chambliss/contact/
1019 Longworth
home:
682 Cherry St., Suite 300
Macon, GA 31201
Ph: 478-752-0800 Fax: 478-752-0888

Congressman Nathan Deal
http://www.house.gov.deal/
Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-1009
Phone: (202) 225-5211 2437
home:
P.O. Box 1015, Gainesville, GA 30503
Phone: 770-535-2592

Congressman Charles Norwood:
http://www.house.gov/norwood/contact.htm
1707 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515
Phone: 202-225-4101
Fax: 202-226-5995
home:
1776 North Jefferson Street, Suite B
Milledgeville, GA 31061
Phone: 478-453-0373
Fax: 478-453-7302

Georgia Forestwatch Events 2003

May 19th - GFW Fundraiser at Manuel's Tavern with The Wilderness Society

June 14th - Workshop at Medicine Bow Wilderness School with Mark Warren - Etowah River Watershed

June 21st - Aquatic Insects Workshop -Mountaintown Creek Mountaintown Roadless Area

August 2nd - GFW Freshwater Snorkeling - Conasauga River

All outings are a perk for GFW members. To join, see form below. As additional events or outings are planned they will be posted on the Georgia Forestwatch website:
www.gafw.org
For more info call 706.635.8733

Next quarter, our current treasurer will be taking on responsibilities as President and will have less time to devote to finances. If you have some experience with finances and think you can help, please call us today at: 706.635.TREE

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Georgia Forestwatch SPRING TEE'S have arrived!

ACT NOW.. SUPPLIES ARE LIMITED

Women's sizes are "Sweatshop Free" Girly Fine Tees by American Apparel with cap sleeves for those hot Georgia days in the forest. Adult (men's) sizes are 100% organic cotton fiber printed with REHANCE, a registered trademark and patented apparel technology developed by T.S. Designs and Burlington Chemical Company, is an innovative method of printing then garment dyeing using environmentally-friendly, water-based chemistry, producing breathable, "no-hand" designs on fabrics. Unlike crusty plastic prints, you feel the fabric, not the print. Maggie's tees are made from 100% certified organic US cotton and sewn by a worker-owned cooperative in Nicaragua.

ADULT (MEN'S) X-LARGE qty: ___
ADULT (MEN'S) LARGE qty: ___
ADULT (MEN'S) MED. qty: ___
Girly Fine Tee's (women's) MED. qty: ___
Girly Fine Tee's (women's) LARGE qty: ___

"It is a wholesome and necessary thing for us to turn again into the earth and in the contemplation of her beauties to know the sense of wonder and humility." ~Rachel Carson

GEORGIA FORESTWATCH MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name: *(please, print)* _____ Email: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Each tee is $20 and all proceeds benefit GFW.
Indicate size & quantity above

MEMBERSHIP CATAGORIES

(please, circle one)	Individual	Joint
Student	$15	$20
Regular	$25	$30
Generous	$50	$75
Extra Generous	$100	$150
Gilded	$200	$300
Life	$350	$500

~All are tax deductible~

Make checks payable to:

GEORGIA FORESTWATCH, 15 Tower Rd., Ellijay, GA 30540

credit card info:
we accept..... MC Visa AMEX *circle one*
_____ Exp. __ /__

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