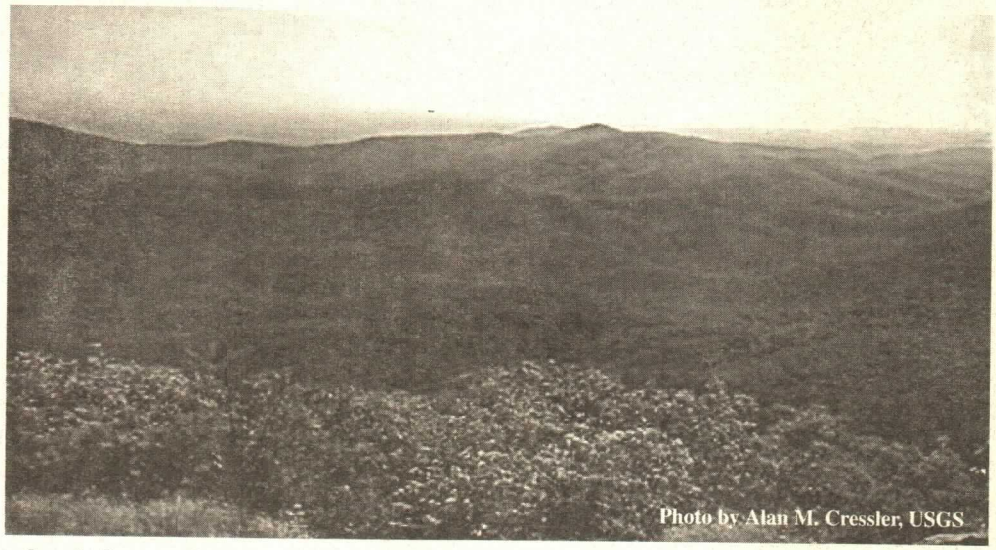
Spring 2004

Georgia Forestwatch
FOREST NEWS

Protecting and Restoring Georgia's Native Ecosystems

Georgia Forestwatch Appeals Land-use Plan for Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forests



Georgia Forestwatch opposes US Forest Service (USFS) plans to increase road building and commercial logging at the expense of protecting water quality and wild areas on the Chattahoochee National Forest.

Georgia Forestwatch and a coalition of conservation groups have formally rejected the new management plan for Georgia's public forests and challenged the US Forest Service (USFS) to revise it. An administrative appeal filed in April on our behalf by the Southern Environmental Law Center and Wildlaw essentially seeks proper and legal management of the 865,000-acre national treasure. As it stands, the new plan nearly doubles the planned timber harvest on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests (CONF) compared to the last decade. In our appeal, we charge that the plan violates the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Forest Management Act, the Endangered Species Act and the Administrative Procedures Act. Please see Page 3 and visit our Web site to read more about the CONF plan appeal, which outlines major problems and shortcomings, including the plan's failure to adequately protect roadless areas, expand wilderness designations to meet public demand for backcountry recreation, and require sufficient buffer zones to prevent runoff into mountain streams, many of which form the headwaters for community drinking water supplies. You can view all 278 pages of the appeal at **www.gafw.org.**

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TIGER MOUNTAIN

photo courtesy Tiger Mountain Vineyards

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Georgia Forestwatch Looks Ahead

Now that the forest planning process is winding down, what's next for Georgia Forestwatch?

As with many government initiatives, the new forest plan is not perfect; getting it improved may take a court battle. Meanwhile, we shudder to think what the plan would have looked like had it not been for the tireless efforts of the Georgia Forestwatch staff, District Leaders, volunteers, and coalition partners during the seven-year plan development phase. We were especially fortunate to have the expertise of our staff ecologist, Katherine Medlock. Her scientific background ensured that our proposals (and now the plan appeal!) were based on the best science available. We want to extend our sincere gratitude to Katherine, Brent, and Angela Martin, and all the folks who worked so arduously on the plan. We also thank you -- forest defenders – for taking the time to attend public meetings and write and send comments on the draft plan. Without your efforts, we can rest assured that the final plan would have been a mandate for road construction and resource extraction! As the forest planning process comes to an end, a new beginning awaits. Georgia Forestwatch now has the opportunity to devote more resources to forest preservation efforts (that don't revolve around management planning efforts). In the upcoming year and beyond, Georgia Forestwatch will continue to:

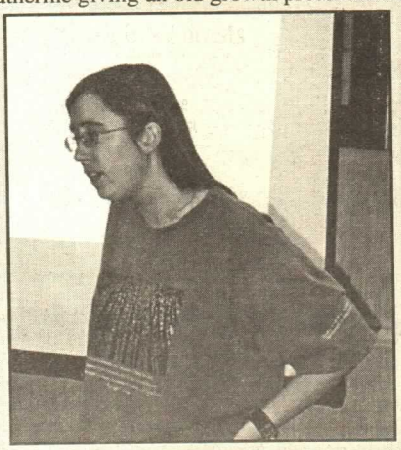
- ***Monitor and influence projects in the forests via our District Leader Program,***
- ***Expand our Education/Outreach Program to ensure that the public has the necessary tools and information to be active participants in forest protection,***
- ***Identify old growth and potential old growth areas for enhanced protections,***
- ***Pursue wilderness designation for areas that meet wilderness criteria,***
- ***Monitor stream quality and the health of riparian areas,***
- ***Document and report the effects of illegal off-road vehicle use and other unmanaged recreation on the forest, and***
- ***Work to eliminate the threat of invasive exotic species, such as the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.***

As you can see, there is still a lot of work to do! Please continue to support us, and keep doing whatever you can to protect our wonderfully rich, biologically diverse forests for today and for the future. Onward!

- Georgia Forestwatch Board of Directors

Parting Words.....

Katherine giving an old growth presentation



Hello Georgia Forestwatch Members,

I appreciate the opportunity to take this space in the Forest News to let you know that I have decided to leave my position at Georgia Forestwatch. I've worked here for a little over two and a half years and, though I have decided to leave, it is with a true sense of accomplishment. As I look back, I don't dare take credit for the many victories we have achieved; they are your victories; the Forest's victories. Thank all of you for the opportunity to roll up my sleeves and work beside you to make them happen. It has been an honor and a pleasure to play a small part. We've come a long way together!

- Katherine Medlock, Staff Ecologist

What's Really Wrong with the Forest Plan

Logging: The plan would allow logging of 50 million board feet per year (MMBF) from half of the forest, which the agency has determined to be "suitable" land. (A logging truck holds about 5,000 board feet.) This is almost twice the average harvest from 1991 to 2000 of 28.9 MMBF per year. Although the yearly target is less than the 1986 plan (87 MMBF), it does not include logging allowed on unsuitable land for insect and disease control, fuel reduction and other non-timber objectives. Wildlife habitat and forest health are reasons the Forest Service frequently uses to justify its clearcutting and burn projects. However, public lands are the best place to ensure protected habitat for the many species that rely on mature, unfragmented forest. Further, the agency ignored the findings of one of its own employees last year that the historic, natural conditions of the Southern Appalachian Mountains supported a relatively stable, mixed-age forest that did not rely on large-scale disturbances to regenerate.

Watershed Protection: Restricting activities such as logging and road building along stream banks prevents silt and mud from degrading water quality and aquatic habitat. In 2000, the regional USFS set out certain measures that each forest was to use in updating its management plan. Among other things, the riparian zones were to be a fixed minimum for perennial and intermittent streams, and ephemeral streams were also to be protected. The Chattahoochee-Oconee plan, however, excludes ephemeral streams and allows riparian corridor widths to change project by project. Further, the plan explicitly allows salvage logging and other silvicultural activities in the riparian corridor.

Wilderness Areas: Wilderness designation is the strongest environmental protection for our public lands. The Chattahoochee currently has 117,436 acres in wilderness (the Oconee has no designated wilderness). The plan calls for extending six of those areas by a total of 8,094 acres. Georgia Forestwatch and others support this increase, but advocate another 9,800 acres in additions, as well as 32,000 acres in five new wilderness areas. The agency had initially included two of those new areas – Mountaintown and Kelly Ridge – in the plan, but dropped them last year. In our appeal of the forest plan, we noted that USFS studies show an increase in demand for wilderness nationwide of 171 percent by 2050, and that 92 percent of the citizens who commented on wilderness in the draft plans for the five Southern Appalachian National Forests supported wilderness and/or adding more wilderness areas.

Roadless Areas: The Chattahoochee has 63,661 acres of identified roadless area – remote wild lands that provide premiere recreation opportunities (there is no inventoried roadless acreage on the Oconee). A federal rule adopted in January 2001 gave lasting protection to all the nation's roadless areas, but the Bush Administration has blocked it at every turn. If the rule were ultimately reversed, 87 percent of the Chattahoochee's roadless acreage would be vulnerable to logging, road building and other harmful activities under the new management plan.

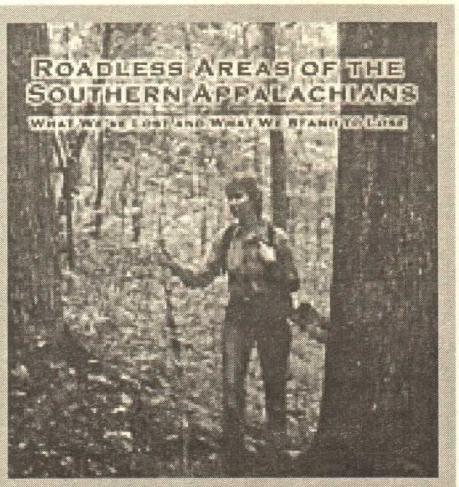
CONF FOREST PLAN APPEAL, BY THE NUMBERS

90,700: Number of acres that merit National Scenic Area and stand-alone Wilderness Area designations, as well as extensions to existing Wilderness areas (as outlined by the Georgia Mountain Treasures Protection Proposal)

160: Number of days the USFS has to respond to the appeal

21: Number of changes requested in the forest plan appeal

12: Number of conservation groups that signed on to the appeal



SPECIAL REPORT:
What We've Lost and What We Stand to Lose

More than 55,000 acres of Georgia's most rugged and beautiful mountain forests could be subject to logging and road building if the Bush Administration reverses the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule, according to a report just released by the Southern Environmental Law Center and members of the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition. These areas provide premier recreation opportunities and wildlife habitat in the Chattahoochee National Forest in northern Georgia, and are the source of drinking water for many communities. The roadless rule is designed to safeguard the last remaining unprotected wild areas in U.S. national forests from roadbuilding, mining and logging. The administration has already exempted America's largest national forest – Alaska's Tongass Rainforest – from the rule, and has announced intentions to revise the rule as it applies to the rest of the nation's forests. The report profiles roadless areas in the Chattahoochee and three other national forests in the Southern Appalachian region that have been lost due to logging and roadbuilding before the roadless rule was adopted. According to the report, the Chattahoochee already has 1,500 miles of roadway criss-crossing the forest's 750,000 acres and a road-maintenance backlog exceeding $50 million. Half of the road system, about 800 miles, exists exclusively to serve commercial interests and is closed to the general public. View the report and learn more about roadless areas in Georgia and throughout the Southern Appalachians at: **www.SouthernEnvironment.org.**

GEORGIA FORESTWATCH EVENTS 2004

May 15 - Hike in Sosebee Cove	10 a.m. – 3 p.m.	Chattahoochee National Forest
June 26 - Wild & Wooly Wine Tasting, Silent Auction and Fund-raiser RSVP at (706) 635-8733 or info@gafw.org	5:30 – 7:30 p.m.	Tiger Mountain Vineyards, Clayton $10/person voluntary contribution
July 17 - Secrets of the Cherokee by Mark Warren	10a.m. - 3p.m.	Chattahoochee National Forest near Dawsonville

*All outings are a perk for GFW members. To join, complete and mail the form below or join online at **www.gafw.org.** Space may be limited. Call **(706) 635-8733** or write us at **info@gafw.org** for more details and reservations.*

photo: Mark Warren

Earthlore and More July 17

with Naturalist
Mark Warren of Medicine Bow

Learn how the Cherokee Indians used plants for medicine, food, and crafts this summer when naturalist Mark Warren of Medicine Bow presents "Secrets of the Cherokee," a Georgia Forestwatch members-only event on July 17. Medicine Bow is a 35-acre wilderness school tucked into the Chattahoochee National Forest in the mountains of North Georgia near Dahlonega. Warren, who owns the school and teaches there, guides his students toward their own unique relationship with nature through the Earthlore accumulated by the Native Americans. Visit Medicine Bow online at **http://home.alltel.net/medbow/** for more information. **Spaces for "Secrets" are limited; reserve your place by calling us today at (706) 635-8733 or e-mailing us at info@gafw.org.**

Fun on Tiger Mountain June 26
Wild & Wooly Wine Tasting, Silent Auction

The 2,000-foot altitude, mineral-rich soils and well-drained slopes of Rabun County's Tiger Mountain are perfect for growing grapes. But don't take our word for it. Go and see (and taste) for yourself! On June 26, former *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* editorial writer Martha Ezzard, her husband John and their Tiger Mountain Vineyard partners Bill and Leckie Stack will host a special evening of fun to benefit Georgia Forestwatch. "Rabun Red" is one of seven wines produced on-site and available for tasting from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Wilderness photographs, camping gear, and native plants are among the many items that will be auctioned at the event. For directions and more information about the winery, go to http://www.tigerwine.com/.

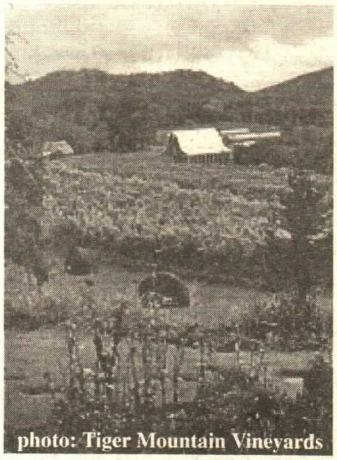


photo: Tiger Mountain Vineyards

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

~All contributions are tax deductible~

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