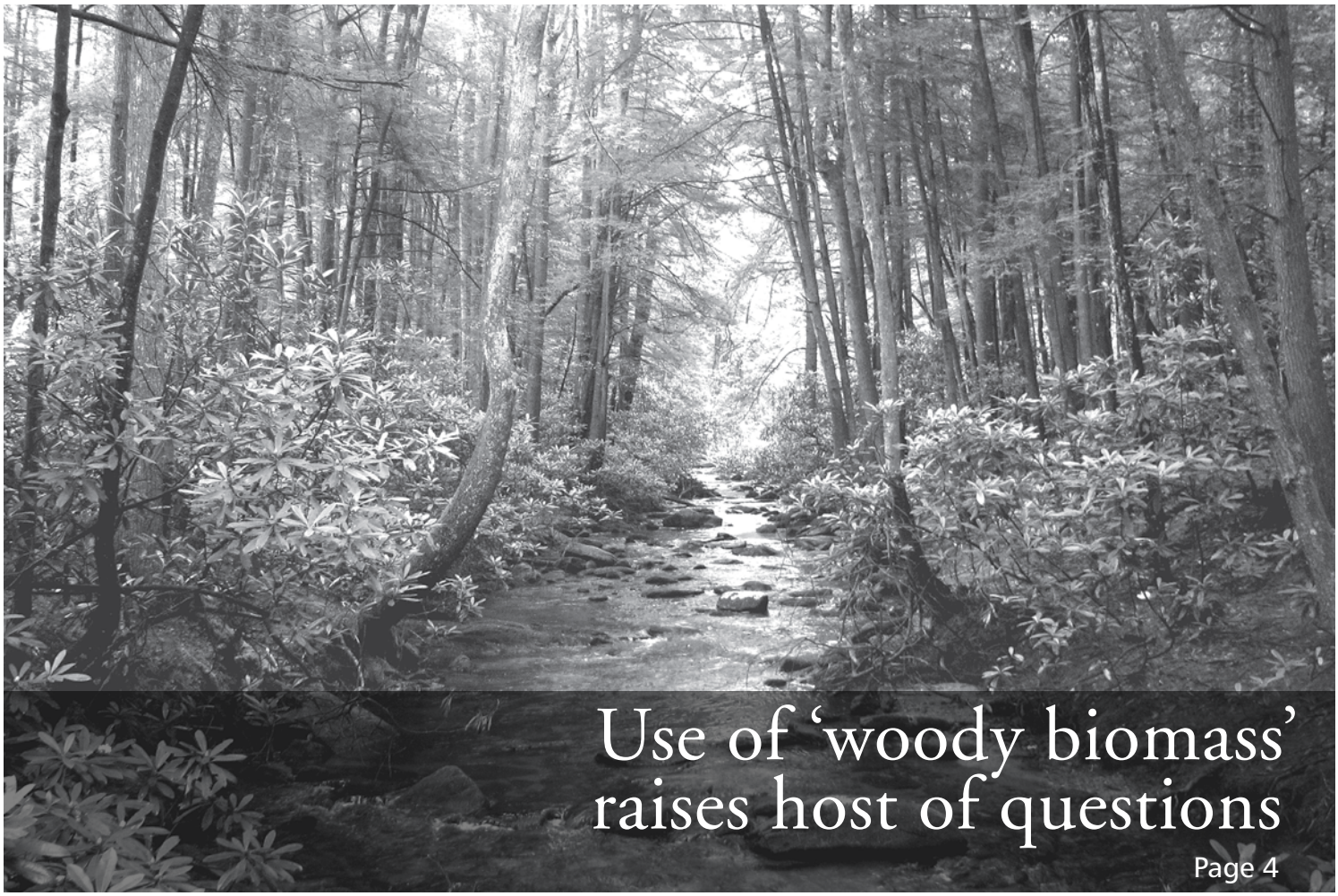
Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Fall 2008



Use of 'woody biomass' raises host of questions

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From The Director

Forest management gone awry?

Wayne Jenkins
Executive Director

During the bad-ole-days of clear cuts and rampant road building on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests (1960s to 1996,) it was easy to see some effects of "bad forest management." Silt bleeding into streams, devastation of clear cut forests, scenic views ruined. Some impacts were not so easy to see: nesting songbirds and other species displaced, soil degradation, loss of mast-bearing trees, etc. The long term effects may never be known, but it is obvious that transitioning hardwood and mixed hardwood-pine forests to pine mono-cultures is an open invitation to mass infestation of the native Southern Pine Beetle. Was this approach bad management? What criteria should be used to determine the answer? How should the public's forest be managed?

That last question is the vexing conundrum at the heart of public forest management. Forest Service managers see a forest suffering from innumerable ills, which they are only too happy to try and "manage." The public sees mainly a hardwood forest that appears generally healthy, beautiful and certainly capable of managing itself. The concept that natural systems "require" human intervention to function properly is pretty foreign to most folks.

Management may appear appropriate in certain circumstances, but exactly where and what should be done is the crux of this conundrum. The view of Georgia ForestWatch is a cautionary one. Our caution is born of the understanding of past management, a healthy dose of skepticism toward human tinkering with complex natural systems, and a continuing passion to piece together the ecological processes and principles that define our national forests. This doesn't mean that we are advocating no management, but that management decisions should be made thoughtfully and respectfully, being careful that we understand the implications and dynamics of any specific site. The forest itself will answer many questions. "What forest community exists here now? What existed formerly? What natural or human caused changes shaped the present situation? What are the geological, climactic and biological processes and conditions shaping this forest?" The present forest management plan states that "we are students of nature," and ForestWatch believes that learning requires asking hard questions.

This view is not just borne of preservationist sentimentality, although having spent much time in these forests, many of us have bonded with specific places making them part of us. But we also know the many practical benefits of our public forests. Clean water from fully forested watersheds, habitat for all manner of wildlife, a forested bulwark for balancing private development, and a recreational destination for millions of hard working citizens.

Our caution is justified by this reality: Many of the "problems" that managers wish to actively manage are the results of past active management. The tens of thousands of acres of planted pine stands now present throughout the forests, are the direct result of past clear cutting and replanting in many cases with pine species not even native to the site. These now face the depradation of the Southern Pine Beetle.

The past three years, as the agency has moved to implement the forest management plan, their basic view of the forest and much proposed management is not what we would define as good management. The heart of their approach is the management plan itself, directing the creation of certain target acreages for "restoration," wildlife habitat, early successional habitat, etc. With our appeal of the plan denied, plus a fully engaged forest supervisor, the push appears to be on to implement the plan.

Troubling issues have arisen as proposals pick up speed. In the pages of Forest News we will tackle these management issues, explaining the agency's approach and our position as we shine the light of inquiry upon the complex intricacies of the latest trends in forest management. For a sampling of one of the more controversial management proposals we have engaged in, visit our website at: www.gafw.org/brawley.html. Take a few minutes to review the Forest Service's proposal and then read our response. This will give you valuable insight into the agency's direction. Also, over the next two issues, Forest Ecologist Darren Wolfgang explores biomass energy production and why our forests should not be used for this purpose. ■

Final Armuchee Ridges decision announced

On August 8, Ranger Michele Jones, of the Conasauga District of the Chattahoochee National Forest, announced her decision to proceed with the Armuchee Ridges project. The details of the project and its effects were released in a 171 page Environmental Assessment.

This proposal was first announced in December 2006, after a series of public meetings. Throughout 2007, Georgia ForestWatch spent a great deal of time in field visits to the Armuchee region and in meetings with Forest Service personnel. In November 2007, ForestWatch along with the Southern Environmental Law Center submitted lengthy comments on the project. In February 2008, ForestWatch staff and volunteers and Sarah Francisco of the Southern Environmental Law Center spent two days meeting with Ranger Jones, district personnel and Forest Supervisor George Bain in an attempt to resolve differences concerning this project.

The project in its initial form consisted of 6,000 acres of pine thinning, 600 acres of longleaf pine restoration and 900 acres of oak/pine restoration. The project in its final form consists of 6,000 acres pine thinning, 600 acres longleaf restoration and 670 acres oak /pine restoration. ForestWatch supports the thinning of non-native planted loblolly pine plantations to combat the southern pine beetle. Due to our efforts, there will be greater protection during timber harvest of riparian areas (streams and stream banks) in these pine plantations.

ForestWatch supports the restoration of mountain longleaf pine but not at the expense of mature oak forest. We prefer that the Forest Service slash down their 30-40 year old recovering clear cuts (of which there are many in the project area) to create sites for longleaf restoration. ForestWatch's ground truthing of the proposed project discovered 230 acres of mature oak forest slated to be clear cut and then 'restored.' We protested this clear cutting for 'restoration' and we are happy to see that these beautiful mature hardwood stands have been removed from the project.

ForestWatch pushed for more monitoring of the effects of this project particularly the experimental oak/pine restoration. The final proposal speaks at some length about monitoring, but does not commit the agency to the rigorous monitoring, including baseline data, necessary to determine if their 'restoration' activities have accomplished the stated goal. We are disappointed that the Forest Service would not commit to meaningful monitoring or a more ecologically correct method to restore longleaf. Despite our misgivings, the pine thinning is important and the project needs to proceed. After much soul searching, ForestWatch has decided not to appeal the project.

For a more detailed history of this project, visit our website at: http://www.gafw.org/newsletters/2008spring_newsletter.pdf. ■

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Cover photo: Lori Martell. A view of the Noontootla River taken in the Ed Jenkins National Recreation Area.

Inquiry into biomass utilization for the production of goods and energy, Part 1 of 2

by Darren Wolfgang : Georgia ForestWatch Forest Ecologist

Introduction and executive summary:

As prices of petroleum and other natural resources long relied upon by Western civilization soar to astronomical heights, industries scramble to find viable solutions to this ever-growing problem. Given the urgency and severity of this cost surge, engineers, scientists, and businessmen have joined forces in the campaign to find solutions. Numerous options for alternative fuels and energy have been identified and are currently on the table for discussion. Some of the various sources of potential energy have been identified, including wind energy towers, hydroelectric dams, hydrogen cell technology, nuclear power generators, as well as coal, oil, ethanol, bio-diesel, solar, and biomass operations.

The utilization of biomass for electricity, production of bio-diesel, and cellulosic ethanol poses a great threat to the long-term sustainability and productivity of national and state forestlands, as well as production operations on land held by the private sector. In order to produce biomass in quantities sufficient to operate steam-powered generating facilities designed to produce electricity, huge quantities of woody material (biomass) must be available for use. In some instances highly agriculturally oriented "plantation" style forestry is the preferred means for producing the vast tonnage of biomass required to meet the demand for this material. It is our belief that the only way to sustainably produce biomass, rotation after rotation is to produce it in an agricultural fashion using crop rotation, nutrient additions, and fertilization. Since the biomass does not need to come from large diameter trees, shorter rotation lengths are desired. Depending on the desired level of production output of the plantation, and the subsequent management inputs and intensity, rotation length could be as little as 5 to 10 years. With this said it is not in the best interest of any public forestlands to be managed on such a short rotation. Public and private lands repeatedly harvested for the purpose of biomass utilization will inevitably exhibit characteristics of soil exhaustion and an overall lack of productivity over time. Biomass can only be utilized more sustainably on sites that will chemically substitute the nutrients lost during harvest with artificial fertilizers and associated nutrient supplement mixtures.

Listed below are a number of facts about trees, how the trees use nutrients, and how various tree harvest operations impact those soil nutrient cycles and relative abundance.

Basic facts about trees:

- Nutrients such as N, P, K, Ca, Mn, Mg, Mo, Zn, C, etc. are important for tree growth and vitality (refer to the Periodic Table of the Elements.)
- With the exception of N, which is deposited largely from precipitation, most nutrients are derived from soil parent material (rocks.)
- Nutrients are "picked up" by trees during the "growing season," and returned for the most part to the soil when the "dormant season" begins.
- When the nutrients are returned to the soil (in the form of leaves, needles, and woody debris,) a collaborative and complicated series of events involving such things as macro-invertebrates (insects,) bacteria, microorganisms, fungi, and natural weathering processes for simplicity's sake "recycle" the nutrients in the soil.
- Since trees return most of the nutrients they "borrow" from the soil at the end of the growing season, the dormant season is really the ideal time for tree harvest (from a nutrient retention and site fertility perspective.)
- Very few nutrients, roughly 8 to 15 percent of the total amount held by a tree is stored in the "bole" or main stem of the tree, including in the bark. Based on this assumption, harvesting the "bole" only does not dramatically degrade the soil fertility.
- The most important nutrient lost by harvesting both the "bole" and the bark of the tree is Ca or Calcium. Some operations will "shuck" or remove the bark off the "bole" before removing it from the forest, but this method is observed only in the most environmentally friendly operations.
- Phosphorous (P) levels in soil are primarily derived from soil parent material. Phosphorous is often identified as a "limiting" nutrient; this is to say that P is important for plant growth and productivity. Evidence suggests that most P that is utilized by trees and re-deposited back to the soil is stored in the "O and A horizon". The "O horizon" is the layer containing the organic matter, and the "A horizon" is the layer right underneath the "O" that contains mixed mineral soil and organic material. With this said, it is important to understand that both whole tree harvesting operations conducted during the growing season as well as fire, cause the depletion of this Phosphorous from the soil, and as in the case of Calcium, once it's gone it's gone – period .
- Due to maximum efficiency and profitability targets, utilization of the forest for biomass production almost always involves "whole tree harvest.)
- Harvesting of the entire tree during the growing or dormant season is potentially destructive. ■

(continued in the next issue)

Public files more than 3,000 e-mails regarding Chattooga boating issue

by Joe Gatins : Co-district leader

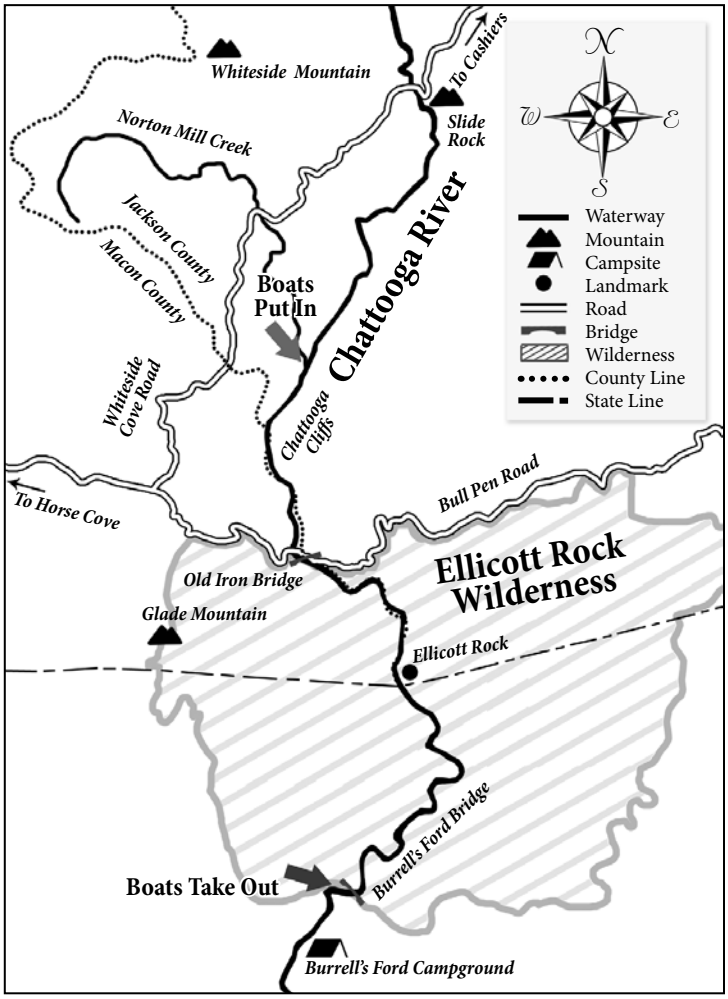
Some want unlimited boating, all the time, on the Wild and Scenic Upper Chattooga River. Some want no boating, but better protection of this river's wild nature. Some would prefer no boating at all, but are willing to throw the boating crowd a little bone – very limited boating, only some of the time.

At the August 18 deadline for the Environmental Assessment comment period, a total of more than 3,000 individuals and organizations weighed in, each wanting a say in how the U.S. Forest Service proposes to manage the 21 mile stretch of river that includes some of the most pristine and solitary wilds east of the Rockies. These include the Chattooga Cliffs, the Ellicott Rock Wilderness, and Big Bend plus the Rock Gorge inventoried roadless areas – all calculated to arouse sleeping controversies.

Many of the comments were indeed passionate, reflecting the deep sense of place evoked by one of the most wild and most remote public lands remaining anywhere in the east and the narrow stretch of river that transects them.

More dispassionate, the Forest Service, following a 24-month study of the issue costing millions of taxpayer dollars, proposed a "preferred alternative" to open seven of the 21 miles of the Upper Chattooga to limited boating, Dec 1 to March 1, at certain water levels only. Those seven miles would begin in North Carolina at the Chattooga North Fork's confluence with Norton Mill Creek, traverse the Chattooga Cliffs area, pass under Bull Pen Bridge, and continue through the entire length of the Ellicott Rock Wilderness to Burrell's Ford Bridge, on the boundary line between Georgia and South Carolina. Access to the top put-in point would be via the so-called County Line Road, a 1.7-mile portage. Boaters would be provided a new parking lot somewhere in this area, possibly shortening the portage. (See accompanying map.)

The agency's proposal visibly sought to craft a legally defensible "political" decision, aimed at trying to appease the aggressive boater lobby, American Whitewater, which is pretty much pushing for unlimited access to these headwaters, 24-7, 365 days a year, at almost negligible water levels. The lobby and its lawyer-lobbyists swiftly rejected the agency's proposal in a 173-page broadside at the Forest Service.



Courtesy of Karen Pait - The Highlander

Georgia ForestWatch, in a detailed comment crafted with the expert aid of two well-versed public lands lawyers, Rachel Doughty and Sanjay Ranchod (with the firm, Paul, Hastings, Janofsky & Walker, LLP,) countered with proposals of its own: Do a more thorough Environmental Assessment – better yet, a true Environmental Impact Statement – which, we felt, would substantially support the wisdom of maintaining the zoning for this wild stretch of river the way it's been zoned for the past 32 years: With no boats allowed, open to foot traffic only.

We made the following, additional points:

- that the Ellicott Rock Wilderness has been degraded by overuse, and that new, tighter management is needed

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Public Files More Than 3,000 E-mails

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to protect the area's remarkable values of wilderness and solitude.

- that "County Line Road" is neither an official Forest Service road nor an official trail and that the agency does not have the money or a defensible plan to make it an official gateway to boaters.
- that the Forest Service has the clear legal right to "zone" national forestlands for certain uses and restrict some areas for other uses, just as it restricts and prohibits use of ATVs on most of the national forests in Southern Appalachia.
- that the Forest Service has not committed to the necessary manpower to regulate and monitor any new boating, and that any boating on this stretch would invite a certain amount of unauthorized, out-of-season boating.
- that the agency failed to properly analyze the proposed new boating in the context of where boating is currently permitted (i.e., pretty much on every navigable waterway in Southern Appalachia, including the 36 miles of the lower Chattooga, its West Fork and two tributaries with highly technical and dangerous rapids much prized by the whitewater-rapid crowd, Holcomb and Overflow Creeks.)
- that the existing zoning of the river was itself the result of a compromise worked out by the Forest Service more than 30 years ago that served to separate the boaters and their extreme sport from hunters, anglers, hikers, picnickers, photographers, swimmers, naturalists, botanists, birders and plain 'ole nature lovers who value the increasingly rare quiet and solitude still available on the Upper Chattooga area.
- that the Forest Service proposal does not adequately protect sensitive plant and animal habitats in the upper river corridor, or the large woody debris so crucial to the aquatic food chain. (Somewhat surprisingly, the agency plan proposed to let the three national forests responsible for managing this stretch of river – the Nantahala, Sumter and Chattahoochee National Forests – craft their own woody debris rules, a truly unmanageable scheme. The advent of the hemlock woolly adelgid infestation also is dropping and threatening to drop a lot of dead and dying hemlock trees into the river, exacerbating the potential problems involving the woody debris in the river.)
- that for multiple reasons, the Forest Service plan did not comply with the legal requirements of the Wilderness Act, Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and National Environmental Policy Act, federal laws that govern management of this area.

Similar positions – that is, recommendations to maintain the current prohibition against boating on the Upper Chattooga and to significantly improve the Environmental Assessment -- were put forward by an impressive array of other organizations, including Wilderness Watch, the Georgia and North Carolina chapters of the Sierra Club, the Georgia Wildlife Federation and the Western North Carolina Alliance. In addition, several member organizations of the Georgia Environmental Action Network -- Altamaha Riverkeeper, Center for a Sustainable Coast, Georgia Conservancy and Southern Alliance for Clean Energy – urged their individual members to file letters supporting a non-boating future for the Wild and Scenic Upper Chattooga.

American Whitewater, meanwhile, attacked the EA unmercifully in efforts to push its campaign (which many believe is actually aimed at securing a favorable decision here in order to further a much larger campaign in Yellowstone National Park.) It wants boating on the headwaters pretty much all the time, if there's enough water to float a boat.

Many of the hundreds of comments filed with the Forest Service were obviously generated by automated letter-writing campaigns promoted by some of the interest groups, including the "Camo Coalition," Georgia Outdoor Network, Trout Unlimited and American Whitewater itself. Such duplicate comments, under current Forest Service policies, only count as one comment. It also appears obvious that some of the campaigns were "hacked" by opponents to try to generate counter-proposals.

In some cases, goodly numbers of the boater letters were forwarded to the office of the Chief of the Forest Service, in an apparent effort to bring Washington influence to bear on the decision of the Sumter National Forest, which is responsible for issuing a decision in this case.

To review all the comment letters, visit:

http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms/forest/projects/commentsonpredecisionalea.shtml

What next? The agency has stated that it hopes to have a "final decision" issued sometime in December, well after the results of the upcoming national elections are known. This then would trigger a 30-45-day period during which any of the 3,000-plus citizens and organizations filing comments in this go-round could appeal the "final decision" in an administrative proceeding before the Forest Service.

It thus seems plausible that the matter will drag on for some time more, and that the ultimate decision could end up in administrative appeal proceedings or before the federal bench. ■

For your legislators' contact info visit: www.congress.org

Enter your zip code under
My Elected Officials

Hike log: Long Creek Falls

by Brad A. Martell : ForestWatch Volunteer

In late June, under a dark grey sky that promised rain, eight eager hikers hit the trail for Long Creek Falls in the Ed Jenkins National Recreation Area. We started with the basics, "First, does everyone know what poison ivy looks like?" Some were surprised to learn that this itchy nemesis grows in two different forms, both of which were growing right at our feet. "See here the delicate vine with small smooth-edged leaves, and over here the better known tooth-edged leaf on the classic hairy-woody vine." A natural history lesson – what not to touch in the woods.

Lori Martell photo

Georgia ForestWatch members and friends joined Brad Martell, far right, for the hike to Long Creek Falls.

Only a few yards into our hike we spotted the hemlock's public enemy number one. "What do you see on this hemlock?" A white fuzzy infestation covered the underside of the tree's branches – Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, *Adelges tsugae*. I shared my experience of seeing the decimation of hemlocks in Shenandoah National Park, having all been killed by the aphid-like adelgid, and then flattened by a hurricane. Then, my spouse Lori updated the group on ForestWatch's collaborative efforts to help find and fund a biological solution using predator beetles. Another natural history lesson – destructive non-native insects changing the ecology of the forests of Appalachia.

Continuing up the trail we breathed in resinous smells. The previous night's welcome rain was still evident in the moist forest leaf and needle litter and rich humus. Though we were thankful for the below normal temperatures, the smell of more rain was not far off and we knew the storm clouds overhead were growing eager to yield their heavy load.

Undeterred, we continued slowly with lessons in identifying a few impressively large trees along the way--tulip poplar, white oak, hemlock. We came across a huge white pine, and shared with the group a fail-safe way to remember how to identify it. We held out a branch, separated a cluster of the pine needles and spelled out W-H-I-T-E pointing to one of the five needles with each letter. "White pine is the only five-needle pine native to eastern North America – five letters in white and five needles in a cluster."

Further on, the forest filled with musical trills and tweets. We tried to focus our binoculars on these fluttering feathered minstrels. I once got a brief impression of black and white, but they were too quick, zipping in and out of the branches always ahead of where we pointed our binoculars. The experienced birders of our group did not need binoculars to identify a few of the songs we were hearing. "Do you hear that 'wheat-a-wheat-tee-o'? That is a hooded warbler. And, there, what sounds like a squeaky wheel going round and round . . . black and white warbler." "And that 'zee-zee-zee-zoo-zee' is a black throated green warbler." As we continued around a bend in the trail, inching closer to the falls, we again did a quick draw with our binoculars and a couple of us actually got a brief visual on a blue-headed vireo.

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Hike Log: Long Creek Falls

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Throughout the forest, various fungi were fruiting including russula, bolete, and polypore species. Right by my boot was a bright reddish-pink capped russula species. As I squatted down to point it out to everyone, I was fascinated to discover a stand of tiny little things literally growing upon decomposing oak leaves. They looked so fragile with thread-thick brownish-black stems and whitish parasol-shaped caps. Growing as they were from the oak leaves they were most likely *Marasmius capillaris*. As my eyes focus wider I can see that these tiny fungi were everywhere amongst the leaf litter.

Although not a fungus, we also spotted what could easily be taken as such. Indian Pipe, *Monotropa uniflora*, looks like a display of white tobacco pipes stuck stem down in the soil with bowls nodding. Although technically a plant, Indian Pipe contains no chlorophyll, but lives as a parasite, stealing nutrients by sinking roots into a fungus' mycelia, (the underground thread-like structures that form the main growing structure of a fungus.) Mycelia tap into tree roots both giving and taking nutrients from the tree. Indian Pipe, however, does not give anything back to the fungus or the tree, but it is so beautiful perhaps we can forgive it this one little flaw.

Lori Martell photo

Thanks to a much needed rainstorm the night prior, Long Creek Falls was flowing nicely.

Lori Martell photo

This plant with no chlorophyll, Indian Pipe (*Monotropa uniflora*), steals nutrients from both a fungus and a tree.

Our mile-per-hour pace finally delivered us to Long Creek Falls. Some of us climbed up the rocks for a top down view. Others wandered down stream for panoramic pictures of the falls, or peered through the crystal waters at small fish. Soon we all found semi-dry places to sit and eat, talking in little groups about our hike, world events, and what each packed for lunch. We actually had to dig out jackets from our packs for warmth against the coolness of the day, which was exacerbated by our proximity to the falls. I was concerned that we might end up chilled if it started to rain, but fortunately it held off until the ride out.

Hiking back down the trail I pondered the sense of scale that makes up the forest. Tiny fragile mushrooms were at one micro scale. The scale of these towering oaks and hemlocks makes me feel tiny. The globe-circulating miles logged by the water in the clouds above us represent a truly massive scale. We humans perhaps more than any other species or ecological system may have the most serious and challenging scale of all—that which comes from the Middle English *scole*, meaning scale of a balance. How we choose to live our lives in relationship to each other and all of nature demands we be conscious of our impact and work toward an ecological "scale of balance." One final natural history lesson—everything is interconnected. ■

Photo contest served to illustrate Georgia ForestWatch day planner

by Joe Gatins : Co-district leader

Think of it as a small thank you. Within the next few weeks, every active member of Georgia ForestWatch will receive, *gratis*, his or her own copy of our new 2009 Day Planner. This useful daybook-and-calendar was richly illustrated by the photos so many of you entered in our recently completed photo contest.

It is meant to be used in the coming year and we urge those members who like the images to consider purchasing extra copies for distribution to friends, family and businesses to help spread the word about ForestWatch. (Details below.) The home office also will be using it as one of the tools in our membership-building toolbox.

The 2009 Day Planner marks the first calendar created for ForestWatch in several years, and was largely made possible by a special grant from the Rock-Tenn Company in Norcross. It also differs from the early calendars in that it includes photos from various different photographers, rather than just one pre-selected artist. We believe you will be pleased by the pictures, which reflect the rich biodiversity of the state and national forestlands we cherish and, together, work so hard to protect.

The photo contest was judged by one of our fellow co-district leaders, Honor Woodard, a professional photo editor in a previous career.

"We had some wonderful entries in this year's calendar photo contest," Woodard said. "All the contributors' love of the forests certainly shone through their images. I hope that this contest has inspired those who enjoy taking pictures to get out into the woods with your cameras a little more," added Woodard, herself an avid hiker. "Images by an assortment of photographers offer us new and different ways of looking at the world around us – and remind us of some of the places we don't get to as much as we would like. Thanks to all who submitted photos for making such a beautiful calendar possible!"

Here is the list of winning photographers, listed alphabetically: Kati Adams, Richard Bondi, Butch Clay, John Crawford, Michael Griffith, Bill Goldstrohm, Lori Jenkins, Brad Martell, Lori Martell, Peter McIntosh, Jim Sullivan, and Jerome Walker. Please let them know, once you receive the planner, how much you appreciate their contributions to this effort.

Let us know what you think, too. The home office and the Georgia ForestWatch board of directors will be evaluating this effort and considering whether to try to finance a similar effort for 2010.

Contact Kathy at the Georgia ForestWatch office via e-mail at info@gafw.org, or via phone at 706-635-8733 both with your comments and with orders for additional copies ($10 each.)

We are also talking to our friends at REI about carrying the day planner during the coming holiday season. So keep your eyes open when you're shopping for your loved ones at the Atlanta area REI stores. ■

Butch Clay photo

One of the many excellent photographs chosen for the 2009 day planner.

Georgia ForestWatch Fall Retreat

Cohutta Lodge • Chatsworth, Georgia 30705

October 24-26, 2008

Registration forms mailing soon! To sign up now, contact Kathy at info@gafw.org or 706-635-8733

Gather with fellow Georgia ForestWatch members and friends for fun, fellowship and learning more about the fundamentals of our work. Invitations with registration information will be mailed soon, so please plan to attend. And, bring the whole family as we will offer a children's program.

Many of you have asked great questions about the What, How, and Why of our work, and we hear you. This is your chance to:

- **HEAR** about how ForestWatch interacts with the U.S. Forest Service on issues affecting the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.
- **SEE** examples of the issues we are addressing as we hike into areas affected by illegal ATV use, prescribed fire used by the Forest Service, and the before-and-after effects of clear cutting.
- **LEARN** what the National Forests used to be, are today, and what issues may be our next challenges.

Special Speakers:

"Native Medicinal Plants Walk and Talk" – Patricia Kyritsi Howell

The Southern Appalachian forest is a unique ecological sanctuary, sometimes referred to as the "apothecary of North America," which contains many native plants with a long history of medicinal use. Join medical herbalist Patricia Kyritsi Howell for a leisurely walk to learn about native medicinal plants. Following the walk, we'll return to the Lodge where she will share more information about their historical and modern uses as medicines and wild foods, and discuss why their preservation is central to ecologically sane and sustainable ways of living in our region and on the Earth.

"Hide and Seek With Pollinators of the Southern Appalachians" – James Costa

Most people know that many plant species depend on insect pollinators but folks would be surprised at the complex and rich variety of plant-pollinator relationships. This talk will explore a wide range of insect pollinators found in the southern mountains, with a look at the ecology and natural history of insect-plant partnerships commonly found in our area. Jim is Executive Director of the Highlands Biological Station, Highlands, North Carolina, and the H.F and Katherine P. Robinson Professor of Biology at Western Carolina University.

"The Southern Appalachian Ecosystem Yesterday and Today" – Quentin Bass

"There is what ecosystems do and what people do. They are not the same. We can make wise decisions if we recognize the difference." Always informative and provocative, Quentin is the USDA Forest Service Archeologist for the Cherokee National Forest, and will put what you have learned in perspective with this capstone address on Saturday night.

District Offices of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests

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Another great Conasauga Snorkel outing

Once again this summer, Georgia ForestWatch hosted the Conasauga Snorkel, our most popular outing of the year. Forty members and friends turned out to swim with an amazing array of freshwater fish. Among the snorkelers this year were several of our good friends from Keeping It Wild, Georgia Conservation Voters, and REI.

ForestWatch member Marilyn Stapleton recalls her experience, "The Conasauga's variety and quantity of fish was fascinating. Pulling oneself along by hand-walking on rocks was an experience quite different from salt water diving since we made our flipperless feet float uselessly in order not to cloud our view with silt. Being still in the water allowed swarms of shiners, almost appearing transparent except for their bright midlines, to come very close to and maybe nibble me. Being still in the rapids to watch a logperch or hogsucker required a tight hold on a rock to keep me from being washed downstream. I also liked finding under water channels that weaved around the riverbed and calmer pools to relax and survey the bigger fish deeper in the water. One easily loses track of time and feels transported to another world. Thanks for a unique day!"

Special thanks to Jim Herrig, aquatics biologist, for being our guide to this fascinating underwater world. If you've never been, please do join us next year. Don't miss out – make sure you're a member of Georgia ForestWatch and are receiving our ForestWatch Alerts via e-mail. ■

Wayne Jenkins photo

Before the humbling experience of squeezing into wetsuits, snorkelers gathered to hear Jim Herrig share tidbits about the fish they would soon meet eye-to-eye.

To join or make a donation, go to www.gafw.org and click on "Ways to Give", or use this form and mail to the address below, or call our office at 706.635.8733 to use your credit card. Thanks!

Georgia ForestWatch Membership Form

Name: _____
(please print)

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

(Please circle one)	Individual
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Georgia ForestWatch helps Forest Service curb illegal ATV traffic in Cashes Valley

by David Govus : Co-district leader

Georgia ForestWatch recently has made significant progress in its ongoing decades-long effort to help authorities control illegal off road motorized activity on the Chattahoochee National Forest – most recently in a joint effort with the U.S. Forest Service to erect a number of physical barriers in the Cashes Valley area. These served to block illegal ATV trails that had proliferated there.

Cashes Valley, located in the Mountaintown Roadless Area adjacent to the Cohutta Mountains, is perhaps the poster child for illegal ATV use on our forest. Illegal ATV trails radiate off the old Cashes Valley public road in all directions onto national forestland and reach the surrounding ridgeline and the Benton MacKaye hiking trail. Illegal fords have been created across Fightingtown Creek, steep slopes turned into rutted hill climbs and spring seeps transformed into mud bogs.

For the past 10 years Georgia ForestWatch volunteer monitors have mapped these illegal trails and written numerous letters to the Forest Service complaining of this abuse and providing detailed maps about the problem. This past June, Michelle Jones, the Forest Service ranger on the Conasauga District, committed a four-man crew and a bulldozer in a two week effort to block all the illegal ATV trails in the area. The Chattooga River District, located across the state in northeast Georgia, contributed an additional dozer. Georgia ForestWatch volunteers joined the agency personnel in the field and pinpointed the illegal trails and the best places to block them. Earthen berms were created and tree trunks added to strategic locations to block ATV access.

Two of the most heavily used and damaging illegal ATV trails ran right out of second home communities. While working on this project the crew intercepted one ATV rider from Florida, illegally riding on national forest land. This individual had rented a cabin nearby and had towed his ATV all the way to north Georgia on a real estate agent's promise that there was ATV riding opportunities nearby. The agency had gone so far as to show this person the trailheads. The real estate agent was in fact correct in stating that there were riding opportunities nearby, but failed to mention that they were all illegal.

David Govus photo

Forest Service bulldozers move into Cashes Valley to block illegal ATV routes. ForestWatch volunteers were on hand to help point out the illegal access points and advise on the best places to block them.

After years of effort to help combat damaging and illegal off-road activity on the Chattahoochee National Forest, Forest Watch has learned a number of things:

1. Almost all illegal motorized activity on this forest involves All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) or 4-wheelers as they are commonly known. These machines are extremely agile and can maneuver around barricades; therefore, it is important to place the blocks carefully and to embed timber in the blocks and berms if at all possible. Physically blocking and signing illegal trails can only go so far.

2. Law enforcement must drastically increase fines for illegal ATV use. Despite damage to our forest, estimated in the millions of dollars, fines for illegal use typically run less than $100. ForestWatch has repeatedly urged Forest Service law enforcement to increase the fines and possible confiscations and the complicated process to do that is nearing completion.

3. ATVs are more likely to ride illegally if they can access the forest on county or Forest Service roads. (Leaving

an empty trailer at an illegal ATV trailhead is a dead giveaway.) In that light, ForestWatch saw to it that the illegal practice of selling Georgia license plates to ATVs was halted in 2000 and has beaten back numerous attempts since then in the Georgia State legislature to put tags back on them. (See http://www.gafw.org/pdf_files/atv_update.pdf.) At the moment it is illegal to ride an ATV on any public road in Georgia, paved or dirt.

4. Political barriers to law enforcement in the national forests must be removed. In 2002, under intense political pressure from the late Representative Charles Norwood, Clara Johnson, then supervisor of the Chattahoochee National Forest signed a Supervisors Order forbidding Forest Service law enforcement from ticketing ATVs riding on 'public' roads which cross Forest Service land but are not official system roads. This order resulted in terrible damage in Cashes Valley in the years since. ATVs have been able to ride deep into the forest on this eight-mile public road. This road must remain open to provide access to private in-holdings but is not claimed by Gilmer County or the Forest Service and is maintained by no one. Once up this road it is a simple matter for ATV enthusiasts to ride off into the forest and they do. Georgia ForestWatch has reason to hope that this anomaly will soon come to an end and that law enforcement will once again be able to ticket those who ride ATVs on any public road through Forest Service land. This would do more than anything to ensure that the beautiful Cashes Valley area in the Mountaintown Roadless Area will become ATV free.

Georgia ForestWatch congratulates Ranger Jones and her hardworking crew and will monitor Cashes Valley for future violations. ■

Late breaking news: As this issue went to press we received word that the Supervisor's Order of 2002 has been rescinded and ATV riders on the public road in Cashes Valley and on all public roads across the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests are now being ticketed. We have pushed for this change ever since the 2002 order was issued. We congratulate Forest Supervisor George Bain for making this politically difficult decision.

FUNDING GOAL MET!

ForestWatch is most pleased to announce that the recent special appeal to our members and other past supporters of the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid research laboratory at the University of Georgia in Athens has met our final goal for fulfilling the $75,000 matching grant from the Turner Foundation. Two years ago the foundation stepped up to help ensure the ongoing work at the lab, after the private and governmental partners successfully raised the initial monies for renovating an old chicken research facility into a state-of-the-art insect rearing lab.

Several species of predatory beetles, that specifically eat adelgids, are being reared throughout the eastern United States in hopes of controlling the invasive insect devastating our beautiful hemlocks. This form of research, known as "biological control," aims to create a predator-prey balance within stands of this important mountain evergreen, enabling hemlocks to persist and multiply in their natural habitat. Without this kind of solution, hemlock stands we wish to save will require on-going treatment with an expensive insecticide which is just not practical on a landscape scale. While it is too early to know for sure, preliminary evidence points to adelgid-eating beetles surviving on their own in the forest. This could be very good news indeed for Georgia's hemlocks! Our guarded hopes are high that a biological solution will be found and our grandchildren will still have hemlock groves to enjoy.

Many, many thanks to all those who stepped up for this special need. Perhaps it is the grandeur of these stately evergreens that so inspires folks to give. Perhaps it is the understanding of the important role hemlocks play in protecting and cooling our mountain streams or the shuddering idea of their loss. Whatever the reason, people that care are coming together for a solution. Thank you!

Jim Sullivan photo

ForestWatchers like you are working together with many partners in the effort to save our beloved hemlocks. Your contributions are making a difference!

Rabun bio-energy plant update

by Joe Gatins : Co-district leader

A Virginia firm is seeking from the state of Georgia an air pollution permit for a 20-megawatt, wood-fired electricity co-generation plant located on the old Fruit of the Loom textile mill property in Rabun Gap.

For Rabun County, which is still chafing from the loss of the more than 1,800 jobs lost when Fruit shut down the mill two years ago, this was welcome news. Multitrade Rabun Gap LLC, the Virginia firm, is going to create 20 full-time jobs at the new power plant, and promises up to 80 more seasonal jobs for truck drivers who will be ferrying woody biomass to the plant's boilers.

Advent of the plant and its permit application to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division's Air Protection Branch posed a conundrum for Georgia ForestWatch, which also wanted to see the new jobs created, but had multiple concerns about air quality and the source of the wood fuel that would be used over the anticipated 20-year lifespan of the facility. (Its high-voltage electric power is destined to be sold to one of Georgia's electricity membership cooperatives.)

Accordingly, ForestWatch filed thorough and detailed comments about the permit with the help of an expert legal partner, Atlanta-based GreenLaw, both about the amounts of pollution emissions that would be permitted at the plant and about the source of the woody biomass that would be burned there. (The firm's permit allows burning of up 198,000 tons of wood per year, a lot cleaner than a coal-fired power plant, but one that would still emit thousands of tons of unhealthy chemicals.) Located at the northern edge of the Chattahoochee National Forest and a stone's throw from the southern edge of the Nantahala National Forest in North Carolina, ForestWatch was concerned that the nation's public forestlands would become fodder for industrial-sized wood chippers to feed the new power plant. This concern was magnified by the notion repeatedly expressed by U.S. Forest Service officials in recent months that grinding up treetops and branches and "unmerchantable" whole trees for the plant would be a fully acceptable solution, for certain timber stands and certain timber sales.

In response to these concerns, the company and the state's air permit officials reduced the anticipated output of the plant – and thereby reduced the tonnage of emissions coming out of its smokestacks every year. And Multitrade officials came to Rabun in person, accompanied by their wood supplier, to explain their plans to the public and to suggest that most of the biomass supply would come from private lands and private sources of waste wood, rather than national forestlands.

And a final footnote, indicative of the international interest in generating electricity from alternative sources: Some of Multitrade's anticipated profits from the new plant will be going back abroad to a British investment firm, Leaf Clean Energy Company, which is pumping $21.5 million (US) into the Multitrade venture.

"MRG will use native renewable fuel from the local forest industry and anticipates selling power to a Georgia co-op under a long term power purchase agreement," Leaf noted in a press release dated July 30.

Leaf is a publicly traded $400 million clean energy investment company, the release said, incorporated for the purpose of acquiring interests in, owning, operating and managing clean energy companies and projects primarily in North America. "The company's main investment objective is to achieve long term capital appreciation through its acquired interests in the clean energy sector, as well as through the potential generation and commercialization of carbon credits derived from these projects."

As of press time, apparently, the permit has not yet been granted. Further updates will be forthcoming. ■

Georgia ForestWatch welcomes the following new members

Nancy Blackadar
Jill Bowman
Sally Brumbill
Hal and Ann Doster
Ben Emanuel
Exposition Foundation
Ginger Golden and David Hollingsworth
Marsha Gregorich
John E. Griffin
Doug Hall
Judy Hardy
Richard and Marcelle Hotaling
Jeanne Kronsnoble
Bert Lent
Herbert Lozott
Dottie McCullar and Andrew Pickens
Tom Mitchell
John and Dorothy Morford
NetCorps
Laura Pickett
Susan Pleasant
Betsy Reed
Jean Rose and Gary Tomblin
Emily Smith
Tommy Smith
Jeri Wells

LWCF dollars for Georgia?

In 2006 and again in 2008 Georgia received no funding from the federal LWCF program or the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Created by Congress in 1964, LWCF provides money to federal, state and local governments to purchase land, water and wetlands for the benefit of all Americans. From majestic forests and snowcapped mountains, to wild rivers and stunning beaches, these acquisitions become part of your national forests. Lands and waters purchased through the LWCF are used to:

- Provide recreational opportunities
- Provide clean water
- Preserve wildlife habitat
- Enhance scenic vistas
- Protect archaeological and historical sites
- Maintain the pristine nature of wilderness areas

Land is bought from landowners at fair-market value (unless the owner offers to donate or discount the land). The Fund receives money mostly from fees paid by companies drilling offshore for oil and gas. Other funding sources include the sale of surplus federal real estate and taxes on motorboat fuel.

Georgia ForestWatch has supported the Forest Service's use of the LWCF program for many years. Other than land swaps the LWCF approach is one of a very few ways the agency can acquire key tracts. Jim Kidd, now retired from the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, managed a great land acquisition program, garnering important tracts over several decades. Al Foster is now on board and continuing Jim's legacy.

A key element of Mr. Kidd's work was the partnership and leverage of initial funding efforts with the Nature Conservancy, the Trust for Public Land and the Conservation Fund. Thanks to their excellent groundwork, we continue this novel approach which has created greater opportunities for securing lands until the Forest Service can make a purchase.

Georgia ForestWatch and the Georgia Wildlife Federation have joined in for building the support necessary from our key elected officials. Senators Saxby Chambliss and Johnny Isakson, and Representatives Jack Kingston and Sanford Bishop (both on the House Appropriations Committee) have staff attending our meetings. Congressman Nathan Deal, whose district contains a large proportion of the Chattahoochee National Forest, is a long-time supporter of LWCF. We are unsure at this time of Congressman Paul Broun's position.

This strong conservation team is working hard to avoid another year that sees no new purchases of Georgia's special places. To read about one of these special places, visit our website at: http://www.gafw.org/lwcf.html ■

YOUR OPINION MATTERS

Return membership survey by October 10, and maybe win a prize

Recently we sent each of you our member survey. Some of you received this via e-mail and others via U.S. Mail. It has been a long time since the last survey, and it's time we heard from you, our dear members and friends. Your answers to these questions will help us understand our members and better plan future membership services. It should take about 20 minutes to complete.

If you did not receive the survey and would like to participate, e-mail us at info@gafw.org.

Everyone who returns the survey by October 10, 2008 (submit online or postmark date depending on your version), will be entered in a drawing for one of the following prizes:

- DVD series: *Planet Earth* by the BBC
- Book: *Medicinal Plants of the Southern Appalachians* by Patricia Kyritsi Howell
- Book: *Poems from Snow Hill Road* by Brent Martin

Note: If you received the survey via U.S. Mail, it means we do not have your e-mail address in our primary database. Please help us save resources by sending us your e-mail address at info@gafw.org.

We very much appreciate your participation in this survey.

Lori Martell photo

We completed the member survey! Have you?

Brawley Mountain Environmental Assessment

by Jim Walker : District leader

The Brawley Mountain Golden-Winged Warbler Habitat and Woodland Restoration Project resurfaced in early August as an Environmental Assessment from the Blue Ridge District office. You may recall the original scoping from 2006, which included timber harvest, herbicide and prescribed fire every three to five years across 725 acres on the south side of Brawley Mountain. The stated purpose of this proposal is to enhance habitat for the declining neo-tropical songbird, the golden-winged warbler.

Though ForestWatch supports efforts to increase golden-winged warbler populations in Georgia, we would prefer that the project be carried out on a reasonable scale, with a sense of balance between the very high ecological and financial costs on one hand, and the uncertain open-ended benefits on the other. The deeper we look into the issue, the more problematic the proposal seems.

Ground-truthing of the proposed project area by ForestWatch volunteers and staff revealed a very impressive mature stand of second-growth forest on the westernmost ridge of the project area, with oak, hickory and ash trees of a size and age rarely found in this heavily harvested area. Our comments to the initial proposal requested a smaller project size and no timber harvest on the western ridge. The preferred approach identified in the Environmental Assessment does reduce the size of the project, but would still nearly clear-cut the big, older hardwoods on the west ridge, in spite of the presence of other areas better suited for golden-winged warbler in the immediate vicinity.

We contend that "woodland restoration" is inappropriate for this area as open woodland is not a forest type that is natural in the Southern Appalachians. Also, we are skeptical of the chances for the project's long-term success in achieving its purpose, since the Forest Service's own models show the golden-winged warbler moving north away from the current southernmost edge of it range (extreme north Georgia) due to global warming. However, we would be willing to support the experiment if the west ridge were excluded. This would leave about 300 acres for the golden-winged warbler population to expand into, compared with the approximately 20 acres it now inhabits. Stay tuned for further developments.

You can read all about this project, including our responses to both the original scoping and environmental assessment, on our website at: http://ww.gafw.org/brawley.html ■

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