Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Spring 2008

Recreation Run Amok?

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From The Director

Recreation run amok? Rights and responsibilities

Wayne Jenkins
Executive Director

The Chattahoochee National Forest is on the forefront of recreational use in the nation and is considered an "urban forest" based on its proximity to millions of citizens. Visitation to Georgia's national forests almost rivals that of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the nation's busiest. For the last three years, ForestWatch district leaders and staff have responded to dozens of recreation-related scopings from the U.S. Forest Service. It would appear that the agency is struggling with just how to manage all this recreation passion while still protecting the resources and other users and values. Not an easy task.

All this recreational use of the people's forests creates unique challenges for our work. For decades, one of our key claims for protection of national forests has been for the needs of citizens to use and enjoy those public lands that belong to them. Historical uses, though still important, are now part of a complicated and growing list of pursuits. From traditional hunting and fishing to adventure racing and geo-caching, we love our forests. But at what point is this admiration too much? When are our impacts harmful and when does one practice diminish or interfere with another? These issues and conflicts have already been brought into stark contrast on the Cohutta Wilderness area, the largest Wilderness in the eastern United States. By 2001, this most beloved and unique landscape was the subject of a "Limits of Acceptable Change" process, conducted by forest managers, due to the widespread negative impacts on this rugged and steep area. The three-year effort of experts and citizens sought to identify problems and resource impacts and together to define a plan for limiting them to protect both the landscape and the human experience and simultaneously maintain a quality Wilderness area. Those conclusions are now being implemented as funds become available. This well-facilitated process was successful, and though heated at times, went smoothly.

Things do not always go so well. A most vexing and public example of a recreation challenge and rift between ForestWatch and a powerful recreational organization has been over the issue of boating on the upper portion of the famous Wild and Scenic Chattooga River. For more than thirty years, boating has been allowed on 2/3rds of the river while the headwaters above the Georgia Highway 28 bridge have been off limits for this activity. The new Sumter National Forest Management Plan maintained that position in effect in 2004, a stand that was vociferously challenged by the boating group American Whitewater. ForestWatch believes the agency got it right and has been a member of a coalition of groups working to maintain a portion of the river for other pursuits. The issues are complex and the process for a decision (a kind of tweaked "limit of acceptable change" attempt gone awry) have been arcane and drawn out. Passions have run high and meetings have been heated, reflecting the difficulty of finding common ground between various interests. And this with a group that has many values in common with ForestWatch. American Whitewater has done incredible work across the country for their members, especially in the areas of dam removal and maintaining river access; however, a lack of balance seems at work on the Chattooga where "sharing the river" seems to mean "we want to boat everywhere and the hell with everyone else."

Another challenging recreational issue is the popular and expanding pursuit of mountain biking. This outdoor activity has rapidly grown over the last decade, especially on weekends when some trail systems are dominated by colorful and speedy cyclists. User conflicts are not rare and some trails, never designed for this use, are eroding into nearby streams. As with many trails, the Forest Service and users are challenged to maintain them. Wilderness areas are also problematic for many bikers as they believe they should be able to use trails there. All of these issues recently came together in the Mountaintown Roadless Area as local citizens sought fuller protection of the area from active road building and timber management by having Mountaintown designated by Congress as a Wilderness area. The biking community reacted strongly to the potential loss of their use of the Mountaintown Creek trail. This very steep challenging trail, popular with the most aggressive

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Anderson Creek OHV Area to close?

For the past 10 years, Georgia ForestWatch has been working to halt off-road vehicle damage in the Anderson Creek OHV Area. This area was established in 1985 on approximately 14,000 acres of Forest Service lands sitting at the headwaters of Anderson Creek. This area was a poor choice for an off-road vehicle playground, but it could be argued that there is no area in our north Georgia mountains that is suitable. Steep slopes, abundant rainfall, highly erodible soils and pristine trout streams are not the setting in which to turn loose machines equipped with aggressive tires designed to churn their way across the landscape.

The Anderson Creek area turned out to be a spectacularly poor place to locate an off-road recreation area. In addition to its fragile environmental setting and blue ribbon trout streams, Anderson Creek's remote location made law enforcement nearly impossible. A number of other factors helped turn the Anderson Creek OHV area into a disaster. In the mid-1990s, Forest Service law enforcement budgets in real dollars began to slide and sales of a new type of off-road vehicle soared, the ATV (all terrain vehicle) or 4-wheeler. These compact, powerful machines with aggressive lug tires can churn their way nearly anywhere in the woods and in the case of Anderson Creek, irresponsible ATV enthusiasts drove them nearly everywhere. Illegal trails were created up and down steep slopes, into creeks and springheads and onto adjoining private land. By 2000, the Anderson Creek area was a garbage-strewn eroding mess.

Georgia ForestWatch turned up the heat on the Forest Service in 2001 and 2002 with a series of letters and photos depicting the problem and managed to interest the media. Several stories about the damage appeared in the Gainesville Times and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. In 2003, the Forest Service announced that they would close the area for rehabilitation. With a special grant, the Forest Service spent nearly $100,000 healing the damage and embarked on a multi-year analysis concerning the area's future.

This February, the Forest Service released an environmental analysis that indicated that their preferred alternative was to permanently close the area and requested public comments. Georgia ForestWatch put out the call to its members and friends to respond and the Forest Service reports that they've received an unprecedented 500 responses with 80% of respondents in favor of permanent closure. Georgia Forest Watch is hopeful that the Forest Service will stand firm in the face of threatened lawsuits from the off-road industry, and permanently close the area.

For more information visit our website at: www.gafw.org/anderson_creek.html ■

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Cover art: Lori Martell. Georgia ForestWatch is working with the U.S. Forest Service to reign in rampant illegal use of all terrain vehicles (ATVs) on the national forests. Even the USFS admits that this is one of the main problems they face.

U.S. Forest Service drops ill-conceived restructuring

The U.S. Forest Service has abandoned a massive restructuring of its environmental planning that would have pulled its biologists and other specialists out of national forests, according to an agency memo released by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). This retreat follows a series of recent setbacks in efforts to privatize large portions of Forest Service operations.

Under the plan, thousands of employees posted to forests across the country would have been reassigned and consolidated into six centers. Altogether, more than a quarter of the agency's entire workforce would have been affected. The object of the plan was to "streamline" work performed under the National Environmental Policy Act or NEPA, the basic planning law that shapes major resource decisions.

This agency-wide reorganization, which had been on the verge of adoption this fall, is being shelved to "avoid additional disruption and confusion," according to the February 20, 2008 memo from Forest Service Chief Abigail Kimbell to top agency managers. The memo also states:
"After careful consideration, however, we will not pursue these options at this time…At a later time, we will revisit recommendations from the NEPA Feasibility Study."

With little time left in the Bush administration, it is unlikely that the plan will be revisited anytime soon. "This is welcome news for an organization that has enough problems; the last thing it needs is another self-imposed migraine," stated PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch, whose organization had first revealed the agency's intentions. "The Forest Service is currently coping with crippling proposed budget cuts and a radically shifting mission without a survival guide."

The restructuring of NEPA functions was designed to facilitate potential outsourcing of all this work. In December, however, Congress blocked further privatization of Forest Service activities for the rest of the 2008 Fiscal Year – another factor acknowledged by Kimbell in her memo. Last week, the Government Accountability Office issued a blistering report that found the Forest Service incapable of rationally carrying out Bush administration dictates to offer large sectors of its operations to private bidders.

Lost in the search for "NEPA efficiency" is the steep decline in the quality of NEPA planning within the Forest Service, which has lost a long string of environmental lawsuits charging the agency with failing to adequately consider the consequences of, or alternatives to, its proposed actions.

"Nothing is more inefficient than losing a lawsuit that forces the agency to throw away months of effort and millions of dollars," Ruch added, noting that the Forest Service does not hold its managers who sign off on planning documents accountable when their handiwork is found to violate federal law. "In the Forest Service, the motto is 'Screw up and move up' meaning that those responsible for these legal train wrecks tend to get promoted and rarely suffer even the slightest reprimand." ■

Thanks to Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility for this article.

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Recreation run amok?

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bikers, usually "bombed" down from the top only, has numerous problems. Making 14 crossings of Mountaintown Creek, a primary trout stream, biking on the trail adds to the existing silt load and creates conflicts with fishermen. On the lower end, mountain bikers must trespass through private property to access a county road and their vehicles. The controversy has tempered due to the Friends of Mountaintown's protection efforts, which now include promotion of the area as a National Scenic Area, which would permit mountain biking. This of course solves none of the problems covered above.

Lastly, the ATV problem. ATVs (All Terrain Vehicles) or, as the agency refers to them, OHVs (Off-Highway Vehicles) are a severe problem across our forests. The impacts and results of illegal motorized recreation are well known to ForestWatch as the lead organization dealing with the problem on public lands outside of the agency. Recent testimony by Jack Gregory, the now retired top law enforcement officer of all national forests, in Region 8 (the South,) gave testimony before the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands hearing on the Impacts of Unmanaged Off Road Vehicles on Federal Land. Mr. Gregory's damning indictment of a growing culture of illegal motorized abuse of our public lands can be viewed at: http://www.gafw.org/pdf_files/atv_testimony_gregory.pdf.

This hydra-headed beast will require a well-planned and well-funded effort to get it under control. Neither the plan nor the funds are forthcoming from the present administration. In fact, funding for law enforcement on the national forests has been continually reduced during the Bush era. The good news in Georgia is that local forest officials on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests are taking a lead in closing illegal ATV routes, beefing up law enforcement and even proposing permanent closure of the Anderson Creek OHV area, a famously deteriorating legal motorized recreation area that has utterly failed. We congratulate those responsible for this bold leadership. Unfortunately it is the tip of a much larger, systemic problem.

The recreational challenge of balancing citizen enjoyment and use of "our forests" and the impacts, both physically to the environment and socially with other recreationists, is growing. The managers of our forests cannot solve these challenges alone. All of us need to rethink our use and priorities when hiking or hunting, biking and kayaking. All of us must consider, not just our affects on the land and waters but on one another. Those who believe they have "a right" to pursue their particular recreation need to put responsibility first. If we say we love these forests and streams, then we should act accordingly. ■

Enter the ForestWatch Photo Contest

We're going to publish a calendar/day planner in 2009, and your photo could be one of the special few chosen.

We're looking for a mix of nature landscape, heritage and family-friendly "people photos." They can spotlight any season of the year. All photos must be taken on, or involve, the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests and its plant and animal life. We are especially looking for photos of ForestWatch members and local residents enjoying recreation in our beautiful forestlands.

The contest is being judged by Honor Woodard of Lakemont, Georgia, artist and former picture editor for Outdoor Explorer, Backpacker and Sports Illustrated magazines. Photographers whose work is selected for the calendar will receive appropriate recognition and accolades, not to mention wider exposure for their work.

For more information and instructions on how to enter, please visit our website at: http://www.gafw.org/contest.html

Please read all the contest rules before submitting any photos. The deadline for entering is June 1, 2008.

Lori Martell photo

Helpful hint: Photos will feel more engaging is someone is looking directly at the camera. Here, a group of ForestWatchers enjoys an outing in Warwoman Dell.

Back from the brink: Kirtland's Warbler

by Lori Martell : Outreach Director

While most birders think of spring as the time to watch for migrating warblers, for me it's fall. Perhaps I'm too busy with matters of gardening in the springtime. Something about fall makes me slow down and sit for hours listening, waiting and watching for my feathered friends.

And if I'm patient enough, they do come. Sometimes it's a gift – like the time a male American redstart landed on my front porch in full view. More often I have to work for it. Last year during an excursion to Fort Mountain State Park, I sat motionless for two hours with warblers flitting all around and was rewarded with two new additions to my life list: Blackburnian warbler and yellow-throated warbler. Warblers are usually not easy birds to see. They're small and very busy. They don't tend to sit in one place for long.

There's been one mystery warbler eluding me for the past two years. I've seen it well enough: blue-gray, yellow belly, black mottling on sides, distinct broken white eye ring. I've seen it multiple times – low down in young trees or foraging in the wild blackberry thicket in my garden. I've pored over my field guide trying to figure it out because I just knew it couldn't be what I thought it was: an endangered Kirtland's Warbler. For two years I've been trying to convince myself I didn't see a Kirtland's.

Then suddenly there it was. A photo caught my eye in the March/April 2008 Audubon magazine, and my heart leapt to read a brief story about the recovery of the Kirtland's warbler. The number of singing males on the breeding grounds was reported at 167 in 1987. Thanks to a successful recovery plan that has increased access to its desired nesting habitat, last summer's census revealed an astonishing 1,697 singing males! Where previously Kirtland's warblers nested only in a small portion of Michigan, a nest site has shown up in Ontario for the first time since 1945. And, even more exciting, three nest sites were found for the first time ever in Wisconsin.

James Ownby photo

With more of them migrating between Michigan and the Bahamas, you'll have a better chance of seeing the endangered Kirtland's warbler in Georgia.

Now I'm more confused than ever! After speaking with other birders, I was almost confident that I was delusional about seeing the Kirtland's. But, according to the University of Georgia's Museum of Natural History, the Kirtland's *might* be seen in Georgia during migration, and I have found a few scattered references to sightings in Athens, and in Union County. Who knows? I'm one to believe in possibilities.

There are now more Kirtland's warblers than have ever been documented since the bird's discovery in 1851. You can bet I'm going to be on the look out. This spring, I'll be postponing my gardening duties long enough to watch and wait for this elusive warbler. If you see one, please call me. ■

The Southern Nantahala wilderness

by Jess & Doug Riddle

The Southern Nantahala Wilderness straddles the North Carolina-Georgia state line, and includes the third and fourth highest peaks in Georgia, Dicks Knob (4600'+) and Hightower Bald (4588'). However, broad valleys border much of the area and lead to private ownership of much of the surrounding land, especially on the Georgia side. Consequently, an extensive trail network never developed in the wilderness, and visitation in Georgia is largely restricted to the Appalachian Trail (which passes through the central and eastern portions). The ridge extending west from the AT at the state line is especially isolated. After forking at the top of Hightower Bald about a mile west of the trail, the ridge remains continuously over 3,600' elevation, and extends another five miles west through Georgia before finally dropping lower south of Eagle Mountain. The ridge's biotite gneiss has eroded into varied topography including steep slopes, hanging coves, and sheltered north aspects. This combines with the relatively high elevations to provide likely habitat for unusual communities, but the area remains little explored by naturalists.

The area has not always been so isolated. In the early 1900's, logging operations from the surrounding valleys extended up the slopes and cleared the high productivity forests in the coves. In the 1940s or 1950s, by which time the Forest Service had likely purchased the area, portions of north facing coves were again clear cut and ridge crests were selectively cut. No additional logging has occurred in the area since 1984 when Congress designated the land as wilderness. However, old road beds crisscrossing the slopes bear testament to the earlier logging and the more recent Forest Service roadbeds serve as ready-made trails for illegal all terrain vehicle activity in the area.

The forests that have re-grown along the ridge in the wilderness area's western reaches consistently suggest rich bedrock and soils. Oaks dominate the forests along comparably large and exposed ridges in north Georgia, including chestnut oak, northern red oak and especially white oak. While oaks occur along the ridges, tulip tree forms much more of the canopy. Tulip tree (also called tulip poplar and yellow poplar) probably gains an advantage over the oaks from the deep, black soils that cover the ridge crest from Eagle Mountain to Sassafras Knob. Those soils may also explain the presence of cucumber tree and basswood on top of one of the smaller peaks and the frequency of white ash and yellow buckeye saplings in the understory. The shrub layer shows analogous differences from other north Georgia ridges. Along the ridge, mountain laurel and rhododendron, which frequently form thickets elsewhere, only occur near the rocky summit of Sassafras Knob and on the steep slope north of Rattlesnake Knob, respectively. Instead, the understory is open, but gooseberry, blackberries, and beaked hazelnut are locally abundant. Isolated individuals of other species typically found in coves at lower elevations also take advantage of the moist soils on the ridge and reach exceptionally high elevations including shagbark hickory (4100'+), spicebush (4000'), and American hornbeam (4100'+).

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Armuchee Ridges Redux

by David Govus : Co-district Leader

Georgia ForestWatch is continuing its dialogue with the U.S. Forest Service concerning its proposed timber harvests on the Armuchee section of the Chattahoochee National Forest. The Armuchee includes approximately 80,000 acres of land, apart from the Blue Ridge Mountains, in the Ridge and Valley section of this national forest, with its highest elevations less than the elevation of the valleys of the Blue Ridge. Much of the land that the Forest Service acquired in the Armuchee was abandoned farmland or industrial timberland. An article in the fall newsletter described in detail the Forest Service's plans and Georgia ForestWatch's response. This article can be found at http://www.gafw.org/newsletters/2008winter_newsletter.pdf.

Briefly, the Forest Service proposes to thin some 5,500 Acres of planted non-native Loblolly Pine plantations, clear cut some 600 Acres of mature hardwood forest in order to restore rare montane Longleaf Pine and manipulate several hundred acres of Oak/Pine forest in an attempt to " restore and maintain" the same. Nearly 24 million board feet of timber would be harvested over 8 years, making a sizable contribution to the Forest Service's budget. This project also contemplates thousands of acres of prescribed fire. Georgia ForestWatch has varying degrees of enthusiasm for these projects but recognizes that the Forest Service has a Forest Plan that governs its activities and that while we disagreed with the plan and appealed it, most of these proposed activities conform in some degree or another with this plan.

In this light, Georgia ForestWatch executive director Wayne Jenkins, Sarah Francisco with the Southern Environmental Law Center and several Georgia ForestWatch volunteers spent two long days meeting with Forest Service personnel on the district in early February. The Forest Service was represented by Conasauga District Ranger, Michelle Jones, newly appointed Forest Supervisor George Bain and other specialists. Day one was spent in the field and Supervisor Bain agreed with our position that several of the Oak and Oak/Pine stands (areas) visited did not need any 'work' and that their inclusion in the original proposal was a mistake. A representative area of planted loblolly Pines was visited and there was an animated discussion concerning how much and what type of activity should be allowed in riparian areas. The area in question had at one time been farmed and then planted in loblolly pines and the stream in question was intermittent and only flowed in the wettest weather. In these circumstances, the Forest Service argued that it would be permissible for heavy machinery to enter the riparian zone to benefit riparian species. When asked how this activity would benefit riparian species the reply was that by removing pines, hardwoods, the native component of riparian areas, would be favored.

Georgia ForestWatch is wrestling with how planted loblolly plantations can be restored to a naturally functioning forest. The field day concluded with a visit to Taylor Ridge, elevation 1,600 feet. We visited several stands of 40 acres or so of mature hardwood forest that were slated to be clear cut and replanted in longleaf pine. Montane or mountain longleaf pine is a rare community type and Taylor Ridge is the northern extent of its range. One small naturally occurring community of longleaf pine exists on Taylor Ridge and Georgia ForestWatch surveyors have visited it and found the long leafs to be mixed with a variety of oaks. The forester and biologist for the district had not visited this natural stand and no effort had been made to stimulate natural reproduction in this stand. We questioned whether clear cutting to plant longleaf would result in a

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Wayne Jenkins photo

ForestWatch staff and district leaders meet with Forest Service representatives in the Armuchee.

Armuchee Ridges Redux

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natural community. The Forest Service insisted that the planted long leafs needed full sun and a lack of competition to thrive. This of course begs the question of how longleaf communities ever maintained themselves naturally. We suggested that several nearby recovering 10-year-old clear cuts be slashed down to make way for montane longleaf planting. The response was that these old clear cuts had a smattering of native shortleaf pine that had been planted and that the forest service did not want to forgo this investment.

As always our opinions concerning forest service activities are informed by the knowledge that the forest service is allowed to keep some of the revenue from a timber sale. As several federal judges have noted, this puts the forest service in a different and potentially compromising situation than other federal agencies whose decisions do not result in a flow of funds back to the agency. The day ended with no meeting of the minds on clear cutting oaks to benefit longleaf.

The Georgia ForestWatch team and Sarah Francisco spent all of the next day in a sit down meeting with the Forest Service with the new supervisor, George Bain, once again present. We discussed areas of the proposed project that we could agree on and methods of keeping Georgia ForestWatch fully informed of all the steps in the implementation of the project, from the prescriptions written as to what species and sizes of trees would be cut to the actual marking of the trees. We also argued for a monitoring plan that would document existing conditions and changes that resulted from the implementation of this project, including the effects of the thousands of acres of planned fire. Astoundingly, the Forest Service claims great ecological benefits from past thinning and fire in this area, though, as far as we can tell, its staff can offer no concrete evidence to back this up. We discussed at length the various kinds and extent of monitoring that we felt appropriate for a project of this size and duration and reached general agreement. With the able assistance of our legal partner, Sarah Francisco, we have written a letter to the Forest Service specifying the conditions under which we could agree with the project and thus make an administrative appeal and potential litigation unnecessary. We are hopeful that a compromise will be reached. ■

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'Tis time to crank up citizen input on Chattooga River Ranger District

by Joseph Gatins, Dudley Sisk & Honor Woodard : Co-district Leaders

It's time for all members of Georgia ForestWatch, especially in Rabun and Habersham counties, and all interested members of the public to help us do what we often do best – monitor the activities of the U.S. Forest Service.

The Chattooga River Ranger District has two proposals pending that merit public scrutiny and there's an even bigger one said to be heading our way from the Sumter National Forest, across the Georgia-South Carolina state line:

Invasives control project

The first, with a comment deadline of early April, entails a district-wide attempt to begin controlling a proliferation of non-native invasive plants and weeds, either by hand pulling, by mechanical eradication or by use of various herbicides. This would cover 131 identified invasive sites, totaling more than 650 acres – including 37 wildlife openings (130 acres) and some 423 acres targeted for restoration of shortleaf pine and oak.

Details eventually should be posted on the Chattahoochee National Forest website, under the Forest Planning & Management section, and then click on Current Projects & NEPA documents: http://www.fs.fed.us/conf/sopa/nepa_docs.htm

Or, contact Mike Brod, wildlife biologist, at the district's office in Clayton, 706-782-3320, to get your own hard copy of the proposal and accompanying maps and an environmental assessment of the project.

And if you're not yet on the Forest Service mailing list, this might be the time to do so. Write to Ranger David W. Jensen, USDA Forest Service, Chattooga River Ranger District, 809 Highway 441 South, Clayton, Georgia 30525. Ask to be placed as an "interested party" on both the regular mail and the e-mail lists.

Georgia ForestWatch previously has commented on this invasives proposal and pointed out several sites missed in the agency's preliminary plans, and will closely analyze the latest plans as well.

Where is the Chattooga boating decision?

As this newsletter went to press, the USDA Forest had again missed an internal deadline for releasing the long-awaited environmental analysis and, finally, its recommendations on whether or not to recommend that boating be permitted on the 21 miles of the Upper Chattooga River.

Maybe the paperwork will be made public by the time this newsletter lands in the mailboxes, and, if so, Georgia ForestWatch will be alerting members and the public to this important decision by e-mail and news releases.

Look for new postings on this topic on the Sumter National Forest website: http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms/.

Also, take a look at a new study issued by the Forest Service on the incidence of large woody debris (and what and who has been causing it) on the Upper Chattooga and nearby river corridors, which also is available at the same website. Forest Service officials had announced the new package would be made public on March 6, but, as best can be ascertained, leading agency officials and higher-ups in the administration in Washington wanted to take a closer look at the information before release.

The environmental review arises from a legal challenge raised by the American Whitewater kayak lobby group (bolstered by one of the largest firms of lawyer-lobbyists in Washington,) which sought to overturn the boating ban on this sensitive part of the Wild and Scenic Chattooga.

The Georgia ForestWatch position on the agency's study and eventual recommendations are clear: The ban has served the public and the wild resources of this river corridor well for about 33 years, and, absent proof otherwise, it probably

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Citizen Input

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should remain in effect – particularly since whitewater enthusiasts have so many miles of nearby spectacular rapids to run, and since the agency is duty bound, under federal law, to protect the solitude values of this area. At the same time, Georgia ForestWatch has been deeply and vigorously engaged in the agency's study over the past two years and awaits its environmental findings and recommendations with interest.

We urge all ForestWatchers to do the same – and to comment on the Forest Service proposals if and when the paperwork is released.

Watershed repairs

The ranger district also is "scoping" three small watershed restoration projects, two in Rabun County, one in Habersham, which propose:

- Fixing a dispersed camping site on the Tallulah River, near Tate City.
- Repairing a heavily eroded and damaged nexus of illegal ATV and off-road-vehicle trails adjacent to the Stonewall Mountain bike trail.
- Closing and rerouting of a portion of the Moates Knob ATV trail on Chastain Branch near Batesville.

ForestWatchers in this case should contact Allen Smith in the Clayton office for further information (same contact information as above.) The deadline for this project also lands in early April. ■

Privacy Policy Update & Apology

We would like to apologize for an inadvertent e-mail glitch in early March which caused a few of you to receive an action alert from the GEAN after you sent a request to opt out of GEAN alerts. Some malicious spam we received made our e-mail program go haywire resulting in a substantial delay in receiving new e-mails. We want to reiterate that it is not our policy to share your information with GEAN against your wishes, and that since the e-mail glitch has been repaired we have followed through on all opt out requests received. If any have fallen through the cracks, please do let us know.

For those new members who don't know what any of this means: We have recently updated our privacy policy. The new policy more clearly articulates guidelines for strategic partnerships that help all of us make a difference on behalf of Georgia's environment. Right now we have one of these partnerships with the Georgia Environmental Action Network (GEAN).

GEAN is a statewide collaborative effort by the conservation community using a cutting edge email alert system to mobilize action on pressing issues - the big issues that need the power of everyone working together. ForestWatch can decide which GEAN issues to participate in, so you will only get a GEAN action e-mail occasionally. Plus, **GEAN will not sell your contact info or use it for any other reason.**

Studies show that public officials pay closer attention to faxed or emailed letters from constituents whose names and addresses are included in the document than they do mass emails. GEAN automatically matches you to your voting districts, includes your contact info and delivers each letter to your elected officials – all with one click!

This is a free service we provide to all Georgia ForestWatch members. **To receive the occasional, issue focused email from GEAN, you need do nothing.**

If you do not wish to be included on the GEAN list, please let us know by sending an e-mail with subject "Opt Out GEAN" to info@gafw.org.

Privacy Policy:

We store in our database information (such as your name, postal and email addresses, and phone numbers) that you provide when you contact us or make a gift to Georgia ForestWatch. We use the utmost care in protecting the privacy and security of your information.

We DO NOT store credit card information. We DO NOT provide your information to any merchants or other third parties conducting marketing of any products or businesses.

We may, in limited circumstances approved by the Board of Directors, share your information with carefully selected like-minded environmental organizations. You may opt out of this type of sharing by contacting us at 706-635-8733 or info@gafw.org.

We may contract with third parties to assist us in maintaining and managing our donor database. However, we do NOT authorize any such third parties to make any other use of donor information.

If, at any time, you would like us to update your personal information, to opt out from receiving Georgia ForestWatch e-mails, or to be removed from our e-mail list, please contact us by email at: info@gafw.org. Be sure to include your full name, address, e-mail address, and fully state your change of information. Please allow a minimum of two weeks for processing your request. We're happy to accommodate you.

Hemlock Woolly Adelgid battle continues

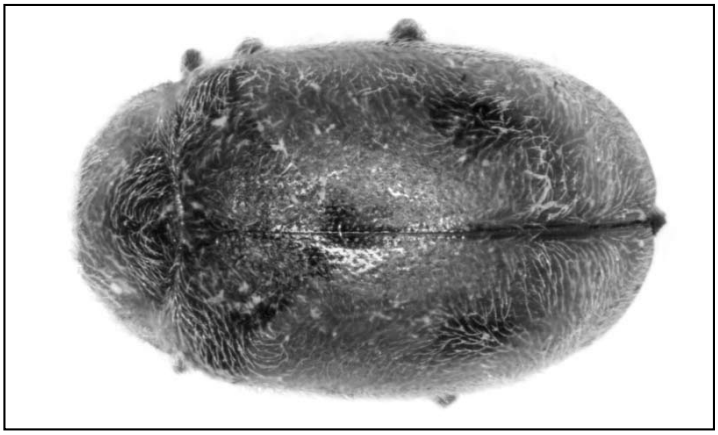
by Wayne Jenkins : Executive Director

The fight to protect Georgia's hemlocks from the depredations of the exotic insect pest, the hemlock woolly adelgid continues with three labs in Georgia now growing and placing three different predatory beetles in infested trees across the Chattahoochee National Forest.

The lab at Young Harris College, run by Paul Arnold, continues to produce and distribute the *Sasajiscymnus* beetle, as the new lab at North Georgia State College and University under the guidance of Sarah Osicka gears up to do the same. The lab at the University of Georgia is rearing two other types of beetles. Along with ongoing fine-tuning and testing of rearing techniques and release methods, the labs in the region rearing the *Sasajiscymnus* are swapping beetles in hopes of increasing the genetic variability of their lab populations to avoid in-breeding.

Field releases of beetles from Young Harris should begin in early March, not as early as in prior years as Paul is holding beetles at least 3 weeks after they emerge in order to ensure their sexual maturity. The strategy is to release beetles mainly on the leading edge of the adelgid infestation in hopes of establishing equilibrium between the beetles and the parasite. This approach is coordinated by the U.S. Forest Service and Georgia Forestry Commission. Although most beetles in past years have gone to forests in Towns and Union counties, it is quite likely that the surrounding counties will receive more attention as the adelgid continues to spread across the hemlocks southern range.

Two new species of predatory beetle are nearing release by the USDA quarantine system for production and biological control research. Only one of these, a more voracious *Laricobius* species is believed suited for Georgia's warmer climate. Greater details on the various predator beetle species being used and being tested for future use can be found at http://tncweeds.ucdavis.edu/moredocs/adetsu02.pdf. This report mentions a fungal disease, *Verticillium lecanii*, of hemlock adelgids that also has promise.



Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

The Scymnus lady beeetle, one of the predatory beetles being raised by the University of Georgia.

Representatives from all three labs met in Athens in late February with U.S. Forest Service personnel, and members of Georgia ForestWatch, Georgia Sierra Club, Lumpkin Coalition, Georgia Forestry Commission and other supporters of hemlock woolly adelgid research.

One of the most important topics covered at this meeting was that of release strategy. In light of successes and failures of beetles in other parts of the country, it was generally thought that continuing a "multipredator" release approach is a good idea, and that every effort will be made to overlap different predatory beetle species, especially "piggybacking" *Sasajiscymnus tsugae* beetles (the type that NGCSU & YHC are producing) and *Laricobius* and *Scymnus* (which are being produced for release in

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Three ways to give to the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Biological Research Lab:

1) Go online to http://www.gafw.org/join_give.html and click on "Make a Donation" under "Save Georgia's Hemlocks" on the lower right.
2) Call our office at 706-635-TREE (8733) and make a gift for our hemlocks using your credit card.
3) Mail a check to our office, and please write "HWA Lab" in the memo line.
   Georgia ForestWatch
   15 Tower Road
   Ellijay, Georgia 30540

Thanks for your help in this important effort!

Hemlock Woolly Adelgid battle continues

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Georgia by UGA and Clemson). These beetles complement each other, and because they are not active at the same time of year they do not directly compete with each other, thus offering a possible "one-two punch" against the adelgid.

Equally as important as the science and implementation of sound biological control research is the on-going funding challenge for maintaining the present lab efforts. All three labs are dependent on some combination of gifts, grants and government support. As many ForestWatch supporters know, our funding assistance has focused on the lab at the University of Georgia which has been enormously assisted by a generous $75,000 matching grant from the Turner Foundation. To date over $53,000 of the grant has been matched, providing $106,000 for salaries, equipment and transportation. Thanks to all our partner groups and individuals who have given so generously from the shared desire and hope that research might discover a solution for saving our hemlocks before it is too late.

We have $22,000 yet to raise for closing out the Turner Foundation match. Every dollar you donate for the research lab at the University of Georgia will be matched and 100% of your donation goes to support that effort. Won't you consider a donation today? ■

Wild & Woolly Event Schedule:

- **1:00 p.m.** Mark Fockele - Landscaping with limited water supplies

- **1:30 p.m.** Charles Seabrook - Cumberland Island: Strong Women, Wild Horses

- **2:00 pm.** Brent Martin - Poems from Snow Hill Road

- **2:30 p.m.** Thomas Rain Crowe - Zoro's Field: My Life in the Appalachian Woods

- **3:20 p.m.** Jeff Biggers - The United States of Appalachia

THIS COULD BE YOU!

- **4:15 p.m.** Raffle winners announced

Wild & Woolly

WINE TASTING & AUTHOR-FIDDLER FESTIVAL

Join us for the annual benefit for Georgia ForestWatch: a celebration of nature, fine wine & food, the written word, and Appalachian folkways.

Saturday, April 26, 1:00-4:30PM

Tiger Mountain Vineyards
Tiger, Georgia

Music performed by talented fiddlers:
Marie Dunkle, Tiger, GA; Kelly Smith, Salem, SC

Food: By Cindy Halbkat. Locally harvested &prepared.

Raffle: 2 rain barrels, plus Patagonia clothing

Books, ForestWatch merchandise, and award winning Tiger wine will also be for sale during the event. Authors will give presentations and be on hand for book signings. See schedule at left.

For more information visit:
www.gafw.org/events.html
Or, contact Kathy:
info@gafw.org or 706-635-8733.

RSVP & advance ticket purchase is appreciated

Wish List

Couch & Loveseat for our office ...

Anyone about to get new furniture and need to find a home for your current couch and loveseat in good condition? Please help – ours are falling apart and in unspeakably bad shape.

The Southern Nantahala wilderness

(continued from page 7)

Somewhat surprisingly, some of the hanging coves on the north side of the ridge between Eagle Mountain and Rattlesnake Knob appeared less moist and rich than the ridge crest. Northern red oak, white oak, and tulip trees occupy the gentle upper sections of some of the ridge's north facing coves, but the presence of yellow birch along the small streams suggests the coves are colder than most areas in north Georgia. Azaleas dominate the hanging coves' sparse understories, but a few scattered yellowwood also occur in them.

However, where the slopes descend steeply from the ridge to the north, mesophytic (moist habitat) species dominate the forest canopy. Where the coldest conditions prevail, on the steep slopes below Sassafras Knob, the forest tends towards northern hardwoods with yellow buckeye, yellow birch, basswood, and white ash forming the canopy over ravines of mountain maple. On slightly lower north facing slopes, especially in Milksick Cove, a wider mix of species compete for overstory space including white ash, tulip tree, black cherry, basswood, and bitternut hickory. A well developed midstory also occurs on those slopes dominated by an unusual abundance of yellowwood along with some beech. Moving farther down the slopes, tulip tree forms nearly pure groves.

The following list is a sampling of measured trees in the area. The list is followed by a few notes on these trees.

Species	Cbh*	Height
Ash, White	11'9.5"	122.7'
Basswood, White	6'11.5"	133.3'
Birch, Yellow	6'1"	89.3'
Birch, Yellow	4'5"	91.0'
Cherry, Black	6'6.5"	126.1'
Dogwood, Alternate-leaf	1'8"	29.8'
Locust, Black	5'0"	127.5'
Locust, Black	NA	139.8'
Locust, Black	8'5"	141.0'
Magnolia, Cucumbertree	NA	121.7'
Magnolia, Cucumbertree	8'0.5"	134.3'
Sycamore	4'10"	126.5'
Tuliptree	NA	149.2'
Tuliptree	10'6"	150.0'
Tuliptree	9'4"	151.3'
Tuliptree	8'5"	152.7'
Yellowwood	7'3.5"	NA
Yellowwood	6'6"	74.4'

**circumference at breast height*

The white ash is large enough to qualify as a state champion, but a larger tree has been located.

The white basswood is the second tallest so far recorded in the state, but this height measurement may not be accurate.

The previous state height record for yellow birch was 90.6'.

Black cherry on the upper north facing slopes frequently reach ~120' tall.

The previous state height record for black locust was 121.3', and the 8'5" circumference tree also has enough points to qualify as a new state champion.

The tallest known cucumber magnolia in the state was 127.8' before the 134.3' tree was found in Milksick Cove.

The sycamore was the only individual of the species encountered in the area, and grows at the unusually high elevation of about 3150'.

Many other tuliptrees reach approximately 150', especially on the western side of Milksick Cove. Taller trees certainly occur in the area.

7'3.5" is the second largest circumference recorded for yellowwood in Georgia.

None of the coves were explored entirely, and some north facing coves were not visited at all on this trip. Hence, other exceptional trees and unusual species surely occur in the area. ■

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Troubles on the Oconee NF threaten endangered species

by Wayne Jenkins : Executive Director

The managers of the Oconee National Forest are struggling to control and contain an explosion of the native Southern Pine Beetle across the forest. Salvage and preventive timber harvests affecting over 5,000 acres have been ongoing since last spring as over 700 bug infestation spots were identified from aerial observation. One of the most troubling aspects of this recent outbreak is the impact to existing nesting and foraging habitat of the endangered Red Cockaded Woodpecker colonies on the Hitchiti Experimental Forest in the most southern portion of the district.

Problems with pine beetle invasions on monoculture pine forests are long standing and widespread throughout the southeastern United States, and forest stands with high potential for attack must be managed to prevent infestation. Discussions with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service scientists reveal disagreement between the Fish and Wildlife agency and the Forest Service concerning the latter's failure to more aggressively thin and use prescribed fire for improvement of this woodpecker habitat. Now the Forest Service must enter into consultation with Fish & Wildlife to secure permits for what are referred to as "takings," or the potential loss of red-cockaded habitat due to the effects of the beetle infestations.

Some background on the Oconee forests may be helpful. At a little over 115,000 acres the Oconee National Forest lies wholly within Georgia's rolling Piedmont province, equidistant between Atlanta, Augusta and Macon. The forest is quite fragmented by blocks of private holdings in mostly Greene, Jasper, Jones and Putnam counties. By the early 1800s, European settlers had pushed the Creek Indians out of the area, clearing the hardwood and pine forests and establishing farm-based communities. Agriculture prevailed for over 100 years. The land was then overworked, and its exhausted soils, combined with the depression of the 1930s and the depredations of the boll weevil on large-scale cotton farming, forced many to abandon their farms and homes. In a very short period of time under the use and abuse of our predecessors, this portion of the Georgia Piedmont was transformed from fertile forests, clear streams and abundant wildlife to a barren, eroding landscape.

From 1930 to 1940 the Soil Conservation Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps, both born out of the progressive attitudes of the New Deal era, terraced and replanted thousands of acres of eroded land with loblolly pine, anchoring the thin soils and beginning the building of topsoil.

In 1959 these lands became the Oconee National Forest and have since been managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Wildlife Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources for multiple use objectives such as timber production, hunting and fishing, other forms of recreation, cultural sites etc.

USFWS Photo

The red cockaded woodpecker is an endangered species that nests in the Oconee National Forest.

One of the more interesting aspects of the present challenge to forest management is the presence of the Red Cockaded Woodpecker, the endangered bird species, usually associated with open, mature longleaf forests of southern coastal plains and Piedmont ecosystems. A few active colonies persist on a section of the Oconee called the Hitchiti Experimental Forest, wedged between two blocks of the Piedmont Wildlife Refuge where the U.S. Fish & Wildlife agency manages over 38 active clusters of red-cockaded woodpecker. The birds in these areas are presently residing in the aging loblolly pine stands, a species prone to beetle infestation and reaching the end of their natural lifespan. Despite past management, which may have neglected to open up the loblolly forest enough, or because of the present drought or stand age or some combination of these and other factors, the woodpecker sites are now being impacted by the pine beetle and the forest managers are trying something new. Georgia ForestWatch recently responded to a proposal and supports the experimental planting of 120 acres of longleaf pine seedlings in openings left from the recent salvage and preventive logging operations.

Though many questions remain regarding the outcome of this approach to red-cockaded habitat management, especially in the intervening 35 years before the planted longleaf will be mature enough for nest sites, we hope the agencies can work more closely together to increase the populations of this rare and beautiful bird.

Now, what about a restoration plan for the hundreds of other pine-beetle acres across the Oconee National Forest that might in time lead to resilient, self regenerating forests? ■

Georgia ForestWatch welcomes the following new members

Robert Armstrong
Jessica and Russell Bauman
Virginia Blades
Leonard Borg
Annetta Bunch
Brad Cole
Mark and Lucy Dickerson
Dobbs Foundation
Marie K. Dunkle
Linda Fenner
Betsy Fowler
Brooks and Maureen Franklin
Garden Club of Ellijay
Annabel Girard
Cheryl and Harris Gottlieb
Paul and Gail Harmon
Carol Harris
Ralph Heller
Jeffrey Hetsko and Nickie White
Virginia Keese
Maggie Kelly and Eric Byrne
David Kyler
Jeff Langford
Tommy and Collin Lines
Susan Lockhart
Mary Lovings
Craig and Kristen Moore
Jeff Moore
Steve and Nancy Moorman
Randy and Barbara Moser
North Georgia Community Foundation
Lou Ann Nunn
Colleen Nunn
John Parrino
Keith and Shirl Parsons
Patricia P. Piper
Lee Pruett
Steven Salamon
Sil Schell
Claudia and Clint Schlottman
Vernon and Miriam Skiles
Cheri and Reggie Smith
Helen Smith
Jerry Smith
Jan and Dennis Stansell
Clayton Stevens
Jerry and Marie Thursby
Utana Bluffs, Inc.
Richard and Teresa Ware
Edus and Harriet Warren
Joseph B. Weaver
Joseph and Patricia Webb
Ed and Jane Powers Weldon
Vincent West
Anne Wilfer
Ansgar Wilke
Mr. & Mrs. Walter Wingfield

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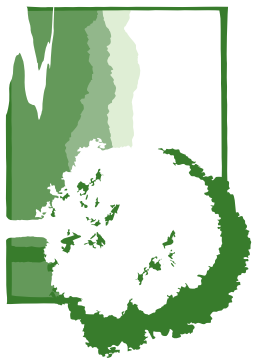

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