Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Summer 2008

The Softer Side of Owls

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From The Director
Of NEPA and NFMA

Wayne Jenkins
Executive Director

Some new Georgia ForestWatch members and perhaps a few older ones may wonder what exactly the staff and volunteer District Leaders do when it comes to U.S. Forest Service projects. So here are some details of how we work to protect your national forests in Georgia. This will be helpful to most as we become ever more immersed in the agency's struggle to implement the present Land and Resource Management Plan, in place since January of 2004. We are seeing and expect an increase in proposed projects over the next year.

Along with the federal legislation governing air, water and life (the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act,) the USDA Forest Service is legally guided by the ever evolving language of two other laws: the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1971. NFMA requires the Secretary of Agriculture to assess forest lands, develop a management program based on multiple-use, sustained-yield principles, and implement a resource management plan for each unit of the National Forest System. It is the primary statute governing the administration of national forests. The focus of NEPA, on the other hand, was the establishment of a national policy promoting the enhancement of the environment, but its most significant effect was to establish the requirement for "environmental impact statements" (EIS) or "environmental assessments" (EA) for major federal government actions. It is these two laws that have enabled the American citizen and concerned groups to engage federal agencies such as the Forest Service on issues of environmental effects and impacts of proposed projects.

So, how does this all work? It's complicated! Following is a simplified view of the process, which reigned over the 35-year timbering and road-building period until 1996 on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests and is still largely the same today. It begins when ForestWatch and other interested parties (currently on a particular forest district's mailing list) receives a "scoping notice" by mail. If you want to know what the Forest Service plans to do on any particular forest district you must call to declare yourself an interested party and request to be placed on their mailing list to receive all "scopings." Scopings define the need and the extent of the work to be done, the location, techniques to be used and a review of expected impacts. If a project is expected to have "significant environmental effects" a "Notice of Intent" is issued followed by environmental analysis and a detailed "Environmental Impact Statement" (EIS). If the agency feels the impacts are less significant they proceed through analysis to an "Environmental Assessment" (EA). Both processes have opportunities for public input before moving to a Draft EIS, Final EIS and Record of Decision for an EIS and a Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for an EA. Got it?

Well, it is at this juncture that citizens and groups, like yours truly, can accept the Decision or appeal the Decision, which leads to an informal meeting to try to work things out. Ultimately the appealing party must decide to settle or go to court to challenge the Decision.

Whew, I'm exhausted just pondering it all.

A positive shift in this scenario in recent years has been a willingness on the part of agency and district rangers to engage in "pre-scoping" which is an early opportunity to identify potential problem issues or proposals. Sometimes, highly controversial projects are never heard from after this initial engagement.

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Oconee National Forest report

- **Longleaf Pine project:** In response to last year's widespread Southern Pine Beetle outbreak and subsequent salvage logging, the district has decided to replant some stands with Longleaf pine, especially in habitat areas of the endangered Red Cockaded Woodpecker. We support this approach to provide future habitat for this woodpecker by using the more beetle resistant Longleaf species.

- **Ocmulgee River and Town Creek ATV project:** Trail maintenance and closures: We applaud the district's efforts to protect Town Creek from the impacts of motorized and other forms of recreation in this area by maintaining some trails and closing others.

- **Salvage logging:** This proposal calls for logging on parts of a 700-acre swath of the Oconee district hit by a large-scale hail storm in March. Georgia ForestWatch District Leaders and staff hope to get a look at this area soon while the district works to map and define management of the affected stands.

- **Large-scale timber project:** An initial open public meeting for launching a Large Scale Assessment process for addressing forest management needs on the Oconee District was held June 13. ForestWatch staff and district leaders attended and will be following this process closely. The Oconee district has some pretty big ecological challenges which we hope will be addressed.

Save the Date: Conasauga Snorkel Saturday, August 16

The "don't miss" outing of the year!
Come face-to-face with rare aquatic wildlife.
Fresh-water snorkeling in a pool with up to 45 fish species.
Aquatics biologist Jim Herrig will be our guide.
Family friendly outing: open to ages 6 & up.

Fee: $20 per person
Wetsuits, masks & snorkels provided

Stay tuned for the e-mail alert on July 15 which will open signups.

(If you're not getting our alerts, e-mail info@gafw.org today.)

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Cover photo: Lori Martell. Female barred owl.

Steamy owl love in the Rich Mountains

by Lori Martell : Outreach Director

This spring in the Rich Mountains, barred owls (*Strix varia*) were particularly vocal. My spouse Brad and I were out for a walk in the woods in May and we heard calls coming from multiple directions, "Who cooks for you – who cooks for youuwaaall?" We wondered if a pair might be nesting nearby. Brad noted a hollow tree not ten feet from the path and said, "Now that would be a great nest tree." We checked around the base of the trunk for telltale regurgitated pellets of bone and fur that might confirm his suspicion, but there were none.

Barred owls are about 21 inches long with a wingspan of around 45 inches, and they are present in Georgia year round. Their preferred habitat is dense coniferous or mixed woods in river bottoms, swamps, or drier uplands near water. Females are generally larger than males, otherwise they look the same. They mate for life. In the wild they live to be about 18 years old, but will live longer in captivity.

As nocturnal carnivores, barred owls have sometimes gotten a bad rap for occasionally picking off small pets left out alone too late by their owners. From a hungry owl's perspective there's not much difference between a large rat and a small cat or dog. So, please, if you live in the woods and have small pets, keep them in a safe place at night. Barred owls are not cold-hearted killers – I know this. I was fortunate enough to see their softer side.

Two days later, I was in the same area when I again heard the call, very loud and close. There stood a very vocal barred owl perched in a large white pine perhaps 25 feet away. It had called a few times when I heard the answering call of its mate, who soon flew in and perched right next to the first. Based on size and vocalizations, it was the female that arrived last.

I guess you could say I turned accidental voyeur by what came next, which I can only describe as the couple loving each other up good and proper. If you'd rather I be scientific and stick to the cold facts, this is called mutual preening. But I tell you, they're in love! The male gently used his sharp beak to preen the feathers on the top of his mate's head and the back of her neck. She returned the favor and they cuddled close together on the branch. They clicked open beaks several times, the owl version of kissing, followed by

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Lori Martell photo

The female barred owl takes a break from her nest to stretch and perhaps catch a quick meal.

Atamasco Lilies and other treasures found in the Oconee National Forest

by Donna Born : ForestWatch volunteer

The image of a meadow of white flowers in the woods is one of my favorite childhood memories. Local residents of Jasper County call them rain lilies. My sister Susan and I first saw the lilies when we were children, ages seven and 10. A family friend took us on a short drive south of Monticello, Georgia, to the Oconee National Forest. At that time, we did not have to venture far from the road to find the lilies.

On a more recent trip to see the Atamasco lilies (*Zephyranthes atamasco*), we accompanied a group of Sierra Club hikers, led by Gene Weeks, to the Monticello Bottomland Woods in the Oconee National Forest. This area is semi-protected, according to Erin Bronk, the U.S. Forest Service ranger for the Oconee. The wetland area we visited is protected as a Rare Community and the surrounding area is considered a Botanical-Zoological Area. In these areas, the Forest Service management plan focuses on conservation of biological diversity and protection of endangered species.

Donna Born photo

The lovely Atamasco lilies,* Zephyranthes atamasco*, in full bloom in the Oconee National Forest.

The Latin name Zephyranthes comes from Zephyrus, the Greek god of the west wind, which brings the rain on which the lilies thrive. The name is appropriate, as we started our hike in rain and mud.

We headed down the gradual slope of a forest road and then pursued an elusive trail. Along the way, we saw bracken ferns, wax myrtles, comfrey, and buckeyes in bloom. The dogwoods were in full bloom. We arrived at a hill of ancient, moss-covered boulders. This seemed like a low mountain outcrop, under a canopy of trees that had not leafed out yet.

A striking tree with lemon-yellow blooms stood out among the white dogwoods. The lemon-yellow flowers were high in the branches and sprinkled in a canopy that reached about 45 feet high. The tree's crown was probably 20 feet across with a few new, small oval leaves and some of the blooms had dropped to the ground, so we got a close look at them. Later, we decided this to be a cucumber magnolia *(Magnolia acumenata)* at the southernmost extent of its range in Georgia.

The rain stopped and the sun appeared intermittently as the afternoon progressed.

From the rocky outcrop we headed downhill to a boggy glade filled with Atamasco lilies.

The glade was two or three acres in size, stretching along a narrow pond and creek. The lilies were on stems about 15 inches tall with 2-inch white flowers. The tips of some of the lily blooms were magenta. Golden Groundsel with deep green foliage and bright yellow flowers provided a striking backdrop for the white lilies in some spots.

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Anderson Creek OHV Area closed permanently

by David Govus : Co-district Leader

On May 23, the U.S. Forest Service announced that after five years of analysis the agency had decided to permanently close the Anderson Creek Off-Highway Vehicle Area. This decision culminates a decade-long campaign by Georgia ForestWatch to end the damage that off-road vehicles were causing in this sensitive area. The Anderson Creek area should never have been selected as a motorized playground as it contains several high quality trout streams and extremely steep ground. The Anderson Creek area was opened in 1987 as an area for anyone to ride any type of motorized vehicle wherever they wished. One has to wonder what the Forest Service was thinking when they designated this beautiful part of the mountains for people to ride vehicles with rough tread tires anywhere. People did in fact ride everywhere, including in streams and springs and up and down the steepest slopes, even knocking down trees in the process.

By 2000, the Forest Service had fielded numerous complaints from hunters, fishers, hikers and adjoining property owners. Large areas were denuded of vegetation and spring heads were turned into mud bogs. With every rain, silt poured into Anderson Creek. The noise level was such that the traditional activities of hunting, botanizing and fishing became impossible. Georgia ForestWatch's comprehensive off-road vehicle survey of the entire Chattahoochee National Forest in that year identified Anderson Creek as the worst area of resource damage on the forest.

The Forest Service then tried to restrict motorized activity to designated trails in hopes that this would improve matters. This approach failed as all the signage marking legal trails was destroyed and off-road enthusiasts continued to ride where they pleased. Illegal, user-created trails spread in all directions and spilled over into adjoining private land and county roads. Serious trespass occurred.

By 2003, Georgia ForestWatch had brought this matter to the attention of local news media and several stories were published. The pressure on the Forest Service to correct the situation grew. The agency then decided to close the area for rehabilitation and study. Now five years later, after several public comment periods, an expensive rehabilitation and a lengthy and even more expensive environmental analysis by a private contractor, the Forest service has made the decision to permanently close the area. This is a great victory that means continued healing for this abused area and we commend the Forest Service for making this courageous decision.

The Bush administration began its stewardship of our public lands by overruling local managers and allowing snowmobiles in Yellowstone Park. This was followed by a Forest Service meeting with the major trade group representing off-road interests called the Blue Ribbon Coalition in which a memorandum of understanding was signed declaring motorized off-road activity a 'legitimate' form of recreation. Struggling against such headwind it is remarkable that Georgia ForestWatch was able to prevail and that local forest managers had the courage to follow the law, ignore the political winds and do the right thing. Motorized 'recreation' may be labeled a 'legitimate' form of recreation in a Washington conference room, but when viewed up close on the ground it is difficult to see how ripping up the countryside can be viewed as legal much less legitimate.

Georgia ForestWatch stands ready to assist the Forest Service in supporting this decision. To read more about Anderson Creek and other successes, visit our website at: http://www.gafw.org/successes.html ■

David Govus photo

Permanent closure of the Anderson Creek OHV trail system will allow ongoing healing of trout streams and restoration of the forest.

New threats to our forests?

by Wayne Jenkins : Executive Director

Change – the only constant. We have all heard this common phrase and when it comes to our public forest lands in Georgia it really rings true. As a constant, "change" has many faces. Changes in our forests are taking place right now and at many scales. Soils are being built through the transformation of everything that ends up on the forest floor by a host of bacteria and decomposers. Wildlife of many species are feeding, bearing young, growing old and adding their contributions to fertility and the active growth of trees, shrubs and ground-level plants. Saplings and young trees grow slowly, waiting under the closed forest canopy for light to strike as older trees die or are blown over by storms.

Lori Martell photo

How global warming and associated climate changes will affect our forests is uncertain, but is sure to present great challenges for forest managers and Georgia ForestWatch.

From the micro to the macro, change, sometimes observable and sometimes too fast or too slow or too small or large to be witnessed, shapes our forests. Changes at one scale may affect many other levels and some reverberate throughout the entire system. The term "disturbance" has been used to describe the most obvious and large-scale changes such as fire, wind-throw, insect and disease infestations, etc. Forests have set patterns of response to various disturbances usually moving the system toward a new equilibrium.

In order to understand the present state of our forests and associated changes we also must consider the effects of humans. Changes wrought by human efforts, usually for our use and comfort, whether the harvest of trees, recreation, building of roads or new subdivisions, etc., all have impacts and change the forest at some scale. Past misuse of our forests, (changes now understood as negative and reverberating across the landscape over time,) and a desire to maintain and protect them for more appropriate uses has led to the concept of "sustainability" or a more balanced approach to human forest use.

A good example would be the use of various timber harvest techniques that do not remove all trees from steep slopes, thus protecting forest soils, streams and the future forest. In these cases we have evolved to taking responsibility for the changes we cause, limiting our effects to changes on smaller scales of place and time so that natural processes can restore forest equilibrium over time. Basically we have our forests and use them too. Not a perfect system but much better than the degrading practices of the past. Critically important to this approach are set-asides for protecting streams, rare habitats and very steep slopes.

That said, to really put things in context, we may presently be witnessing "change" whose affects to our forests will be beyond anything humans have seen in our short historical tenure. For most of the 10,000 years since the last ice age we have been blessed with stable weather, with the exception of the Little Ice Age (1300 to 1850). This stability has assisted our rapid rise and success as the dominant species on the planet but that very success may be a root cause for what everyone now refers to as "Global Warming" or "Climate Change."

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Welcome to new staffer

Lori Martell photo

The Georgia ForestWatch Board of Directors and Executive Director Wayne Jenkins extend a warm welcome to Georgia ForestWatch's new Forest Ecologist, Darren Wolfgang. Darren's primary responsibilities are the evaluation of proposed vegetation management treatments as well as inspection of active Forest Service projects on the ground for their compliance with NEPA regulations and the current Forest Plan and good conservation science.

Darren holds a Bachelor of Science in Forest Science (Management Option), and an Associate of Science in Wildlife and Fisheries Technology, both earned from Pennsylvania State University. Penn State's wildlife and fisheries and Forestry programs incorporated a balance of physical field forest and wildlife habitat management techniques, as well as research and theoretical applications of sustainable forest and ecosystem management practices.

Upon graduation, Darren served as a Research Technician for Penn State's Forest Resources Department, as well as The Institute for Energy and The Environment. His professional background also includes urban forestry and horticulture, agriculture work, wildlife management work, and surveying commercial fruit orchards for plant pathogens. Darren is also an avid gardener, sportsmen, and conservationist.

We are pleased to welcome Darren to our staff here at the Georgia Forest watch office in Ellijay. Stop by and say hello!

New Threats

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Climate change is increasingly understood and accepted as a change or shifting in the dependable weather patterns we have always depended upon. These changes in climate appear to be so widespread and irreversible that intense speculation, planning and research are underway to identify just what may be happening now and into the near future as these fundamental shifts in climate patterns impact and change our forests.

It is possible that we may already be experiencing climate changes and effects on our national forests, which later will be clearly linked to the larger global climate shift. Our unprecedented drought coupled with unhealthy crowded conditions in loblolly stands on the Oconee National Forest is implicated in the huge outbreak of native southern pine beetle in the more than 700 "bug-spots" now affecting that forest. The impacts of the beetle and the agency's management following salvage logging have led to potential problems with the endangered Red Cockaded Woodpecker and its habitat. Consultation between U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Forest Service is ongoing due to these forest changes and risks posed to this important bird species.

The rapid spread of hemlock woolly adelgid infestation in southern hemlocks may be linked to drought stress and a generally warmer annual temperature making these beautiful evergreens weaker and more susceptible to rapid decline and death from this exotic insect.

The first ever tornado storm event that ripped through downtown Atlanta on March 14 also spawned a hail storm on the Oconee, damaging a forest swath several miles long and totaling more than 700 acres. No one on the district can remember a storm of this kind, this widespread. These are just three examples of weather driven phenomena and certainly are not "proof" of climate related change linked to global warming but …

An expanding list of forest effects are rising to the surface and gaining attention from researchers and forest managers.

- Shifting of ecological zones northward as the climate warms.
- Loss of local and regional biodiversity.
- Increase in wildfires beyond historical return intervals.
- Increase in diseases on stressed forests.
- Increase in insect infestations beyond historical ranges.
- Increase in spread of non-native species.

As forest management has evolved and taken place during a relatively stable climate, our approaches and techniques are geared to those conditions and changes. Under shifting climate and weather patterns, those changes, as well as the extent of disturbances, are less predictable. When, why and how forest managers should react is yet undefined, but past approaches may be unwarranted and new ones, most assuredly, experimental. ForestWatch will be challenged to analyze the appropriateness of new management proposals in a time of unprecedented change. The next decade should be interesting. Change anyone? ■

A "Wild & Woolly" good time

For a substitute event, things didn't turn out half-bad.

The 2008 Georgia ForestWatch Wild & Woolly Wine Tasting and Author-Fiddler Festival came off without much of a hitch on April 26, supplanting the native plant sale customarily held at this time of year. (We will reconsider the plant sale once north Georgia is no longer in the grip of this drought.)

Our friends and supporters were wonderful, coming out in droves and contributing mightily to this annual "affordable fundraiser."

It helped that our good friend and local chef Cindy Halbkat did excellent work readying the food.

It helped that Martha and John Ezzard and Leckie and Bill Stack, as with the plant sale, provided both the venue and the wine for this tasting.

It helped that so many ForestWatch volunteers came forward to help organize the event, and that Mark Fockele, perennial plant expert, was on hand to teach us how to help our native plants weather the drought.

And it definitely helped that four authors and two fiddlers proved to be such excellent presenters (and that attendees paid close attention to their presentations.)

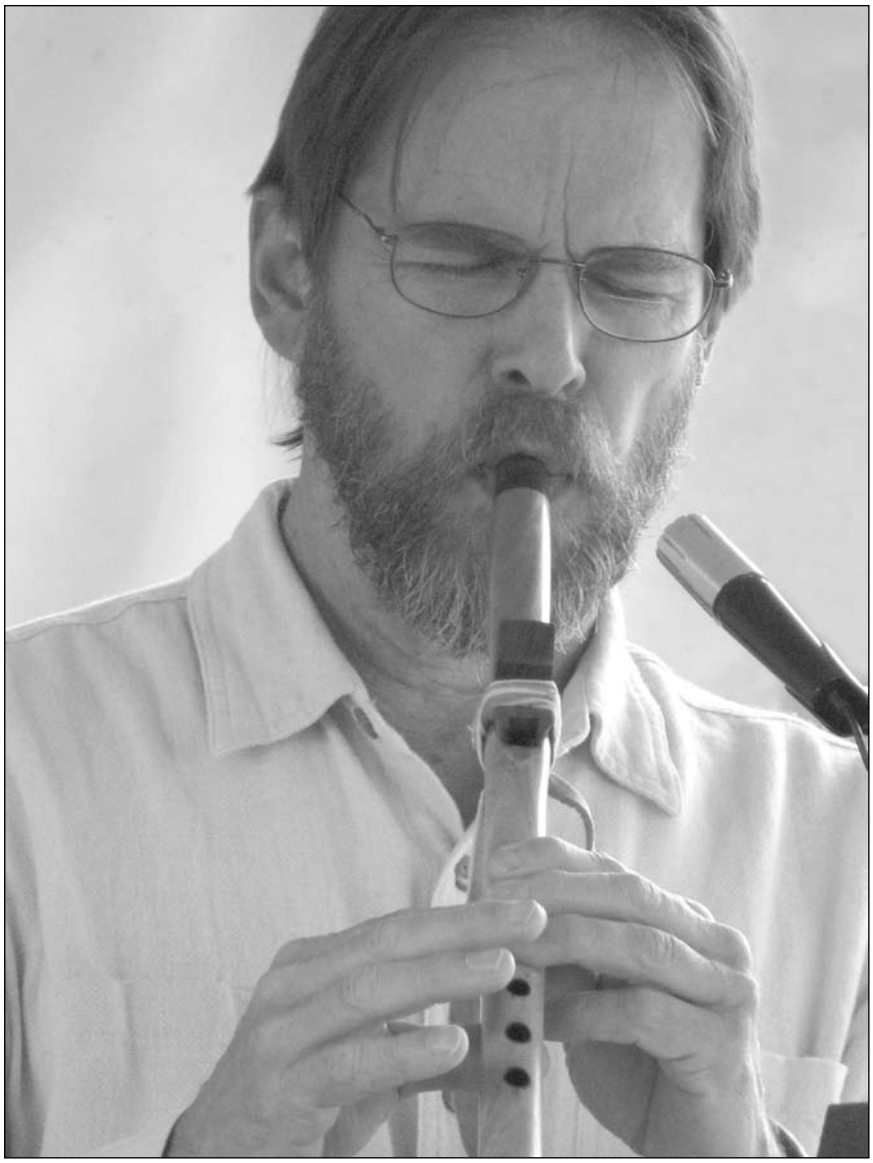
Charlie Seabrook wowed us with talk of mountains-to-the-sea. Brent Martin swept us up into the poetic reality of Western North Carolina. Thomas Rain Crowe elucidated on matters both wild and urbane. And Jeff Biggers, an Appalachian presenter perhaps like no other, had everyone on the edge of their seats.

Two fiddlers, Marie Dunkley and Kelly Smith, sprinkled the book talk with music for our ears – and mighty pleasant sounds they were, too.

We knew something was truly happening when Dunkle and Crowe converged at the end of the day for an impromptu duet, he on his flute, she on her Scottish fiddle.

And somewhat miraculously, the buckets of rain predicted for that Saturday held off until Sunday.

Thank you all, for such a Wild and Woolly good time! ■



Lori Martell photo

Thomas Rain Crowe playing his handmade wooden flute for the crowd.

Of NEPA and NFMA

(continued from page 2)

The good news is that ForestWatch has gained some expertise in all this over the years. Working with our District Leaders, staff forest ecologist, legal partners and outside scientists when needed, we stand ready to assist, cajole, convince, pressure and sometimes litigate to protect your national forests and secure good, science-based forestry. We could not do this complex and challenging work without your continued support.

So the next time you are out there in your forest, hiking along that lush green trail or camping by that glistening-gurgling stream or fishing or picnicking or what have you, don't even think about all the stuff above. Just remember there are folks watching out for your forests. Your support through membership and contributions, helps us keep up this good work! ■

Atamasco Lilies

(continued from page 5)

After marveling at this glade of lilies, we went upstream to higher ground where we crossed the stream without getting into the bog. We continued our walk for another mile or so in search of Paw Paw trees in bloom. We crossed rocky woodland streams with little cascades of gurgling water that seem like misplaced mountain streams. The land is quite hilly in places.

Along the way, we saw trilliums, rue anemone, hepatica, morel mushrooms, palmetto, and a shagbark hickory. Near the stand of paw paw trees in bloom, we found fragrant sweet shrubs also blooming. The native Piedmont azalea, Rhododendron canescens, in full bloom added grace to the woods.

The Atamasco lilies there were sprinkled along the winding creeks, but not as concentrated as in the boggy glade. We arrived at a huge swampy pond with lots of water lilies, probably at least 30 acres, with a prominent huge boulder on the far side of the pond. Carnivorous bladderworts (Utricularia inflata) were blooming and floating in the water near us.

On this hike, the Atamasco lilies were even more magical than I remembered. The lilies and the dogwoods together are like a fairyland. Finding the Magnolia acuminata was an unexpected treat, which in itself made the trip most memorable! ■

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

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(please print)

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MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

(Please circle one)	Individual
Sugar Maples	$25
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Conasauga Logperch: A species in grave peril

by Jim Herrig : U.S. Forest Service Biologist

The Conasauga logperch (*Percina jenkinsi*) is a small (5-inch) fish in the Perch family. It is long and slender with dark vertical bars on its yellowish-tan sides. This pattern resembles a tiger-stripe. Conasauga logperch are usually seen alone or in pairs. They are found in groups only during spawning season.

The distribution of Conasauga logperch was, at the time of its listing as a federally Endangered species, thought to be restricted to only eleven miles of the Conasauga River in Tennessee and Georgia. Since its 1986 listing, the Conasauga logperch has been found an additional five miles upstream.

J.R. Shute photo

If the Conasauga Logperch still exists, its future, uncertain at best, is dependent upon habitat preservation.

Of its total 16 miles of known distribution, the upper six are administered by the Cherokee and Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. Further extension of its range is unlikely because little suitable habitat (swift flowing water that is not turbulent; with a gravel bottom) exists upstream and habitat degradation along with competition from the Mobile logperch may be limiting its downstream expansion.

Feeding requirements for this fish exceed even those of trout. The curious wart-like bump on the nose of the Conasauga logperch is used to flip small stones exposing aquatic invertebrates hiding beneath. While other similar logperch flip stones to forage, they are also known to feed in silty substrates where the Conasauga logperch has never been collected. This adaptation to an extraordinarily clean substrate (a very narrow niche even under natural conditions) has placed this species in real peril.

During the April spawning season, Conasauga logperch are thought (no one has ever observed them spawning in the wild) to congregate in swift flowing areas with a clean gravel substrate. The female and male(s?) vibrate together in a loose gravel pile depositing the eggs. It is essential that this gravel be free of sediment so the eggs can sink into the spaces between stones; if left exposed on top, they are eaten by other fish.

Besides suitable feeding and spawning habitat, fish require appropriate escape cover. For the Conasauga logperch the ideal "hide out" from predators is loose gravel that they are able to burrow into.

Given the requirements for clean gravel for feeding, spawning and escaping, it is of little wonder that the Conasauga logperch numbers are declining. On September 19, 2003 three Conasauga logperch were observed and collected for artificial spawning by Conservation Fisheries, Inc. Unfortunately, no fertile eggs were produced and these fish eventually died of "old age" in captivity. The "last" live Conasauga logperch was observed on September 30, 2004, about two weeks after Hurricane Ivan decimated the Conasauga River. It is hoped that others survived and this unique species still exists. ■

Got Alerts?

If you don't know what outings are coming up, you're not getting our weekly e-mail alerts. E-mail us at **info@gafw.org** and ask to be signed up to ForestWatch Alerts!

One more time for the hemlocks – $17,000 needed

Georgia ForestWatch and its partners are close to the end of the joint effort to raise $75,000 for support of the University of Georgia's research work on the hemlock wholly adelgid crisis. You may recall from our Winter 2005-2006 newsletter that ForestWatch and many other concerned conservation groups, state and federal agencies, citizen organizations, businesses and individuals along with the Entomology department at the university had joined together to raise necessary funding for equipping and managing a research facility for rearing predators specifically to control the exotic invasive insect, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, (*Adelges tsugae* Annand).

At that time we used the word "daunting" to describe the challenge posed by the $250,000 budget for initial set-up and our first three years of operation. We have been inspired and elated by the response from so many across Georgia. Along with the financial and in-kind support given by the U.S. Forest Service, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Forestry Commission and APHIS. The private sector has generously stepped up to support this program. Georgia Power, the Lumpkin Coalition, Sierra Club-Georgia Chapter, Georgia Wildlife Federation, Upper Chattahoochee River Keeper, Georgia ForestWatch members and friends and so many, many others have contributed to this research effort.

Lori Martell photo

Besides being beautiful and providing a home for wildlife, hemlocks also stabilize stream banks and hold moisture in the soil. Please help us fund the effort to save these important trees.

DO YOUR PART In Saving Our Hemlocks

Make a donation to the Save Our Hemlocks campaign! All gifts are tax deductible and used 100% for supporting the HWA Bio-Control Research Laboratory at the University of Georgia.

Your donation will be matched dollar for dollar with a generous grant from the Turner Foundation. You can't beat that!

Go to http://www.gafw.org/membership.htm and make a donation using your credit card
or
call GFW's office @ 706.635.TREE (8733) for making a credit card gift by phone

Or mail a check to Georgia ForestWatch
15 Tower Road • Ellijay, GA 30540
Put "HWA Lab" in the memo area
THANKS!

The last two winter rearing seasons at the lab have been spent successfully rearing several species of beetles which specifically prey on adelgids, getting them out into Hemlock Conservation Zones on the Chattahoochee National Forest and following up in the field to check on population reproduction and other factors. It is yet too early to gauge the success of this form of biological control but we remain hopeful. There are too many tireless workers to praise for their many long hours in the lab and the forest but they should know how greatly all Georgians who love our stately evergreens appreciate their work. Special thanks are due to Wayne Berisford, Mark Dalusky and all of the lab team, plus volunteers and employees of the Georgia Forestry Commission and the hard working personnel with the Chattahoochee National Forest, especially Ron Stephens and Jim Wentworth and crew for their placement of beetles in the forest and on-going treatment of stands.

But our fundraising is not yet finished. We need to raise another $17,000 to match the final portion of the $75,000 grant awarded to the project back in 2006 by the Turner Foundation. We are so close. What a shame it would be to not take full advantage to turn that $17,000 into $34,000. So, let's roll up our sleeves, write that check, go on-line or call the ForestWatch office with plastic in hand to help reach this goal! ■

Playing the 'waiting game' on Chattooga River District

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

Sometimes, the business of volunteer "ForestWatching" is like playing a waiting game. That's how it feels these days on the Chattooga River District, which generally encompasses national forestlands in Stephens, Habersham, Rabun and portions of White and Towns counties. We're waiting for a lot of shoes to drop. Among them:

- The U.S. Forest Service decision on whether to recommend boating on the upper reaches of the Wild and Scenic Chattooga River appears hung up in the corridors of power in Washington.
- The Virginia firm that wants to re-activate and refurbish the old, wood-fueled electricity power plant at a defunct Fruit of the Loom textile plant in Rabun Gap has filed an amended air pollution control permit application with the state of Georgia. There's no word yet on where the firm intends to find the 196,000 tons of wood needed to put this plant back online fulltime. Georgia ForestWatch is monitoring this situation closely.
- The district is in the beginning stages of "scoping" a new woodland restoration project off Waterguage Road in the southern end of Rabun County. ForestWatchers have visited the site several times, once with appropriate Forest Service and Georgia Department of Natural Resources officials. (The latter are particularly interested in a string of wetlands and bogs that dot the old agricultural site.)
- The district is in the process of evaluating comments on a large, proposed land exchange involving public land in Rabun County. ForestWatch is concerned with several aspects of the proposal and has engaged agency officials and Rabun officials to try to both safeguard sensitive resources and improve the land swap.
- The district is continuing to review a special permit application from the 2nd Nature Wilderness program for troubled youth to see if it wants to allow the significant expansion sought by the for-profit therapy camp. ForestWatch has met with both 2nd Nature principals and district officers to register their concerns about this proposal. We've also become involved in 2nd Nature's attempts to secure a similar, large-scale permit just across the state line on the Nantahala National Forest in North Carolina.

Finally, ForestWatch and other area conservation groups are working together to craft an appropriate response to the agency's proposals to use various herbicides to begin controlling non-native invasive plants on the district as well as to try to regenerate and restore several stands of pines and hardwoods. ■

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Steamy owl love

(continued from page 4)

more preening. I was practically blushing by the time the female took flight. And, just guess where she flew – she swooped low right toward me, passed so close I could hear the breeze in her wings, then disappeared into Brad's hollow tree.

The next evening the couple was calling back and forth, he from a nearby hemlock and she from inside her nest tree. The calling escalated from the typical pattern into an excited frenzy of squawking so monkey-like that it is sometimes used for sound effects in motion picture jungle scenes according to UGA's Wildlife Web.

Another vocalization we've heard only from the female seems to be a contact call to her mate and is a slow and gentle, "Eeeeeeeep, (pause) eeeeeeeep." One late afternoon she was vocalizing from her nest in this manner once every few minutes. Soon the male flew in and landed in a tree about 15 feet from the nest tree with a lover's gift that could only be appreciated by a raptor. In his beak, a luscious dead vole. (My gardener's heart rejoiced, as voles have turned one of my wildflower beds into Swiss cheese.) Aware of being watched, he seemed to be reluctant to deliver the meal and give away the nest location. During the pause, the female's "eeeping" increased in frequency, "I'm hungry dear!" We decided to turn away and watch using our peripheral vision and the tasty morsel was finally delivered.

Females lay 2-4 almost round, pure white eggs. She will incubate for 28-33 days. Once the eggs hatch, it will be seven days before the owlets can open their eyes and 40 days before they can fly. The male will bring food for the family until the young are old enough for the female to leave them for short periods and join the hunt. The pair will feed the young for four months after they leave the nest, then the young will disperse a few miles to establish territories of their own.

As of press time, it's unclear whether the eggs have hatched, but if not it should be any minute. I feel like an expectant aunt. I look forward to watching the new parents raise their young and hope to photograph the owlets once they are strong enough to crawl out of the nest to perch on a branch. If all goes well, the pair should return to this same nest tree next year. ■

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Conasauga River District report

by Wayne Jenkins : Co-district Leader

A number of proposals are currently underway on the newly combined Armuchee/Cohutta ranger districts, now called the Conasauga River District.

- **Armuchee Ridges Project:** This is the large scale logging proposal that Georgia ForestWatch has been engaged in through a collaborative process for over two years. We have received and commented on the draft Environmental Assessment after close analysis of the project. We are close to agreement on much of this very large list of projects but monitoring protocol differences remain under review and discussions with Forest Service personnel continue. Much of the 6,000-plus acre proposal consists of thinning planted, off-site loblolly pine for prevention of Southern Pine Beetle infestation and we support this long overdue management. The great weakness in the environmental assessment is the lack of a longer view for moving these thousands of acres into a healthy, native forest mix. We also are perplexed by the almost universal use of prescribed fire on these stands. A smaller portion of the proposal, around 1,200 acres, consists of experimental forestry approaches to restoration of "under-represented" forest communities of montane long leaf pine and various oak-pine mixes. These projects are much more problematic due to their experimental nature, scale and lack of adequate monitoring. It should be said that ranger Michele Jones has been very cooperative and patient when discussing these issues with our staff and district leaders. A decision is forthcoming.

- **Mountaintown Scenic Bill:** It appears legislation for permanently protecting the Mountaintown area, Georgia's largest roadless area in the national forest, is stuck in the U.S. House of Representatives Resources Committee. ForestWatch staff and the Friends of Mountaintown are working every angle to assist Congressman Nathan Deal to move the bill through both Democratic & Republican sides of the Resource sub-committee on Lands & Parks. You can help by calling Nathan's Gainesville office and showing support for passage of this important legislation. (See p.13 for coordinates.)

- **Recreational Access to Mountaintown Creek:** This proposal is an attempt by the district to resolve a long standing private land trespass problem which the district created by permitting mountain bikes on the old Mountaintown Creek hiking trail back in the early 1990's. There was no scoping or public comment period on this earlier action. We are against the proposed new route and believe that this trail should be closed to bikes which presently use this steep bomb-run from the top down, crossing a primary trout stream 14 times. The steepness of the trail, consequential sedimentation plus conflict with fishermen and hikers should be enough justification for this conclusion. Recent involvement of the private landowners, who would stand to gain from the trail change, indicates that the sedimentation of Hills Lake, at the foot of the trail, is a huge issue. The Forest Service plans to meet with them. The scoping comment period has been extended to July 28 in response to their concerns.

- **Pre-Commercial Thinning and Swamp Creek Road Repair:** This project to thin160 acres of dense pine stands retaining oak and hickory for regenerating a more southern pine beetle resilient and natural forest looks good. The proposal also includes improvement of two miles of failing road along Swamp Creek. Analysis of the proposal compared to the present stand data in the agency's database indicates some discrepancies but overall this type of work is what the agency should be doing.

- **Non-Native Invasive Species:** This proposal, in conjunction with the Blue Ridge District, takes a first step toward controlling non-native invasive plant species on these districts. This is heartening. The proposal is much improved over an earlier Chattooga River District program for several reasons, chief of which is the avoidance of co-mingling the use of herbicides for forest thinning projects. We have responded to the initial scoping and look forward to a well planned and more aggressive invasives control program on the Conasauga and Blue Ridge Districts. You can help out on this important issue by sharing your knowledge of the location, extent and species of invasive plants with our forest ecologist, Darren Wolfgang, at dwolfgang@gafw.org. We will add the information to our database and pass it on to the appropriate Forest Service professional. ■

Georgia ForestWatch welcomes the following new members

James Albert
Catherine Ashford
Doug and Carla Barnes
Jeff Biggers
Annetta Bunch
Cadmus Construction
Lorna Campbell
David Carswell
Thomas Rain Crowe
Andy and Betty Jo Currie
Elizabeth Daly
Marty Dyche
Mark and Cecilia Elias
Sherrie Foley
Betsy Fowler
Cindy Halbkat
Frank and Shirley Halter
William P. Hicks III
Beckie Hilton
Alan Jenkins
Dick and Susie Jones
Linda and Rich Kumfert
Adele Kushner
Frederick C. Marland, PhD
Camissa McCurdy
Anita Michele
Edmund Mullinax
Alyce Robertson
Myles Smith
Stephanie Swann and Nancy Kropf
Bill and Cherie Thompson
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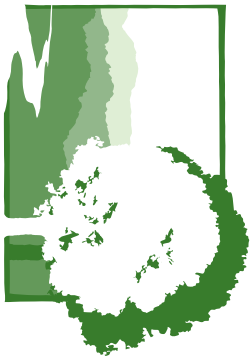

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