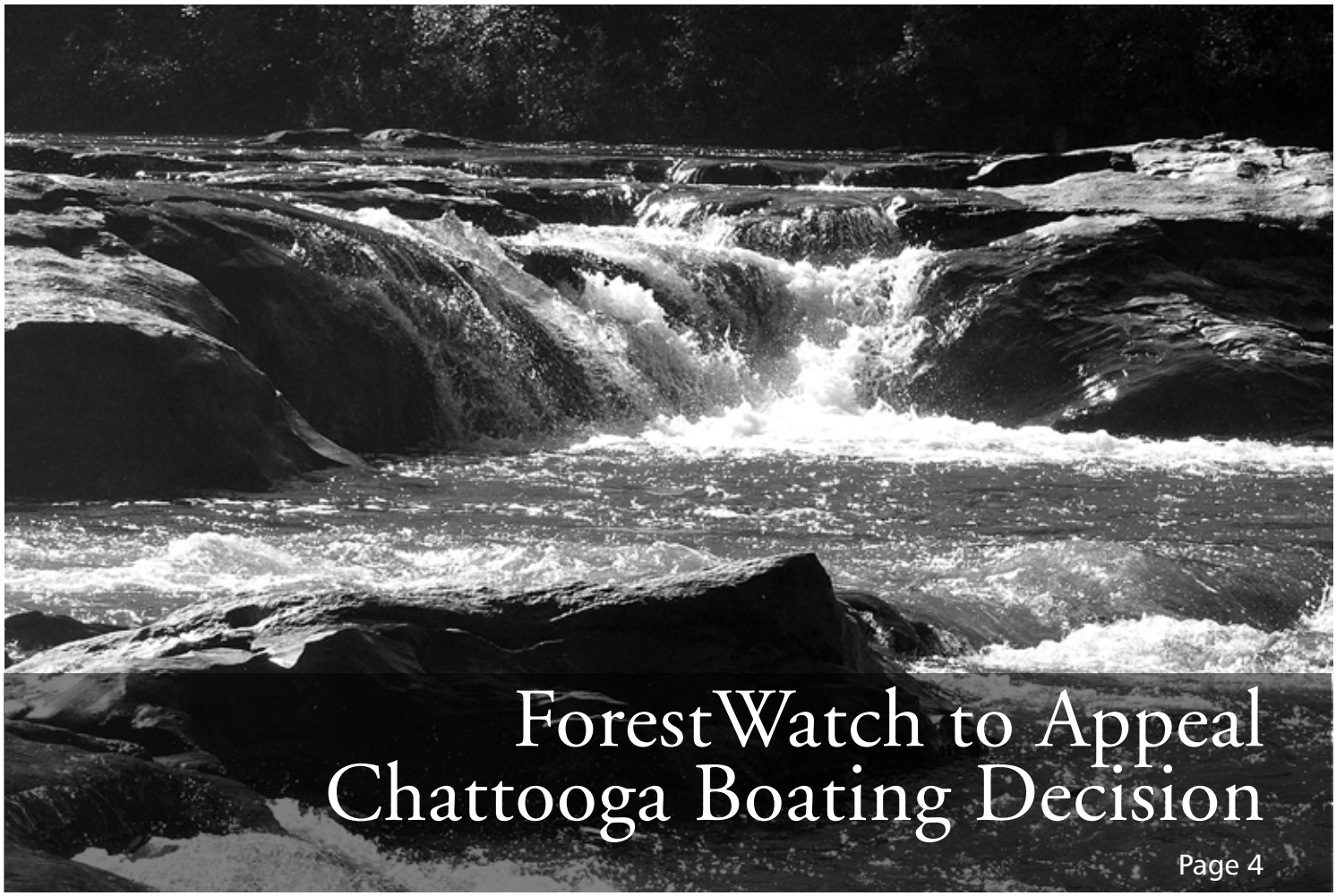
Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Fall 2009



ForestWatch to Appeal Chattooga Boating Decision

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From The Director

Be concerned, be very concerned

Wayne Jenkins
Executive Director

Five years into the evolving implementation of the 2004 Land and Resource Management Plan we have entered a new era in forest management across the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. You might call it the "Experimental Forestry Period" or the "We'll thin, cut and burn our way toward our goals" approach. I do not mean to trivialize the agency's plans or its commitment to achieving its stated goals but there does seem to be a real disconnect between what they would like to achieve, how they want to achieve it and where they want to achieve it. But first, some background for perspective.

The present Land and Resource Management Plan has the following goals across various "Prescription" areas:

- Creation of 46,239 acres Early Successional Habitat on 18 Prescription areas across 602,418 acres. These would be clear-cuts of various sizes. (The last intensive harvest program lasting from 1965 to 1996 yielded timber from 68,000 acres.)
- The 46,000 plus acres above does not include other management goals that include timber thinning and restoration harvest scattered across 461,264 acres.
- Plus 30,000 acres per year of prescribed fire. That's 300,000 scorched earth acres per decade!

Now, some management goals make sense, especially the thinning of overstocked single species pine stands and the use of prescribed fire for specific fire-associated forest types. For example, pine plantations should be thinned and managed for native tree species complexity and resilience, and certain rare forests such as table mountain and pitch pine stands should be carefully treated with fire.

And to be fair, one district is implementing over 5,000 acres of sorely needed thinning, one is in the process of analysis for nearly 6,000 acres of pine thinning and a third is part way through a similar planning approach. These projects should be enough to keep districts quite busy and create some cash flow for precommercial thinning on younger stands and road maintenance. We applaud the agency for advancing in this direction and we are satisfied that our engagement in the collaborative process has helped encourage the agency to begin managing the mess that is the legacy of thirty years of clear cutting public lands.

Unfortunately, much of the other forest Plan goals, though cloaked in the verbiage of "Ecological Management" and "Restoration," must be considered experimental and we intend to question these goals. You can review the Plan at: *www.fs.fed.us/conf/200401-plan/index.htm*. The Plan embraces an approach called "Adaptive Management" which should be understood to mean management proposals with adequate planning, monitoring and adjustment so that we learn how to return forest communities to their "ecological potential." Yet, the level of expertise evident in the active management proposals we see convinces us that the agency is challenged to get "restoration" right. We are particularly concerned with the lack of monitoring that would inform future decision making and the "one size fits all" approach. The implementation of the forest plan is beginning to look like a thin it, burn it and burn it again, forever approach for almost all the various goals.

Driven by the western wildfire crisis, nearly half of the national Forest Service annual budget is now related to fire and fuel control management. So, even on our wet mountain forests the managers design their projects around where the money is. Though ecologically wrong for much of our forests, it seems to be the way for getting things done within the bureaucracy. We have asked ourselves the obvious question, "Why?" till we are blue in the face and cannot help but suspect the problem is bureaucratic in design and budgetary in nature. ■

AT Thru-hike: Lessons on living

by Myra Kibler : ForestWatch Volunteer

The woods were always my playground and my refuge. My family moved a lot when I was a child, and each time we moved, my father would buy undeveloped land, clear it, and build a house. We always lived on the edge of the woods. For fun, I built "forts" in the woods and furnished them with a few treasures. I found cozy places in trees, spots shaped just right to form a seat with a back where I could settle in with a book for long periods. When home was not a happy place to be, I took to the woods. In my late 50s, when I hit an all time low, it isn't surprising that I took to the woods again. By this time, I was steeped in the ideas of Henry David Thoreau, Thich Nhat Hanh, William Faulkner, and Wendell Berry. Burned out in an unrewarding, soul-wearying job, anxious, overweight, not sleeping, with high cholesterol, I was a mess. The doctor said, "Lipitor." I said, "No. I'm going to change my life."

It took me three months to decide what to do, gather equipment, get my job and life in order, and walk out the door. I knew I wanted to live simply in nature. I had no cabin or desire to sit in one spot, so I decided to hike the Appalachian Trail. I could live in the woods for the season until the weather got bad. By simplifying my life to just walking, sleeping, and eating, getting along on what I could carry, and by living close to nature, I'd get my balance back. I'm enough of a romantic to believe that the natural world is healing and that we lose our balance when we get too disconnected

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StephenGA photo

Myra's starting place, Springer Mountain, Georgia

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Cover photo: Adam Drewes photo. The Wild & Scenic Chattooga River

Georgia ForestWatch to appeal Upper Chattooga boat decision

by Joseph Gatins : Chattooga River District Co-district Leader

Georgia ForestWatch will file an administrative appeal of the U.S. Forest Service's recent Decision to reverse a policy for over thirty years of managing the Upper Chattooga as a boat-free zone. The recent decision would allow kayaking during part of the year on seven miles of the Wild and Scenic Upper Chattooga River at certain flow levels. The agency proposes to allow boating under these conditions from the confluence of Norton Mill Creek, adjacent to the pristine Chattooga Cliffs, to the bridge at Burrell's Ford. This section of the river flows right through the heart of the Ellicott Rock Wilderness, prized by hikers, anglers and boaters for its isolated and wild character. The Lower Chattooga is dominated by boaters of all kinds and has lost its wild remote character as a result.

This decision reverses an earlier decision by the Forest Service to maintain the boat-free zone following protests from American Whitewater which calls the zoning of uses a ban on boating. Georgia ForestWatch believes the Forest Service's original decision to maintain the boat-free zone was a smart one, and cautions that authorizing even limited boating will prove detrimental in the long term to the protection of the Ellicott Rock Wilderness and the wild and remote character of the Upper Chattooga.

At the same time, Georgia ForestWatch applauds the parts of the Forest Service's new decision that will curb informal campsite and user-created trails in the Wilderness portion of the Upper Chattooga because these cause erosion and other resource damage, as well as management that will limit encounters in the area so that solitude is preserved.

Wayne Jenkins, executive director of Georgia ForestWatch, explains why the group will appeal, "The federal agency has been overly compromising in opening this door, which will inevitably lead to resource damage and user conflict. While we appreciate the agency's effort to better safeguard this wild area's outstandingly remarkable values by taking steps to limit the impact of hikers and campers, we believe the decision to allow boating to extend into the Upper Chattooga wild area will seriously change and degrade the 'wild and scenic' experience for the many recreationists in this backcountry Wilderness." The Forest Service's reversal is the result of constant lobbying

Joe Gatins photo

This is an example of the large woody debris that will be at risk of illegal removal by boaters due to expanded boating access on the Wild & Scenic Chattooga River. Downed wood is an important part of stream ecology.

by American Whitewater to expand boating to the entire Wild and Scenic corridor. American Whitewater's protest has resulted in more than four years of public hearings, study and analysis, expenditure of millions of dollars of taxpayer money and creation of a veritable mountain of paperwork. Recent statements by American Whitewater suggest even this newest decision may be appealed as public statements suggest the group is still disappointed because limitations in the new plan which are intended to protect the experience of other user groups limit boating access.

"The history of boating on this river – just take a look at the lower Chattooga – is that the boating industry and kayakers are never satisfied with the many miles of wild river available in this part of the south," Jenkins said. "Though the boater contingent speaks of 'fairness' and 'our rights' it is obvious to those that know the history and present condition of the river that strict zoning of the river's use is necessary to protect the experience of all users and the resource. There is no telling where opening this door will lead, but it does not bode well for a place that

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Administrative Appeal filed for controversial Watergauge project

by Wayne Jenkins : Executive Director

Southern Environmental Law Center recently filed an Administrative Appeal on behalf of Georgia ForestWatch for the *2009 Watergauge Woodland Restoration Project Decision Memo*. ForestWatch has been monitoring the Watergauge proposal since the Forest Service's "pre-scoping" session in 2008. The Forest Service's purpose for that session was to hear any issues participating citizens and conservation groups had with the project prior to releasing the scoping notice (project proposal). ForestWatch has since made several visits to the Watergauge site since the scoping process began and submitted detailed questions and concerns.

We appealed this project because district personnel used a Categorical Exclusion (CE) for the project. This means an unwillingness to conduct an Environmental Assessment to survey the impacts of the project. CEs are used for non-controversial, non-experimental proposals which have clear limits on project size and type. ForestWatch believes the Watergauge project goes well beyond the clear definition for a Categorical Exclusion.

The project proposes the removal of 34-60% of the dominant canopy trees across the 508-acre project area. Yet, the Forest Service rules under the National Environmental Policy Act generally limit CEs for timber harvest projects to 70-250 acres in size, depending on the project's purpose. The proposal also includes the use of prescribed fire within a larger 1,000-acre burn unit. Fire would be used on a 3-5 year rotational schedule in an attempt to convert the forest floor into a grassy "orchard like" condition, reminiscent of the longleaf pine woodlands found in the sandy coastal areas of the South. ForestWatch believes this type of management is both experimental and controversial. In fact, the district's response to our pre-scoping questions required 17 pages of explanation and still did not respond to all the issues we raised.

In all fairness to the district, poor soils associated with the Tallulah Dome formation several miles south of the project area do contain areas that might support a more open forest condition. Some of this area, near the Lake Russell Wildlife Management Area, contains "dry site" trees with poor form and stunted growth. Unfortunately the project area in question doesn't meet these criteria.

Despite the obvious radical and experimental nature of this proposal to attempt to convert the area into a grassy "woodland" with sparse trees, the District maintains that there would not be any environmental or ecological impacts. ForestWatch and SELC disagree!

The Watergauge project resembles the previously challenged 400-acre Brawley Mountain project. A full Environmental Assessment was conducted for the Brawley project, which proposes similar treatment to Watergauge and seeks to again convert forest to "woodland." Since Brawley and Watergauge are similar, it would seem as though similar projects would follow similar administrative and environmental evaluation processes.

Categorical Exclusions were originally established in part to allow the Forest Service to perform various emergency, custodial or routine forest management activities for small acreage projects that clearly do not have significant environmental effects, without requiring a more detailed environmental review and administrative process.

ForestWatch believes that a project resembling a 500-acre shelterwood* timber harvest that will heavily thin an existing forest and burn a thousand acres repeatedly, to suppress the natural vigorous response to increased sunlight, does not and should not fit the criteria for a Categorical Exclusion. We hope our Appeal results in the district deciding to take a closer look at the ecological and environmental implications of this project and alternatives by engaging in a full Environmental Assessment.

**Shelterwood is a forestry term referring to a forest management system that encourages the establishment of essentially even-aged reproduction under the partial shelter of seed trees.*

At press time Ranger Dave Jensen indicated his desire to rescind the Categorical Exclusion for the Watergauge project and willingness to adapt the project through further discussions with Georgia ForestWatch and Southern Environmental Law Center. ■

Mountaintown Scenic Bill still in limbo

by David Govus : Co-district Leader

On September 1, representatives of Friends of Mountaintown met to discuss the fate of the Mountaintown Scenic Bill with U.S. Rep. Nathan Deal; Chris Clark, the commissioner of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR); George Bain, supervisor of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests; Dan Forster, head of the DNR Wildlife Resources Division, and several other government officials.

This bill, drafted in 2006 and introduced by Rep. Deal, would permanently protect the 12,000-acre Mountaintown roadless area from road building and timber cutting. The bill was the result of years of effort by the Friends of Mountaintown and enjoys broad local support in Ellijay and Gilmer County where the Mountaintown area is located. Rep. Deal traveled to Gilmer County and met with over 100 citizens who supported the bill and was persuaded by broad local support that he should sponsor a bill for protecting the area. For the past three years Rep. Deal has been unable to move the bill out of the House of Representatives. This has disappointed and confused the bill's supporters as it was difficult to understand where the opposition was coming from.

The opposition is now clear. The Forest Service, which provided the map for the original bill and voiced no opposition to it at the time, now has problems with the legislation – in a significant change of heart, as do the game managers of the DNR Wildlife Resources Division. Both agencies declare that this bill would limit their management options particularly when it comes to creating "high altitude early successional habitat" (i.e. clear cuts). The DNR apparently has communicated this concern to Georgia's Senators, and, despite Rep. Deal's efforts, it is clear that the bill will not move with their opposition.

Both agencies are absolutely correct that this bill will limit their management options. That is one of the main objectives of the bill. The Forest Service in the mid 1990s would have pushed a road through and clear cut sections of the area had it not been for successful litigation on the part of the Sierra Club and Georgia ForestWatch.

The Wildlife Resources Division has one million acres of Wildlife Management Areas in Georgia, and in most of those areas they are free to cut timber and burn the forests as they see fit. The Wildlife Resources Division budget is declining with the shortfall in state revenues and decreasing hunting license sales and they have been forced to abandon some Wildlife Management Areas that they had committed significant resources to over many decades. Given this fact, it is hard to understand why the Division would seek to expand their management options when their budget will not allow them to manage the options they have.

The Forest Service's change of direction is particularly troubling. Time and again the Forest Service has asked the public to trust them to operate freely, particularly in areas like Mountaintown that have only administrative protection, yet in this instance the Forest Service in three years has changed course dramatically.

Rep. Deal suggested a meeting between the Friends of Mountaintown and the Forest Service to see if a compromise could be reached and a new map drafted. The Friends of Mountaintown has agreed to this and will attempt to find middle ground, but after a certain point, if sufficient management options are left open, the bill becomes meaningless. Congressman Deal and his staff are to be commended for staying with this process and committing his valuable time in an attempt to pass the bill. We will see if the concerned agencies are willing to make reasonable compromises for the citizens they serve. ■

How do you get your *Forest News*?

Two years ago we began offering our quarterly newsletter electronically, sending a PDF file via e-mail instead of a paper copy. Now almost 21% of our members get the electronic version of *Forest News*! This allows us to save energy and reduce our expenses.

We are also happy to continue mailing newsletters to those of you who prefer a paper copy. We appreciate knowing that it is getting passed around homes and offices, informing our community of breaking forest issues and Georgia ForestWatch happenings.

If you wish to receive your newsletter electronically or if your e-mail address has changed, do let Jill know at info@gafw.org or 706-635-8733.

Board gives warm welcomes and fond farewells

by Peg Griffith : President

The Georgia ForestWatch Board of Directors welcomes three new Directors: Goodloe H. Yancey IV joined us at the April board meeting, and Honor Woodard and Kasey Sturm joined the board in July. Congratulations and welcome to all three!

A resident of Gainesville, Goodloe H. Yancey IV is an art student, businessman, and member of the Yancey family, owners of Yancey Brothers, the Caterpillar dealer for Georgia and the nation's oldest Caterpillar Tractor dealership. Goodloe is serving on the fundraising committee, and will work to strengthen our ties in the business community, with special emphasis on Atlanta and Gainesville.

Kasey Sturm is an attorney with Stack and Associates, P.C. in Atlanta. Prior to joining the private law firm she practiced with GreenLaw, an environmental not-for-profit law firm serving Georgia. She has extensive experience working with and representing non-profit organizations on a variety of environmental issues. Her current practice focuses primarily on environmental issues such as land use and zoning issues, water quality protection, air quality issues as well as permitting and compliance. In her current practice she continues to work closely with several non-profit organizations to protect Georgia's natural resources. Kasey's expertise in environmental law will be a real asset as ForestWatch considers increasingly complex issues confronting the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.

Honor Woodard has been a co-district leader in Rabun County for some time, and was eager to expand her role to become more involved with ForestWatch. Her on-the ground experience as a district leader adds her voice to the "Watching" part of Georgia ForestWatch. Honor is also an artist, editor, photographer and teacher.

All of these contributions strengthen the skill set of the board and add new perspectives and deeper ties to the communities that we serve. Science, law, business, media and communication, education, fund-raising and politics are all essential elements of our work. Having each of these skill sets represented on the board contributes to a solid and healthy organization.

Two of these seats were filled due to the departure of Sarah Linn and Carol Kemker. Sarah was a generous supporter of our mission who worked tirelessly as our treasurer and served for years on the organizing team of our native plants sale. As an attorney, she also helped review legal documents. Carol Kemker brought her considerable scientific environmental and regulatory knowledge to the organization. She also helped plan and lead the 2008 Fall Retreat. Both will be missed on the board. We thank them for their significant contributions. ■

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Critically endangered darter spotted in Conasaug

by Lori Martell : Outreach Director

Under normal conditions it would take a rather dramatic storm event to turn the Conasauga cloudy, but this summer was not normal. "Perhaps the years of drought and low water have left the river banks bare for too long. This could allow organic matter to build up and decay on the banks--then when the rains came in August organic debris washed into the river," speculated Jim Herrig, aquatic biologist for the Cherokee National Forest. Unfortunately, these August rains came just before two ForestWatch snorkel outings. For the first time in a decade of leading these trips, visibility was a challenge.

Though disappointed that snorkelers weren't able to experience the usual glass-like clarity of the river, Jim was elated over his recent discovery. Just one week prior to the ForestWatch snorkel, Jim spotted a critically endangered Conasauga logperch for the first time since 2005! Jim beamed, "I was able to photograph it and have the sighting confirmed by two independent specialists."

Lori Martell photo

Connor Jacoby, age 7, attended the snorkel and medicinal plant walk with his father and both grandfathers.

Just one week before the ForestWatch snorkel, Jim snapped this ph the first sighting in the snorkel hole since 2005.

The Conasauga logperch, *Percina jenkinsi*, is a darter about 4.5 inches long with tiger-like vertical dark stripes over a yellowish-brown upper body. Using an almost pig-like snout, it feeds on invertebrates it finds by flipping stones. It depends on fast-flowing riffles over a clean pebble bottom. Conasauga logperch are threatened by habitat loss and any development that results in silt covering the clean pebbly stream bottoms they depend on for breeding and feeding. The stretch of river where we snorkel is healthy because it flows through an intact, mostly unroaded forest and the forested headwaters lie in the protected Cohutta Wilderness Area in Georgia. The Southeastern Fishes Council includes

a River snorkel hole

Jim Herrig photo

oto of the critically endangered Conasauga logperch. This is

the Conasauga logperch on their "Desperate Dozen" list of the twelve most imperiled fishes in the southeast.

As you can tell by the photos, the cloudy water didn't stop this year's snorkelers from having a great time. Quite a few fish were spotted in the shallower areas, and one member saw a large crayfish lurking under a rock ledge.

Want to see the unique rock-flipping behavior of the Conasauga logperch?

Watch the video at: *www.youtube.com watch?v=5MRCmz0sEOk*

Thanks to all the snorkel attendees who joined as new ForestWatch members. And, thanks to Jim Herrig for his passion and dedication. ■

Lori Martell photo

New ForestWatch members, the Gould family, had a great time at the snorkel, despite less than ideal water conditions.

Lori Martell photo

Lily, age 7, gets a helping hand from her father, Nick Jokay.

Brad Martell photo

After the snorkel, Patricia Kyritsi Howell expanded our minds and wowed us with her in-depth knowledge on a medicinal plant walk.

Open letter to our boater friends

by Wayne Jenkins : Executive Director

The Forest Service decision on whether to allow boating on the upper section of the Chattooga River is finally out and it allows a very minimal amount of boating during the winter. This may minimize conflicts with anglers, but it fails to address the larger issue of fair zoning of recreational use throughout the length and breadth of the Wild and Scenic Chattooga River.

Despite our respect for boating and our boater members and friends, Georgia ForestWatch has maintained and still believes that this section of river should remain free of boater use. The recent and rapid expansion of aggressive river running could have never been predicted thirty years ago when the former decision was made to maintain the upper river section for walk-in recreation while managing and permitting boating on the lower two thirds of the river. That decision now appears to have been prescient in its conclusion.

Without a full Scenic River analysis and some historical perspective, it might be easy to misunderstand ForestWatch's position as dislike for boating per se or boaters as a group. Nothing could be further from the truth!

Boaters and their national representative group American Whitewater have accomplished an enormous amount of good over the last fifty-five years: from boater safety education to the removal of dams, pipes and other impediments to free flowing streams all over the country. We applaud these efforts and wish AW and boaters everywhere god-speed and safe boating. Believe it or not, many Georgia ForestWatch members are boaters.

But for a fair decision on an expansion of a particular use into a new area one must ask whether the effects go beyond environmental impacts. One must also ask if the existing user's experience may be negatively affected.

Why has this become an issue now rather than thirty years ago? First, the 10-15 year re-do of National Forest Management Plans creates an opportunity to re-visit old assumptions about forest service management in many areas, recreational use being one.

Three other things have also changed. Boat design, using carefully engineered and advanced plastic molding techniques has revolutionized the sport by enabling boaters to float the most extreme sections of rivers. The Chattooga's proximity to rapidly growing cities like Atlanta and other major urban centers of the southeast combined with descending costs of well engineered boats has grown kayaking popularity and produced a dramatic increase in numbers of boaters on almost all the streams across the region. Boaters naturally desire to enjoy every stretch of river they can, even evolving to using modern, real-time internet water level reports and hopping on extremely steep and low flow segments when they are at rare high flow or flood levels. These technologies are historically new and in combination enable the presence of more boaters on more rivers more of the time.

Is it any wonder that the walking contingent of forest lovers has reacted strongly against the expansion of boating into the last vestiges of this Wild and Scenic River? Is it so mysterious that hikers, swimmers, campers, naturalists, anglers and other foot-powered citizens seek to maintain this last place for their recreational pursuits along this one-of-a-kind wild river?

Fair zoning of human use of our national forests means fair protection of various experiences. Allowing boating on the upper Chattooga, though restricted in time and limited in place, still affects the coveted experience of non-boaters. With further concerns over precedent setting, enforcement and protection of the wild Chattooga's ecological processes, ForestWatch continues to maintain that the compromise for allowing boating on the upper river will impact more than just this unique river's environment. ■

For the scoop on:

- **Chattooga boating issue visit:**
  www.gafw.org/chattooga.html

- **Forest "Stimulus" funds visit:**
  www.gafw.org/pdf_files/stimulus_funds.pdf

In Memoriam
Stephen Jeffrey Langford

Karen & Tom Aaro
Carol & Peter Abreu
Mallory Betsy
Victoria Blakeney
John & Ellie Brazee
Janet Cheshire
Charles Cumbaa
Jeanne & Leo Czervionke
Susie & John Downard
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Robert & Connie Sudlow
Renee Threatt
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Mary, Susan & Mike Webber
Helen & A. Ray Weeks, Jr.
Opal Wright & Family

Editor's note: *To learn more about celebrating the memory of your loved one through Georgia ForestWatch Memory & Honor Gifts, please contact Jill, office manager, at info@gafw.org or 706-635-8733.*

Georgia ForestWatch welcomes the following new members

Sarah Barker
Kenneth & Linda Bass
Edge of Night Camping Club
Kelly Bryson
Sheila Cantor & Stedson Linkous
John Chastain
Elise Cormier
Jan & Keith Crofford
Susan Darnell
Murphy Davis
Richard & Suzy Davis
Patricia & John Dunleavy
EarthShare Georgia
Jack & Joyce Etheridge
Virginia Ewerling
Jake Farmer
Pam & James Fox
Glen & Tammy Gould
Thomas Gaither
Georgia Organics
Letha & James Griffin
Nick Jokay
Keeping it Wild
Thomas Langley
Stephen McClure
Michael & Laura McLane
Pam Purvis & Debi Chamblee
Shannon Reisner
Sarah Roadcap
Tommy Sanders
Angela Sims
Johanna Tuttle
Morning Washburn

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!

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Upper Chattooga boat decision

(continued from page 4)

thousands of picnickers, hikers, bird watchers, anglers and hunters currently enjoy in solitude and quiet. The boaters already dominate the rest of the river," Jenkins continued.

The Forest Service often protects national forestlands by "zoning" or restricting particular areas of public lands to certain recreation groups. Four-wheeled vehicles, for example, are not permitted in congressionally designated Wilderness and horses and mountain bikes are often steered to specially designated trails to avoid user conflict and protect natural resources. Until this last decision, boaters had been given the lower two thirds of the Chattooga so anglers, hikers, hunters and plain old visitors could enjoy the headwaters without conflict.

"It seems the agency is unwilling, in this case, to firmly separate often incompatible recreational uses, even though this has worked for over thirty years," Jenkins said, "alarming and unwise!"

Conservation group Georgia ForestWatch has these primary concerns about the Forest Service's reversal of position:

- The Forest Service lacks the personnel and financial resources necessary to monitor and enforce the terms of the limited boating proposed and so boating use will actually be much greater than suggested. Once they are familiar with the area, boaters will access it if they know there is no consequence for doing so. Management of the Upper Chattooga is made many times more complex because three states, three national forests and three different ranger districts are involved. Parts of this Wilderness area are difficult to reach by foot which will make monitoring for resource damage a challenge. Managing this area is already a challenge for the Forest Service, evident in the trash and user-created trails that already mar the otherwise pristine area.
- Despite a laudable proposal to forbid removal of "large woody debris" from the Upper Chattooga, such bans have never dissuaded boaters from chain sawing out the strainers and dead and dying hemlocks that often fall into the river and nearby creeks. Such woody debris forms a key component in the aquatic food chain of cold-water rivers like the Chattooga; removing it will harm the Wilderness ecosystem.
- The put-in and take-out locations proposed by the Forest Service will put new pressures on the small parking areas along the Upper Chattooga and create new access to a section of river that is now protected by its remoteness. New access trails, many created by users and of poor quality, will further fragment this valuable and rare Wilderness area.
- Visitors who traditionally have hiked many miles to this remote section of river for the solace of solitude and back-country challenge will find their experience transformed during high water events as groups of boaters with easier access rush in to satisfy their desire for the thrills of an extreme sport, erasing the wilderness and remote character as they go.
- The Forest Service decision could be used by boater groups as a legal precedent to again try to open the much larger whitewater creeks in Yellowstone National Park. It could also be used as a precedent for other user groups to challenge and undermine agency zoning efforts.

The Forest Service study of the issue has been closely followed by dozens of organized groups and spurred the filing of thousands of letters to the agency, pro and con. For more information, and review of these comments, visit: *www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms/sumter/resources/Chattooga.php*

Of the many groups involved in this review, Georgia ForestWatch previously has found particular common cause with Wilderness Watch and the Georgia and North Carolina chapters of the Sierra Club, whose members share our concerns over the expansion of boating. ■

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AT Thru-hike

(continued from page 3)

from it. Fresh air, exercise, the rhythm of day and night – those would counteract the effects of rotating work shifts, the hellacious commute, and the joyless routine of my life. I'd walk until I found myself again.

I set out on March 3, 2000, at the age of 59, a woman alone, to walk north on the Appalachian Trail for as long as I could or until the weather turned bad. I had no particular desire to reach Mt. Katahdin. In fact a rule I made for myself was to give up being goal-oriented. I was to do the trail as a walking meditation. I wanted to change my self, and I wanted to observe the change as it happened. I was certainly very different from the 19 year olds with their GA-ME signs, who charged past me in those early days and talked of pace and mileage in the trail shelters each night. We were all thru-hikers. I called myself a thru-hiker, not because I expected to finish the trail that season but because I was committed to walking for the entire hiking season. I was there for the duration, which would be longer than most of the faster hikers would be out in the woods. Membership in the community of thru-hikers requires only declaring that you are doing a thru-hike. But I suspect I was not considered likely to be among the elite who go all the way from Springer in Georgia to Katahdin in Maine.

The first few days were the worst. At Neel's Gap, about three days in, I stumbled into the Walasa Yi store and asked for help. A kind young employee had me unload my pack, and he helped me repack it, piling off to the side things that I didn't really need. When I put the pack back on, and he showed me the adjustments I could make to all the straps on the pack, it felt for the first time like part of me.

By the time I began to get a bit of rhythm in my steps, the weather turned foul. It rained, it snowed, and it rained again. Day after day, it seemed, I was soggy. Socks once wet never dry on the trail. And cold!!! I often started walking in long johns only to have to shed them mid-morning. I quickly learned that a small tent was cozier than a trail shelter, and less crowded. In the early weeks, rain or snow meant that trail shelters would fill up, and then a few more wet hikers would wedge in. I learned that a Nalgene bottle filled with hot water is a sleeping companion.

Oatmeal is not a favorite food of mine, and the tea bags of instant coffee that were new at the time were horrible. It was hard to choke down food in the morning. Breakfast has always been my favorite meal. I love sunny side up eggs, grits, toast with marmalade, and coffee, hot, hot coffee. These became things of fantasy. I once hiked off-trail a couple of miles to a

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Get to know your forest: Intro to forest dynamics, Part 2

by Darren Wolfgang : Forest Ecologist

This continues a series exploring various topics in forest ecology. Our goal is to help members better understand the complex systems and processes that drive our national forests in Georgia.

As we explored in part one of this series, forests are wonderful and highly variable natural systems. Currently the U.S. Forest Service has identified over 100 generic forest community types or associations. Other more ecologically focused classifications further separate these types into several hundred more complex and individually unique forest communities.

New trees thrive or perish depending largely on the amount of light they do or do not receive at early stages of development. This variance is called understory shade tolerance, which loosely defines the survivability and growth strategy of a given tree species in varying light conditions beneath the shade of a closed canopy forest. When walking through a forest we observe certain tree species, in certain height or canopy positions (Suppressed, Intermediate, Co-dominant, and Dominant). That is, some trees form the upper canopy or tallest, most sunlight exposed position while others stand lower in the shade of the canopy from seedling to midstory.

We can use this general understanding of shade tolerance to inform us of how species might have been distributed in the past and what happens to species composition following disturbances such as fire, wind throw, old age mortality, hurricane, hail, and tornado damage, and more commonly timber harvesting activities. Since forest disturbances change forest light conditions, a tree's response to light or shade largely determines if it will eventually make it into the light or die before being "released."

Table 1 identifies the shade tolerance ranking of some common conifers and hardwoods of North America. One pattern that should be evident is that many of the "Southern Pines" as well as several common hardwoods are ranked as intolerant or very intolerant of shade. There is a relationship between species' ability to persist in low light conditions and their growth strategies. Oaks, for example, are classified as intermediate in shade tolerance, and subsequently can persist in the understory of a closed canopy forest for a reasonable length of time, spending most of their early life growing roots as opposed to attempting rapid vertical growth. Because of this dynamic, newly germinated Oak seedlings are often overtopped and outcompeted by other shade intolerant competitors of the same age. Yellow Poplar which is shade

Table 1: Shade Tolerance of Trees in Eastern U.S.

Hardwoods

Very Tolerant	Tolerant	Intermediate	Intolerant	Very Intolerant
Eastern hop-hornbeam American hornbeam American beech American holly Sugar maple Flowering dogwood	Red maple Silver maple Box elder* Basswood Tupelos Persimmon* Buckeyes	Yellow birch Sweet birch American chestnut White oak, Red oak Black oak American elm, Rock elm Hackberry Magnolias* White ash, Green ash Black ash	Black walnut Butternut, Pecan, Hickories Paper birch Yellow poplar Sassafras* Sycamore* Black cherry Honey locust Kentucky coffee tree Catalpas	Willows Quaking aspen Bigtooth aspen Cottonwoods Grey birch Black locust Osage orange Pin cherry

Conifers

Very Tolerant	Tolerant	Intermediate	Intolerant	Very Intolerant
Eastern hemlock Balsam fir Atlantic white cedar	Red spruce, Black spruce White spruce Northern white cedar	Eastern white pine Slash pine Bald cypress	Eastern red cedar Red pine, Pitch pine Loblolly pine Virginia pine	Tamarack Jack pine Longleaf pine

** Shade tolerance for species is uncertain.*

intolerant will typically be much taller than neighboring Oaks of the same age during the early stages of development. This happens because, upon germination, Poplar focuses all of its energy into attaining vertical growth, because it will die if it cannot reach a competitive position in the canopy where it can receive sunlight. Once the Poplar is established, growth will typically slow.

During this early growth period, roughly 30 to 40 years, if no disturbance occurs it will be difficult for oaks to attain a dominant canopy position, (if they were not already in a "competitive advantage" and able to out-compete with the newly "released" fast growing, shade intolerant species). This theory is limited in its application due to yet another layer of complexity related to soil type, which influences soil moisture, nutrient retention and availability, and root penetration. Generally speaking, "dry oaks" such as scarlet, black jack, chestnut, post, black, southern red, and white oaks have a better chance of gaining a competitive advantage on drier sites, typically uplands and upper mid slopes, due to their ability to out-compete some of their competitors who require greater soil moisture to grow vigorously. (The role of fire also influences species composition depending on the timing and frequency of the incident. Fire and its potential influence on vegetative patterns is a topic that we'll cover later in this series.)

Evidence of past land use activity such as clearing bottom land for agriculture and logging of uplands can be observed in many areas of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest, if you know what to look for. Many areas clear-cut only a few decades ago are easier to spot and are composed of many stems (individual trees) of shade intolerant species such as Virginia Pine and Yellow Poplar. Upon European settlement and more recent land clearing these species came to dominate the overstory in some areas of the national forest due to large scale disturbances such as heavy "high grading" and clear cut timbering. (If you would like to see a slide show of maps indicating the past disturbance history of what is now the Chattahoochee National Forest lands go to *www.gafw.org* and click on *About Your Forest* at the top and then *Forest History* and then the lower link, *Chattahoochee National Forest: A 200 Year History of Timber Harvest*.)

Large acreages of continuous canopy openings from these activities stimulated the shade intolerant species to grow vigorously and densely, out-competing their shade tolerant neighbors. Once again we see the critical role of light and the tolerance or intolerance of shade determining how species compete against each other for dominance. In some cases if canopy gaps are smaller in size, species that are shade tolerant will have the opportunity to "release" themselves from the understory of the forest floor if they have germinated and established several years prior to the canopy disturbance. ■

AT Thru-hike

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place called Mountain Mama's that advertised in leaflets left in trail shelters. I got there for breakfast, only to find that eggs were powdered eggs, scrambled. Definitely, eggs were the food I missed most, and after I gave up the postal box method of re-supply and began buying food in stores, I'd buy a dozen eggs, hard boil them, and pack them into spots in my pack where they wouldn't get squashed.

Adjustment after adjustment, life very gradually, in tiny, often indiscernible ways, got easier. The anxiety which I felt every day in the first month or so, faded. I enjoyed the routine of my life. I rose before daylight each morning and started heating water on my stove, set up outside the door of my tent each night. In the dark, I'd retrieve my bag of food, hung out of reach of bears and mice and raccoons. And I'd eat my oatmeal, washed down by hot coffee as I watched the daylight gather. At some point I realized that the combination of coffee and oatmeal was good, and I ate two packets of oatmeal each morning. I could pack in low light and be on the trail by the time I could see my footing well enough to walk. Those first hours on the trail, I was out front. Most other hikers, especially the young ones, slept in until good daylight. I'd break the overnight cobwebs, see a few animals, and enjoy the solitude. As the day went on, companions from the trail shelter would pass me, hot-footing towards Katahdin. Some of them, I'd never see again. Often, though, I'd catch up with others in a trail town or back on the trail after a trip home. Tortoise and hare. When I was tired, I stopped and rested. When I was hungry, I ate. Trail food was cheese or peanut butter and crackers; an apple or orange was a luxury of a resupply or gift from a trail angel. Trail angels are people who leave gifts, usually food, near road crossings, or help hikers in some other way. I once came across a bag of oranges hanging from a tree, a happy surprise.

I liked getting to a trail shelter by five in the afternoon; being later made me anxious. I rarely slept in the shelter, but I knew water was there. Occasionally I would carry water and camp in the woods if the trail shelters weren't spaced right for me. But I liked the company of other hikers at night. In camp I'd take water into the woods and do a thorough wash. Then I'd put on dry camp clothes that I slept in, never hiked in. The feeling: magnificent. I usually ate in the company of other people at the trail shelter. Then I'd sort my pack, hang my food, set up my kitchen for morning, and crawl into my tent to read. As it got dark, I fell asleep. ■

Part two of this article will appear in the next issue of Forest News.

Patch-nosed salamander discovered in Georgia

A tiny salamander living in the leaf litter along a north Georgia stream caused a big ruckus in the world of wildlife biology when a graduate student's discovery turned out to be the second smallest salamander ever discovered in the U.S.

When he found the little slithery creature, University of Missouri graduate student Bill Peterman was visiting a research team headed by Professor John Maerz of the University of Georgia's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources.

Experts from multiple universities determined the discovery of the patch-nosed salamander was quite significant indeed. Peterman's discovery was not only the second smallest ever and a new species, but a whole new genus. A new genus of four-footed creatures hasn't been discovered in the U.S. for 50 years, so it's no wonder the research was published recently in the Journal of Zoology.

This newbie salamander is another in a long list of at least 58 for Georgia, more than a 10th of the world's species.

UGA photo

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