Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Spring 2010

In praise of *Castor Canadensis*

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From The Director

Wild Silence

Wayne Jenkins
Executive Director

Take a moment. Just listen. What do you hear? A car going down your street? The jet passing overhead? The roaring ATV or motorcycle tearing down a nearby road? The low hum of your computer? Is it quiet enough that you can hear a ringing in your ears or your own heartbeat? Is what you hear pleasant? Man-made or natural?

Most of us seldom pause long enough to consider the sounds around us unless they are particularly annoying or very beautiful. Despite our usual inattentiveness most of us are bathed in unacknowledged sound everyday. Rarely do we consider what affect the sounds in our lives have upon us. We are unconscious of the sounds around us, melting into a background drone we mostly ignore. We neither really listen nor enjoy much of the sound in our daily lives.

There is a change when we take to woods or stream for a hike, go fishing or take time to enjoy the outdoors in any number of ways. Our attention to sound shifts. Surrounded by the sound-scape of a natural place we pay more attention, returning to our full senses, awash, we hope, in natural sound. We unconsciously seek and expect to hear only the babbling brook, the sighing wind and singing birds, the crunching leaves underfoot. The sounds of any natural place create a sound mix which is a unique signature of that place at any given moment in time which tells a complex, unique and beautiful story.

> "It is not a matter of choosing between what is doable and what is not when making a stand. One chooses between what is right and wrong. And when you are alone in nature the difference between right and wrong sharpens, often becomes blatantly obvious. Silence gives me the strength to be a good Earth citizen. I know that it is right to save silence. I do not know if silence can be saved. Saving silence will take many voices."
>
> – Gordon Hempton
> from "*One Square Inch of Silence*"

Are we listening? What do we really hear? Unless we are far removed from city and neighborhood, highways and even back country roads, we hear a kind of pollution most of us give little thought to. The increasing cacophony of our society is everywhere, even when we strive to escape it.

In north Georgia many of us seek temporary relief and spiritual renewal when we venture into those few large forest areas left in our national forest, our Wilderness and Roadless areas. Yet even in these remotest of places, in the wild heart of our largest wild lands, the unwanted racket of man intrudes, marring the streams liquid notes, the winds sighing through the trees, the woodpeckers drumming.

All these musings are inspired by the thought provoking book, "*One Square Inch of Silence*" by Gordon Hempton; Free Press, Simon & Shuster, Copyright 2009. "The landscape of America is sick and losing its voice," claims the author. "The dawn and dusk chorus of native birds is changing as species numbers decline while the background sounds of nature must compete with civilizations growing din to reach our ears." "Most people have the illusion that there are still quiet places on planet Earth, but that's not the case," Mr. Hempton states. After recording natural and manmade sound all over the world, the author visited many of our National Parks and estimates intervals undisturbed by man-made noise rarely exceed a few minutes. A few minutes!

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2009 Volunteer of the Year: Joe Gatins

Georgia ForestWatch is a member organization. Our small and excellent staff does a lot, but we count heavily on member-volunteers to do everything from ground-truthing forest service projects and other potential impacts, to leading hikes, to raising funds for us. Some members do all of those and more. Joe Gatins is such a person.

Joe began his work with ForestWatch as a district leader for the Chattooga River Ranger District in 2003 (work he continues today, co-leading with Honor Woodard.) Joe reads all of the Forest Service scoping notices for his district, and participates in writing the organization's response to many of them. That process involves consulting with the ForestWatch staff and getting out to see the site of the proposed work. Often it includes talking with lawyers, or even finding pro-bono attorneys to help craft our response.

Joe Gatins: 2009 Volunteer of the Year

As the board president from 2004-06, Joe guided the board through year-long planning for membership and development growth. Continuing as a member of the board of directors, he chairs the Fundraising Committee. The financial health of the organization is due in large part to Joe's tireless fundraising efforts. He pens hundreds of appeal requests and thank you notes each year, putting his personal touch on most fundraising correspondence. When needed, Joe drives to Atlanta to call on foundations in person, and edits grant proposals and progress updates. And he recently participated in creating a new three-year strategic plan for the organization.

As if those things weren't enough, every year Joe plans the spring "Wild and Woolly Benefit." Thanks to this winter's plentiful rains, this years' event on May 1st will again offer native plants for sale. (See information about the event on page 9 of this issue.)

It's clear Joe is passionate and tireless when it comes to supporting Georgia ForestWatch. Thanks to his inviting personality many folks have discovered ways to get more involved or join as new members. That's why Joe Gatins was honored as the 2009 Volunteer of the Year. Thanks Joe! ■

Contact Information
Georgia ForestWatch

www.gafw.org

15 Tower Rd. Ellijay, GA 30540
706-635-TREE (8733)

Georgia ForestWatch is a 501(c)3
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Forest News edited by Wayne Jenkins and Peg Griffith.
Layout by Eleanor Thompson.

STAFF
Wayne Jenkins, Executive Director
Jill Gottesman, Outreach Director
Darren Wolfgang, Forest Ecologist
Office Manager, Position open

BOARD MEMBERS
Ted Doll, President
Kasey Sturm, Secretary
Ida Long, Treasurer
Andy Edwards
Joe Gatins
David Govus
Peg Griffith
Robin Hitner
Bob Smiles
Honor Woodard
Goodloe Yancey IV

ADVISORS
Butch Clay
Sarah Francisco
Bob Kibler
Brent Martin
Charles Seabrook
James Sullivan

GEORGIA FORESTWATCH DISTRICT LEADERS

Chattooga Ranger District
Joe Gatins 706-782-9944
(Rabun & Towns counties)
Wally Warren 706-754-0150
(Habersham, Stephens & White counties)
Honor Woodard 706-212-7924
(Rabun County)

Conasauga Ranger District
Robin Hitner 678-294-3256
(Chattooga, Gordon, Murray, Floyd, Walker & Whitfield counties)
David Govus 706-276-2512
Wayne Jenkins 706-635-8733
(Fannin & Gilmer counties)

Oconee National Forest
JP Schmidt 706-613-8483
Caleb Walker 706-248-4910
Larry Winslett 404-375-8405
(Greene, Jasper, Jones, Monroe, Morgan, Oconee, Oglethorpe & Putnam counties)

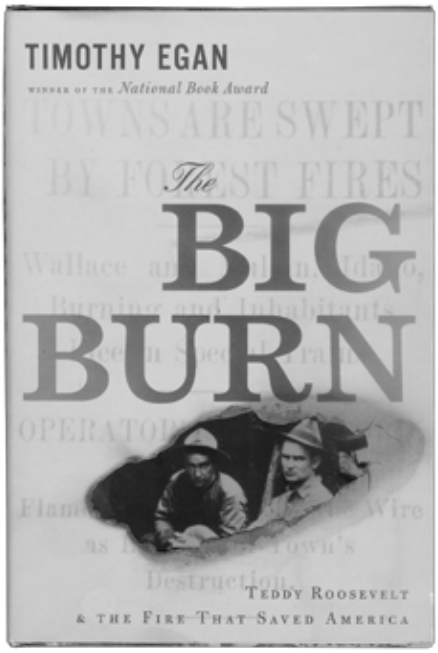
Blue Ridge Ranger District
Howard Markel 770-781-5418
Dennis Stansell 706-747-5892
(Dawson & Towns counties)
Jim Walker 706-273-3465
(Fannin, Gilmer, Lumpkin and Union counties

Cover photo: ShutterStock

Book review: *The Big Burn*

by Jim Walker : Blue Ridge Co-district Leader

The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America, by Timothy Egan
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009, 336 pages



A fascinating read on fire, *The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America*, tells the story of the great conflagration of the Northern Rockies in August 1910. The big burn was the largest forest fire America has ever seen, a wind-driven firestorm that consumed "three million acres in barely two days." That is four times the size of the entire Chattahoochee National Forest! It is a dramatic story indeed, with thousands of people fighting for a place on evacuation trains leaving soon-to-be-destroyed towns and others, first fighting the fire and then fighting to save their own lives.

Despite the book's title, the big burn is not its main subject; Egan uses the fire as a frame within which he tells the story of the establishment of forest reserves – what we now know as our national forests – and the creation of the U.S. Forest Service. The heroes of the big burn were rangers of the newly created Forest Service such as Joe Halm and Ed Pulaski, whose stories are told in the book. The political heroes of the fight to save public lands were Teddy Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot.

Roosevelt, as president, more than tripled the area of forest reserves, adding over 100 million acres, much of it single-handedly in the face of ferocious opposition from robber barons plundering the country's public lands, and their corrupt political lackeys. For my money, he was the greatest conservationist in the history of this country, at least in terms of his accomplishments. Without Teddy Roosevelt, this country would be a much different, poorer place, and he deserves his place on Mount Rushmore.

Pinchot, whom Roosevelt appointed as the first chief of the Forest Service, was certainly a very strange fellow, but he knew what he wanted and how to get things done, often through his close friendship with Roosevelt. After reading *The Big Burn*, I have a more balanced view of him than primarily as John Muir's opponent in the Hetch-Hetchy dam fight. And Pinchot brings the story close to our neck of the woods, since his truly bizarre love affair with his fiancé began during his time at the Biltmore Estate just up the road in Asheville.

The Big Burn contains two stories, one of the fire itself and the other of the fight to conserve public lands. If the former is more dramatic, the latter is undoubtedly more significant in its consequences, more so even than the ruin of millions of acres of timber, the total destruction of numerous towns, and the loss of over 100 lives. Egan tells them both well.

(Editor's note: Georgia ForestWatch intends to provide more book reviews on forest and environmental issues. Check our website later this spring at www.gafw.org.)

You might also like…

Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildland and Rural Fire
By Stephen J. Pyne
University of Washington Press, 1997
Paperback, 654 pages.)

Stephen J. Pyne literally wrote the book on fire in America. The book is recommended reading for anyone seriously interested in the interrelation of fire and forests and how the fire policies of the U.S. Forest Service has changed over the years. This comprehensive account is sometimes mind-numbingly bureaucratic. But don't be dissuaded; if you are looking for solid information on wildland fire, read this book.

In praise of *Castor Canadensis*, the ever-industrious North American beaver

by Darren Wolfgang : Staff Forest Ecologist

Weighing in at nearly 40 pounds, the beaver is North America's largest rodent. Beavers are semi-aquatic herbivores that live in small colonies, usually consisting of a monogamous mated pair and their offspring, called kits. Beavers become sexually mature at age two, and at that time leave the colony and start their own adult lives in a nearby location. Beavers spend a great deal of time in the water and have several interesting aquatic adaptations including nictitating membranes (transparent third eyelids allowing them to see underwater), valvular ears and nose, webbed feet, a large flat rudder tail and perhaps most interesting, a pair of lips located behind their front teeth that allow beaver to carry sticks without taking water into their mouth.

The ecological value of these nocturnal and secretive animals is surpassed by few other species. The beaver is referred to as a "keystone species" because numerous other species depend on the beaver for their existence. Beavers actively work to create wetlands and temporary ponds, which are eventually abandoned and allowed to revert back to forest. Their activities produce habitat for rare plants, fish, amphibians, reptiles, and numerous species of birds, including neo-tropical migrants and waterfowl. The ecological value of beavers is reflected in the fact that nearly half of North America's endangered species are associated with the habitats they create and maintain. The Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee found that 81% of the state's threatened and endangered species are associated with the successional processes influenced by beaver.

An oversimplified, but illustrative example of these cyclical successional stages goes as follows: beavers dam a stream and clear all vegetation. Silt and nutrients accumulate behind the dam. When the beaver abandon the area, water levels decrease, giving rise first to grasses and wetland plants, then pioneer shrubs and trees, followed by eventual reforestation.

Since beaver once occupied entire watersheds up to headwater streams, such beaver-induced habitat were distributed in a "chain like" fashion, up and down the stream. Nearly 100 years of drastically reduced beaver populations in the Southern Appalachians could account for the rarity and great distances between threatened and endangered plant populations.

The value of beaver-associated wetland systems is not limited to flora and fauna. Such wetlands serve as a natural water filtration system, in the sense that they capture and break down sediment, nutrients, and even agricultural pollution, resulting in cleaner water from the outflow of the beaver wetland. By the early 1900s, beavers were almost wiped out from North America due to the draining of wetlands for agriculture as well as the demand for timber, and beaver pelts for the fur trading industry. Estimates of the current populations across the beaver's historic range are as low as five percent of those present prior to European settlement.

Despite the population rebound in some areas not much has changed for beavers; humans are still their greatest threat. Many public and private land owners and managers kill or remove beavers, or simply breach their dams, because they can damage timber, clog road drainage culverts, flooding roads and agricultural lands. Human activities have made it difficult for beavers to play their incredibly important role across large areas of the landscape.

However, land managers can explore alternative measures to attempt to coexist with beaver. Alternatives they might consider include placement of larger road culverts that are more difficult for beavers to plug. Modification of beaver dams by careful installation of metal or plastic pipe with baffles or wire guards can maintain an intended water depth and control flooding in sensitive areas. The most cost efficient strategy for conservation of beavers and the species associated with them is to reintroduce them to National Forests and Parks where they can reestablish the ecological balance of the land while simultaneously increasing diversity and human interest.

Finally, it is worth noting that beaver work for free and can assist forest managers to attain specific wildlife goals in an age of tight budgets. The active management approach to forest restoration can benefit from embracing the primary ecological role of beavers across the public landscape, gaining the many benefits of this remarkable creature at an economic savings to the taxpayer. A win for beaver and humans! ■

Noise pollution and natural quiet

by David Govus : Conasauga Co-district leader

Comprising over 800,000 acres, most of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests are within a two-hour drive from metro Atlanta and its more than six million residents. In the early part of the 20th century the Forest Service was given authority by Congress to purchase land in the eastern United States for the purpose of protecting watersheds. Over the years our national forests have taken on many other roles, not the least of which is as a haven for those seeking peace and quiet while engaged in nature based recreation such as hiking, botanizing, bird watching, fishing, hunting, picnicking, painting or nature photography.

Noise pollution has been identified as a significant problem in many modern urban areas. Human-created sounds create a din that can adversely affect human and animal wellbeing. People exposed to noise pollution suffer from hearing loss, sleep deprivation, chronic fatigue, anxiety, hostility, depression and hypertension. The World Health Organization, National Institute of Health, United Nations and numerous scientific and medical publications recognize noise pollution and its negative effects. The Chattahoochee and Oconee forests, with their close proximity to a major metropolitan area, are well suited to provide a respite from the ever-increasing clamor of modern urban living.

Unfortunately, our right to be free from noise pollution in our national forests is being threatened by illegal motorcycle noise. During good weather thousands of motorcycles, often in large caravans, ride through these national forests. A significant percentage of motorcyclists choose to have their stock exhaust systems illegally modified to make more noise. Riding a motorcycle through the national forest is a perfectly legal, and judging from the numbers of riders, an enjoyable pastime that anyone has a right to do. What no one has a right to do is to create noise by altering the stock muffler on his or her bike. Removing stock mufflers is not only illegal, but it destroys fellow citizen's enjoyment of the national forest.

In 1982 the Environmental Protection Agency passed a regulation that all motorcycles sold in the United States can emit no more than 80 decibels and that the frame of the motorcycle and the muffler must be stamped with matching labels to prevent tampering. Europe, Japan and Australia have more restrictive noise standards for motorcycles and require an annual inspection to ensure that the 'label match' has not been tampered with.

According to the excellent website NoiseOff (http://www.noiseoff.org), it is estimated that over 50 percent of all Harley Davidson motorcycles have illegally modified exhaust systems. A Harley with straight pipes can emit over 100 decibels. The decibel scale is logarithmic, so an increase of 20 decibels equates to thousands of times over the legal limit. With legal mufflers even a Harley Davidson sounds barely louder than an automobile. If a motorcycle roars then the exhaust system has been modified.

Communities across the country have started to fight back and pass local legislation banning illegal motorcycle noise using 'label match' as a foolproof simple tool, but always in the face of stiff opposition from the motorcycle lobby. Modifying stock exhaust systems is a multimillion-dollar industry. It is unclear why the existing federal regulations cannot be enforced as they are by local or state law enforcement.

Georgia Forest Watch supports motorcyclists who enjoy the roads while riding quietly and safely. What we cannot support is the illegal alteration of motorcycles to increase noise output. We encourage all members to support a requirement for annual motorcycle inspections, which will include a label match check, to assure that factory-issued mufflers have not been altered.

NoiseOff (http://www.noiseoff.org) has a complete primer on how localities can craft legislation banning this nuisance and ensuring Americans the freedom from unnecessary illegal noise that they are entitled to. We encourage all members and friends who have comments, thoughts or questions on the issue to contact Georgia ForestWatch at info@gafw.org. ■

A fond farewell to Lori Martell and a wild and woolly welcome to Jill Gottesman

In the forest, strong trees are sometimes felled by natural events, like lightning or a microburst of wind. This gives understory trees, some of which may have been waiting for years, an opening to rapidly grow to fill the resulting gap in the canopy.

Photo by: Oren Kleinberger

Jill Gottesman: New Outreach Director

Just as forests have their natural successions, so does ForestWatch. Our Outreach Director, Lori Martell has moved on to begin a new adventure with her husband. Brad and Lori have moved to Independence, Missouri, where he is beginning a new job as Minister of Peace and Justice with the Community of Christ. Brad recently completed his course work for the Ph.D. in Religious and Environmental Education. In his new position, he will work with local churches in troubled communities like Haiti.

Lori will be taking some time off to pursue her interests in art and gardening. Reportedly, she'll have her own studio in their new home. Lori is also a minister in the Community of Christ, and we're sure she'll be heavily involved with the church as well. And ForestWatch may call on her from time to time as a consultant for Outreach issues and projects.

Our sincere thanks go out to Lori for the outstanding job she did with ForestWatch. She helped take the organization through a re-branding effort that gave us a consistent "look and feel", took a major role in getting our new membership campaign rolling, and was the driving force behind the successful adoption of our new computerized membership database system, as well as performing the myriad of other duties that outreach entails.

Though we are sad to lose Lori, we are excited that Jill Gottesman has "hit the ground running" as the new Outreach Director. Jill has worked with ForestWatch for about 14 months, and has impressed everyone with her skills, energy, and commitment. She has a Master of Social Work degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and a Bachelor of Science in Outdoor Recreation Resource Management from the University of Georgia. She included field studies with the Sierra Institute of the University of California at Santa Cruz as part of her undergraduate curriculum, studying natural history and wilderness education while backpacking through southeastern Utah. She has eleven years of volunteer and work experience with outdoor programs, schools, and nonprofit organizations, including working with adolescents in residential wilderness programs with the Stone Mountain School of Black Mountain, NC, and completing a graduate field placement at the Community Foundation of Henderson County in Hendersonville, NC.

Our best wishes to Lori and our thanks to Jill for taking on the huge job of Outreach at Georgia ForestWatch! ■

Save the date!

Come One, Come All!
2010 ForestWatch Retreat
Saturday, September 25
Vogel State Park

Photo by: Lori Martell

Brent Martin with the Wilderness Society & past GFW Executive Director will be our main speaker.

Lodging available for Friday & Saturday nights – Limited number of cabins & tents sites available for additional fee.
Please contact Jill Gottesman to reserve 706-635-8733 or jgottesman@gafw.org

Come just for the day or make a weekend of it.
Day Fee: only $20 per person (includes 2 meals, beverages & all programs)
$5 park entrance fee.

2010 Wild and Scenic Film Festival packs the house

by Jill Gottesman : Outreach Director

On Sunday, March 7th, friends of the environmental movement packed the house at the Tara Cinema in Atlanta for the 8th annual Wild & Scenic Environmental Film Festival. Organized and hosted by the South Yuba River Citizens League and premiered in Nevada City, California, this was the third year Georgia ForestWatch, Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, and Georgia River Network have collaborated to bring the festival to Atlanta.

The goal of the event is to highlight films that bring the importance of conservation issues down to local and personal levels, leaving viewers feeling educated and motivated to go out and make a difference in their community and world. This year more than 233 attendees and volunteers viewed the eight independent films and shorts. ForestWatch member Donna Born said she "especially enjoyed the film on organic farming. People need to realize where their food comes from ... and the industrial farmers are focused on making a profit. They are not focused on the consumer's health. The organic farmers are truly dedicated to protecting the land and producing a healthful product."

Human interaction with the forests was highlighted in two films at this year's film festival. "Ascending the Giants" offers a glimpse at the rarely seen ecosystems within the canopy of some of our nation's largest trees. A group of climbers is helping to share this view as well as the message that we must understand and appreciate the role these trees play in order to protect them and their forest communities. "Planting Hope" tells the story of Wangari Maathai, who saw the destruction of the ecological and social fabric of her Kenyan village home and launched the Green Belt Movement that not only planted millions of trees, but brought hope and self sufficiency back to her village.

Photo by: Oren Kleinberger

Festival goers talk about the environment with Jill Gottesman and Wayne Jenkins (left).

Of the two longest films, "What's organic about Organic?" looks beyond the eco-label of the grocery store to see how organic farming benefits our land and communities. The film also exposes hidden costs of conventional agriculture. In the documentary "Bag It" an average citizen makes the resolution to stop using plastic bags at the grocery store and is led on a journey to follow the path of plastic after it is thrown away. He moves through our relationship with plastic on social, environmental, economic, and personal levels, and is illuminated by new and complex understanding. The film "Big River" is a sequel to "King Corn," which documents two students from Boston who decided to conventionally farm an acre of corn in Iowa and follow its path in the marketplace. In "Big River" they return to their acre after the 2008 floods and follow the path of the chemicals they used as the runoff joined the water flow, touching lives from the farm family they worked with in Iowa all the way to fishermen in the Gulf Coast. These three films drove home the connections between human activity and our global ecological networks in personal and powerful ways.

After the program, Georgia ForestWatch Executive Director Wayne Jenkins asked the audience to take a deep breath. Then he asked if they felt more informed than when they arrived, and if they felt motivated to act. "The answers were a resounding 'YES!' People were touched by these films. People were changed. They came out from the films informed, not happy – perhaps frightened a bit, but empowered to make changes. All of the films offered solutions, and folks left inspired to make small changes in their lives that collectively make a huge difference in protecting the living planet and ourselves."

Partnerships and connections with our fellow conservation groups is an important part of the WSFF. With participation

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Encore for Wild & Woolly Plant Sale & Book Festival

by Joseph Gatins : Chattooga Co-district Leader

Mark your calendars today for May Day, Saturday, May 1, for the 2010 Georgia ForestWatch Wild & Woolly Native Plant Sale & Book Festival – an event not to be missed.

This annual benefit is a celebration of nature, the written word, and Southern Appalachian folkways. It offers hearty local food and wine and includes hundreds of native plants (now that the recent drought is over), and a host of local and regional authors. It will be held this year at the Sheehan Barn, a lovely spot nestled in the Persimmon Creek Valley of Rabun County (directions below.)

None of the plants are taken from public lands, but rather are provided by local growers Scott Creek Nursery, Jennie Branch Nursery, Jack Johnston Natives and Mill Gap Farm. A selection of hardy ferns, native flowers, plants and tree seedlings are available.

The list of authors is growing, including Dr. Barbara Duncan, Education Director of the Museum of the Cherokee, poets Mildred Greear and Laurence Holden; the "Wild Gardener" from Asheville, Peter Loewer; Wilderness advocate and Atlanta author, Melissa Walker, who will be launching an engaging new book set in north Georgia, *A Place for Delta*, as well as local authors Fran Moeller Gatins, Hoke Shirley and Charles H. Souther.

Local food and refreshment is coordinated by Whitney Denham from Grapes & Beans in Clayton. Raffle items include a hand woven basked from Jan Stansell; a signed, limited-edition photograph from Peter McIntosh, and outdoor gear from Patagonia. And, oh, music from Celtic fiddler Marie Dunkle!

Photo by: Joseph Gatins

The festival this year will be held at the well-appointed Sheehan Barn.

Wild & Woolly
NATIVE PLANT SALE AND BOOK FESTIVAL

Photo by: Lori Martell

Dedicated plant sale volunteers Helen Meadors and Sarah Linn helped last year.

"We started this event on a wing-and-a-prayer at Tiger Mountain Vineyards six years ago and now see that it has blossomed into one of the main events of the social calendar for this region," said Wayne Jenkins, executive director for Georgia ForestWatch. "It's also a good time for all ForestWatch members and friends to reconnect every year.

"And remember, it's an 'affordable fundraiser,'" Jenkins added. The organization asks for a $20 donation per adult to attend the event. Look for invitations in the mail in early April, as well as on the ForestWatch website: www.gafw.org. Or contact 706-635-8733 if you wish to reserve a spot for your party.

Directions to Sheehan Barn, Rabun County, Georgia.
Directions (from the intersection of U.S. 76 and Persimmon Road.) Proceed 0.9 miles north on Persimmon Road to intersection on right with Persimmon Creek Road. Proceed on Persimmon Creek Road 3.1 miles to left intersection with Blue Ridge Gap Road. Proceed 1.1 miles on Blue Ridge Gap Road to barn property on right at 2839 Blue Ridge Gap Road, Clayton, GA 30525. ■

Planning for the future

by Peg Griffith : Past President, GFW Board of Directors

Every now and then it is good as an organization to step back and review what we're doing right, what we could do better, and what we're missing. Lead by our current President, Ted Doll, the Georgia ForestWatch board, district leaders, some founding members and advisors are doing just that. The outcome will be a three-year revision to the current strategic plan. Rather than being just some pie-in-the-sky wish list, the plan will guide the annual staff work plans, focus the board's fundraising and policy positions, and inform the district leaders' efforts on the ground.

Georgia ForestWatch was created in response to the damaging clear-cuts occurring on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests in the 1980s. Nearly 25 years later, clear-cutting has stopped, but the work of protecting our forests has not. New threats have emerged and the issues have become more complex. It's time to look at today's issues to determine where to focus our efforts. We also need to ensure that we have the organizational support to address those issues.

As a baseline, it became clear that all existing initiatives should remain in place, but we gave them priorities, so the staff knows where to spend their time. And we focused some energy on some new areas. Noteworthy changes are:

1. Programmatic issues receiving more emphasis will be
   - Science-based forest management. For example, on any proposed project, will the forest soils be affected? Has consideration been given to the entire ecosystem (plants, animals, water, air) or only the trees? What is planned for on-going monitoring? Is there benchmark data against which "success" can be measured? What are the criteria for judging "success?"
   - Protecting waterways and watersheds. The Chattahoochee-Oconee Forests are the headwaters for the water supplies of Atlanta and many other Georgia communities, so we've always cared about the water. The recent drought, burgeoning recreational use and approaching increase in active forest managment directs us to be even more vigilant.
   - Working collaboratively with recreational groups using the forests. Only an hour or two from Atlanta, our national forests are considered "urban forests." We want the public to enjoy their woods, but are we "loving them to death"? What is "appropriate usage"? How can recreation be in balance with the ecology and each other's way of enjoying the forest? This sticky issue is becoming ever more complex.
2. Organizationally, we identified some planning needed to better position us for the future:
   - Expand the District Leader program and recruit younger volunteers to become "the next generation" of leaders.
   - Increase the number of outings we do, with special emphasis on intergenerational outings.
   - We also desire to expand our Atlanta presence and membership.

These are just the big items – there is always a lot to do – but the groundwork has been laid for the next three years. Want to help? Contact one of the staff, district leaders, or board members to start the discussion. It's YOUR forest. ■

U.S. Senate

Senator Saxby Chambliss
U.S. Senate, 416 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-3521
Fax: 202-224-0103
E-mail via web form: chambliss.sentate.gov
>contact us >email
-or-
Regional Representative Darren Kendall
c/o Sen. Saxby Chambliss
100 Galleria Parkway, Suite 1340
Atlanta, Georgia 30339
770-763-9090
Fax: 770-226-8633
E-mail: darren_kendall@chambliss.senate.gov

Senator Johnny Isakson
U.S. Senate, 120 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-3643
Fax: 202-228-0724
E-mail: http://isakson.senate.gov/contact.cfm
-or-
Field Representative Denise Clopton
c/o Sen. Johnny Isakson
One Overton Park
3625 Cumberland Blvd., Suite 970
Atlanta, Georgia 30339
770-661-0999
Fax: 770-661-0768
E-mail: denise_clopton@isakson.senate.gov

U.S. House of Representatives

Representative Nathan Deal
P.O. Box 1015
Gainesville, GA 30503
770-535-2592 • Fax: 770-535-2765
E-mail: http://www.house.gov/deal/contact/default.shtml

Representative Paul Broun
560 Falls Road
Toccoa, GA 30577
706-886-1008 • Fax: 706-886-1009
E-mail: http://www.house.gov/writerep

Representative Jim Marshall
682 Cherry St., Suite 300
Macon, GA 31201
478-464-0255 • Toll-free: 877-464-0255 • Fax: 478-464-0277
E-mail: http://www.house.gov/writerep

2010 Wild and Scenic Film Festival

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from Georgia Organics, Patagonia, and REI the message is underscored that the issues from the festival connect the work of all of these groups. "Working with Georgia Forest Watch and Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper to offer the Wild and Scenic Film Festival gives us the opportunity to connect with more people who care about the environment and want to learn what they can do to get involved and how each of our organizations give them an opportunity to be involved in protecting the places they love and the things they value", noted April Ingle, Executive Director of the Georgia River Network. Film attendees visited the information booths of the participating groups, collecting information and joining the organizations.

Outside, featured guest Holt Webb offered tours of his motor home. Holt has been traveling the country, powering his vehicle with waste vegetable oil and biodiesel, to promote his photography project Vanishing America.

We wish to thank everyone who made the event such a great success! We are grateful for our partners at Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper and Georgia River Network, as well as our local film festival sponsors: Turner Broadcasting Systems, Turner Foundation, Patagonia Atlanta, SweetWater Brewing Company, REI, Vonnie's Greens, 7 Visuals, Whole Foods Market, Cadmus Construction, Chevron and 92.9 Dave FM. And most important of all we wish to thank the attendees who were willing to be educated, challenged, and motivated to act! ■

Roadless protection bill in limbo

The nearly six year effort to permanently protect the Mountaintown roadless area, Georgia's largest roadless area, has hit a major snag. Congressman Nathan Deal has announced that he will join the Georgia gubernatorial race. Mr. Deal announced he would resign from his congressional duties early to concentrate on the new campaign. Congressman Deal has worked closely with local citizens of north Georgia to craft legislation to protect the popular 13,000 acre area with National Scenic Area status. The local group, the Friends of Mountaintown, which has doggedly spearheaded the push for protection, now seek to inform and educate the candidates for Congressman Deal's House seat to smoothly transition the legislation.

"We strongly believe that this bill is good for everyone from the hunters, hikers and fishermen who use the area to the general tax-payer who will save money by having these beautiful steep mountains protected." says Friends of Mountaintown member Dave Cherry, who lives and hikes in the area.

The Friends of Mountaintown will continue the effort to get protection status for the Mountain Roadless protection bill – no matter how long it takes.

District Offices of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests

Ranger, Michelle Jones
USFS Conasauga River
Ranger District
3941 Highway 76 • Chatsworth, GA 30705
mjones@fs.fed.us
706-695-6736

Ranger, Andrew Baker
USFS Blue Ridge Ranger District
1181 Highway 515
P.O. Box 9 • Blairsville, GA 30512
albaker@fs.fed.us
706-745-6928

Ranger, Dave Jensen
USFS Chattooga River Ranger
District
9975 Highway 441 South
Lakemont, GA 30552
dwjensen@fs.fed.us
706-754-6221

Ranger, Erin Bronk
USFS Oconee National Forest
1199 Madison Road
Eatonton, GA 31024
ebronk@fs.fed.us
706-485-7110

Forest Service Contacts

George Bain – Forest Supervisor
USDA Forest Service
Chattahoochee – Oconee National Forests
1755 Cleveland Highway
Gainesville, GA 30501
gbain@fs.fed.us
770-297-3000

Elizabeth (Liz) Agpaoa – Regional Forester
USDA Forest Service – Region 8
1720 Peachtree St. NE
Atlanta, GA 30309
404-347-4177

Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture, USDA
James L. Whitten Bldg.
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Georgia ForestWatch takes a position on biomass

by Wayne Jenkins : Executive Director

The use of various vegetative materials, including small diameter and waste wood from national forests are being proposed as a fuel for generating electricity and for liquid transportation fuels across the US. After extensive research and discussion Georgia ForestWatch has created the following position statement. The issue is so complex and multi-layered that we feel our members and other concerned citizens deserve as brief a statement as possible.

Georgia ForestWatch opposes extraction of timber from national forests in Georgia for the purpose of producing biomass energy, and opposes conversion of diverse natural forests to single species plantations for any purpose.

In furtherance of that position, the organization's board of directors has adopted the following policy:

"**Georgia ForestWatch opposes whole tree harvesting in the national forests for any purpose because such harvesting is unsustainable and detrimental to forest soil fertility, productivity, and water quality.**" (1)

The United States uses 20% of the world's energy, annually serving 5% of global population. (2) According to the Central Intelligence Agency's World Fact Book and the U.S. Energy Information Agency the United States uses around 4,000,000,000 megawatts of electricity per year. Although varying types of wood produce different quantities of energy, generally speaking it takes 13,000 tons of green wood to produce one megawatt of electricity per year. (3)

Given the current yield of forests in Georgia, this would require logging 1,000 acres to produce one megawatt of electricity per year. If America were to generate 10 percent of its electricity by burning wood, this could result in logging 40 million acres per year. This is slightly greater than the total landmass of Georgia. Clearly, burning wood has no primary role in the energy future of America, except for small-scale projects that use existing biomass on site that would otherwise be wasted.

In addition to the effects on soil and water resources and indeed the very existence of our national forests, the use of woody biomass for energy production has other negative effects. Some of these are:

- The most efficient biomass production model would entail plantation-style harvesting systems, involving planting of rapidly growing species (pine, eucalyptus, etc.) and harvesting them every 10 to 20 years, and then replanting and harvesting again. (4) This process is no longer permitted under the current Land and Resource Management Plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. (5)
- Burning of wood for biomass is not "carbon neutral," and could increase carbon dioxide emissions by as much as 50 percent more than coal on a "per megawatt basis." (6)
- Biomass energy is inefficient, capturing only about

20-25 percent of the energy in wood. The rest is lost as heat. (7)

- Large-scale development of biomass energy has the potential to destroy forests. So-called "waste wood" is not sufficient to keep biomass plants operational, forcing dramatic increases in harvesting levels which could include consumption of "whole trees," not just tree tops and slash. (7)
- Biomass energy pollutes the air. (8)
- Biomass energy could lead to plantation or intensive forestry or over harvesting that would displace valuable and beneficial uses of our national forests, including carbon sequestration, clean water, fish and wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation. (9)

For further information and sources, see:

- (1) Minutes, Georgia ForestWatch board of directors meeting, October 19, 2009, as amended March 1, 2010.
- (2) World Population Balance website; Population and Energy Consumption: http://www.worldpopulationbalance.org/population_energy
- (3) Innovative Natural Resource Solutions, 2007. Biomass Availability Analysis Report prepared for the Massachusetts Division of Energy Resources http://www.mass.gov/Eoeea/docs/doer/renewables/biomas/bio-08-02-28-wmass-access.pdf
- (4) http://www.gafw.org/newsletter/2008fall_newsletter.pdf (Inquiry into Biomass Utilization for Goods and Energy, by Darren Wolfgang, Georgia ForestWatch Forest Ecologist, Part 1 of 2 and http://www.gafw.org/newsletters/2009winter_newsletter.pdf (Inquiry into Biomass Utilization for Goods and Energy, by Darren Wolfgang, Georgia ForestWatch Forest Ecologist, Part 2 of 2
- (5) See Land and Resource Management Plan, Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, January 15, 2004.
- (6) http://www.stopspewingcarbon.com/biomass-facts/56-biomass-vs-coal.html (Stop Spewing Carbon)
- (7) Unpublished 2009 draft fact sheet on biomass, Mollie Matteson, Conservation Advocate, Center for Biological Diversity.
- (8) http://airpermit.dnr.state.ga.us/gaairpermits/PermitPDF.aspx?id=PDF-OP-18100 Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Division, Air Protection Branch, Air Quality Permit for Multi-trade Rabun Gap LLC 20 MW power plant, Rabun Gap, Georgia.

(9) Unpublished Southern Environmental Law Center comments on Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the National Forest System land management planning rules (February 16, 2010), addressing woody biomass and other issues. ■

From the Director

(continued from page 2)

I bet that holds true for our largest pockets of nature in Georgia from the Okeefenokee swamp to the mountainous Cohutta Wilderness.

As so much of the natural world continues to slip away, only greater awareness clarifies the Faustian bargain we have made and what we have lost. Kurt Fristrup, a scientist with the National Park Service's Natural Sound Program says, "The loss of quiet is literally the loss of awareness. Quiet is being lost without people even becoming aware of what they are losing. It's tragic."

A few airlines have voluntarily changed travel routes to protect natural sound quality in a handful of national parks. And a small number of towns and cities have passed anti-noise ordinances, with mixed results. Like many modern issues this one will not be resolved easily. (See "Noise Pollution and Natural Quiet" on page 6). More information concerning the growing movement to protect quiet places can be found at http://onesquareinch.org/links/

Perhaps the issue of sound pollution in natural places is a new one to you, but now, made more aware, the world may sound different. What are your thoughts? Sound off to us: we'd like to hear. ■

USFS closes unlawful mine, cites individual for violations

by Joseph Gatins : Chattooga Co-district leader

To the old-timers in the borderlands areas of northeast Georgia and western North Carolina, the Jacob's Mine assumed near mythical proportion. "They were getting amethysts big as a washtub out of it," one said.

But as far as the U.S. Forest Service is concerned, digging for semi-precious gems at this location is unlawful – resulting in a five-month-long investigation in late 2007 that eventually led to the issuance of three violation notices against one individual and restitution and rehabilitation payment of almost $14,000. The money is being used both to close the shafts that tunneled into this part of the Chattahoochee National Forest and make restitution for the trees damaged and dropped during the mining.

No one seems to know how long this site was in operation. The mine involves a long and narrow, 300-plus foot long uphill trench broken by five or six deep vertical shafts going straight downward, accessed by small ladders. Some of the shafts went down more than 25 feet from the top. Earlier this year, a Forest Service contractor was brought in to close the shafts and rehabilitate the area. The only work now pending, according to a Forest Service spokesman, involves installation of a special "gate" to permit entry and exit for the bats that decided to call one of the shafts their home, and final smoothing of the steep terrain.

In 2009 the Chattooga River Ranger District announced the decision to close the site. In response to a request from Georgia ForestWatch under the federal Freedom of Information Act, Forest Service officials provided additional, but fragmentary supplemental information about the case.

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Photo by: Joseph Gatins

Co-district leader Honor Woodard inspects a shaft burrowing into the Jacob's Mine .

The response, however, blacked out the names and identity of all suspects interviewed and placed under surveillance during the mine probe. What was clear was that various people, including several "illegal immigrants" had worked at the site. According to the government's surveillance reports, the miners hauled five-gallon buckets of dirt and mud out of the shafts and then used screens to sift for gems.

Ultimately, one individual was served with three separate "violation notices" for the work at the site. Two were for "damaging property of the United States," and the was third for "removing property of the United States." Each ticket involved a $125 fine. Forest Service law enforcement officers also took possession of several amethysts taken from the old mine, according to investigative reports in the file.

Amethyst is a purple-colored variety of quartz crystal, much prized by semi-precious stone enthusiasts and collectors. (The rumor from old-timers was that the famous Tiffany & Co. jewel house in New York had a standing order to buy amethysts taken from the Jacob's Mine. The Forest Service, however, said it knew of no such agreement.)

The paperwork reflected that the Forest Service had collected a restitution payment of $13,987, both to cover the cost of the equipment operator brought in to close the shafts and install the "bat gate," and to repay the government for the damage and loss of the trees at the site.

At the request of the agency, Georgia ForestWatch is not disclosing the exact location of the closed mine site, other than to note that it is federal property on the Chattahoochee National Forest. ■

Are You a ForestWatcher?

Georgia ForestWatch' s work with the US Forest Service to encourage the best management of our national forests is accomplished by the joint efforts of our staff and our volunteer district leaders. The district leaders are a group of a dozen dedicated citizens who give up personal time and resources to conduct ground inspections of project proposals, as well as assisting in drafting comments and concerns submitted to the Forest Service about such proposals. Without this group of highly dedicated individuals we could not effectively fulfill our mission.

Are you interested in learning more about the district leader program? Would you like to go out with your local district Leaders to see what they do? Please contact our office so we can add you to our list. Once the list is assembled we'll send you a notice about a project happening in your area and you can join us for an on the ground inspection and learn more about how you can more actively engage in a program that is educational, fun and effective in protecting your forest.

Georgia ForestWatch welcomes the following new members

Wayne Bradshaw
Joe Bristol
Bob & Deana Brooksher
Kathryn Brown
Susan Edgett
David Engbritson
Jane Fanslow
Jasper Muse, Inc.
Josephine Kelly
Sandra Michaels
Tetyana Molodtsova
Jane Monahan
Carol Moon
Jeffrey Narvil
Nan Orrock
Julie Peters
Ashley Robbins
Julie Roberts
Patti Ross
Peter Schrand
John Shaw
Spalding Garden Club
Alan Toney
Don Toney
Mark Zemmin

NEW

Our website is getting upgrades! Look for the new symbol like you see on this box. There will be more frequent website updates, a place for hike pictures, and an expanded calendar. Check the website every Tuesday for new stories, pictures, and events. And please tell us what you think by sending an email to info@gafw.org!

Georgia ForestWatch
15 Tower Rd.
Ellijay, GA 30540
706-635-8733

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