Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Spring 2011

Recreation planning considers more than hiking

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From the Director

Is it time for organic forests?

Wayne Jenkins
Executive Director

We've all had the experience of looking at a map of Georgia or the United States and having our eyes wander naturally to those big green patches. On closer inspection, these turn out to be national forests, parks, or wildlife refuges – great swaths of natural landscape with few or no houses and few paved roads. These are where we fish and hunt, hike and bike, take the kids for a picnic or campout, watch wildlife and go to experience nature. You know that feeling of ahhhh……, just thinking about the beauty of the land, water and forest, the fresh air and clean streams, the anticipation of your next trip. Yes, you feel it. You expect it.

Lately the leadership and staff of Georgia ForestWatch have been contemplating the health of those places, especially our own Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. We are concerned about the chemical "tools" that are used in the name of protecting the health of this forest. You may be aware that chemicals are used for a number of purposes across the forest, including control of non-native invasive species. Chemical spheres the size of golf balls are dropped to ignite prescribed fires. Food plots (lately referred to as "wildlife openings" are treated with herbicides and larvacides are used to eliminate grubs. And stump sprout inhibitors were used widely from the 60's to the early 90's after clear-cutting and conversion of natural forest to monoculture pine stands, and paraquat was sprayed on hemp plants in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest in 1983, in spite of public outcry and a District Judge's restraining order.

Perhaps you were not aware. Perhaps you assumed that your national forests would be the most unlikely place for the use of pesticides, herbicides and exposure to potentially dangerous chemicals. Over the last couple of years ForestWatch staff, their pets, and volunteers have inadvertently been exposed to dangerous chemicals in the woods. This was a shock to us. These incidents have sparked deep concern over what we know and do not know about the use of chemicals in our forests. As a result, our board and staff have investigated and become more educated on this subject. As of now, we have no firm stance against the use of legal materials used in accordance with EPA guidelines, but our examination of the issue is certainly producing an abundance of questions. Some of these are:

1) Is available research on the safety and environmental effects of approved chemicals accurate, adequate? Do we know enough about specific chemical persistence, bio-accumulation, toxicity and other affects on all organisms? What about bio-degradation of chemical compounds, chemical interactions using multiple materials, the effects of so called "inert" ingredients?

2) Is the regulatory system for managing chemical use robust, adequate?

3) Do we know enough about the complex inter-workings of ecosystems – soils, hydrology, organisms etc. – to feel confident in the use of chemicals as management tools?

4) Do corporations that manufacture and sell chemicals influence the regulation of those chemicals through contributions and other means?

5) Are users and applicators of potentially harmful materials in public forests sufficiently knowledgeable and well trained? Do they follow application guidelines?

6) How many chemicals applied by the USFS are World Health Organization Class I, II, or Highly Hazardous poisons?

7) How can citizens learn the extent of chemical use on public lands, both location and material?

8) Is there any testing, monitoring or mapping of the use of chemicals, ongoing or previous, on national forests? Given that water flowing from national forests is a critical resource, what

level of risk associated with the use of chemicals is acceptable? Without adequate monitoring how do we know these chemical agents are not finding their way into streams and aquifers?

9) Should our public forests be managed differently from private lands when considering the use of chemicals? Why? How?

10) What are the potential health and environmental effects and dangers of burning chemically treated vegetation, by prescribed or un-prescribed fire?

As usual, we have more questions than answers. Perhaps you as a member have your own concerns, experiences and insights into this complex issue and would like to share those with us. Please send any comments to info@gafw.org. We will continue delving into the questions raised by chemical use on our forests and report what we find.

Save the Date
for the ForestWatch Fall Retreat:
"Sustainable Recreation in Your National Forests"

September 30-October 1
Vogel State Park

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Georgia ForestWatch is a 501(c)3
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Cover photo: Hikers are not alone in the woods anymore, as bikers, horse riders and others compete for trail use. Photo by Donna Born.

A sign of change

by Peg Griffith : Board Member

After years of making do with a hand-made sign, ForestWatch has completed the last element in its branding, thanks to Mike Davis, of Boy Scout troop #402 in Ellijay, Georgia. Mike undertook work on the sign to earn his leadership badge toward completion of his work to become an Eagle Scout. To earn his badge, Mike had to write a proposal establishing the need for the sign, produce a budget for it, raise the funds, and do most of the work to create the sign. He began the proposal in October 2010. Funds came from his church, the Lions Club, and Georgia ForestWatch. Cohutta Rustic Signs provided their services as a donation and materials at cost.

Mike touches up the sign after installation.

Working under the direction of Cohutta Rustic Signs owner Rex Jackson, Mike learned how to join the redwood boards, sanded them, and rounded the corners of the sign. He watched as Jackson sandblasted the reversed template into the wood. Then it was Mike's job to apply 2 coats of primer and then paint two coats of each of the four colors of the Georgia ForestWatch logo. He reset the signposts, painted them, and then mounted the sign. With the help of fellow scouts Eli Chastain, Taylor Jones, Sean Davis, and a friend, Holden Banks, landscaping was added around the sign. Mike says that with proper maintenance, the sign should last for at least the next 20 years – maybe more!

When asked what he learned from the project, he chuckles: "Not to procrastinate!" All requirements to become an Eagle Scout have to be completed by the Scout's eighteenth birthday. Mike turned 18 on March 4th. His paperwork went in on March 2nd. He goes before the board of review April 2nd. Close call, Mike!

Wayne Jenkins thanks Mike Davis for the new GFW sign.

Mike will complete high school this spring. Then his plan is to take some time off and maybe hike the Appalachian Trail next year, travelling from North to South so that he can "walk home." After that he's not sure what the future holds. He is interested in working for the Department of Natural Resources as a wildlife technician (after a degree from the University of Georgia), or maybe joining the Army. But first, there's that Eagle Scout board of review. We wish Mike the best, and thank him for a sign that came just in time, for him and for us! ■

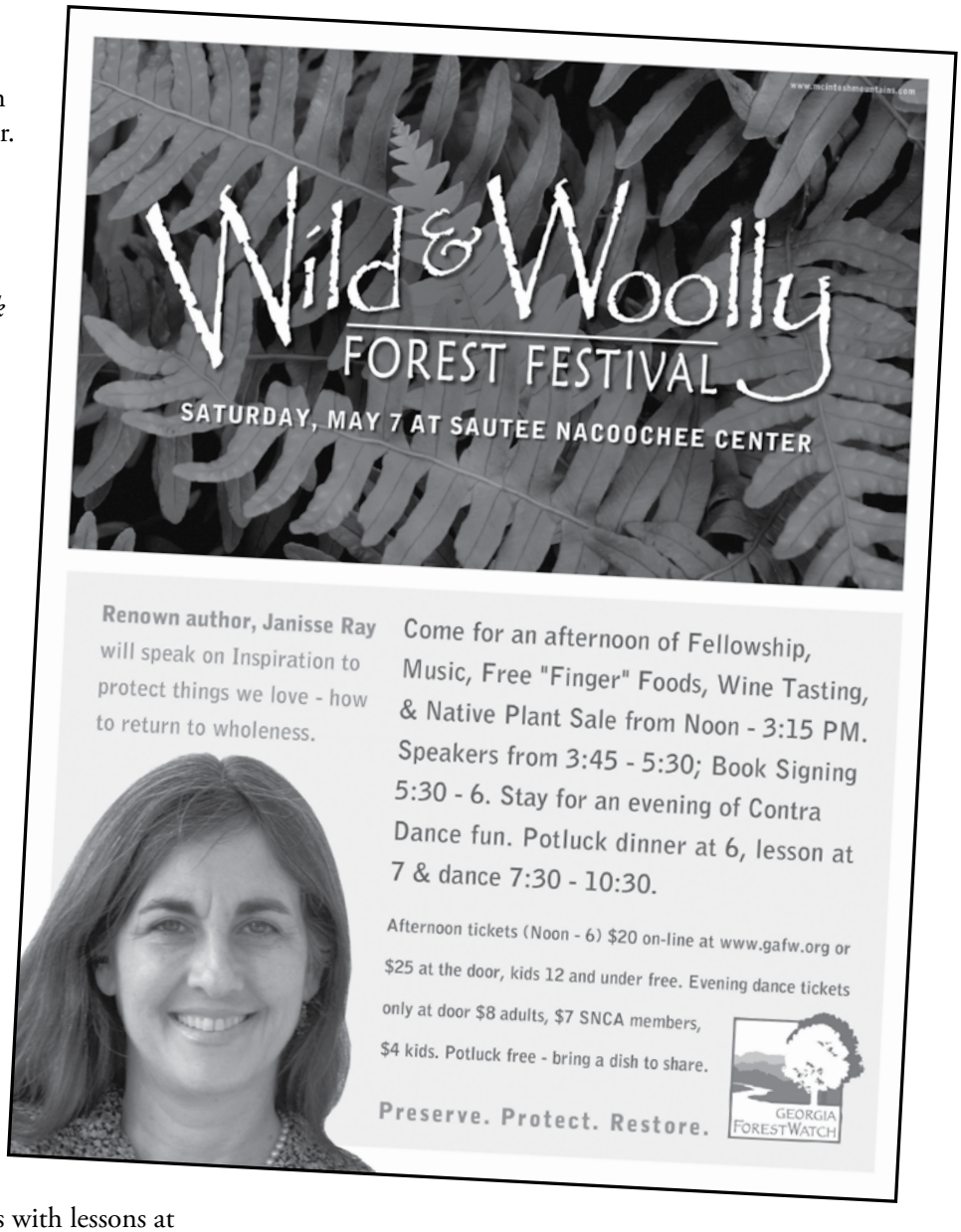
Our apologies, and thanks…

As we prepared the Winter newsletter, we inadvertently left out some businesses and individuals who support us. We apologize to them for the omission, and thank each of them, and each and every one of you for your loyal and continuing support.

Anderson Creek Retreat
Bent Tree Lake & Wildlife Committee
Ens & Outs
Jasper Muse Inc.
REM
The Sentient Bean
Tiger Mountain Vineyards
James and Debra Campbell

Janisse Ray to keynote Georgia ForestWatch Wild & Woolly Forest Festival & Native Plant Sale

Renowned Georgia author Janisse Ray will highlight the 2011 Georgia ForestWatch Wild & Woolly Forest Festival & Native Plant Sale on Saturday, May 7 at the Sautee Nacoochee Center.



She will focus her talk on *"Inspiration to Protect Things We Love – How to Return to Wholeness."* Ms. Ray is well known as the author of *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*, which won the *New York Times* Notable Book Award and was chosen as The Book All Georgians Should Read. Janisse has also authored two other books of prose and a book of poetry, *A House of Branches*, just out in 2010. For more information on Janisse, go to http://www.facebook.com/pages/Janisse-Ray/112661215411916.

A fabulous array of native plants from Jennie Branch Nursery, Scott Creek Nursery, the Pickens County Master Gardeners and 4H, Saul's Nursery, and others will be available for sale, and as always, there will be plenty of food, wine for tasting, music and a special raffle of an exciting biplane ride! The public is invited.

Festivities start at 11 a.m., with the plant sale, food, and wine tasting. Around 3:15 p.m. the plant sale wraps up and two outstanding talks start soon thereafter. Janisse Ray will be available for book signing from 5:30 – 6 p.m.

This year a special potluck supper and contra dance will also be held in the evening. Come at 6 p.m. for the potluck – free admission – just bring a dish for all to share. The dance starts with lessons at 7 p.m., and the dance runs from 7:30 – 10:30.

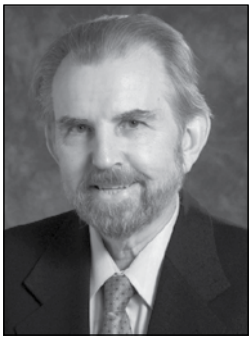
Get your tickets early and save! Tickets for the plant sale, food, wine tasting, and talks are $20 on-line at www.gafw.org or $25 at the door. Children 12 and under get in free. Admission for the contra dance is separate and at the door only – $8 for adults, $7 for Sautee Nacoochee Center members, and $4 for kids.

The Sautee Nacoochee Center is located at 283 Highway 255 N, just north of the Old Sautee Store at the intersection of highways 17 and 255, 4.5 miles south of Helen Georgia , and 11 miles west of Clarkesville. ■

New board members and advisor welcomed to the Georgia ForestWatch family

by Ted Doll : Board President

During the month of February, we were fortunate to recruit three additional people to the ForestWatch leadership. All are exceptionally well qualified.



Jim Dawson

Jim Dawson has been speaking publically to get the word out about Georgia ForestWatch for some time, and has worked with our Executive Director, Wayne Jenkins, on outreach. Jim has served on several boards in the past, including the Chattahoochee Nature Center. Jim has a B.S. in Wildlife Biology from the University of Vermont and an M.B.A. in Information Technology from Fairleigh Dickinson University. He is a member and past President of the National Speakers Association of Georgia and has been a Director of the Chattahoochee Nature Center and Advisor for the Metro Atlanta Chamber.

Patton Dycus

Patton Dycus is a litigation attorney with the McKenna, Long & Aldridge law firm. He was the volunteer litigation attorney with the Georgia Sierra Club for several years, and also served on the Wildlands Committee with the Club. His practicum was in Environmental Law, working in the Etowah River basin, and while in school, Patton worked in the University of Georgia Land Use Clinic. Patton received his law degree from University of Georgia Law school, magna cum laude. When he can get into the woods, Patton enjoys mountain biking.

Craig Richardson

Craig Richardson is Vice President for Field Operations for ACE Environmental Risk. Craig has worked in environmental risk insurance for the past twenty years. He has a B.A. in Biological Sciences from University of Mississippi and an M.B.A. in Public Policy and Administration from Mississippi State University. Craig is an avid hunter and trail runner. He and his wife Susan have two young daughters, residing in Atlanta.

Audrey Moylan

Our new Advisor, Audrey Moylan, is a native of Atlanta. She retired to north Georgia following a varied career that included teaching high school sciences, supervising an industrial laboratory, conducting insect surveys, and managing environmental impact assessment projects. Since locating in Cleveland, she has served as Head of the Environmental Studies Group at the Sautee Nacoochee Community Association (SNCA). Audrey currently serves as SNCA's representative to the Georgia Water Coalition and is leader of the team developing SNCA's Nacoochee Valley Nature Preserve. She is an active member of Friends of Smithgall Woods State Park and Preserve.

Audrey has a B.S. Ed. in Science from the University of Georgia, an M.S. in Biology from Georgia State College, and a Ph.D. in Entomology from Auburn University. Most of her professional work involved interfacing with government agencies—particularly the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Please join us in welcoming Jim, Patton, Craig and Audrey to the Georgia ForestWatch family. We appreciate their willingness to serve, and the contribution of their expertise. Their deep knowledge, personal connections, and unique skills will enhance our organization in immeasurable ways. We look forward to working with them to protect the National Forests of Georgia. ■

Film festival success

by Peg Griffith : Board Member

Every seat was sold in Atlanta's Tara Theater before the doors even opened for this year's Wild & Scenic Film Festival. The Festival is the largest environmental film festival in North America, and this is its fourth consecutive year in Atlanta. With a growing public awareness of environmental issues, the Wild and Scenic Film Festival inspires viewers to go out and make a difference in their communities and around the world.

Each year, Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, Georgia River Network and Georgia ForestWatch partner to select the best of these award-winning environmental films and bring them to Atlanta in a 3.5 hour program addressing issues such as energy, food systems, biodiversity, climate change and the protection and restoration of wild lands and waters.

There are many wonderful films this year, but two stand outs are *The Majestic Plastic Bag*, and *Eastern Rises*. Narrated by actor Jeremy Irons, *Plastic Bag* addresses a dreadful pollution issue in a tongue-in-cheek manner. The camera follows the migration of one of this "endangered species" after it escapes from a big-box parking lot and makes its way though parks and rivers, toward its breeding ground in the Atlantic Ocean.

On an entirely different note, *Eastern Rises* takes the viewer to Kamchatka, an uninhabited and remote peninsula in far eastern Russia. There, four fanatical fly-fishermen explore rivers that have never been fished before.

Rich with artful slow-motion scenes of fish and line skimming across the water, the film is well edited, with titles and close ups cut to compelling music. Amusing narration is provided by the fisher-folk, poking fun at themselves, lest the viewer forget that they flew half way around the world to go fishing.

This year's program concluded with a special local feature, Chattahoochee: *From Water War to Water Vision*, a film by Rhett Turner and Jonathan Wickham. The one-hour documentary explores the decades-long fight between Georgia, Florida and Alabama over water in the Chattahoochee River basin.

Make a note to yourself now: "Next year, I will buy my ticket online and early. I do not want to miss this." ■

Welcome Diane Freer, Office Manager

Georgia ForestWatch has a new office manager, Diane Freer. Diane started with us January 17th and is already making her mark. She is up to speed on our membership database and office software, and has finished the cleaning, sorting and straightening that Board Member Robin Hitner began. Now Diane is rolling into her part of the planning for the Spring Event. Her calm presence is welcome as the new year heats up.

Diane has a background in Software Development, Project Management, and Training in the Financial, Payroll, and Transaction Processing fields. In the foreground is her need to be out and about in nature, whether it is exploring the Canadian Rockies, fishing in remote Alaska, or hiking the southern forests. Diane and her husband Ned love their yearly salmon fishing trips to Alaska, but can be found most often enjoying the fishing on Carter's Lake. Diane's daughter is an Art instructor at Young Harris College. Please introduce yourself to Diane.

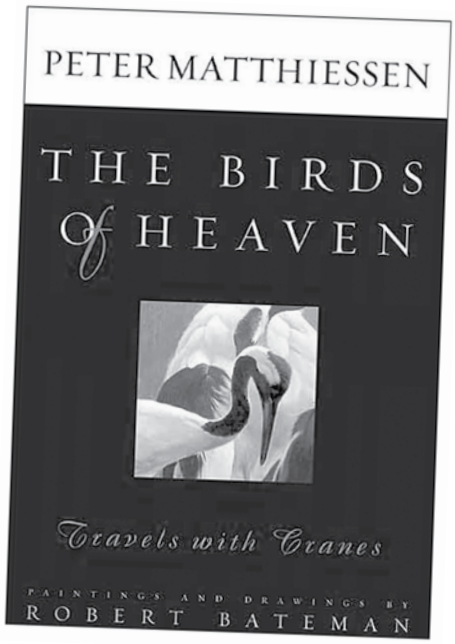
Photo by: Ned Freer

Freer finds fishing fun.

Book review:
The Birds of Heaven; Travels With Cranes

by Wayne Jenkins : Executive Director

The Birds of Heaven; Travels With Cranes, by Peter Matthiessen & Robert Bateman; 2003 – North Point Press, 2001, 350 pages.



Perhaps our most accomplished nature writer delivers one of his finest efforts in this wonderful book. Like the magnificent avian species grus, Matthiessen's "Travels" stitches continents together and spans our ever-shrinking planet. This prolific author, (be sure to read *Wildlife in America*, *Snow Leopard* and *Sand Rivers*), followed all fifteen crane species in their natural habitats, including both the wintering and breeding grounds. His research included visits to Siberia, Mongolia, Korea, China, Japan, India, Bhutan, South Africa, Australia, England, Wisconsin, Nebraska, and the Gulf Coast of North America. Detailed, yet lightly poetic descriptions of his travels, the landscapes, people he meets and the various species encountered are accompanied by beautiful images of cranes by painter Robert Bateman, making "Travels" a perfectly balanced and satisfying read.

The plight of the world's fifteen crane species is no happy tale. Eleven species are threatened with extinction by habitat loss and human activities. This ancient species requires expansive wetlands and prairies, and in most cases travels great distance between nesting and wintering grounds, which are continually in danger of being usurped for human agriculture and city building. Increasingly, it seems we will only retain those species for which we actively choose to provide the necessary habitat and to protect. The many crane champions ("craniacs"), sprinkled across many continents, devoted to the hard work of observing, studying and working to save this fascinating bird comprise the good news.

Foremost among these is the founder and past president of The International Crane Foundation (ICF), Dr. George Archibald, who plays a key role in global crane conservation. ICF's research and education center, in Baraboo Wisconsin, cares for, studies and breeds captive crane species for reintroduction around the world. The center's famous and innovative work on bringing the endangered Whooping Crane from the precipice of extinction (1 population and 35 birds in the 1940's) http://www.savingcranes.org/ to four wild populations and one captive in North America, total count at 534 birds in 2009 is a wonderful example of concerted efforts by citizens, scientists and government agencies working together for this remarkable recovery.

The superlatives describing this species pepper the story throughout. They sing (complex vocalizations-songs), they perform courtship dances, leaping, bowing and wing flapping straight up into the air. Some species migrate cross the Himalaya above 32,000 feet, and some have little fear of man and will attack at will. All are beautiful. Be sure to study the color plates of the African Crowned Cranes. Probably my favorite parts of Matthiessen's book are the descriptive passages about the cranes and their habitats. This example from the author's visit to the Bharatpur marshlands of India, to catch sight of the threatened Siberian cranes, serves well:

"Beyond the bright-headed Tibetan geese, not eighty yards away in the open marsh, stand two white cranes with startling red faces and red bills, fresh as roses in the light of the new sun. Like most cranes, G. leucogeranus prefers open areas with unobstructed views, and since it is wary, I am scared I might flare the first snow wreaths I have ever seen, or cause them to move farther from the bank. I sink to my knees behind a bush, watching in relief as they resume feeding: they probe wet gleaming bills through the bronze duckweed or immerse red faces to the eyes to grasp sedge tubers and tug them from the mud. Between probes, they glare with livid eyes – the iris is a strange pale yellow – yet they do not take alarm at my close presence but on the contrary seem curious and confiding."

This is conservation writing at its best. Matthiessen's passion and love for these birds, keen observation and great story-telling make

(continued on next page)

The Weeks Act: government gets it right

by Wayne Jenkins : Executive Director

March 1st, 2011 marked the centennial of the Weeks Act. The bill empowered the federal government to purchase private land in the eastern United States, to protect the headwaters of rivers and important watersheds after fifty years of deforestation by private timber industry. By 1911 industrial scale logging had devastated eastern forests, especially the steep slopes of the southern Appalachians. Huge areas were deforested, causing massive erosion and producing floods that destroyed roads, rich bottomland farms and railroad systems. Silt in the rivers affected river-based trade.

The public support necessary for government action to find a solution to all these problems was gradually formed by a then new kind of literature: nature or conservation writing. Evolving over the previous seventy years, these American environmental writers began to understand the role deforestation played in Europe and past civilizations. They warned that in building our nation we were repeating the same mistakes, but more efficiently than ever before. The rapid conversion of wild lands to cutover wastelands and the terrible consequences of our own activity bore fruit as calls for conservation expanded. Voices outside of government and the obvious results of our "highest degree of folly" from government forest studies combined to inspire several bills at the end of the 1800's, to restore and protect "forest reserves". These reserves later came to be known as "national forests". The Weeks Act specifically addressed and supported government purchases of eastern forestlands which now amount to over twenty million acres in the densely populated eastern US.

Cut and burned over pine lands in Chippewa County, Michigan.

Few of us can imagine or comprehend what that period must have been like in North Georgia. However, we can appreciate the decisions made and actions taken that have given subsequent generations these great forests that serve so well to anchor the soil, purify the air, cleanse and protect the waters and supply generous opportunities for outdoor recreation. When the Weeks Act was voted into law, these forests were called the "lands nobody wanted." Ask yourself what they are worth now, and what they would have become had the Weeks Act not been passed.

Happy 100th birthday Chattahoochee National Forest. We haven't always agreed with your management but we're glad you're there! Sometimes government gets it right.

For more details, historical photographs and presentations on how America saved its eastern forests, go to this excellent website: http://www.foresthistory.org/ASPNET/Policy/WeeksAct/index.aspx ■

Sawmill in North Woodstock, New Hampshire, circa 1903.

Book Review

(continued from page 8)

this book a pure joy to read and will make you a lover of this splendid species. Get it, read it and share it.

If you become a "craniac", you will enjoy a visit to the Tennessee Hiawassee Wildlife Refuge, north of Birchwood, Tennessee. This managed wintering and stopover site for Eastern Sandhill Cranes provides the opportunity to witness up to 10,000 Sandhills in January and February, part of a flock that had around 700 birds in the 1970's and now contains over 65,000. Occasionally one may also see a few larger pure white members of the famous experimental eastern migrating Whooping Cranes.

http://www.tnwatchablewildlife.org/watchareadetails.cfm?uid=090716082739777 28&region=Hiwassee_Refuge&statearea=East_Tennessee ■

Around the forest – a partial list of the largest Forest Service projects

by Darren Wolfgang : Forest Ecologist

Chattooga River Ranger District

Eastside Forest Health Improvement Project: The District has signed a Decision to move forward with this project which entails 6,663 acres of forest thinning in young stands of artificially abundant pine trees for the purpose of southern pine beetle (SPB) prevention. Georgia ForestWatch was supportive of this project and strongly encouraged the District to retain as many native hardwoods such as oak and hickory, for the purpose of improving wildlife habitat and species diversity. Species diversity is an important element to restoring these forests to their natural ecological potential.

Watergauge II Open Pine-oak Woodland Project: We've been following this project for the past few years. The original project has been modified and parts of it relocated to an area Georgia ForestWatch and the Forest Service agreed might be more conducive to maintaining an open, light-rich environment, while restoring pitch and table mountain pine communities as well as native oak and hickory. The District has issued a Scoping Notice and is in the process of reviewing the logistics and environmental effects that could be associated with this project. ForestWatch is fortunate to be able to work collaboratively with agency staff on this project and will continue to do so moving forward.

Prescribed Burning: The District will continue to pursue its aggressive prescribed burning program in 2011. While we recognize the importance of fire in our ecosystems as well as its use as a forest management tool, we are concerned about the scope and frequency of the burning of our forest communities. We have been engaged in ongoing dialogue with the agency regarding our preferences, which include long-term monitoring of fire effects in various forest community types. The District recently issued a proposal to burn a projected14,400 acres of forest land in 2011. Out of the initial larger proposal, agency staff agreed to prioritize burning activities on "high priority" burn units that host the most fire adapted species, are of highest conservation priority, and are the least controversial. This is the approach we believe the Forest Service should take.

Blue Ridge Ranger District

Lake Nottely East Forest Health Improvement: The primary intent of this proposal is to thin approximately 1,000 acres of artificially pine dominant forest surrounding Lake Nottely. The purpose of the burn is to prevent southern pine beetle infestation and improve forest health while reducing the risk of wildfire in the dense pine thickets adjacent to residential housing developments. The District is in the process of reviewing public comment regarding the Environmental Assessment of this project.

Prescribed Burning: The District has proposed 11,000 acres of prescribed burning, primarily in the Coopers Creek watershed. Our concerns for this burning are similar to those listed for the Chattooga District.

U.S. Senate

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Jake and Bull Trail System Improvement: Contractors will continue to work with agency staff in 2011 to improve, relocate, and decommission sections of the large Jake and Bull Mountain Trail Complex. This work is intended to reduce environmental impacts to streams via erosion and sedimentation associated with this trail system, as well as to improve the safety and sustainability of recreational use in this area.

Conasauga River Ranger District

Armuchee Ridges: The District will continue to implement the large scale Armuchee Ridges Project, which includes thinning of pine plantations for southern pine beetle prevention. Forest restoration activities include planting longleaf and shortleaf pine, as well as improving the desirable oak-hickory component of pine thinning units.

Sumac Creek: Agency staff is currently conducting a watershed level inventory and analysis to assess forest health and restoration needs within the Sumac Creek vicinity. Georgia ForestWatch will meet with the District this spring to learn more about this large scale inventory.

Oconee Ranger District

Red-Cockaded Woodpecker: The District will continue to move forward with its large scale management and recovery projects for the endangered Red-Cockaded Woodpecker. These activities will be focused south of Interstate-20. While some initial success has been achieved, the battle for the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker in this part of the forest has been slow and difficult.

Oconee Large Scale Assessment: To date the District has issued Chapter 2 Proposed Action of the Environmental Assessment to the public for comment. The intent was to solicit input regarding proposed activities and hypothetical management and forest restoration objectives. This assessment was somewhat unique for this national forest because it used a fairly detailed "ecological classification system" process to determine vegetation communities, as well as management and restoration suitability. Georgia ForestWatch is supportive of the more detailed analysis involved in determining potential forest management goals. ■

JOIN NOW! Complete this form and mail to Georgia ForestWatch, 15 Tower Road, Ellijay, GA 30540; or call 706-635-8733 to join via phone. Want to go paperless? Join online at **www.gafw.org/join_give.html**

Georgia ForestWatch Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

CHOOSE YOUR GIVING LEVEL

- ❑ $2,500 President's Circle
- ❑ $1,000 Benefactor
- ❑ $500 Patron
- ❑ $250 Supporter
- ❑ $100 Friend or Small Business
- ❑ $35 Basic Member
- ❑ $ _____ Other amount

CHOOSE YOUR NEWSLETTER PREFERENCE

Send my newsletter via: (choose one) ❑ E-mail ❑ U.S. Mail

PAYMENT INFORMATION

❑ Enclosed is cash or check payable to Georgia ForestWatch

❑ Charge my credit card: ❑ AMEX ❑ MasterCard ❑ VISA

Signature: _____

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Forest Service reaches out to the public for help on recreation planning

by Wayne Jenkins : Executive Director

Over the last decade, Georgia ForestWatch members and staff have become concerned about the effects of increased recreation on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest (CONF). Impacts are both social and environmental as more folks use the forest for hiking, biking, equestrian, hunting, fishing or motorized recreation purposes. The two major areas of concern are negative impacts to streams and wildlife and impacts to the quality of recreational experience of various users. Georgia ForestWatch volunteers and staff have noted changes in use, increasing user conflicts, and deteriorating and user-created trails for a number of years, and have urged the agency to take a comprehensive approach to the challenges of trails management.

Photo by: Donna Born

Old logging trails may work for hikers, but are they suitable for mountain biking and other forms of recreation?

Well, the leadership of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National forest is now doing just that. Over a year ago Forest Supervisor George Bain and Georgia ForestWatch Director Wayne Jenkins hit upon the idea that perhaps the time was ripe for a facilitated public collaborative process for addressing the growing recreation challenges. We wondered if we could bring representatives of various recreation groups, concerned citizens, the agency and trail professionals together to identify problems and solutions with the long range goal of creating a world class trails system on Georgia's National Forests. Several small, facilitated meetings with a handful of various trails organizations where held in late 2010 to test the idea and approach, which led to preliminary agreement on the following mission statement and principals.

Mission: To provide a diverse, quality trail system that is maintainable and ecologically sustainable.

Principle 1: A diverse, quality trail system meets the expectations of a range of users, is safe within those expectations, has a variety of terrain and routes and is located in a natural setting. The trails include appropriate infrastructure that provides users access to a range of opportunities.

Principle 2: A maintainable trail system is properly designed and has long-term financial commitment from the public and Agency. Financial resources are available to provide needed funds for management while protecting the natural and cultural resources.

Principle 3: An ecologically sustainable trail is designed and constructed so negative impacts to natural and cultural resources are minimized to acceptable limits.

Following the initial small meetings, five public meetings were held across north Georgia and down on the Oconee District during February and March to test the public's acceptance of the need for and desire to tackle such a large problem. The response has been very positive and constructive. It is clear that recreationists of all types love their national forests and their trails. There appears to be a keen willingness to volunteer to maintain trails if there were a centralized system for coordinating the work and hosting training. Bikers, equestrian and motorized users all believe they should have more trails, while hikers and some other users, such as hunters and fisherfolk, are a bit wary of too many people in the woods. In the final analysis, the environmental impacts of trails may be easier to address than the complex social challenge of sharing trails. So far, those attending this recent series of meetings seem ready to roll up their sleeves and get to work figuring out how to move forward. Meetings to continue this effort are now being planned and will be announced on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest website and through our newsletter,

website and email alerts. If you would like to be added to the email contact list to receive further information type "Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest" in your browser.

There is much to be done to achieve the goals of moving from our current trails situation to a system of sustainable trails that meet the principles above. There are many reasons why now is a good time to begin addressing the problems. The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest is considered an "urban forest" by many, due to rapid population growth in the greater Atlanta area and the surrounding Southeast. In the last forty years the population of Georgia has doubled. This doubling is estimated to occur again over the next fifty years. Many private lands, which once provided some opportunity for recreation, have been developed, and along with increasing population, this development tends to concentrate more recreation on our public forests. This trend will continue. Many of the trails on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests were developed on old logging roads which were never designed for the type and amount of use they now receive. Some of these are experiencing resource damage, safety problems, and do not provide for a quality experience. Proper trail design and layout can address these challenges while lessening necessary maintenance hours. Some multiuse trails may not be suited for all uses, and trails recommended for shared use need to be studied carefully for potential impact or conflict issues.

Part of any comprehensive trails planning that involves a public process must include trails analysis, recommendations of trail improvements, relocation and possibly closure. An educational component for creating understanding and consensus for necessary changes is also needed. We must all identify our roles in maintaining our trails into the future, and understand what constitutes sustainable trails. All recreational use causes impact. Recreationists must "own" their use and have a desire to limit and mitigate impacts associated with various types of use. Only by taking full responsibility now can we feel confident in having sustainable trails for our children and their children to enjoy, which at the same time protects the beauty, wildlife and scenery we go to the woods to enjoy. ■

when faces called flowers float out of the ground

when faces called flowers float out of the ground
and breathing is wishing and wishing is having –
but keeping is downward and doubting and never
– it's april (yes, april; my darling) it's spring!
yes the pretty birds frolic as spry as can fly
yes the little fish gambol as glad as can be
(yes the mountains are dancing together)

when every leaf opens without any sound
and wishing is having and having is giving –
but keeping is doting and nothing and nonsense
– alive; we're alive, dear: it's (kiss me now) spring!
now the pretty birds hover so she and so he
now the little fish quiver so you and so i
(now the mountains are dancing, the mountains)

when more than was lost has been found has been found
and having is giving and giving is living-
but keeping is darkness and winter and cringing
– it's spring (all our night becomes day) o, it's spring!
all the pretty birds dive to the heart of the sky
all the little fish climb through the mind of the sea
(all the mountains are dancing; are dancing)

edward estlin cummings, poet, United States, 1894-1962

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North Georgia: World class salamander diversity

by Darren Wolfgang : Forest Ecologist

As spring approaches, our mountains and bottom lands are filled with the familiar sounds of spring peepers, wood frogs and the songs of birds returning from their winter vacations at warmer latitudes. Heavy rains are falling and vernal (temporary) pools form, as mountain seeps and streams fill. While the frogs and birds are easily detected from their song, it is easy to forget about the silent and reclusive native salamanders of the region. The mountains of North Georgia, with abundant streams and moist forests, provide ideal habitat for salamanders. The rugged terrain of the region has provided the conditions for salamanders to become genetically isolated from one another and evolve into separate species. As a result, this region boasts the richest salamander diversity in the world. For example, in 2007 an entirely new species was discovered in northeastern Georgia, the Patch-nosed salamander (*urspelerpes brucei*). Not only was this a new species, but the specimen was so unique that it was assigned to a new scientific genus and is thought to be the smallest species discovered in the United States, slightly larger than a dime.

Photo by James Sullivan

Matching the natural habitat diversity found in these mountains, these salamanders are diverse in their habitat preferences and lifecycles. Beaver ponds, large and small streams, wet cliffs, waterfalls, caves, seepages, rock outcrops, bogs, temporary ponds and old growth mesic forests all provide unique habitat required for specific salamander species. While spring is most often associated with frogs and salamander breeding and development, some species such as the marbled salamander (*Ambystoma opacum*) breed in the fall. Instead of laying their eggs in a permanent water pool, marbled females nest and lay eggs under logs, leaves and other coarse woody debris in dried vernal pools and remain with the eggs to keep them moist until the nest is flooded and the eggs begin to develop. A close relative of the marbled salamander, the spotted salamander (*Ambystoma maculatum*) does its breeding in the late winter and early spring, using flooded pools. The spotted salamander also has a strong homing ability and frequently returns to "regular" vernal pools or breeding areas. According to some researchers (Shoop 1994), when individuals were captured and released into foreign breeding habitats, they bypassed the habitats and returned to their home breeding ponds. This long lived species (up to 32 years) also has incredible regenerative abilities, being able to drop their tails and re-grow limbs and even parts of major organs when damaged by predators.

One last but fascinating detail gives some perspective on salamander numbers and their environmental role. Researchers estimate that the salamander population in a northern hardwood ecosystem in New Hampshire was more than twice that of the bird community and nearly equal to that of small mammals, while in southern Appalachian forests salamander population may exceed that of all other vertebrates combined (Shoop 1994)

Spring is a wonderful time to get out onto your National Forest to look for salamanders, wildflowers, trees and all the numerous wonders that await. Look for salamanders under logs and leaf litter and in rock crevices. Carefully turn over logs and rocks, especially near streams, and shine a light into the crevices of rock outcrops, being sure to return all cover back to its original position. The recently published "Salamanders of the Southeast" by University of Georgia Press will assist you in identifying the results of your salamander search. ■

Resources:

Savannah River Ecology Laboratory (herpetology): www.uga.edu/srelherb/index.htm
Amphibiaweb: www.amphibiaweb.org
Camp, C.D., Jensen, J.B., Elliot,M.J.Salamanders of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest
Shoop, C.R. (1994). ''Migratory orientation of *Ambystoma maculatum*: movements near breeding ponds and displacements of migrating individuals." *The Biological Bulletin*, 135, 230-238.

Seabrook wins lifetime achievement award for environmental reporting

by Peg Griffith : Board Member

If you are interested in the environment in Georgia, you know the name Charles Seabrook. For more than 33 years Seabrook reported on medicine, science, and the environment for the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. The *Atlanta Business Chronicle* recently recognized that body of work with their Lifetime Achievement Award. He was honored at a breakfast held at the Georgia Aquarium. More than 400 dignitaries and guests representing the Georgia business community, the political arena, and multiple environmental groups attended the event to thank Seabrook for his vast body of work that has covered everything from AIDs to the Exxon Valdez oil spill, to the decline of multiple bird species in Georgia. In addition to the Lifetime Achievement Award, the State of Georgia recognized him with the R.L. "Rock" Howard Award, its highest conservation prize.

With a B.S in Biology and a B.A. in Journalism from the University of South Carolina, Charlie was the perfect choice to become the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*'s first science writer. He prowled the halls of the Centers for Disease Control from 1972-1986. That connection made him one of the first writers in the world to report on the mystifying and deadly virus later labeled HIV/AIDs. His first AIDs story came out in 1981, three years ahead of the *Time Magazine* article and four years before the death of actor Rock Hudson made the topic an open discussion.

In 1986 Charlie became the AJC's first environmental writer, covering natural and human-caused disasters. In 1998 he began showing up at the board meetings of the Department of Natural Resources, much to the discomfort of Commissioner Leonard Ledbetter. The city and the Environmental Protection Agency began to take notice of Charlie's investigation of the city's sewage spills into the Chattahoochee River after a big rain. As storm water-runoff flooded the sewage treatment plants, the only way to relieve pressure on the aging plants was to release the effluent, causing dangerous and disgusting pollution to the creeks feeding the river, and sending a city's filth downstream. Chattahoochee Riverkeeper Executive Director Sally Bethea says "Charles Seabrook's thorough and tenacious reporting on Atlanta's chronic sewage problems was essential to gain public support for the multi-billion dollar upgrade to the city's sewer system. He deserves immense credit for the fact that the Chattahoochee and its tributaries are dramatically cleaner today than they were a decade ago." The articles contributed to the lawsuit that ultimately forced the city to undertake a $3 billion construction project to separate the storm water and sewage systems, replace aging infrastructure, and expand the system to meet city growth.

Seabrook made no friends when he investigated the kaolin industry in Georgia. Unlike 45 other states, Georgia has no minerals severance tax, resulting in the loss estimates to be millions of dollars each year of possible revenue for the state as a valuable resource is unearthed and hauled all over the world to make paper, china, and countless other goods. The people who benefit are the mining companies who have 99 year mineral leases on property near Sandersville, Georgia, and the railroad lines that haul the kaolin to Savannah. Three years of investigative stories in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution resulted in Charlie receiving the Investigative Reporters and Editor "Best Story of the Year" Award in 1994, a slap on the wrist for the operators, and a book for Seabrook: *Red Clay, Pink Cadillacs and White Gold: the Kaolin Chalk Wars,* published by Longstreet Press (1995.)

In 2002, Charlie released his second book, *Cumberland Island: Strong Women, Wild Horses*, John. F. Blair, publisher. The book describes the fascinating story of the people, animals, and plants of Cumberland Island, Georgia. It also created the conditions for the reunion of Seabrook with the coastal South.

(continued on back page)

Georgia ForestWatch welcomes the following new members

Ashley Robbins
Betty Daniel
Bob Kerr
Carol Moon
Carolyn Nohria
Elizabeth Knowlton
Heather Hilton
James and Lori Carey
Jeffrey Narvil
John Akridge
Josephine Kelly
Kathy Tallini
Laurence Rudisill
Linda Jordan
Nan Orrock
Pam Wawrzyk
Patti Ross
R. Dismukes
Sara Godwin
Susan Edgett
Susie McNeely
Tetyana Molodtsova
Wes Lovell
Bowman and Sheryl Crum
Carole Wintle
Carolyn Dalusky
Jennifer Bauman
Joseph Paprocki
Lori Steedley
Hillary Sparks
Northwood Garden Club

Seabrook wins lifetime achievement award

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A native of South Carolina, Charlie grew up on Johns Island, adjacent to Seabrook Island, named after the Seabrook family. The love of island life and coastal marshes led Charlie to write his latest book: *By a World of Marsh*. Four years in the making, the book pulls together all the latest research on the ecosystem that he calls "the kidneys of the earth". Though it is written for the layperson, the book recently passed review by three aquatic experts. Charlie says the revised manuscript will be out by the end of 2011.

His work has lead Seabrook out of his beloved South and around the world. He traveled to the Amazon rainforest in 1989 to examine how deforestation was contributing to climate change. He returned there in 2002 to write a series of stories on the illegal smuggling of wild creatures. In 2004 he spent four days in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to learn how proposed drilling in the oil fields there would affect the fragile environment and the native peoples who live there.

Charlie stepped down from the Georgia ForestWatch Board in part to make more time to write his latest book, but he still serves as an advisor to the Board. We congratulate Charlie on his latest much-deserved recognition. ■

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