Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Summer 2011

Tornado damage in national forests

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From the Director

Is this the new normal?

Wayne Jenkins
Executive Director

I'm having trouble dealing with the weather. Or perhaps its *change* that's getting to me. I hope what we have experienced with this Spring's storms is an anomaly. But my gut is telling me this is part of something much bigger. This much change is fundamentally and psychologically upsetting because despite Nature's ups and downs I felt she was pretty reliable. Things are feeling different now.

By June 1st our region of north Georgia had experienced six distinct waves of violent weather; thunderstorms with incredible lightning, copious deluges, strong straight line winds and tornadoes plus damaging hail. Other areas of the country were harder hit, but the sheer ferocity and repeated waves of tumultuous weather this Spring are something I have not witnessed before.

One recent Spring , laying awake at 3 a.m., listening to the loud drumming of rain on our roof, I marveled at the constant lightning which lasted 30 minutes. The flashes frequent and overlapping produced an eerie, solid blue-white light one could read by. Driving home from our Ellijay office last week I slowed to a crawl, creeping through inches deep rain sheeting across the road, hail pinging off the windshield. One storm in our county toppled many large oaks onto power lines and houses. I've seen all this before, usually infrequent, even rare, but now things feel different, violence condensed, malevolent. Someone emailed me recently saying, "Mother Nature is pissed and she ain't taking it anymore." Indeed.

I've watched weather and seasonal changes carefully over the last thirty years, here in Ellijay. That's what a gardener and someone who lives without air-conditioning does. Yes, that's a short time to be making any conclusions about our present circumstances and I cannot help but connect the dots. For our first decade or so I do not recall the need for irrigation until the late 80's drought, followed by two more. It is definitely warming; winter's increasingly mild, summers becoming torrid. Seasonal shifts are obvious. We grow figs now, a wonderful development and cool season crops all the way through the winter; the last killing frost backing up from mid April to mid March or earlier and the first frost delayed from the second week of October to the end of November. As gardeners we adapt, even take advantage of change, but it's still disconcerting.

All this has me thinking about our forests and the changes we might expect and those that are already underway. Beyond the general assumptions of stronger and more frequent storm events, droughts, blow downs, more silt washed into streams from roads and trails, increased tree mortality from insects and diseases, species migration and extinctions, warming streams and fewer trout (sounds almost biblical doesn't it?); I want to share with our members an example highlighting interrelated changes and established relationships within eastern forests' flora and fauna. I ran across this great example in a NOAA (National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration) education article from 2008 and though it applies to regions farther north, it's a great example of ecological interrelationships and how they can unravel.

> "To better understand the potential impacts of climate change, researchers from the U.S. Forest Service and the University of Maine used computer modeling to predict the future distribution of 150 common bird species. Because bird distributions are influenced mainly by climate and the availability of suitable habitat, the researchers used predicted future distributions of tree species types (representing their habitat and food source) and temperature changes to inform their model. What the researchers found was that, just as some tree species will expand their geographic range and others will decrease their range, so too will the different species of woodpeckers. For example, the model predicted that the

red-headed woodpecker, *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*, will increase in abundance throughout the eastern region while the yellow-bellied sapsucker, *Sphyrapicus varius*, will decrease in abundance.

This potential decrease in abundance of the yellow-bellied sapsucker could have a large impact on the eastern forests due to the unique role that the bird plays within this ecosystem. The yellow-bellied sapsucker creates its nest in balsam fir trees by pecking a hole into the side of the tree. The sapsucker also maintains smaller holes, called "sapwells," from which it eats tree sap for nutrients. This unique behavior creates new food sources and habitats for creatures that live near sapsuckers. The sapwells attract and support various insects, which in turn support other animals.12 And, because the sapsucker is the only woodpecker in eastern North America that is completely migratory, other birds and mammals, such as the flying squirrel, use the sapsucker's nesting cavities as roost sites when the sapsuckers leave in autumn. For example, the ruby-throated hummingbird, *Archilochus colubris*, appears to be an ally of the sapsucker. This hummingbird places its nest near sap wells, is known to follow sapsuckers during their daily movements, and may time its migration to coincide with that of the sapsuckers.13 However, models predict greatly reduced abundance of balsam fir trees in the eastern forests due to climate change, and as a consequence, less suitable habitat for the sapsucker.14 Thus, as climate changes affect the distribution of tree species, the animals that depend on these specific trees for food and habitat will be affected as well."

I wonder how many ancient and natural relationships are at risk of disruption by rapid changes in climate? I wonder how a shifting natural system finds new equilibrium? I also wonder how management agencies like the Forest Service will react to these changes and how they will approach and prioritize their response? Certainly change has been a part of the equation all along, but taking the long view, the last 10,000 years of human history, expansion and now single species global dominance has occurred during a relatively stable climatic period. Perhaps that is now changing too.

What will the "new normal" be?

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Cover photo: April tornadoes caused extensive damage to the forests, especially in the Boggs Creek area of Lumpkin County. Photo credit: National Forest Service

Law 'n order in the forest

by David Govus : District Leader and Board Member

The Chattahoochee–Oconee National Forest (CONF) comprises over 800,000 acres of land located mainly in the North Georgia Mountains. The Forest is accessed by a network of 1200 miles of Forest Service gravel roads, many of which are in poor shape and some of which can easily become impassable in winter with little warning. Many areas of the Forest have no cell phone reception and are over an hour's drive from any semblance of civilization. This is a Forest that receives hundreds of thousands of visitors annually from nearby metro Atlanta. With all of these factors the question rises as to whose job it is to enforce the law on the Forest. Law enforcement is the prime responsibility of nine Forest Service Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs) aided by Georgia Department of Natural Resource (DNR) Rangers.

What is the state of law enforcement on the Forest today? It is the best of times and the worst of times. On the one hand the vast majority of visitors enjoy their Forest without any encounters with criminal activity despite a very limited law enforcement presence. America is in many ways a peaceful and civil society but also has one of the highest murder rates in the developed world and a higher percentage of its citizens incarcerated than any other country. The recent arrest of the convicted murderer Gary Michael Hilton opened a window into the darker side of the Forest. Hilton lived on National Forests in Florida, North Carolina and Georgia, squatting at campsites and living out of his van. He supported himself by breaking into vehicles at trail heads and remote cabins, and along the way murdered at least 4 people including the gruesome murder of Meridith Emerson on the Chattahoochee National Forest. The ease with which Hilton managed to live in the National Forests for several years during his crime spree is alarming. Even more alarming is that despite the ever expanding metro Atlanta area and increasing number of Forest visitors, law enforcement personnel numbers in the Forest are scheduled to be reduced in the years ahead.

Now there are only nine Forest Service Law Enforcement Officers to cover the entire 800,000+ acres of Georgia's National Forests. With in-service training, vacations and a normal 40 hour work week at any one time, perhaps only 3 or 4 LEOs might be on duty on any given day. In the early 1990s, with far fewer visitors to the forests, there were 20 Forest Service employees who had police powers. Some of these individuals performed other tasks but they had badges and guns and spent most of their time in the Forest. Softening the effects of this reduction in Federal numbers has been the presence of law enforcement officers from the Department of Natural Resources.

The most remote sections of Forest Service land in the north Georgia are designated as Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). These areas are joint projects between the Forest Service and the Wildlife Resources Division of the Georgia DNR. From the 100,000 acre Cohutta WMA in northwest Georgia to the Warwoman WMA in northeast Georgia, there are at least 10 wildlife areas stretching across the Forest. Together, they comprise a significant portion of the acreage of the Forest. These WMAs were established in the 1940s in an attempt to restore wild game populations. Deer, bear and turkey were nearly wiped out by the 1930s as a result of poor land management practices, woods burning and massive poaching. Initially many of the WMAs were closed to hunting for years and DNR rangers or game wardens lived, at times, in the woods and guarded their areas. There was resistance from some locals in the mountains. One of the first state game wardens in the 1940s, George Schuler, was shot and wounded while on patrol, and as late as the 1960s shots were fired into a game warden's personal residence in the Cohutta Mountains. The WMA program was a huge success, and over time the animal populations were restored and limited hunting resumed. Today each has an area manager who oversees open hunts on the area, checks in hunters, checks harvests and maintains numerous food plots. This careful stewardship allows the WMAs to function as zoned areas. The open hunt dates on a given WMA usually are no more than 3 or 4 days at a time with several hunts on each area per year. These dates are staggered from area to area, thus providing opportunities for hunters while allowing other forest users to avoid areas open for hunting. Over the years, these area managers remained as trained peace officers with badges and guns, but were split off from DNR Rangers who focus strictly on law enforcement. The area managers were given the less than glamorous sobriquet of Wildlife Technician. Whatever their titles, these Area Managers remain the face of authority in the forest and to this day if you encounter an official in the forest it is most likely to be an Area Manager.

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Why hikes and outings matter

by Peg Griffith : Board Member

Georgia ForestWatch is not a recreation group. We are an advocacy group: we exist to "Preserve, Protect and Restore" the National Forests of North Georgia. So why do we have a Hikes and Outings Program? Because we only protect what we love, and to love something it helps to have an encounter with it. We want Georgians to encounter nature, and more specifically, Georgia's National Forests, because we believe that the experience will be so wonderful that you will be moved. Moved enough to want to preserve and protect these fabulous forests.

As a child, if you climbed trees, found tad poles in pools of water, hid in the tall grass of an open field, caught dragonflies or played in a stream, you might have fallen in love with nature. You might have discovered the smells of grass or the sounds of the wind in the trees. You might have seen a new born fawn or baby rabbits, and come

Snorkeling is a great family event, and a wonderful way to introduce kids to to joys of exploring nature.

away fascinated and thrilled by the beauty and complexity of nature. I did, and I am still thrilled by it all. I love learning from all you smart folks about plants, trees, birds, and how the parts of the ecosystem interact.

The Hikes and Outings Program is intended to offer these kinds of experiences. We want to share with you beautiful places in tour National Forests. We hope you will discover the remarkable diversity in our waters and woods. We want to teach you about some of the threats to our forests – effects of people, bugs, invasive plants and critters, management gone right or wrong. When we spend time exploring and learning together, we share our knowledge with each other and deepen our love of this marvelous terrain. And we make friends who care about the same things we care about: things worth Preserving, Protecting, and Restoring: friendships and forests. ■

Welcome Jennifer Lopez, our new Outreach Director

Jennifer Lopez has joined Georgia ForestWatch to take on the important role of Outreach Director. She will be assisting with the planning and execution of our major annual fundraiser and retreat, helping to increase membership by marketing Georgia ForestWatch to the public, supporting the major donor program, coordinating the production of our newsletter, and organizing outings and educational events.

Jennifer's recent background is in marketing, program development, and volunteer management, for several non-profits in Northwest, GA. Prior to coming to Georgia, she worked as a seasonal park ranger in Westminster, Colorado, where she also volunteered with Hawkquest to protect eagles, owls, falcons, and hawks.

Her love of the mountains brought Jennifer to Ellijay, and she's happy to call it home. She enjoys playing blue-grass music on her guitar, singing and wildlife photography. Jennifer takes a yearly trip to rock climb and hike in the Rocky Mountains. She also enjoys hiking, canoeing and whitewater rafting here in Georgia.

Please say "hello" to Jennifer when you're in the office and welcome her to the ForestWatch "family".

Jennifer Lopez

Sustainable Recreation in Your National Forests
Annual Fall Retreat
Vogel State Park
September 30 – October 1, 2011

Come to the Fall Retreat, September 30 – October 1 at Vogel State Park, to hear the latest thinking on recreational issues. As mentioned in our last newsletter, Georgia ForestWatch members and staff have become concerned about the effects of increased recreation on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests and have urged the Forest Service to take a comprehensive approach to the challenges of trails management.

Recently, Forest Supervisor, George Bain, and Georgia ForestWatch Director, Wayne Jenkins, facilitated public collaborative meetings for addressing the growing recreation challenges on our forests. Supervisor Bain will discuss his position on forest recreation issues and Wayne Jenkins will present on the recent recreation collaboration meetings. On Saturday afternoon, we'll offer fun, educational hikes, interesting programs on issues related to how the forest is used. The kids will enjoy tree-climbing (safely conducted with helmets and in harnesses) with Jim Walker and Genevieve Summers. All retreat programming will take place on Saturday, October 1. In addition, we will host a potluck dinner on Friday evening and a hike on Sunday morning, so come enjoy an autumn weekend at beautiful Vogel State Park with the whole family!

Volunteers are needed to serve on the food committee. Please contact Andy and Melinda Edwards at andrewedwards@ellijay.com if you can help out.

Admission to the retreat is $20 per person, $30 per couple. (FREE for kids 12 and under) and includes lunch, refreshments, BBQ dinner, and all activities (camping fees not included, and parking at Vogel is $5 per vehicle). We are limited to 75 persons because of the conference room size at Vogel – so don't miss out! Register early. Sign up now and reserve a campsite or cabin today! Call Diane at 706-635-8733 or email us at info@gafw.org.

We look forward to seeing you there!

One of the afternoon activities offered at the Georgia ForestWatch Retreat on October 1, 2011, will be a vertical hike, with Genevieve Summers of Dancing With Trees, in a big hickory across the parking lot from the pavilion where the retreat is held. There will also be a morning tree climbing session for kids. Don't miss the thrill of viewing your surroundings from high atop a tree!

Law 'n Order in the Forest

(continued from page 4)

Poaching, while not as common as it once was, still exists and today features an ugly edge. This year in the Rich Mountain and Cohutta WMAs, fifteen individuals were arrested in six cases involving bear poaching. In one particularly disturbing case, a group used dogs to track a mother bear to her den, killed her, removed her gall bladder and took her live cubs. Unfortunately there appears to be an active underground market supplying gall bladders an underground market for these gall bladders. Despite increased use of the Forest and the demonstrated need for law enforcement, the numbers of sworn officers are scheduled to be drastically reduced. The DNR has decided to strip the area managers of their police powers for the next seven years. Area managers will be expected to manage hunts, check in hunters, check out harvested game and enforce hunting regulations but will not have arrest powers, badges or guns. When Colonel Homer Bryson, head of law enforcement for the Wildlife Resources Division of the DNR was asked what an area manager should do if he or she witnessed a crime, he replied that they were to call a DNR ranger. When it was pointed out that in the vast WMAs in north Georgia phone reception was spotty and even if a call was possible help could well be an hour away, Colonel Bryson replied that new technology would solve these problems. He did not reveal what these new technologies might be. The stated reasons for this action are DNR budget cuts and the need to resolve "huge internal issues."

The DNR does have severe budgetary problems but they continue to spend precious funds on money-losing golf courses, lodges and the scandalous equine spa at the Brasstown Resort. Training peace officers is costly, but it is a necessary expense of modern civilized life. Many small cities are able to support as many peace officers as currently patrol a vast area of public land in north Georgia. The net effect of this change will be a 50% reduction in law enforcement numbers on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. Citizens should contact their state representatives and voice their opposition to this plan by sending an e-mail to Dan Forester, Director of the WRD c/o leigh_cureton@dnr.state.ga.us. ■

2011 Southern Blue Ridge Fire Learning Network

by Darren Wolfgang : Forest Ecologist

The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Forest Service recently co-hosted the sixth annual Fire Learning Network (FLN) meeting in Del Rio, Tennessee. The three-day workshop focused on promoting awareness and sharing knowledge of the use of "prescribed fire" in the Southern Appalachians. The mission of the Fire Learning Network (FLN) is to bring together private and public land managers, concerned citizens, environmental groups, and leading regional fire researchers from the Southern Blue Ridge region (SBR) to discuss the appropriate use and safe application of controlled burning on public and private lands.

The 2011 FLN focused on the Unaka Mountains of the Cherokee National Forest. Additional presentations and demonstration area updates came from land managers and researchers in the SBR FLN and sister Central Appalachian FLN which includes GA.,VA.,TN.,NC,SC.,WV., KY., and PA.

Several goals and highlights from this years' FLN meeting:

- Determine if fire managers are burning the most important conservation areas across the landscape. The dialogue among fire managers and scientists on prescribed fire and conservation priorities has been a "work in progress". Faced with limited time, resources, and regulations such as air quality emissions standards and climate change concerns managers are working to identify "conservation" priorities across the Southern Blue Ridge landscape in an effort to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of burning activities. Techniques were demonstrated to help identify areas that can benefit from fire.

One interesting tool presented was referred to as "eco-math". This concept works by assigning numerical values and scores to certain ecosystem attributes. Fire adapted ecosystems are analyzed by using a scoring system to identify areas with the highest fire associated conservation value. For example, sites where known populations of threatened and endangered plants or animals that are fire associated occur are assigned a higher numerical value than those sites that do not have rare species. Forest communities such as pitch pine, table mountain pine, and upland dry oak would receive a higher score than mesic cove forests and stream corridors. Soils that have unique chemistry, as well as rocky and/or sandy soils that are excessively well drained could also be included in the analysis to identify dry upland communities that are more likely to support fire associated communities. Another component of "eco-math" was the review of a modeling system that ranked the "ecological departure" condition of various forest communities. This process identifies communities that are

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Wild & Woolly Forest Festival 2011 recap

by Ted Doll : Board President

Renowned Georgia author, Janisse Ray, highlighted the 2011 Georgia ForestWatch Wild & Woolly Forest Festival & Native Plant Sale on Saturday, May 7 at the Sautee Nacoochee Center. She gave a spell-binding talk, "Inspiration to Protect the Places and Things We Love." 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. After the talk, the audience crowded around the book-signing table to get signed copies of these wonderful books.

As has become tradition, this annual ForestWatch benefit featured a fabulous array of native plants for sale from Jennie Branch Nursery, Scott Creek Nursery, the Pickens County Master Gardeners and 4H, and Saul's Nursery.

The festival also featured music and song by Joanne Steele, a local folk musician and craftsperson. She did a great rendition of John McCutcheon's *"It's Kind of a Circular Thing"* on guitar and harmonica. This was followed by an outstanding talk, "Man's Place in the Wilderness" by Jim Walker, a ForestWatch volunteer and district leader.

A special feature this year was tree climbing provided by Genevieve Summers, owner of Dancing with Trees. The kids especially enjoyed being up in the branches. Last but not least, Shayne Johnson and his band, the "Crooked Tunes," provided great bluegrass music during the afternoon.

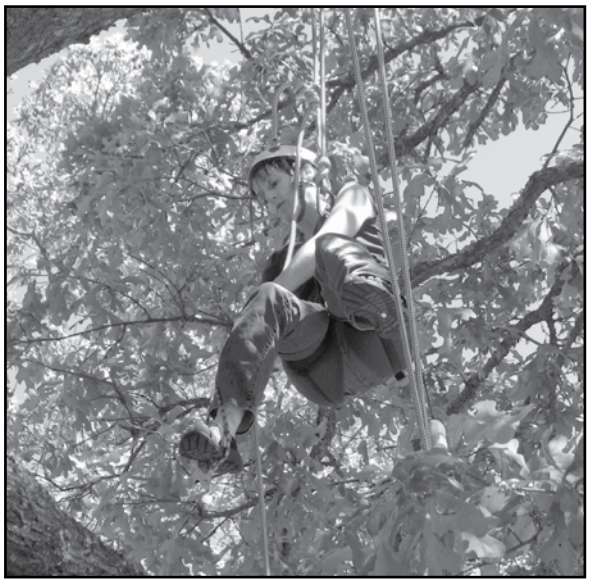
As always, there was plenty of food, wine for tasting, music, and a special raffle of an exciting biplane ride! Special thanks go out to Martha and John Ezzard and John McMullen of Tiger Mountain Vineyards for donating wine, and Cal and Sandi Tax for providing the biplane ride. Special thanks also to Melinda and Andy Edwards who coordinated the food. Many volunteers, too numerous to mention by name, made this event a success – thanks to all of you!

Music was provided by Shane Johnston and his band.

Office manager Diane Freer and volunteer Cynthia Chesna greet guests.

Which to choose? All the native plants are great!

Georgia author Janisse Ray



Climbing trees with ropes is safe and fun!

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A mighty one falls

We are saddened to learn of the death of Melissa Graves Walker: author, educator, lover of wild nature and long time friend and member of Georgia ForestWatch. Melissa died May 4. The following is quoted from her obituary:

"Melissa Graves Walker … died Monday, May 4, at Hospice Atlanta, of breast cancer. Born and raised in Dublin, Georgia, Walker completed her undergraduate and doctoral degrees in English literature at Emory University ... She was an outspoken advocate for wilderness, and served for ten years on the national board of Wilderness Watch, as well as being President of the Georgia chapter. She also served on the executive council of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE), and was Vice Chair of the Southern Council of the Wilderness Society. In 1994, Norton published her edited collection of essays by nature and science writers, entitled *Reading the Environment*.

Shortly after turning 50, Walker embarked on a solitary quest to learn about America's wilderness area ... Her account of these travels, *Living on Wilderness Time: 200 Days Alone in America's Wild Places,* was published by the University of Virginia Press, and won the Georgia Writers' Association Award for Best Memoir of 2002."

Melissa inspired ForestWatch members back in 2005 when we got together at Camp Wahsega for our annual Retreat. She asked us why we loved trees. What happened, when we were children, that lead to our present passion for forests and the natural? Each in turn told their story of tree houses and swings, climbing trees, the smell of the woods. She re-awakened that early magic and reminded us of those deep roots that lead to activism. We bought her book, *Living on Wilderness Time*, and reading it, traveled with her to remote places and experienced her fears and her joys as a woman in the wild. Joining her at Camp Wahsega that day was her husband, Dr. Jerome Walker. We send him, their children and their grandchildren our love and best wishes. Our lives are richer for knowing the Walkers, and for the sharing of Melissa's passion for nature. She was a fine, wild spirit, and will be missed and remembered by each of us.

In keeping with her style, Melissa was buried May 5th in a "green" cemetery at Church of the Holy Spirit in Conyers, Ga. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made in the name of Melissa Walker to Wilderness Watch, P.O. Box 9175, Missoula Montana, 59807.

Farewell Melissa; your spirit precedes us into that wilderness we are all destined to reach. ■

A personal note by Peg Griffith

It is fitting that we include the review of *Living on Wilderness Time* (see page 12), to accompany our goodbye to Melissa Walker. I am honored to have met Melissa. I sense that we shared much in common: love of writing, of nature, and of time alone. And we shared a sense of caution around bears.

A female black bear arrived on my deck in the wee morning hours of the Memorial Day weekend. Adrenaline flooded my body as I found myself face to face with an upright bear. Later I realized I was standing between her and her tiny cub, up the tree behind me! I think it was Melissa, calling: "Come outside." The next day, I got the news that she had died this month. Like she said: *"Each part of nature is directly or indirectly connected to every other part of the natural world. Humans are no exception."*

Photo credit: US Fish & Wildlife Service

Tornados damage national forests

by Darren Wolfgang : Forest Ecologist

While news coverage of North Georgia's wild spring weather has been thorough, little has been reported about the damages to the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. In recent weeks, several tornadoes ripped across the National Forest leaving behind a large mess and likely headaches for Forest Service managers. All told the Forest Service estimates that more than 2,000 acres have been seriously damaged and more than 80 miles of roadways are still closed. The agency is in the process of clearing downed trees from system roads as well as doing the appropriate NEPA planning to repair campgrounds that suffered substantial damage such as Boggs Creek in Lumpkin County and several areas in Rabun and White Counties.

The agency is also seeking to conduct salvage logging operations to recover commercially valuable timber damaged during these storms. ForestWatch is supportive of the removal of trees from system roads as well as the recovery of storm damaged trees from forested areas near system roads and existing campground cleanup. However, for environmental reasons we are not supportive of salvage logging in steep or difficult terrain, nor do we support building new roads and infrastructure to harvest downed timber within or adjacent to designated Wilderness Areas. Wilderness is one of the few places legally mandated to allow for the full spectrum of natural processes to transpire unhindered and untended by man. We need to have areas where natural processes dominate - from tornadoes to soil formation. Wind events are a natural part of the forest ecosystems, and these systems need no help from management after the storm.

Photo credit: National Forest Service

For more information on trail closure status visit the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests home page: http://www.fs.fed.us/conf

View photos of the damage here: http://www.flickr.com/photos/chattoconeenf/sets/72157626514458743/

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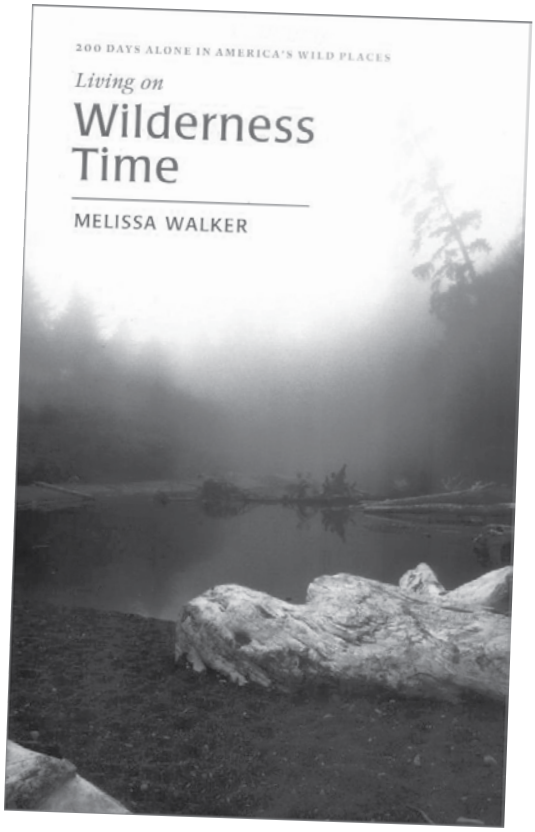
Book review:
Living on Wilderness Time: 200 Days Alone in America's Wild Places

by Peg Griffith : Board Member

Loving on Wilderness Time: 200 Days Alone in America's Wild Places, by Melissa Walker, University of Virginia Press, 2002, 304 pages.
http://www.amazon.com/Living-Wilderness-Time-Melissa-Walker/dp/0813921104/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid-1306894394&sr=1-1

At age 51, with an established career as a university English professor, Melissa Walker was ready for a new challenge. She had published a textbook. She had written a book about Black female authors of the Civil Rights era. Yet increasingly she found herself drawn to the topic of wilderness. Now she wanted to experience the wilderness for herself, by herself. Living on Wilderness Time is the story of what she discovered on three extended trips over a fifteen month period. She traveled to Yosemite National Park in California, Rocky Mountain National Park, Yellowstone National Park Grand Teton National Park, the Grand Canyon, the Smoky Mountains, Glacier National Park, Bryce Canyon, Zion National Park, Mount Hood, Mount Baker, Cloud Peak, Gila Wilderness, much of Alaska and parts of Canada, Florida, Georgia and others.



In Wilderness her life slowed down to match the pace of nature, and natural silence made room for introspection. Walker interweaves her reflection on the natural world with reflections of her life as a woman who is also a wife, mother and career woman. She reflects: *"It was in the wilderness that I began to understand that efforts to influence the behavior of people I know were as futile as trying to change the habits of animals in the wild ... as day after day I confronted the hidden structures that bind life to life. Each part of nature is directly or indirectly connected to every other part of the natural world. Humans are no exception."* One does not "manage" a spouse or children any more than one manages nature. Who knew? Who knows indeed, unless one slows down enough to get quiet, create some space and listen. Two hundred days in the wilderness gave Melissa the time to reflect on these things. When she returned home, she gave away most of her clothes, stopped waiting for her husband to come home from his work at the hospital, and began living her life her way, on her terms.

There are other glimpses into the author's life. One gets the feeling that Walker has a visceral respect for bears. The book includes numerous amusing anecdotes regarding bears, and when in Alaska and invited to go Grizzly watching, she reflects: *"Humans should not intrude on bears. We should leave wild-life alone."* She laughs at herself, just a little, at times like this.

Living on Wilderness Time is a tribute to the last wild places in North America. Walker makes the case for preserving them, not just because they are beautiful; not just because they are home to the wild creatures she encountered (bear, elk, alligator, hawks, eagles, snakes and more.) She praises the silence, the blue skies, the rushing streams, the cold mornings. These things, she tells us, are worth saving because we need them: as human animals, we need to feel connected to the Earth and the other animals. *Living on Wilderness Time* is a beautiful, thoughtful book, written with an abiding love for the wild outdoors. It inspires the reader to make the time to experience what these places have to impart. ■

Southern Blue Ridge Fire Learning Network

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associated with fire and determine how far out of "ecological balance" they have become due to fire suppression, logging, or other human activities. After departure values are established, various management scenarios can be applied to hypothetical ecological conditions to evaluate the physical and economic effectiveness of various treatments such as harvesting and planting desirable species, mechanical thinning to increase light and improve species composition, and or the use of prescribed fire as the communities move towards a more balanced future ecological condition.

- Determine how many acres across the landscape need to be restored to secure biodiversity and adequate landscape level habitat for protected, threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. Fragmentation and development of private lands will likely continue to increase in the future, causing managers of public forests and private conservation groups such as the Nature Conservancy to take a close look at "conservation reserves" to determine what needs to be done to preserve our natural systems and all of the species found within them. The restoration of table mountain pine communities was a key theme in this years field visit to the Cherokee National Forest. Managers are also focusing efforts on several other forest communities that are thought to benefit from occasional fire. such as: dry upland pine-oak commnunities. Pine species associated with fire disturbance include Table Mountain., Pitch, and Shortleaf pines.

- Monitoring was a central theme with presentations about large scale monitoring being conducted by natural resources faculty members at Western Carolina University. Discussion centered around using monitoring to inform adaptive management, as well as identifying and prioritizing research needs and shortcomings in data sets to further investigate the influence of fire on the landscape. Presenters expressed a willingness to prioritize burning activities on xeric ridges, where the appropriate rare and degraded communities of flora and fauna were present.

- Climate change and protecting the "human infrastructure" were discussed this year. Effective fire awareness education and messaging were discussed. Such activities include identifying communities located within the Wildland-Urban Interface and promoting Firewise Communities. This National initiative works by educating land owners about building construction, landscaping, and forest management activities and strategies to minimize the risk of fire damage to properties.

Progress is being made regarding the appropriate timing, location, and use of fire on our southern mountains. More long term research and monitoring is needed to fully understand and predict the effects of prescribed fires across the diverse Appalachian landscape. We hope that land managers will remain open-minded and observant as they use prescribed fire. Managers recognize the situation is delicate and the importance of using fire carefully, and in the appropriate locations. Adequate monitoring is required to adjust to new information as we learn. Georgia ForestWatch is pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this year's meeting and is looking forward to hearing of new progress at future meetings. ■

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American Chestnut restoration

by Darren Wolfgang : Forest Ecologist

The American Chestnut *(Castanea dentata)*, once common throughout the Eastern United States, was highly prized for its abundant nut crops, rapid growth, rot resistant wood, and it's straight, easy to work grain. It was said that the chestnut grew fast like yellow poplar and was durable like oak, a perfect hardwood tree. Today, this giant that once lived for centuries and grew to heights of up to 100 feet has been reduced to brushy stump sprouts throughout much of its historic range due to a fungal disease introduced from Asia, popularly called the "Chestnut blight" but familiar to scientists as *Cryphonectria parasitica.* This new threat was discovered in 1904 on American chestnuts in the New York Zoological Park (now the Bronx Zoo) by the park's chief forester. By 1915 the rapidly moving blight, which is largely transmitted by wind, had swept across most of the Chestnut's range, from Maine to North Carolina. Already an economically important species, the Chestnut was subject to accelerated harvest by foresters and lumbermen who set out to conduct salvage logging operations on chestnuts already killed and the remaining virgin chestnut trees before they were killed and devalued by the blight. Some have speculated that this ambitious logging response, harvesting even the most remote and difficult stands of the steep Appalachians may have wiped out isolated pockets of Chestnut that harbored some genetic resistance.

The blight works to kill the trees when blight spores land in wounds or fissures in the tree stems. Once the trees are killed, the stems produce stump sprouts, which typically grow for several years and become re-infected. This cycle can repeat for many years, however in areas subject to dense shade, young stems can eventually become exhausted and die outright. Several long term studies have suggested that sprouts in study locations become less abundant over time.

Interestingly, the decline of the Chestnut didn't begin with the blight. Aside from extensive commercial exploitation and land settlement, historical accounts document the decline of the American Chestnut in the South some 75 years prior to the discovery of the Chestnut blight. Over the course of a few decades, steady Chestnut morality was reported as it spread across areas of the Piedmont and into the lower slopes of the eastern Blue Ridge.

"There seems to be a combination of insects, fungous diseases and fire, or perhaps something more deep seated, such as a widespread but obscure soil or climatic change, of which the others are but manifestations of subordinate causes, destroying the chestnut in the South. The trees generally die in midsummer and, unlike blight-killed trees, seldom sprout from the stump after the trunk is killed. Certain insects, notably the two-lined chestnut borer (Agrilus bilincatus), are almost always found under the bark of the dead or dying trees, but whether as cause or effect has sometimes been a matter of dispute. Formerly chestnut grew pretty well over the entire South, east of the Mississippi River and north of Florida. But about seventy-five years ago it began mysteriously to die out throughout the lowland portions of the region and today it is a disappearing straggler of no commercial importance everywhere except in the mountains, its former abundance being attested by old stumps, rotting logs, weathered fence rails, and the tales of the old inhabitants. Even in its Appalachian stronghold, where it reaches its greatest development and abundance, this strange dying off is going on in a few sections. At this time it is particularly active along the lower slope of the eastern side of the Blue Ridge, where whole mountain-sides are covered with gaunt white trunks of trees killed within the last few years." (Buttrick, 1915)

One of the most probable causes for the earlier "pre-blight" Chestnut die-off is believed to have been a combination of factors mentioned above: the damaging of developing Chestnut trees from the frequent burning practices by European settlers, which wounded trees, making them weak and especially susceptible to damage caused by the native two-lined chestnut borer, and perhaps more importantly another fungal disease, also introduced from Asia in the early to mid 1800s, called "ink disease" or Phyhtophthora cinnamoi., Phytophthora attacks and kills the roots and root collar of Chestnut trees, causing outright mortality as opposed to the top kill and stump sprouting response associated with the Chestnut blight, so Phytophthora is a more likely culprit of the initial reduction of Chestnut populations.

Current Status:

A few isolated and surviving pockets of healthy Chestnut trees have been discovered throughout the its natural range, including one population discovered in 2006 in Georgia at Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) State Park near Warm Springs. The population at FDR State Park is reported to include roughly half a dozen individuals, with the largest being 40 feet tall and about 20 to 30 years old. This population is thought to be the southernmost American Chestnut stand discovered to date that is capable of producing flowers and nuts. The seed from this population will be evaluated for genetic resistance

to the blight. Another population, one of the largest in the country, is located east of La Crosse, Wisconsin, which is outside of the native range. This population was initiated in 1909 when a farmer planted a few Chestnuts on the ridge above his farm. Those original trees, one of which attained a diameter of 58 inches in less than 100 years, has since gone on to produce nearly 6,000 chestnut trees in a grove that covers 90 acres, assisted by squirrels. Because this population was outside of the native range of the Chestnut, the blight did not begin to infect the area until the mid-1980s. Currently it is estimated that 600 trees in this population have become infected. Several other large diameter trees have been discovered in Tennessee and elsewhere in the east, although most have struggled and, like the lone survivor growing along Forest Service Rd 42 near Winding Stair Gap on the Chattahoochee National Forest, appears to have fought off the blight several times.

Hope for the future?

For over a century, foresters, scientists, government agencies and private individuals and organizations have been researching the chestnut and testing various strategies to someday return this once magnificent species to the Eastern forests. Early efforts to locate trees with potential genetic resistance to the blight (such as those mentioned above) have resulted in some hope for the future due to the presence of individuals that seem to be more blight tolerant. Bud grafts and seeds have been collected from some of these survivors and have been incorporated into the hybridization program. This program aimed at crossing genes from the blight resistant Chinese Chestnut with the American Chestnut have been going on for several decades. The goal of the hybridization program is to produce trees with similar form and vigor to the American Chestnut and posses the gene from the Chinese Chestnut that allows for resistance. To date, field trials of the trees produced after generations of careful breeding and back-crossing for keeping the Chinese blight resistance but eliminating as few as possible of the American traits show good resistance to the blight. Current hybrids are called 15/16ths, meaning that they are predominately American Chestnut DNA and 1/16th Chinese. The process of breeding resistant Chestnuts is very time consuming; some of the first Chestnuts were cross-bred in 1977 and it has taken until 2010 to produce the latest 15/16th version.

There are concerns among researchers that once hybrids are planted in the "wild" they could cross pollinate and "undo" their blight resistance. Additionally there are other concerns that the blight resistant progeny will not take on the same form and habit as the American Chestnut, as the Chinese Chestnut does not grow as tall and large and takes on a more spreading "bushy" form. Only by planting in natural settings and observation over many decades will we know the answers to these and other questions regarding this great species of eastern hardwood.

Other research originating in Europe has identified a strain of virus that infects the blight and causes the blight to become "sick" (hypovirulence). The process works to slow the impacts of the blight allowing trees to wall off the infection which ultimately allows the trees to recover and live longer. This treatment in its current state of development is limited in effectiveness and scale in the U.S. due to difficulties with natural dispersion of the virus. Researchers are optimistic that manipulations of hypovirulence could eventually render the blight weakened and nonlethal to the American Chestnut. You can learn more about hypovirulence here: http://www.vatacf.org/hypovirulence.html

Several out-planting sites for the new "resistant" strain of Chestnut have been established in the Eastern states. The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) suggested the identification of areas on both public and private lands to be planted with groups of 25 hybrid trees, spaced every ½ mile to create populations that could disperse naturally. At a 2011 Regional Workshop in Tennessee TACF defined the following critiera for Chestnut "restoration":

"Restoration will be achieved when the American chestnut has reached a self-sustaining population that reproduces without human involvement. This population must fulfill the original ecological niche in the plant and animal communities where planted. TACF must conserve existing genetic resources and biodiversity within the historic population."

Additionally the group expressed the need to extract or breed Phythophthora resistance in seedlings, determine the level of self-sustainable trees for a 100 year population and how many trees would be initially required to set the stage for the development of such a population?

Pilot projects are already underway at undisclosed locations on a few National Forests in the Southeast. The Chattahoochee National Forest has suggested that they could receive hybrid trees for a trial within the next several years. As mentioned, new seedlings will need to be periodically monitored to evaluate overall resistance to the blight and Phytophthora, as well as other ecological effects such as loss to herbivores and other problems and the potential "invasiveness" of the new hybrid.

Resources:

Buttrick, P.L. 1915. Chestnut in the Future, American Forestry (Reprinted)
The American Chestnut Foundation: http://www.acf.org/
American Chestnut Cooperators Foundation: http://accf-online.org/Tennessee/index.htm

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