Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Winter 2011

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From the Director

Wilderness and management

Wayne Jenkins
Executive Director

In the Fall issue of Forest News I said I would explain why land management agencies and more specifically the USDA Forest Service do not appear to be supportive of Wilderness designations on the lands they oversee. For a good historical perspective on this issue see Doug Scott's "The Enduring Wilderness".

An underlying fundamental reason that Forest Service decision makers do not embrace the Wilderness movement is their culture of active management. Professional forest managers are trained to manage forests. Wilderness designation eschews that approach, allowing nature to self-manage with little to no interference by man. When I discuss the "Wilderness question" with managers, the informal response is almost always, "What if?". What if there is a fire, insect or disease problem, human injury…

These are fine questions and need to be addressed, but I think they miss the point and are borne from the management-only perspective. I understand the concerns but do they not reflect a built-in bias? Wilderness is a place, set aside, where the activities of man are minimal to non-existent. (At least intentional actvities; the global reach of our unintentional impacts is becoming all too clear and no place seems safe or completely unaffected.) Those who choose to visit wilderness are on their own. Self-reliance and acceptance of whatever challenges the land has to offer are prerequisites. You might become lost or injured. You might be confronted with wildlife that can be dangerous. You might even die. These are "real" places, wild landscapes that could care less about your comfort, skills or survival and you should come to them knowing full well that upon entering, upon walking away from your car, boat or plane, that you must meet the land on its terms, not yours. Your computer surfing skills, cell phone and bank account mean nothing here. You have jumped from the information age into the elemental age and the questions of existence have flipped. Can you stay dry, warm and hydrated as you, step by step move further away from civilized safety? And isn't this one of the great values of wilderness humans appreciate?

Edward Abbey brings this a bit closer to home in his "Appalachian Wilderness-The Great Smokey Mountains", "In the ceaseless quest for goods and status, men have become so frantic to keep up with their fellows, and have so cluttered their communities with the effluvia of their civilization, that they must, to preserve some link with nature and some measure of sanity, repair at frequent intervals to yet unspoiled and uncrowded scenes." These are two human-centric views of wilderness and its values: why we go and that we best be prepared.

The Wilderness Act, our nations most protective legal designation of land was also meant to protect large areas for their own sake; whether we ever "use" them or not. Howard Zahniser, in defining Wilderness as the drafter of the Act, used the phrase "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man," and in the preceding Statement of Policy wrote

> *" In order to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States and its possessions, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition,… ".*

It is clear from these statements that the intent of the act goes far beyond human recreation. Some have said that the Wilderness Act may be one, if not the first, "Bill of Rights" for nature; nature protected for its own sake. It is a most uncomfortable idea for an active, exploitive people. And yet, as we see the cumulative affects of human society, it is obvious we do not have enough nature for nature's sake, enough wilderness to protect our water and air, the full family of wildlife, all the natural processes necessary for our own survival, least of all our recreation pursuits.

So back to the management question. Is it true that Wilderness is "locked up", that the managers hands are tied and can do nothing? If a natural or even man-caused fire originating in wilderness threatens a house or town can the "responsible

managing authority", put it out? If someone is lost or injured in wilderness can they be rescued? If diseases or insects threaten forests within wilderness, can they be controlled?

Subsection 4(b) commands that, "Except as otherwise provided in this Act, each agency administering any area designated as wilderness shall be responsible for preserving the wilderness character of the area and shall so administer such area for such other purposes for which it may have been established as also to presearve its wilderness character."

Wilderness character? The question is addressed two ways by the Wilderness Act. First, Section 2(c),

"A Wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

This is the ideal, the definition that should overarch all management decisions and actions to maintain the essential character of wilderness. The key word, untrammeled, means "unconfined", "unrestrained", "unencumbered", "unlimited", and "unimpeded".

The Act continues, "An area of Wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural condition and which
(1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable;
(2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation;
(3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in unimpaired condition;
(4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

The second definition, though still seeking to uphold the ideal is a bit less severe, using, "generally appears", "affected primarily", "substantially unnoticed", which creates the opportunity to include lands that, though not yet in the "ideal" condition or character of wilderness, may still be incorporated by legislation into the federal system. This is crucially important for those places with wilderness potential under the jurisdiction of agencies reluctant to recommend them for wilderness.

(continued on back page)

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Cover photo: Darren Wolfgang, Georgia ForestWatch Forest Ecologist, left, and Executive Director Wayne Jenkins took Indonesian visitors on a hike to one of the Chattahoochee National Forest's largest trees. Photo by Robin Hitner.

Indonesian environmentalists confer with ForestWatch

On November 19, the Georgia Council for International Visitors, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of State's International Visitor Program, hosted a number of experts in the environmental field from Indonesia.

The visitors, with expertise in forest management, environmental law, environmental activism, and forestry, met with representatives from the Georgia Environmental Protection Agency, National Wildlife Federation, and the U.S. Forest Service before visiting Georgia ForestWatch offices in Ellijay. Their itinerary also included a volunteer activity with Trees Atlanta, a visit to the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site, a meeting with the Georgia Forestry Commission, and a visit to Brender Demonstration (Hitchiti Experimental) Forest.

Photo by Robin Hitner

Indonesian environmentalists discuss policy and legal issues with ForestWatch staff.

The visitors included Ms. Choiriatun Nur Annisa, International Processes Commissioner and representative of the International Forestry Students' Association; Mr. Fauzan Azima, head of the Leuser Ecosystem Area Management Body; Mr. Yuyun Indradi, forest campaigner for Greenpeace Southeast Asia; Ms. Josi Khatarina, senior researcher at the Indonesian Center for Environmental Law; Mr. Kussaritano, director of the Environmental Partnership, Central Kalimantan; Ms. Prayekti Murharjanti, deputy director of the Indonesian Center for Environmental Law; Mr. Lyndon Baines Pangkali, program coordinator of the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, FOKER (Forum for Cooperation) Program; and Mr. Abetnego Panca Putra Tarigan, executive director of Sawit Watch (Palm Oil Watch).

They spent much of the day with ForestWatch's executive director, Wayne Jenkins; Forest Ecologist Darren Wolfgang; and Board Member Robin Hitner. "This was our second opportunity to meet with Indonesian officials who struggle with forest protection issues in their home countries. We were able to discuss not only the challenges but some solutions and approaches now being tried in the U.S. for improving forests and protecting all species. One thing emphasized by our guests during their visit is how the rest of the world looks to the U.S. for leadership on difficult environmental problems," Jenkins said.

After a presentation about the history of ForestWatch, discussion expanded into a wide-ranging conversation covering forest ecology, bio-diversity and human forest impacts. Afterward, the contingent went on a short hike to see the Gannett poplar, Georgia's largest yellow poplar, which stands in stark contrast to the younger, logged forest surrounding it along Bear Creek in the Conasauga Ranger District.

At the end of the hike, the visitors enjoyed some snacks and spring water from Jenkins' home spring. Several remarked on the water's taste, which led to a discussion of the role played by forests in protecting water flows and quality and the worsening problem of water pollution in Indonesia. Too soon our quests headed to Atlanta, but during their short visit much was learned and new friends made, which is not too surprising when forest lovers from anywhere come together to discuss our favorite topic. ■

Save the Date!
March 6, 2011
4th Annual Georgia Wild and Scenic Film Festival
Tara Theater
Atlanta, Georgia

New fungus disease could threaten Georgia's walnuts

State and federal officials and academic researchers in Georgia are warning state residents to be on the lookout for the advent of a black walnut-killing disease called Thousand Canker Disease.

The disease, once believed to exist only in Colorado and several other western states, has now been found in neighboring Tennessee, prompting officials in North Carolina to issue quarantine against the importation of walnut products and firewood from that state. Tennessee also has issued a quarantine against export of walnut logs and firewood from affected counties around Knoxville.

To date, no such quarantine has been put into effect in Georgia, but Georgia ForestWatch has called on the state to do so.

Thousand canker is a fungus (*Geosmithia morbida*), that is introduced into the tree by the walnut twig beetle (*Pityophthorus juglandis*). Initial symptoms of infection are branch flagging (yellowing and browning) and crown decline, which may not be evident for several years after the beetles infest the tree.

According to available research, there is no cure and trees will die once they are infected by this disease, probably within two or three years. An infested walnut tree may contain tens of thousands of beetles that carry the fungus beneath their wings.

Photo courtesy of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture.

A black walnut branch infected with Thousand Cankers disease.

Walnut is prized for use in furniture, gunstocks and veneer and its nuts serve as an important food source for both humans and wildlife in north Georgia. Georgia has 126,000 acres of forest land with a walnut component, according to the Georgia Forestry Commission, with an estimated "stumpage value of approximately $18 million.

But the potential scope of the canker disease is dwarfed by the potential threat of another tree killer, the Emerald Ash Borer, which also has a high risk of being moved in firewood, according to James Johnson, the Forestry Commission's forest health coordinator. Georgia has 1.35 million acres of forestland with an ash component, with an annual "stumpage value" of $364 million. As a result, Georgia is taking part in a nationwide trapping program to detect the presence of this pest. Another 2.9 million ash trees are found in Georgia's urban and community forests, with an approximate value of $725 million, according to the state forestry commission.

Ash is used for furniture, veneer, interior finish, baseball bats, railroad ties, tool handles and fuel. The take home message for Georgians is to not transport or accept firewood transported from Tennessee, or any other state for that matter. The message for the state is to protect our forests by instituting an official ban of the transport of potentially infested wood materials across state lines.

For links to more information, see the Georgia ForestWatch website: www.gafw.org. ■

Federal judge nudges Chattooga boating controversy closer to trial; Forest Service seeks yet more input

by Joseph Gatins : Co-district Leader

About six years ago, the U.S. Forest Service began analyzing the possibility of permitting boating on the 21 miles of the Wild and Scenic Upper Chattooga River, the narrow, fast-flowing waterway that has not had legal boating since 1976. The agency's study was initiated as an outgrowth of an administrative appeal by the American Whitewater boating lobby. Not satisfied with the pace of the study, the boaters filed suit in U.S. District Court in Gainesville, Georgia, in 2006 to short-circuit the study and immediately open the upper reaches of this wild river to boating (a move denied by a senior district court judge at that time).

Now, fast forward to the fall of 2010. American Whitewater is back in federal court (in Greenville, S.C. this time), seeking a similar short-circuit solution to the boating ban, and the U.S. Forest Service is back to defending its position as the manager of the river. History repeats itself, but only in part.

Unlike the firm denial handed down in the federal court ruling in Gainesville, U.S. District Court Judge J. Michelle Childs in Greenville breathed new life into the efforts of the boating lobby, still being led by the American Whitewater organization, to immediately open the headwaters to boating.

While denying the boaters' efforts to immediately open the Upper Chattooga, she also denied the Forest Service petition to dismiss the case entirely. The upshot of her ruling on December 2, 2010, is that the issue appears headed to a trial, with forest managers ordered to fully answer the boaters' complaints in writing within 30 days.

How did we get to this stage? What happened in these past few years? Among other factors affecting this long-delayed planning exercise is that the chief planner for the Sumter National Forest, the man most responsible for the boating analysis, retired from government service, and his boss, the Sumter Forest Supervisor, got promoted and transferred to a new post. A Forest Service proposal to try to permit highly regulated and limited boating on the Upper Chattooga was itself appealed by five different conservation groups (including Georgia ForestWatch), only to see the agency temporarily pull its decision, stating it had discovered minor flaws in its study and analysis.

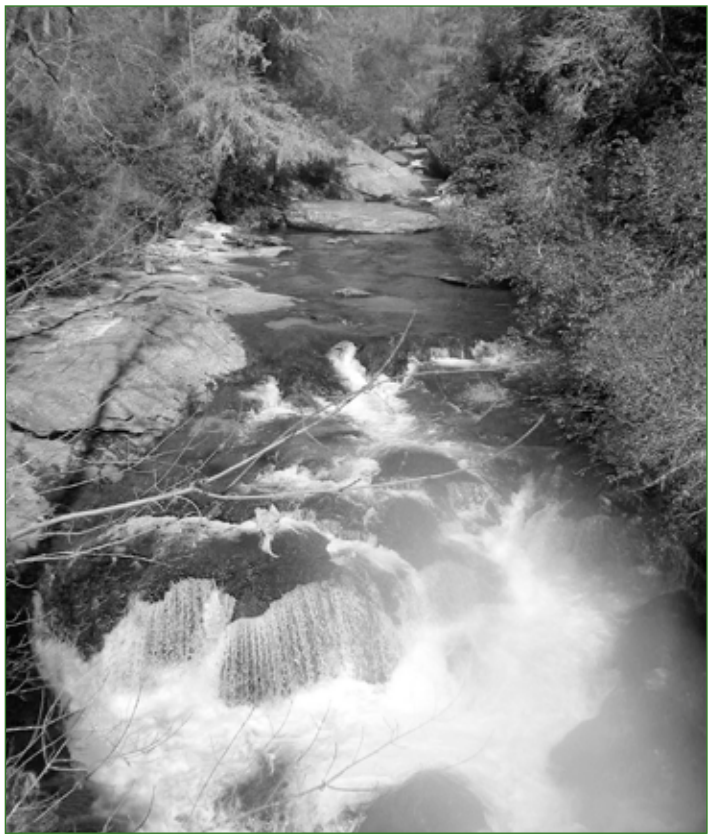


Photo by Joe Gatins

Upper Chattooga River at the Old Iron Bridge.

At this writing, a new chief planner and supervisor on the Sumter have readied a new boating study and proposal for public comment, with public comments due January 24, 2011. That proposal is being termed as the "re-initiation" of an environmental planning process, with the agency asking for "any new information, such as recently released articles or publications or new concerns" that should be incorporated into the Forest Service analysis.

But the agency is unwilling to comment on Judge Childs' decision. A Sumter spokeswoman referred all questions to the U.S. Attorney's office in Charleston, where another press contact, Beth Drake, also deflected all questions regarding the case. "We do not comment on litigation," she said. Drake added that it was not appropriate for her to comment on the new Forest Service boating proposal either.

American Whitewater, by contrast, claimed on its website that, "the decision marks a major victory for the conservation-oriented kayaking and canoeing community …"

Judge Childs had conducted a fast-paced and no-nonsense, day-long hearing on the case on October 13, during which both boating lobby and government lawyers went at it hammer and legal tong. Open the river immediately, the boaters said. Dismiss the Whitewater case right now, the government said, seconded by yet another lawyer, this one representing the more narrow interests of several private property owners in the Grimshawes, N.C., area, the uppermost headwaters at issue in this case.

The boating forces came out in force, with more than 15 kayakers and boating sympathizers, whose number was pointed out in the audience during the hearing. One boater, 68-year-old Bruce Hare of Mountain Rest, S.C., was placed on the stand to deliver an emotional entreaty – seemed like he started tearing over the issue at one point – to re-open the stretch of river that he'd traversed before the Forest Service ban was put into effect. "I'd like to paddle it again before I pass away," he said.

Less emotional, an assistant U.S. Attorney argued in counterpoint that the boaters' case summarily should be dismissed as a point of case law, in that the administrative study and analysis by the U.S. Forest Service was not yet complete (a point of bitter complaint by boating lawyers, who foresaw years of possible further delay if their cause was not immediately granted). The legal back-and-forth was punctuated and seconded by telling argument from Alan Jenkins, the lawyer representing the private property owners, who raised the additional point that the section of Chattooga at issue could not, and should not, be considered a navigable waterway.

Judge Childs left the door open to further litigation because, in her words, "it was likely that the USFS would issue new decisions continuing at least a partial ban against floating on the headwaters." Given that stand, it "would be futile" to first require the boaters to exhaust their "administrative remedies" before the agency.

At the same time, Judge Childs continued, "although Hare presented moving testimony, the fact that he and others will not immediately have unfettered access to the Headwaters is not the type of immediate and irreparable harm which merits the imposition of a mandatory preliminary injunction [i.e., to open the Upper Chattooga immediately to all boating all the time].

The net result, at least temporarily, is that the controversy is now being decided in court between the Forest Service and private landowners and American Whitewater and allied groups as much as in an administrative Forest Service environmental review Georgia ForestWatch, which has steadfastly maintained that the boating ban on the 21 miles of the river should be upheld, is reviewing its legal options as to the court case and will be involved in the latest request for further analysis.

For links to more information, go to the Georgia ForestWatch website: www.gafw.org and the following Forest Service link: http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms/sumter/resources/Chattooga.php ■

Save the Date!

May 7, 2011: The GFW Wild and Wooly Spring Event

Featuring:
Jannise Ray

Author of :
Ecology of a Cracker Childhood,
Wild Card Quilt, Pinhook and
her newest work, a book of poems,
A House of Branches

Contra Dancing
Native Plant Sale
Bi-Plane Ride Raffle

Finger Food and
Beverages included

Sautee-Nacoochee
Community Center
Sautee-Nacoochee, GA

Order Tickets Now!
$20 if purchased before May 1
$25 after May 1 or at the door
www.gafw.org

Armuchee Ridges planning meeting

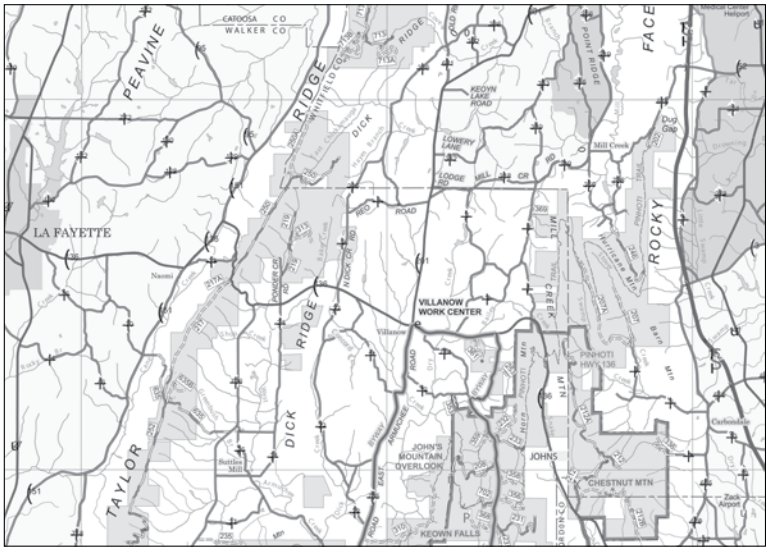
by Robin Hitner : District Leader and Darren Wolfgang : Forest Ecologist

On Monday, October 6th, Georgia ForestWatch representatives and managers from the Conasauga River Ranger District met together to discuss progress on the Armuchee Ridges project as well as planning and management initiatives projected to take place in FY 2011.

The Armuchee Ridges project was finalized in August, 2008 when the Forest Service (FS) signed a Decision Notice (DN) for the Armuchee Ridges Thinning and Restoration Project. The agency's stated purpose for this project is to improve forest health, allow for the restoration of native plant communities, improve habitat for riparian associated species and enhance wildlife habitat throughout the project area. Specifically, the project includes the following activities: 1) 669 acres of mountain longleaf and shortleaf pine restoration; 2) 453 acres of oak/oak-pine restoration and maintenance; and 3), 5,787 acres of pine thinning to improve forest health. Georgia ForestWatch has been engaged in this project from the start in what has come to be called pre-scoping, then scoping and on through the Environmental Assessment and Decision Notice.

ForestWatch did not appeal the proposed management alternative or the Decision Notice, however our concerns are now the same as they were during the planning process for this project. They include the need for increased monitoring of prescribed burning results, thinning for forest health to avoid Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) epidemics, and restoring areas of the forest (especially pine plantations) into a more healthy, natural, and diverse mixed forest.

The District is currently focused on implementation of loblolly pine plantation thinning for Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) prevention and suppression. The District anticipates the pine thinning efforts to continue over the next several years due to the large acres of pine plantations present on the Armuchee Ridges. The District will also focus on the planting and restoration of montane (mountain) longleaf pine in several areas. While ForestWatch supports the maintenance and restoration of populations of montane longleaf pine, we question the range and historical extent of these populations in the Armuchee area, despite a handful of "relict" clusters near Taylors ridge, and some scattered individual trees of various ages along the ridge top. We have submitted montane longleaf community descriptions from various publications to illustrate that this rare forest



Map courtesy of the U.S. Forest Service

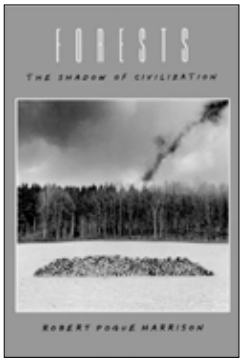
community was likely different from the longleaf-wire grass ecosystem of the southern gulf coast. Because of the differences the District will likely have to use monitoring and adaptive management to determine the right amount and timing of fire and other mechanical thinning treatments associated with these activities. We have asked the District to monitor the response of the longleaf restoration treatments.

ForestWatch still has concerns about the current Forest Service burning program, however the District has committed to igniting controlled burns on ridge tops and allowing the fires to move down slope and naturally burnout when they contact more moist areas of the forest. ForestWatch is strongly opposed to forcing fire into areas of the forest that would not burn under natural circumstances. The effect of this approach to burning will hopefully be a more natural "mosaic" of burned and unburned areas. We object to the Forest Service plans to burn the forest on a 3 to 5 year schedule. We fully acknowledge that fire has a role to play in the restoration and maintenance of dry upland shortleaf pine, oak, and mountain long leaf pine communities in the project area but our questions about why, where, when, and how often to burn still remain unanswered. For these reasons we continue to encourage the District to establish more long term fire monitoring plots, an idea the District appears willing to entertain. ■

Book review: *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*

by Wayne Jenkins : Executive Director

Forests: The Shadow of Civilization, by Robert Pogue Harrison, The University of Chicago Press, 1992, 288 pages.



Georgia ForestWatch members are an odd lot. We have this thing about forests, a connection perhaps not easily described or understood. Harrison's *Forests* may help us grasp the depth of this connection.

This is a challenging read, though I loved its examples of connectivity, the many revelations of past western cultural relations with forests, and more importantly, I enjoyed gaining a deeper understanding of the psychic force that forests held for early western cultures. The book begins with the keen work of the little known Italian political philosopher and historian Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), who observed that the forests were "first", their vast and somber wilderness a precondition or matrix for civilization. The author uses Vico's critique of modern rationalism, his magnum opus, New Science as a framework for understanding the mythic, poetic and intimate relationships between forests and man, which Vico believed were natural, immutable and unavoidable. The nature of man, as he understood it, is the driver. Vico's axiom from *New Science*: the nature of people is first crude, then severe, then benign, then delicate and finally dissolute. "Men first feel the necessity, then look for utility, next tend to comfort, still later amuse themselves with pleasure, thence grow dissolute in luxury and finally go mad and waste their substance," he said.

Hmmm … sound familiar? Man's substance is not all we waste, as we shall see.

Both Greece and Rome were born of the forests they vanquished and constantly pushed further from the city centers. But as western culture pressed from abundant nature its very necessities for existence, it wove the retreating forests and groves into its stories, mythology and soul. As man "plundered" the trees, he also appropriated the forest as metaphor for human institutions. Harrison writes:

> *"From the family tree to the tree of knowledge, from the tree of life to the tree of memory, forests have provided an indispensible resource of symbolization in the cultural evolution of humankind, so much so that the rise of modern scientific thinking remains quite unthinkable apart from a prehistory in such metaphorical borrowings."* (Bechman, *Des Arbes,* 258-263)

Borne of primeval forests, which were everywhere, early western civilization was the counterpoint to "wild Nature." It evolved over time from benevolent sunlit forests to dark wooded recesses haunted by vindictive gods, witches, robbers which reflected the fears and dreams, hopes and disappointments housed in the evolving social mind of man.

Philosopher Vico's views weave like a trail through the author's essays. Harrison uses them to link together and illustrate connectivity of such disparate stories, writers and thinkers as Gilgamesh and the Greek myths of Artemis and Dionysos, Euripedes and Socrates, Homer and Plato. His wanderings and poetic story telling explain early language and the underlying meanings (associated with forests) hinting at western development. The path continues through the early Christian era, into the period of the "King's Wood", Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Boccaccio's *The Decameron* and Shakespeare's comedies *Macbeth, A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It*, all which take place in forests.

It's tough going but press on as Harrison continues into the Enlightenment where stories and myth must fall before the cold light of Descarte's reason, Nietzche's doubts ("God is dead! We have killed him – you and I".) where we find our modern selves very alone in the woods with our reason and methods. We no longer fear the gods as now mathematical formulae will guide our forest use and the idea of wild woods becomes a measurable commodity. The diversity and messiness of nature can be planned for maximum productivity. We have become the forest's God.

Into our era now the author strives to connect concepts of "*dwelling*", what we might refer to as "being in place", by linking Thoreau's Walden cabin and Frank Lloyd Wright's *Fallingwater* house, both set perfectly in forested settings, but even the author seems fatigued and finds it necessary to use an Epilogue to bring all this fascinating rambling to some unified closure.

Lastly, we see Vico's great mistake. He concluded that nature and history operated under two different laws. Civilizations eventually fall due to inherent entropy, which results in systemic disorder. Once the cities collapse, the forests reclaim their original ground, replicating a stable yet closed cycle. Vico never foresaw that civilized entropy could threaten the full "domain" of nature. ■

Forest Service considering Chattooga commercialization

by Joseph Gatins : Co-district Leader

The U.S. Forest Service has initiated a push to vastly increase the amount of commercial recreation permitted in the Wild and Scenic Chattooga River corridor, moves that Georgia ForestWatch believe should be closely analyzed before the routine approval contemplated by federal forest managers.

What's at issue? As explained by the Andrew Pickens Ranger District of the Sumter National Forest, the South Carolina-based agency responsible for overall management of the corridor, various private schools and outfitter guides would like permission to conduct a total of more than 2,600 new "service days" of commercial use on and near the Chattooga River corridor. This activity would include backpacking and hiking trips, swimming, "environmental day hikes," guided fishing trips and waterfall viewing outings. A "service day" is defined as "any full or fractional part of a day the client receives goods or services on National Forestland." [The agency has not posted this proposal on its website, so call Andrew Pickens officials Greg Borgen or Michael Crane at 864-638-9568 to receive a copy of the relevant paperwork, or contact them via e-mail at gborden@fs.fed.us and mcrane@fs.fed.us].

Currently, the main commercial use of the river is reserved to three raft and kayak outfitter companies, under fairly tightly controlled and delineated provisions of the Sumter's Land and Resource Management Plan.

The new activity would be in addition to separate Andrew Pickens proposals to commercialize the Russell Farmstead into some form of demonstration farm between Route 28 and the river (analysis of that proposal is still pending); to permit "ultra marathon racing" in the corridor (details below); and long-delayed, new proposals regarding the notion of possibly permitting boating on the 21 miles of the Upper Chattooga. [See related article on page 6.]

Georgia ForestWatch has filed detailed comments with forest agency representatives and the supervisors for both the Sumter and Chattahoochee National Forests to express concern over these proposals and urged that they be closely analyzed for a variety of reasons. Among them:

- Is the "carrying capacity" of the pristine natural resource that lines both sides of this wild and scenic river such that it can accommodate the proposed increased commercial recreation pressures? (Each of the permit applications involves payment of daily, per person fees, with a certain percentage of gross fees paid to the Forest Service.)

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- Would the commercialization displace and mar the experience of the other taxpayers who have an unfettered right to enjoy the corridor as boaters, birders, hunters, hikers, anglers, photographers, picnickers and nature lovers?
- Is there a limit to the number of commercial permits and "service days" the Forest Service believes it can approve for this area?
- Where was the public notice? The proposals for the permits were quietly issued, with little fanfare. Georgia ForestWatch has urged the agency to hold a true public hearing on the project proposals.
- Federal law may require a more detailed and thorough amendment to the Sumter National Forest plan before the proposed recreational increases are approved.

More recently, the Andrew Pickens district sought public comment on a companion proposal to permit up to 75 people to participate in an "ultra marathon" race along the Foothills Trail, most of which is in or near the Chattooga River corridor and in and out of the Ellicott Rock Wilderness and adjacent Ellicott Rock Wilderness Extension Study Area.

Georgia ForestWatch urged that the race proposal be made part of the ongoing analysis of all the commercial recreation permits, noting that permitting up to 75 racers into the Ellicott Rock Wilderness and study area probably violates the Sumter forest plan's requirements to limit "commercial and organized group size" in wilderness areas to 12 people.

It also appears that national forest managers do not have a good estimate of how much visitation, especially of the non-commercial variety, currently occurs on these national and public forestlands, figures that should be analyzed before the increased use might be approved.

"Frankly, the citizens of this region are loving the public forests to death," Georgia ForestWatch opined in its comment letter about this proposal, urging the agency to adopt a formal "Limits of Acceptable Change" process to cover the entire river corridor and surrounding public lands. ■

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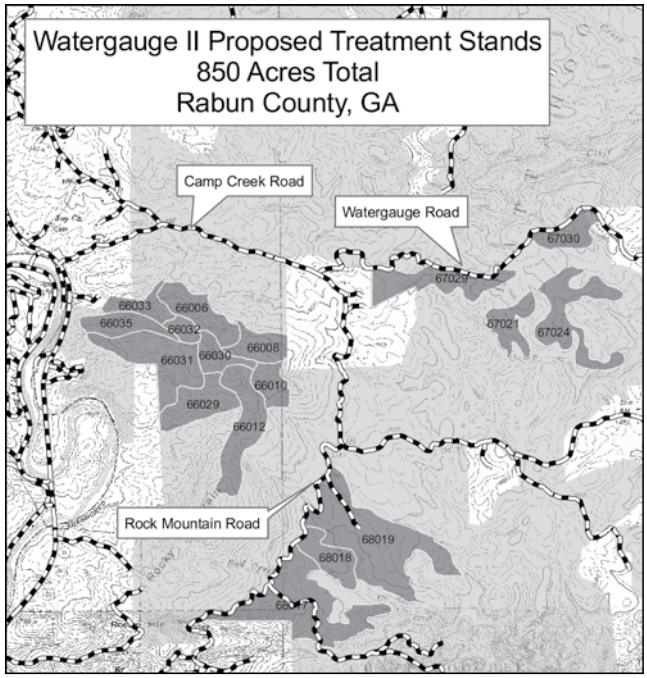
Chattooga River Ranger District – Watergauge II Open Woodland Project update

by Darren Wolfgang : Forest Ecologist

In the fall of 2008 the Chattooga District issued a Scoping Notice to solicit comments from the public on a proposal that entailed 508 acres of "open oak-pine woodland restoration". The agency attempted to use a Categorical Exclusion (CE) for the original project to exempt it from detailed environmental impact analysis. After discussions with our partner at the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC), GFW and SELC determined that the project as initially proposed did not meet the criteria for a categorical exclusion, SELC filed a legal appeal of the project on behalf of GFW. The goal of the appeal was to have the agency to take a closer look at the finer details of the project in a full Environmental Assessment. CE's are typically used for small, routine, and non-controversial proposals such as replacing toilets, maintaining small areas of forest infrastructure, salvage harvest of small patches of damaged trees, thinning pine trees for forest health purposes on a small scale, etc. We felt that creating woodlands and savannahs in the mountains of North Georgia is a relatively new idea that should be viewed as "experimental" and subject to detailed monitoring and evaluation.



After filing the appeal, ForestWatch met with the district personnel and an appeal resolution was reached. Through this process the District committed to proceeding under a CE for some of the work in the original Watergauge I project, which included thinning 318 acres of overly dense pine stands for the prevention of Southern Pine Beetle and conducting mountain bog restoration on less than 7 acres of bottom land within the original project area. The District also agreed to conduct a full Environmental Assessment for the remaining acres of the Watergauge I area targeted for woodland creation.

Because ForestWatch felt that some areas of the original project were unsuitable for woodland/savannah management and more conducive to closed canopy forest, the District invited us to collaboratively identify other areas in the vicinity which we believed were more suitable for maintaining a more "open" forest condition. ForestWatch worked in the office and in the field to identify alternatives to the original Watergauge I project. An area of uplands near Rocky Mountain was identified as potentially suitable for woodland maintenance. ForestWatch selected this area due to the parent geology, soil type, forest community types, drainage, site productivity index rank, slope, aspect, etc. The Rocky Mountain site has a significant component of shortleaf and pitch pine as well as many dry oak forest species. In addition to that criteria we are working from the basic premise that if managers are looking to manage for "open" woodland/upland forest types, they should seek to identify sites that are most conducive to producing such open forests without needing frequent fires. It should be acknowledged that upland forest types, due to their dry nature do benefit from occasional fire, as many of the species associated with the upland communities are also fire associates. Areas of the Rocky Mountain site already have a more "open" and stunted forest character without management.

Woodland restoration on the Chattahoochee has become synonymous with identifying a mature second growth forest that has the presence of some plants that require partial sunlight and removing 40 to 60 percent of the forest canopy to allow sunlight to reach the forest floor. Following the timbering, the area is burned on a 3 to 5 year schedule using prescribed fire. ForestWatch has insisted that the Forest Service take a closer look at the criteria used to identify forest stands suitable for "woodland" restoration. The District is currently working on the Environmental Assessment for this project, which will receive the same close review that the first proposal received. ■

Arkaquah Trail Hike

by Ted Doll : Board President

On November 13, eight hardy souls followed Ben Cash into the Brasstown Wilderness. The hikers included Ben, Vicki Miller, Parrie Pinyan, Patty Lowe, Walt and Kate George, Ted and Lynda Doll, and Lynda's niece from Ohio, Erin Twining. We explored the 6 mile Arkaquah trail on a bright, sunny but cool day. The going was difficult, since leaves obscured rocks, roots, and such. We were constantly slipping and sliding. The trail loses a net of 2500 feet in elevation, but there are many ups and downs. It seemed to go up as much as down.

Along the way, we saw a ruffled grouse, and heard a raven, which are rare in Georgia. Thanks to Ben's expertise as a botanist, we also saw some notable flora, including large American Chestnuts, about 20 feet tall, Yellow Birch, Catawba Rhododendron, Mountain Maple, Rock Harlequin, Sunburst Lichen, and a Horse Gentian with fruit on it, none of which are common in Georgia. Thanks to Ben for a great workout as well as an educational experience. ■

Photo by Peter McIntosh

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From the director

(continued from page 3)

For our purposes we can see described in these two definitions the distinguishing features of wilderness character; nothing directing agencies to abandon all management but that managers must strive to protect these characteristics. Howard Zahniser has said "such tracts should be managed so as to be left unmanaged." And he warned, "Some men see hills come together across streams of running water and then fancy dams there. Some have seen the apparent loveliness of deer and have fancied the elimination of "cruel" predators. Some men fancy timber management to tidy up the forest. All these see such areas as scenes for their own "skill, judgment, and ecological sensitivity." They all threaten the still lingering possibility that some of the earth may be so respected as not to be dominated by man and his works.

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