Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Fall 2012

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Joe Gatins passes on

With deep sorrow we must note the passing of Joe Gatins. Joe died September 11th, while on vacation in Ireland, with his wife Fran. Though he has battled cancer for some time, it was a heart attack that brought him down. Joe has always done things his own way, in his own time, and his death was no different. Below are just a few memories some of our members have of Joe. Georgia ForestWatch will host our own memorial to him at our Fall Retreat on Saturday, September 29th. Our love and best wishes go out to Fran and Damien Gatins, Joe's wife and son.

Joe Gatins was one of the most determined, opinionated, strong willed, stubborn, pain-in-my-ass persons I have ever known. He was also my friend, mentor and brother in arms for working to defend Georgia's 867,000 acre Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. When Georgia ForestWatch fell on difficult times in 2004, having lost our founding director, some key funding and members, Joe stepped up.

With a handful of others willing to follow his lead, Joe reconstituted the Board of Directors, secured basic funding and hired new staff, insuring that Georgia's public forests would have a dedicated group to oversee its well-being. I became the new executive director and Joe and I worked very closely to bring Georgia ForestWatch, like some phoenix rising, back to functionality. We tag-teamed writing many grant proposals. We worked with our small pool of committed major donors, Joe doing an incredible job to raise money for ForestWatch. Joe would often say he was never too proud to ask anyone for money for Georgia ForestWatch and he was religious about getting thank-you notes to contributors. Some donors claimed they received hand written thank-you notes before the ink was dry on the check! Joe pushed everyone hard, which I increasingly resented, but it got the job done.

Which, with his passing has got me thinking. Maybe, with the many hundreds of relationships Joe maintained and his wide and varied interests, he knew something that many of us miss: that if you want to get everything you can from life, you've got to put everything you can into it. And then some more! Goodbye Joe. I'll miss your way too many emails, your single-minded approach to things, even your inability to back down when that's what was needed. And if the man upstairs has any questions about letting you into that Great Virgin Forest we all hope to go to, just tell him to send you on back down here, because there's a forest that's missing you.
– Wayne Jenkins, formerly Executive Director of Georgia ForestWatch; currently Executive Director of Cook Inlet Keeper

Dear, dear Joe. There was never another one like you. You were a formidable friend and a force of nature with a distinctly human flair and an indelible voice. I was emailing someone yesterday who only met you for a few moments and yet had received such a strong impression of you. I was trying to express in words the uniquely special relationship that comes from sharing so much time in the woods together, and I found that my words probably cannot convey this. All the moments of shared awe of the beauty around us. The shared moments of breathlessness climbing big hills. And the depth of sadness and exasperation shared at the sight of projects gone wrong. Then there was the unforgettable discovery that you and I made of the Bear Moon Ritual Tree. I dragged you up off-trail 100 or so yards, deep in the rich cove and we came upon this great elder of a Tulip Poplar, bark peeling and bubbled with old growth. Around it out 15 or 20 feet or so was a ring of great big Black Cherry trees – a perfect circle around the Poplar. In another ring, only a few feet from the Poplar, there they were – about ten gargantuan piles of bear scat, arranged in a circle around the great Poplar. I could only imagine that under the full moon those bears had gathered around that tree and in a great circle had pooped together – and of course this was why there was a perfect ring of Cherry trees there, also. You and I had such a great laugh this day together in the way that keeps us all in love with our sweet woods. This is why the family called Georgia ForestWatch is glued together so – not because of the battles we must wage, which we must, but because of the love we share in the most primal sense – in the natural state of awe and wonder we can only share in those places we must keep protecting. So many thanks to you, Joe, for inspiring so many of us to remember this love and commit to this responsibility to protecting and

preserving what knits us together, in spite of ourselves. I shall cherish the many memories of our woods time.
– Honor Woodard, formerly Co-District Leader with Joe Gatins; currently Advisor to the Board of Georgia ForestWatch

As I write this, I cannot imagine Georgia ForestWatch without Joe Gatins. Our organization will remain strong, of course, because Joe helped make it that way. But a mighty tree has fallen in the forest.

Joe's never-give-up tenacity and dedication to forest protection was infectious. It helped make me – and many others, I am sure – a proud, unabashed tree hugger. It was Joe who first invited me to become a ForestWatch board member and allowed me for the first time to become an active, decision-making forest guardian.

Joe and I became friends. As retired journalists and active authors, we encouraged each other in our literary pursuits. Joe also was an eagle-eyed editor, and, as good editors should, his editing could "make your copy sing," as we used to say in the newsroom. His demand for accuracy no doubt saved many a reporter from embarrassment – and perhaps a costly libel suit. I confess that one time I misjudged Joe. He was leading a hike up to Rabun Bald, and so I thought the walk would be slow and easy. Being a slow walker, I have always had difficulty keeping up with hike leaders who tromp uphill at a steady clip. I thought to myself that Joe is a large man like me, and surely I can keep up with someone his size. But I was wrong. Joe moved up the steep trail as if a pack of hungry dogs was after him; I struggled to keep up. I should have known better. Joe Gatins was not a man who tolerated slowness, whether it was hiking up a mountain or fighting a project that he believed would harm his beloved forest.
– Charles Seabrook, formerly a board member, Georgia ForestWatch; currently journalist and author

Back in the late nineties, I began running into a man by the name of Joe Gatins at Forest Service Interdisciplinary Team meetings. The Chattahoochee NF was going through forest planning at the time, and Joe was someone who simply showed up as a citizen who cared – fiercely independent, with no organizational affiliation, but seriously committed to protecting our remaining wild lands. We became fast friends, and over the years I drew him into the GFW fold as a district leader and strong supporter. Yet, though I have many memories of being out in the woods with Joe on hikes, some of my best memories of him are as a supporter of his many friends' artistic endeavors. Numerous times Joe would show up at one of my wife's musical performances, stand up impromptu, and begin passing the hat from chair to chair, table to table, complimenting the show, demanding that each person there contribute. This exemplified his enormous spirit. He gave so much to all of us, and he will be greatly missed.
– Brent Martin, formerly Executive Director of Georgia ForestWatch; currently Southern Appalachian Regional Director of The Wilderness Society

Joe Gatins was a great agitator. I first met Joe in March of 2003. I had been an attorney at the Southern Environmental Law Center for six months and was tackling my first Forest Service appeal for Georgia ForestWatch. Yesterday I found the first email I ever received from Joe. He had acquired from the Forest Service all 56 comment letters on the project, reviewed them all, and summarized the key arguments as he saw them, plus his own editorial take in his always-sharp writing voice. This was classic Joe, as I would learn working with him on many other matters over the years. I have tremendous respect for Joe. He would dig into the details of Forest Service proposals, track things down energetically and relentlessly, never let anything go, and get every objection of ours, and every admission of the agency's, on the record in writing. He had a newspaper reporter's drive to uncover the real story playing out behind the scenes. As a lawyer, I loved this. The best story wasn't always the strongest legal point, but he always respected my advice, we would strike the right balance, and I think we made a good team. He was also a lot of fun to work with. I think he relished sparring with the Forest Service staff and he brought his bold personality, strong convictions, and unique style and approach to those exchanges (I doubt the staff enjoyed it as much as he did).

Joe always seemed positive and undaunted in his belief in the cause to protect our national forest, in what we all could achieve together, and in me. He always made me feel like he believed he had the best lawyer in his corner. When I was a young lawyer, this was a big confidence booster. Now that I've been in practice for a decade, it was still priceless to me to hear Joe's warm voice on the phone or to see his big smile at a meeting and to feel like he was truly glad I had shown up for another round. I will miss him a great deal.
– Sarah Francisco, Advisor to Georgia ForestWatch and Senior Attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center ■

Our "From the Director" page will return in the Winter Forest News issue.

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Cover photo credit: Sarah Francisco.

Thanks to our retiring board members!

The Board of Directors of Georgia ForestWatch wants to thank four retiring board members, Andy Edwards, Peg Griffith, Ida Long, and Honor Woodard, for their long and faithful service.

Andy is a Professor at Reinhardt University and has served on the Georgia ForestWatch board for seven years. He has worked on the Nominating and Personnel Committees for many years, but he will most remembered for the fantastic food that he and his wife, Melinda, organize and provide for our spring festivals and fall retreats.

Peg has been like the Rock of Gibraltar and glue that holds Georgia ForestWatch together. She has done a plethora of jobs too numerous to mention, and has served on the board for over seven years. This included a stint as board Secretary for two years, then as board President from 2007 to 2009, and as Vice President for the last two and one-half years. Peg recently earned her degree in counseling, and is pursuing a new career centered in Atlanta. We wish her the highest success, and hope she will stay involved with us as her time permits.

Ida Long has served on the board for seven years, and has served faithfully as a member of both the Nominating and Board Development Committees. She has provided invaluable services as ForestWatch's accountant for many years, and we hope she will continue in that role.

Honor Woodard has served on the board since June 2009. She was busy as co-district leader for the Chattooga District until recently, and has also provided valuable help in editing the Newsletter, getting the Georgia ForestWatch Facebook page up and running, and many other jobs important to Georgia ForestWatch.

We hope all four of these retiring board members will remain active parts of the Georgia ForestWatch family. Thanks for your dedication and exemplary service! ■

Locust Stake OHV area assessment

by Darren Wolfgang : Forest Ecologist

The Locust Stake Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) trail system is located on the Chattahoochee National Forest on the southern portion of the Chattooga River Ranger District in Stephens County, Georgia. Until January of this year, these trails were open from April 1 – December 31 to all terrain vehicles (ATVs), motorcycles and bikes, as well as limited hiking use. In the open season, the system is closed during rain events greater than 2 inches. The trail system is a no camping, day use fee area. The Forest Service closed the system temporarily in order to conduct a review of current conditions and a professional assessment of the 9+ miles of trails.

Prior to establishment of the designated Locust Stake trail system, motorized vehicle drivers had created several illegal user trails on the area. When a Forest Service executive decision in the mid-1980s charged the Ranger Districts with providing OHV/ATV opportunities across the forest, the Chattooga District formed the current system out of the user created trails. Heavy equipment was used to carve out the trails without regard to engineering or potential environmental impacts. As a result, this poorly thought out trail system now has numerous deep erosion trenches, some over 12 feet, and an infrastructure that is largely in a state of disrepair. The system is not sustainable despite efforts of motorized trail volunteers working with the Forest Service to stabilize the trails.

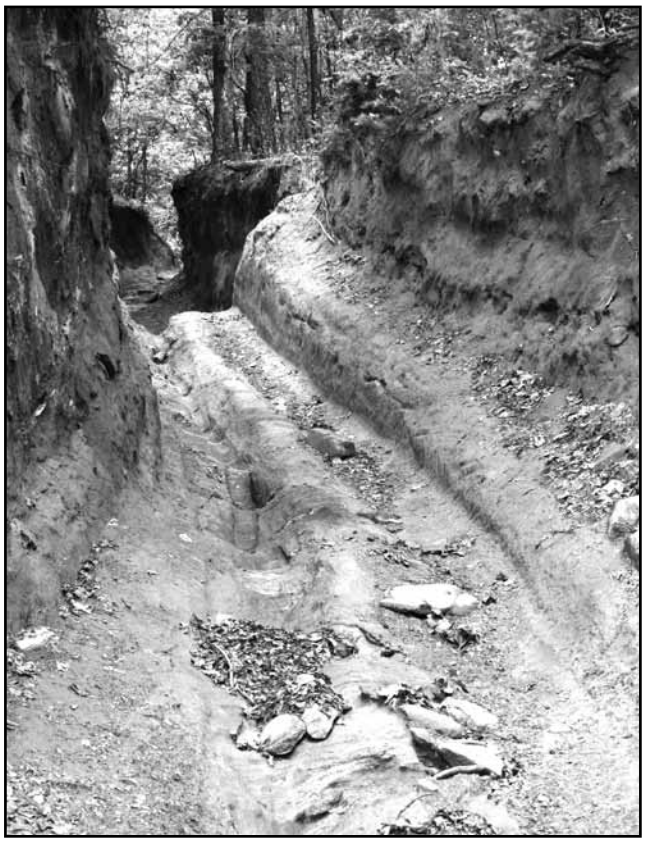

Photo credit: Darren Wolfgang

An erosion trench over 8 feet deep in the Locust Stake trail system.

Photo credit: Darren Wolfgang

In 1996, Forest Service staff conducted an assessment of OHV trails across the forest and issued a report to the Supervisors Office. In the report on Locust Stake, the then Chattooga River District Ranger stated that "it was a mistake to name this an ORV (Off Road Recreational Vehicle) area under the current Forest Land and Resources Management Plan." The Ranger also stated that he could "spend the district's entire annual trail budget on the Locust Stake ORV trails and it would be inadequate to properly maintain the trails." The Recreation Staff Officer who conducted the field assessment reported, "we drove to the southeast end of the area where the North Fork of the Broad River exits the area and observed a silt-sand pile larger than a house which had accumulated in the PL-566 structure."

Now, after nearly 16 years of allowing this extensive environmental degradation of public land to continue, the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests' administrators have finally decided to do the right thing by issuing a temporary closure order and having a professional assessment conducted on the Locust Stake trail system. The professional assessment, completed in May, 2012, addresses the physical condition of the trails, such as slope, erosion, soil type and setting, and makes recommendations for improving the entire system.

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Fading summer

by Darren Wolfgang : Forest Ecologist

Perhaps it's too early to start thinking about fall, but I can't seem to help myself. Everywhere I'm surrounded by signs of the coming season. Canada Geese can be seen and heard honking and gliding up and down the mountain river corridors in their signature "V" flight formation. It's hard to imagine that populations of these geese, now considered a nuisance in urban and suburban areas, once dwindled to such low numbers that the Georgia Wildlife Resources Division initiated a stocking program that ran from the late 1970's through the early 80's. Georgia held its first goose hunt in 1991 following the population recovery. Many areas of the Southeast now have year round "resident" populations of these birds.

Photo credit: Darren Wolfgang

My evening commute is particularly enjoyable this time of year. The rural road corridors that lead me to my cabin are painted with the beautiful colors of the late summer wildflowers and a gentle reminder of the coming fall. The purples and pinks of Joe-pye weed, ironweed, and bull thistle abound, and to make things even better they're highlighted by the radiant reds, yellows and oranges of the cardinal flower, coreopsis, wild sunflowers, goldenrods, black-eyed-susans and jewelweed. All sure signs summer is almost gone and the most beautiful natural fireworks display in the mountains is about to begin.

I feel comfortable saying fall is easily my favorite time of the year. I've never been able to put my finger on the exact reason. Maybe it's the abundant crop harvests, pumpkin pies, and anticipation of the coming holiday seasons. Perhaps it's bottled up energy from my hibernating during the oppressive July and August heat in north Georgia. Or maybe, it's hoping to indulge my guilty pleasure of taking a ride in my gas hogging Jeep on a twisting mountain road, the windows down, the air perfectly cool, and the mountains on fire with orange, yellow and red foliage.

Leaves start out green in the spring due to the presence of chlorophyll. Chlorophyll is the primary compound that allows trees to convert sunlight into carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are like money – the more the trees have, the more they are able to put into leaf, stem and root growth, flower production, fruit production, and repair processes from insects and diseases. As the growing season winds to an end, trees start to prepare for dormancy. It is the degradation of chlorophyll and its reduced level in leaves that allows other previously masked pigments to become prominent and take center stage, resulting in the spectacular display of color we associate with fall.

Anthocyanin compounds found in leaves, for example, often contribute to red and purple fall colors. Anthocyanins act like sunscreen, blocking blue-green UV light and protecting leaves from damaging effects of photoinhibition or high light stress. In yellow-orange fall leaves, carotenoid pigments become more prominent. These carotenoid compounds are also responsible for the color of common crops such as carrots, cantaloupe, and sweet potatoes.

Predicting peak fall coloration can often be challenging as a wide variety of factors such as local and regional climate shifts, early leaf-out, summer drought, elevation, insect and disease outbreaks, and soil fertility play important roles in leaf color. Be sure to check out the Georgia State Parks LeafWatch page in coming weeks to plan your fall outings: http://www.gastateparks.org/LeafWatch.

It's always fun to try and identify tree species by their fall leaf colors from afar. As a general rule of thumb, our common Southern Appalachian woody species can be broken into the following categories:

Yellow	Yellow-gold	Red/red-orange	Red-purple	Bronze/red-brown
Black Cherry	White basswood	Red maple	Sweet gum	Chestnut oak
Yellow poplar	American beech	Scarlet oak	Sumac	American elm
Black locust	Black walnut	White oak	Scarlet oak	Black oak
Buckeye	Hickories	Sourwood		Southern red oak
Umbrella magnolias		Persimmon		
Sweet/black birch		Black gum		
White ash		Sassafras		
		Dogwood		

Photo credit: Darren Wolfgang

Photo credit: Darren Wolfgang

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Around the forest

by Darren Wolfgang : Forest Ecologist

Blue Ridge Ranger District

2013 Growing Season Prescribed Burn Project: The district has recently issued a Scoping notice proposing to conduct growing season burning on 1,655 acres over a 5-year period beginning in 2013. The project consists of four separate units: Fruitkoff, Lake Blue Ridge (255 ac.); Turkey Farm, near Lake Blue Ridge (415 ac.); Frozen Branch Loop, Rock Creek (795 ac.); Lake Chatuge (220 ac.). Prescribed fire researchers have had lengthy discussions about conducting growing season burning rather than traditional dormant season burning strategies to maximize effectiveness for reducing fire sensitive vegetation encroachment in more fire associated forest communities. Burns conducted after fire sensitive species have leafed out in late spring/early summer are thought to be more effective in controlling encroachment. Georgia ForestWatch will conduct field inspections in the burned areas and continue to encourage the Forest Service agency to carefully monitor the effects of growing season burning. Monitoring on a regular basis will provide information for fine tuning these burning techniques, as well as for determining impacts to non-target flora and fauna such as fire sensitive rare plant communities, ground nesting birds, and amphibians and reptiles.

FY-13 Dormant Season Burn Project: The district has recently issued a Scoping notice proposing to conduct dormant season burning on nearly 7,000 acres over a 3-5 year period beginning in 2013. The project consists of six separate units: Old Padena, Lake Blue Ridge (281 ac.); Rogers Rd., road end in Union Co. (58 ac.); Montgomery Creek, east of FS 77 (1913 ac.); Big Stamp, across FS 77 from Montgomery Creek unit (1745 ac.); Boggs Creek (83 ac.); Rich Mountain, Rich Mountain WMA (2919 ac.). Dormant season burns result in different vegetative responses from growing season burns.

After inspecting tens of thousands of acres of dormant season burn units, some of which have been burned several times, Georgia ForestWatch believes that dormant season burns are not effective in establishing meaningful woody species competition control. This is due in part to the fact that when trees are dormant, a dormant season burn merely top-kills many of the stems, leaving them free to re-sprout in the 3-5 years before the next burn. Further, five years is plenty of time for vigorous stump sprouts to reach heights greater than 12 feet, thus making it nearly impossible for a low intensity, dormant season fire to do anything but top kill them and cause resprouting. As a result, too much undesirable competition remains, preventing desirable oak and yellow pine stems from becoming properly established and seizing a competitive position in the stand. While dormant season burning is helpful to achieve various forest management goals, long-term monitoring will be required to refine burning techniques that maximize conservation and desired forest restoration outcomes.

Chattooga River Ranger District

Russell Farmstead tourist attraction: The adjoining Andrew Pickens Ranger District just across the Chattooga River

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in South Carolina's Sumter National Forest has proposed turning part of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River corridor into a seemingly privately-run, commercial heritage working farm tourist attraction. While many Georgia Forest Watchers appreciate the idea of preserving Southern Appalachian Heritage, the proposal is not appropriate and indeed conflicts with the basic tenants of the congressionally-designated Chattooga Wild and Scenic River Corridor. The Forest Service's plan to restore the old Russell Farmstead, the site of Old Chattooga Indiantown (a rare, early version of a Cherokee Lower Town), garnered almost universal disapproval from area conservation groups and interested citizens. A review of over 60 public comments posted by the Forest Service showed that a substantial portion of respondents were opposed to the proposal as it is outlined in the Environmental Assessment.

Those opposing the proposal include the Chattooga Conservancy, Georgia ForestWatch, Georgia Wildlife Federation, the South Carolina Chapter of Trout Unlimited, American Whitewater, and numerous citizens on both sides of the Chattooga River. Georgia ForestWatch has twice commented in opposition to this ill-conceived project located at the old Russell Farmstead.

View the project files and public comments here: http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/scnfs/home?cid=stelprdb5365697.

Upper Warwoman Landscape Management Project: The Chattooga River Ranger District continues an analysis and program for management activities in the Warwoman watershed. A stakeholder field trip was conducted July 30 to acquaint interested groups with their plans.

Potential projects discussed at this meeting included a wide range of both commercial and non-commercial forest management activities, among them: commercial harvest of off-site white pine, large-scale prescribed burns, thinning, and herbicide applications in order to create more open woodland. Other restoration activities discussed included increasing the abundance of oak-hickory and yellow pine (shortleaf, table mountain, and pitch pine) communities within the watershed. These communities have been degraded from a variety of improper management practices in the past, including excessive livestock grazing in the woods, fire exclusion, and especially harvesting of timber with no consideration of future forest composition.

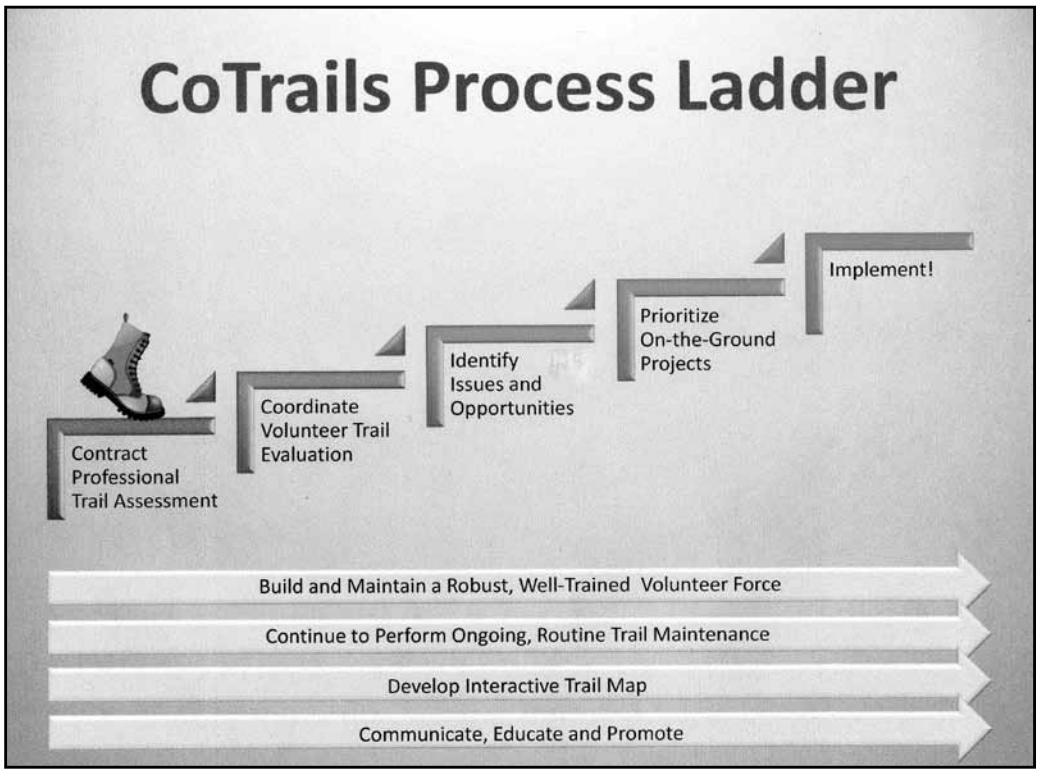
While Georgia ForestWatch supports certain types of restorative forest management to un-do damages of the past, we are interested in assuring that appropriate measures are taken in this particular watershed to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. We have a long standing interest in this particular watershed for several reasons, among them: Georgia's Environmental Protection Division has placed a major stream (Tuckaluge) on its 303(d) impaired streams list; failing segments of Forest Service system roads; and very steep terrain with highly erodible soils. All of these factors will make sustainable forest management difficult on many acres of this watershed. We have previously partnered with the Southern Environmental Law Center, the Chattooga Conservancy and the Georgia Sierra Club to ask the Forest Service to modify or abandon proposals that posed intolerable risks to water quality and resource protection. The agency is scheduled to release a draft Environmental Assessment by October 30th. We look forward to participating in the development of this proposal.

Conasauga River Ranger District

Armuchee Ridges pine thinning: The district continues to work through more than 5,000 acres of pine thinning, outlined in the 2008 Decision. To date, the majority of these thinnings have been completed in a satisfactory manner. More recently, the district has implemented the restoration of several hundred acres of montane longleaf pine. This longleaf pine restoration is aimed at expanding two small, isolated pockets of longleaf pine on Taylors Ridge. To date, the initial over-story removal and outplanting of native warm season grass plugs, and longleaf and shortleaf pine seedlings have been completed. The next step in this project will be to release the planted seedlings from their rapidly growing woody competitors (black locust, red maple, black gum, Virginia pine, etc.), utilizing select herbicides and mechanical treatments (brush cutters/chainsaws). Because Georgia ForestWatch has a conservative stance on using chemicals on public forests, we asked the district to modify the herbicides and application techniques to maximize the effectiveness of this restoration effort while minimizing the probability of any environmental damages and need for reapplication of chemicals to accomplish their goals. ■

CoTrails Step 2:
Volunteer trail assessments nearing completion while ongoing projects make strides

CoTrails volunteers and collaborating Forest Service staff have been busy since the last Georgia ForestWatch newsletter. Immediately after the Forest Service and Trail Dynamics presented an overview of the professional trail assessment at the June 12 general meeting, CoTrails members were asked to sign up for volunteer trail evaluations. These assessments cover 250 trail miles on 65 of the Chattahoochee-Oconee Forests' trails. Most of the trails, though not in poor condition like those professionally evaluated, do need some degree of improvement to make them sustainable. Like the professional assessments, volunteer evaluations will include recommendations for the Forest Service to consider in making trail rehabilitation or enhancement decisions.



Sometime in early fall, Step 3 in the CoTrails process will begin. Unauthorized social trails will be evaluated and opportunities for new trails identified using digital maps and on-the-ground observations. Then, all of the trail assessments, both volunteer and professional, will be analyzed in a joint effort by the CoTrails Working Group and Forest Service representatives. The analysis will identify potential projects, including those projects that will require formal environmental evaluations through the NEPA process. Step 4, which is scheduled to begin in spring 2013, will prioritize the proposed projects.

In the implementation phase, trail work that does not involve heavy equipment will be done mostly by trained volunteers. To comply with a new Forest Service policy, these work teams, as well as those currently performing trail maintenance on a regular basis, will be overseen by a volunteer who has attended the Crew Leader Certification Program, which was developed jointly by qualified CoTrails volunteers and Forest Service personnel. The volunteers who helped develop the program have worked several years on the forest and/or have taken the trail maintenance course offered at Gainesville College.

CoTrails Working Group member Gary Monk is working with Larry Thomas to build the well-trained volunteer force necessary to implement on-the-ground projects. Gary just led a team that opened up the badly overgrown Logan Turnpike trail, and Larry Thomas will lead a work team on the Bartram Trail in conjunction with National Trails Day, September 29. National Trails Day work events will occur on each Ranger District; see www.CoTrails.org for scheduled events.

Bartram Trail has been selected for some much-needed maintenance and signage work in the coming months. Named for the famous naturalist William Bartram, the trail in Georgia follows more or less his travels through the state from the Wild

(continued on page 12)

Locust Stake OHV Area Assessment

(continued from page 5)

Although Georgia ForestWatch views this assessment as an important first step, we believe it should be followed by a second assessment that focuses on the environmental degradation, hydrology, and engineering components of this trail system. Together, the two assessments should provide all of the information we feel is necessary for the Forest Service to make an informed management decision.

While the professional trails assessment was being conducted, Georgia ForestWatch visited the Locust Stake area to assess the trail system and document our own observations. Our field inspection confirmed what was reported almost two decades ago: much of the trail system seems to be deteriorated beyond reasonable repair; it is still sending silt into the tributaries of the North Fork of the Broad River; and the trail system is in dire need of immediate mitigation and permanent closure. As a follow up to our field inspection, we partnered with the Southern Environmental Law Center to file a lengthy report to the Forest Service with photo illustrations of what we believe could be direct violations of the Clean Water Act.

In voluntarily closing the area, the Forest Service seems to be honestly acknowledging the magnitude of the problems at Locust Stake. According to their website, during this extended closure the Forest Service will "consider the professional trails assessment, gather additional technical expertise, and collaborate with interested stakeholders to determine whether and how the Locust Stake trail system can be made sustainable. The Forest Service will also be evaluating methods for mitigation of the natural resource damage that has already occurred. The public will have opportunities to review and comment on proposed actions before decisions are made."

Georgia ForestWatch will continue to monitor this analysis and make timely comments when we feel an issue has not been addressed adequately. The Forest Service's definition of a quality trail is one that is maintainable and ecologically sustainable – a state that will be difficult, maybe even impossible, to obtain on Locust Stake.

View the Locust Stake Contractor's Assessment here: http://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/conf/recreation/ohv/recarea?recid=10513&actid=93. ■

Georgia ForestWatch Annual Fall Retreat:

Our Responsibility in Maintaining a Healthy Forest

Vogel State Park • Sept. 28-30, 2012

Don't miss the fun, food, camaraderie and great information! Meet the new Executive Director, Mary Topa. She is in our line-up of speakers on Saturday and will discuss "New Directions" for Georgia ForestWatch. Bring your questions, a supply of your best chili, some stories or music to share, and be ready to join in an important conversation about "Our Responsibility in Maintaining a Healthy Forest" with our panel of experts.

Some new additions to the schedule include a Friday night movie with popcorn; a Chili contest with prizes; raffles; stories; songs and music on Saturday; a Sunday morning meditation walk around the lake; a "Ways of the Cherokee" walk with Mark Warren of Medicine Bow; tree climbing with Genevieve Summers and Jim Walker; and an optional tour of the CCC museum at Vogel State Park. The hikes and other outdoor events have been moved to Sunday to allow for more participation in discussions on Saturday.

Delicious Saturday Bar-B-Que dinner will be supplied and prepared by David Govus with music accompaniment by Marie Dunkle. Don't miss it!

There are a limited number of tickets for this fun and interesting event because of the shelter size at Vogel, so don't miss out! Sign up now, and if you are staying the weekend, reserve a cabin or campsite. For more information and reservations, or to help as a volunteer, call Diane Freer today at 706-635-8733, or e-mail us at: info@gafw.org. Tickets are $30 per person, $45 per couple (children under 12 free). Consider bringing your own extra chairs.

CoTrails Step 2

(continued from page 10)

and Scenic Chattooga River through Warwoman Dell past Rabun Bald and into North Carolina. Unfortunately, much of this National Recreation Trail is in poor shape, especially in the lower sections. In addition to extensive damage from inadequate or failing water diversion features, and despite its national designation as a hiking-only trail, considerable damage has been done by off-highway vehicles and bikes.

Volunteers working on the Bartram Trail.

Repair on the Bartram, as well as routine maintenance and law enforcement by the Chattooga River Ranger District, are curtailed by federal budget restraints. The Georgia Bartram Trail Group's small volunteer maintainer team helps keep up the trail and reports illegal use, but much more is needed to improve existing conditions. The recent professional assessment by Trail Dynamics highlighted this damage, and also suggested that the Forest Service consider expanding its use to bikes. Concerns about this Trail Dynamics' recommendation were voiced by some members of Georgia ForestWatch and local hiking and trail clubs, but the Forest Service assured all groups that Bartram would remain dedicated to pedestrian use only.

The Forest Service proposed applying the remaining funds that supported the CoTrails initiative towards restoration of the Bartram Trail. The R. Howard Dobbs, Jr. Foundation requested that any remaining funds be used on trail restoration and that volunteers be involved in this restoration. Both Georgia ForestWatch and the Forest Service were interested in identifying projects that would help stem unauthorized use and abuse of the Bartram. Possible projects on Bartram, potential sources of some matching funds, and sources of volunteer workers were discussed at a meeting of Forest Service personnel, ForestWatch District Leaders and CoTrails representative, and the maintainer group leader. The meeting attendees helped develop a restoration and maintenance plan to address some of the worst sections of Bartram, including steps to prevent illegal use by horses, mountain bikes and OHVs; re-blazing the entire trail system for hiking only; and rehabilitating unauthorized access and trails through volunteer efforts or small contracts. This plan was approved by the Dobbs Foundation and much of the work will be completed by the end of year.

The next CoTrails general meeting will be at CONF headquarters in Gainesville on September 25 at 6:00 P.M. The last general meeting of 2012 will be November 13, same place and time. ■

If you would like to volunteer with trail maintenance activities on Bartram Trail, Georgia ForestWatch will have its own volunteer Bartram Trail work day on October 5th. Please contact Diane Freer at 706-635-8733 if you would like to volunteer.

Photo credit: Audrey Moylan

Volunteers Joe Gatins and Ben Cash assessing 3 Forks Trail System.

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: _____

Make your conservation statement – go paperless and receive your newsletter via email:

❒ Yes! I want to go paperless!

CHOOSE YOUR GIVING LEVEL

❑ $2,500	President's Circle
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❑ $500	Patron
❑ $250	Supporter
❑ $100	Friend or Small Business
❑ $35	Individual
❑ $ _____	Other amount

PAYMENT INFORMATION

❑ Enclosed is cash or check payable to Georgia ForestWatch

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

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Boating likely on Upper Chattooga as government denies all appeals and review

The Forest Service will open 17 of the 21 miles of the upper section of the Wild and Scenic Chattooga River to boaters on December 1 for the first time in nearly four decades unless its decision is reversed by a federal judge, or environmental problems with boaters' access points cause delay. The section of the Chattooga at issue twists its way through high cliffs studded with waterfalls and a green tunnel of remarkable biodiversity, including the Ellicott Rock Wilderness, Chattooga Cliffs, and the Rock Gorge Roadless Area. Boating will be permitted from December 1 to April 30, at river levels of 350 cubic feet per second or greater measured at the gauge at Burrell's Ford Road Bridge.

In June, the U.S. Forest Service denied all administrative appeals to the decision to allow boating, including one filed by boaters demanding more access than proposed by the Forest Service. Other appeals were filed by Georgia ForestWatch, the Georgia Chapter of the Sierra Club, and Wilderness Watch, acting together; as well as the Chattooga Conservancy; Mountain Rest, S.C., resident William "Butch" Clay; and two sets of private landowners at the top end of the headwaters at Grimshawes, N.C., the Whiteside Cove Association and the Rust Family.

Appellants subsequently petitioned the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service to exercise a "discretionary review" of the decision handed down by the three affected national forests, the Chattahoochee, Sumter, and Nantahala. These entreaties were denied on August 13.

Now, the question of whether and to what extent boating may be allowed on the Upper Chattooga is up to the U.S. District Court in Greenville, S.C., where American Whitewater and other boater groups are seeking boating on the entire Upper Chattooga, without flow or season limits. Georgia ForestWatch has been granted "intervenor" status in the case, as have the Rust Family and Whiteside Cove Association. With the help of Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton law firm in Atlanta, Georgia ForestWatch will maintain a seat at the table. Our presence is important for conservation of the Upper Chattooga because American Whitewater's arguments challenge the Forest Service's ability to regulate recreation, and the court's decision could result in placing recreation management above conservation as a priority on Wild and Scenic Rivers and in wilderness areas.

Even as the case winds its way through court, the Forest Service is moving ahead to implement boating on the Upper Chattooga. Proposed access routes, put-ins and take-outs for boaters, which Georgia ForestWatch members have visited and reviewed, are old eroding road beds and user-created trails. Georgia ForestWatch is concerned because of the sensitive species located along some of these routes and the risks of erosion and sedimentation from increased foot traffic on inappropriately steep trails during wet weather. Run-off from the sizeable parking area planned is an additional potential source of erosion and sedimentation.

ForestWatch and its two partners, the Georgia Chapter of the Sierra Club and Wilderness Watch, are represented by Greenfire Law in the environmental matters, and all have submitted comments to the Forest Service on the proposed actions.

Know that Georgia ForestWatch will continue to work hard to ensure a balance between recreation and protection on this River. Our goal is to preserve the long-term health of the Chattooga for future generations and the other hundreds of species that depend on this rare and very special place. ■

Hike leader quick to engage fellow hikers

by Joseph Gatins : Co-district Leader

Georgia ForestWatch members and friends who trek the mountains, vales and riverfronts of Rabun County know her well as the engaging hike leader with the unmistakably flaming red hair – and the engaging, sweet demeanor that makes for successful outings.

Photo credit: Peter McIntosh

Brenda Smith is also an artist and potter, retired elementary school art teacher, mother and grandmother who followed a circuitous pathway to the north Georgia mountains and Chattahoochee National Forest. The second of six children of a Baptist preacher-father, she grew up on a 35-acre farm on the Dawson-Forsyth County line, back in the day when there were still farms in those Atlanta and Gainesville suburbs.

"It was a cotton farm until 1959, until the government paid us to start on pimento peppers," Brenda said. Then came marriage, and after she "got [her] children grown," she pursued a non-traditional art education degree at North Georgia College and State University in the early 1990s. This led to a 15-year career teaching art to elementary school pupils in Forsyth County.

A college chum led her to the wilds of Rabun County about that same time, and she "fell in love with this place." Having played in the woods around the family's Forsyth home and hiked the Cohutta Wilderness with her family as a young adult, Brenda felt "it was just natural for me to be in the woods." So, by retirement time, she had carved out a small farmstead home in Rabun Gap, complete with adjacent pottery studio, and had fallen in naturally with the local ForestWatch crowd.

Now, Brenda leads five or six hikes per year and stays in shape with 20-plus-mile bicycle road trips in and around Rabun Gap and Dillard. She's led art hikes, poetry-and-music hikes, picnic hikes and storytelling hikes. Her favorite trails are the Chattooga River and Bartram trails, which "give you water and mountains combined."

"I only go at a moderate pace when I lead hikes and I go back and forth to get acquainted with all the hikers," said Brenda. "It's part of the social agenda. And I'll get people on the hike to talk about the wildflowers and trees. That way, they feel part of the hike. And I always have a 'caboose' at the end of the like – that's one of my rules," she said.

"I do care very much about the environment and trying to keep as much wilderness as we can," Brenda said. "So, I try to make [these hikes] a pleasant experience for everyone so they want to come back – and ForestWatch seems to be the place to do it." ■

Welcome New Members!

Kathleen Ackerman
Mike Bamford
Kumar Choudhuri
Margaret Clay
Mary Eidson
Alice Ferland
Lynn Kearns
Carol Morgan
Kristin Oblander
Robert Sanders
Victor Williams

See Details Inside!

Georgia ForestWatch Fall Retreat:
"Our Responsibility in Maintaining a Healthy Forest"

September 28-30, 2012
Vogel State Park

Georgia ForestWatch
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