Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Spring 2012

A Collaborative Trails Initiative

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From the Director

It's show and tell time

Robin Hitner
Interim Executive Director

Since the eighties I have hiked the Keown Loop Trail several times, and recently I participated in the CoTrails (Collaborative Trails Initiative) group analysis of this trail. The Keown Trail is located in the western part of the Conasauga Forest Service Ranger District between Rome and Dalton, Georgia. This area used to be its own district called the Armuchee (pronounced "R' mer chee") Ranger District.

What is unbelievable is that until the CoTrials hike, I had never actually completed the loop. Near the Keown waterfall, I always took what was a side trail to John's Mountain's Overlook thinking I was still on the Keown trail. Why? As it was pointed out by the CoTrails leader, poor signage was one of the culprits. (Learn more about the CoTrails initiative in this newsletter written by Audrey Moylan) I have been hiking the Pinhoti Trial between Rome and Dalton in sections and noticed not only poor signage, but the layout of the trail in certain areas was very poor. Near the Keown Falls, the side trial that I used to go to the overlook included poorly designed steep stair steps.

For the past twenty years, I was either riding my motorcycle or driving my car through the Armuchee scenic area between Marietta and Chattanooga. Having moved to Marietta in 1993, I typically took the scenic route when visiting family back in Chattanooga. Little did I know I would eventually become a member of this well respected environmental organization.

Prior to moving back to the Chattanooga area in 2008, I noticed a picture in the newspaper of Wayne Jenkins (our previous Executive Director) leading a hike of urban kids near Ellijay. I had never heard of Georgia ForestWatch up to that point. I went to the website to learn more. Later I applied for the forester position that Darren Wolfgang now holds. I did have a degree in forestry, but spent my career as a Human Resources Manager. Knowing it was a long shot, I did not expect to hear from anyone. Low and behold Wayne gave me a call. Though we mutually agreed that I was not quite qualified for the job, Wayne did talk me into joining Georgia ForestWatch. I later became a district leader, and a member of the board.

And where am I going with this? *It's show and tell time folks.* We need members, district leaders and board members. We all have our story of how we became connected to ForestWatch. It usually begins with doing something you enjoy: hiking, hunting, fishing, camping or other outdoor activity. That activity may develop into a love of, and appreciation for nature and the environment, and a desire to protect it. And that, of course, is our mission: to Preserve, Protect and Restore the National Forests of Georgia.

We need our members to spread the word of our history, mission and vision statement. All of this information can be found on our website, http://www.gafw.org/mission.html. We need to learn our own "elevator speech" – a 30 to 60 second summary on who is ForestWatch so we can help recruit members and volunteers. As an example, "Georgia ForestWatch is a not-for-profit conservation organization dedicated to *promoting naturally self-sustaining forests and watersheds within the more than 867,000 acres of national forest lands in Georgia*." The italic portion is taken from our mission statement on our website.

You don't have to have a degree in forestry to join. All you have to do is love nature and want to preserve it. There are many ways to get involved:

- Share your love of nature with a child. What they learn from you will translate into a life-long love of nature as they grow up. It's the greatest gift you can give them, and they will remember it always.
- Tell a friend about Georgia ForestWatch and invite them to join you and become a member. Just doing that would double our membership and strengthen our voice! Please do that today.

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Breaking News: Mary Topa, our new executive director

We are thrilled to announce that Mary Topa has accepted the position of Executive Director of Georgia ForestWatch effective May 7th. Mary has a Ph.D. in Forestry and Environmental Studies from Duke University. She worked at the Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research at Cornell where she established an internationally-recognized research program in plant ecology. Her group studied how forests respond to environmental stresses such as air pollution, soil moisture extremes, invasive organisms, and fire. For the last seven years, she worked for Holden Arboretum in northeast Ohio where she directed the research program and added an ecological focus.

At Holden, Mary integrated research with management of Holden's 3100 acres of natural areas, outreach and educational activities, scientific policy development, and funding strategies, including donor cultivation and proposal development. She has extensive grant writing and major donor experience. She also spearheaded two strategic planning efforts for Holden. Mary is very savvy about relations with the Forest Service – she's worked with them in Ohio, and with state personnel responsible for the northeast Ohio Metroparks.

Mary taught forest ecology while at Duke, and also courses on water quality and sustainable forestry. She believes it is very important to educate the public about our national forests, especially private landowners adjacent to the Forests. She would like to see non-profit groups get kids involved in programs like removing invasives as a way of recruiting the next generation of environmentalists.

Prior to visiting us in January, Mary had already learned a lot about ForestWatch, having read our history and strategic plan. She was impressed with our District Leader program and our strong relationship with the Southern Environmental Law Center.

Mary has spent a lot of time in the woods, as an avid runner in past years, and now as a hiker. She is very knowledgeable about forest health issues – soils, invasives and exopathogens. She has

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Cover photo credit: Peter McIntosh

Ed Jenkins (1933-2012): Defender of the Georgia Mountains

by Peter Kirby

Former U.S. Congressman Ed Jenkins died on New Year's Day, following a brief illness. He was elected to Congress in 1976, the same year Jimmy Carter was elected president, and represented Georgia's 9th Congressional District from 1977 to 1993.

I first met Ed Jenkins around 1990 at a dedication ceremony at Anna Ruby Falls Scenic Area on the Chattahoochee National Forest. I was new to my position as a field staffer for The Wilderness Society, I had been told that the congressman had an exceptional, personal interest in the national forest, which was virtually all in his 9th district. Near the end of his speech, Ed lifted his eyes from the podium and recited from memory – and from his heart – stanza after stanza of Sidney Lanier's *Song of the Chattahoochee:*

> Out of the hills of Habersham,
> Down the valleys of Hall,
> I hurry amain to reach the plain,
> Run the rapid and leap the fall,
> Split at the rock and together again...

After the ceremony, I introduced myself and complimented Ed on the recitation. He said he wanted to talk to me about the national forests and asked me to visit. Little did I realize that within a year or so, he would protect as wilderness the very headwaters of that mighty river.

Before long, my associate, Shirl Parsons, and I were sitting in Ed's office. He pulled out several letters from his desk. The letters were from local folks complaining about damaging Forest Service road-building and clear-cutting operations. He read them out loud, his voice rising. After a while, he paused and asked if we would prepare a proposal of additional areas on the forest that needed protection, including especially Blood Mountain and headwaters of the Chattahoochee River. That was the genesis of what became the Chattahoochee National Forest Protection Act of 1991.

Shirl and I got to work convening a task force of knowledgeable conservationists, drawing especially on Georgia ForestWatch activists. The task force, which I chaired, met almost weekly and made proposals for additional wildernesses and scenic areas, as well as for a large National Recreation Area along the high spine of the National Forest, following the Appalachian Trail. In an extraordinary effort, the task force of literally dozens of folks drew up proposals with detailed area descriptions and map boundaries. Among the long list of task force participants, those making key contributions included James Sullivan, Bob Kerr, Chuck McGrady, George Owen, Bob Kibler, Charles Wharton, Jerry McCollum, Hillary Quinn, Dennis Stansell and Linda Jones.

The task force presented Jenkins with a package containing a comprehensive proposal, draft legislative findings to justify the bill, and draft report language detailing how the Forest Service should carry out provisions in the bill. In selecting the final areas for protection, Ed considered their natural value and the extent of public support. In addition to Blood Mountain and Chattahoochee headwaters for new wilderness areas, he added wilderness to the existing Brasstown area. He also renamed the Chattahoochee headwaters area the Mark Trail Wilderness in honor of famed local nature artist and educator, Ed Dodd, who created the Mark Trail comic strip.

Jenkins also liked the idea of a wide National Recreation Area along the Appalachian Trail, so he delineated one along the trail's beginning at Springer Mountain. Another proposal, one that surprised me, was to designate Coosa Bald a National Scenic Area. Coosa Bald had great biodiversity but was not as well known as Blood Mountain. Ed explained he had hiked, fished and camped there as a youth growing up nearby in Blairsville and wanted its big trees to get even bigger. Even though all of our proposals were not included in Ed's legislation, they became the foundation for a set of proposals – *Georgia's Mountain Treasures* – issued in 1996 by The Wilderness Society, Georgia ForestWatch and many other groups. This publication laid out an agenda for forest conservation into the 21st century.

In addition to being an avid advocate for the national forest, Ed proved to be a keen legislator. He was concerned about possible strong opposition from the George H. W. Bush Administration - maybe even a veto - because his bill contradicted recommendations in the Forest Service's 1986 Plan. So, Ed got the entire Georgia House delegation to sponsor the bill, including later House Speaker, Newt Gingrich. Ed also won the support of Gov. Zell Miller, a mountain resident himself, and from Georgia's fish and game agency, after making concessions to remove acreages with maintained wildlife openings.

Ed delayed introducing the bill until he received replies to a questionnaire sent to all 9th district voters. His constituents not only strongly supported his proposals but, In fact, the majority favored even more wilderness than his bill called for! With this information to deflect House committee complaints about the lack of public comment, and with the help of committee member, fellow Georgian Buddy Darden, the bill moved through the committee and passed the House without change. In the Senate, Ed had the support of both Sam Nunn and Wyche Fowler, with Senator Fowler persuading potential opponents to vote for the bill. It was passed near the end of the legislative session and was signed into law by President Bush.

This bill completed the extraordinary legacy of forest conservation left to us by Ed Jenkins. The Eastern Wilderness Act of 1975 established the principle that national forest areas in the east though once logged could recover their naturalness and be designated wilderness; that bill also named Cohutta and Ellicott Rock as the first wildernesses on the Chattahoochee National Forest. Ed was elected a year later – in 1976 – and built on that principle with bills in 1984, 1986 and 1991 designating the bulk of today's 118,000 acres of wilderness on the forest. These treasured wildlands are to be managed as pristine, forever off-bounds to logging, off-road vehicles, mining, road building, dams and other development. Ed also reached across partisan divides; all three wilderness bills that passed Congress during his tenure were signed by Republican Presidents.

To acknowledge his enduring leadership, Congress in 1992 renamed the Springer Mountain National Recreation Area the Ed Jenkins National Recreation Area. What a fitting tribute! This special area that bears his name – the area where the Appalachian Trail begins its journey to Maine – will preserve outstanding scenic beauty of waterfalls, primeval forest and rugged trails. Ed's legacy will provide adventure and serenity alike to countless visitors now and for ages to come. ■

Share with us!

Share your forest experiences with us and we'll share them with your fellow ForestWatch members!

- Write up your experience on a Georgia ForestWatch outing, or a personal forest outing.
- Send us your forest photographs, mountain views, waterfalls, wildlife etc. (High-resolution, please)
- Tell us why you love Georgia ForestWatch.
- Are you an artist? Send in a copy of your art work.

You don't have to be a professional writer. Articles up to 500 words are best. If needed, your submission may be edited.

We all have something to share, so let's get to it! Send your submissions to: jlopez@gafw.org.

Peter Kirby first backpacked across the Chattahoochee National Forest in 1977 and was deeply impressed by its scenic beauty and rugged wildness. As a lawyer with the Wilderness Society's national office in Washington, Kirby was one of the lawyers who led the 1986 appeal that challenged the Forest Service's first ever comprehensive management plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee forests. ForestWatch came about as part of this legal settlement between the Forest Service and seven conservation organizations. During his time in Washington, Peter also initiated the campaign to cut funding for Forest Service road construction – a successful effort that eventually led to the famous nationwide Roadless Rule that barred logging from roadless areas, including many prized wildlands on the Chattahoochee National Forest. Peter can be reached at peterkirby23@aol.com.

Out in the forest: Poetry hike to the Chattooga River

by Laurence Holden : Georgia ForestWatch Member

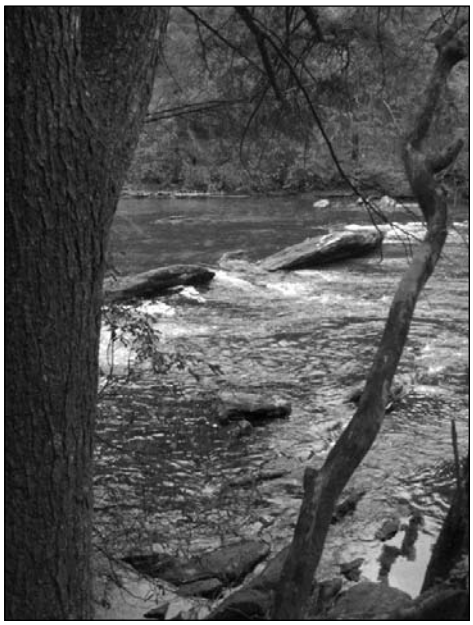
Nine a.m. Rock Creek, Rabun County, November 26, 2011. All the glories of fall colors have left the woods silent, calm, and dressed in their essential hues of umbers and grays. Seventeen of us have gathered at a trail crossing of the Chattooga River Trail to witness this, to hike south and to see what poetry is in it for us. To help with this, we have a poet along (me), and a fiddler, Marie Dunkle.

Brenda Smith, hike leader, calls us into a circle to declare our names as brightly as diligent school children and count off so that later we'll know if we've lost any one. I look around and appreciate how special such a circle is in a forest. For how many millennia have we humans been doing this?

Quickly we un-circle and dance in a crowd across the stones of tiny Rock Creek, our delighted voices playing over the gurgling stream, and we begin the long ascent up a finger ridge. Up through the pine a wood pecker cracks open the silence.

We pause to catch our breath and I read a poem about how our breaths each time, reach out and come back - that they so love the world they always go back for more.

The forest opens up into that larger silence of winter – tall oaks and hickory, still, listening and waiting, rooted to the steep slope plunging down to the Chattooga, and overhead weaving intricate and cryptic patterns against the brightening gray sky. Up here we can't see the river, but we can hear its steady roar. If a ridge like this shows the working knife edge of time, wind scoured and boulder scored, then that ceaseless deep roar below must be the anchoring voice of it. I don't know if any of us could take in the meaning of this, but we knew just enough to pause and wonder at the secret of it.



It's easy to compare this open winter forest to a cathedral; its gallery of columns and arching vaults certainly reflects that solemnity. But if it is a church then it is also a place for those fundamental ceremonies we can never get very far from – life, birth, transformation, and death. So we meet a miniature green field of Moss Wort along a level bench where it can catch moisture wafting up from the river, Rattlesnake Plantain peaks up at us among the dead leaves of an open hillside, and where an old oak has been ripped out of the mountain from some terrific upward gust we pause. I read a poem about how a storm, a rock, a leaf, can be torn loose to wander and fall, just like any one's life.

Nature often tends to mirror our feelings, and we all find ourselves drawn to a scene, a plant, or a place that does. But could it be, if we were to step outside that orbit of ourselves where we think we are the center, that perhaps it's the other way around? Standing on this mountain side, perhaps it is we who are doing the mirroring of what nature wants, and even needs, to speak?

When our rising trail looks like we might soon reach the top, it turns down the spine of a long gentle finger ridge back toward the river. A great open stand of hemlocks greets us sheltering the deep cut of Buckeye Creek.

Then it's up and over the shoulder of another ridge and steeply down to the river at last.

We gather wood for a fire. Marie Dunkle and I perform my long poem "Let Us Gather at This River." with her wild and coursing fiddle music

Then we all fan out to seek a place that draws us to it and write some immediate impressions. We gather again in a circle, and

in round robin fashion proclaim our newly created poem together about what we see and smell, hear and touch, taste and imagine. Just behind our voices I can hear the soft swish of the river. I think – is the river coming with us, or are we going with her?

Each hiker has her or his own story, following his or her own river. Each trek down the trail is another story, another part of the river - each a different needle threaded through the same enduring tapestry that calls us into a circle to a story each and every time, and each and every story to a river.

To see a short slide show of our group at the river go to: Poetry at the Chattooga River November 26, 2011 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L00ulNuxhRs

Photos by Dietrich Hoecht. Please e-mail him for permission to use at: potsniron@windstream.net

From the Director

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- Participate in a hike or other outing event. Go to our website and click on the Outings & Events/calendar to see what's coming up: http://www.gafw.calendar.html
- Not able to hike? That's ok: come join us at the Spring Event! This year it will be a "drop-in" event, held in Ellijay. Local artists and authors will have their wares for sale, along with our annual native plant sale. Local bands will serenade you while you shop. Mark May 5th on your calendar, and bring a friend or two.
- Sponsor an event. Our Spring Fundraiser Event and Fall Retreat are made possible by your $200 sponsorships. Your donations help make these events possible.
- Support our work with a generous donation. There are many easy ways to help: give online by clicking on Membership and the Donate button: http://www.gafw.org/join_give.html. Or consider planned giving: set up automatic withdrawal with your bank to give monthly. Just $20 a month becomes $240 dollars a year. A small monthly gift will make a huge difference to Georgia ForestWatch, and it will be easy for you.
- Ask your employer to match your gift and double your giving-power.
- Call us to discuss how your talents can support the District Leader and Outreach Programs or the Board: 706-635-Tree (8733). We are looking for specific skills, and you may have them!

These are YOUR forests to enjoy today and protect for generations to come.

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Around the forests (a partial list of new and ongoing Forest Service projects)

by Darren Wolfgang : Forest Ecologist

Forest-wide

In July of 2011 the agency proposed a 1,800 acre forest wide project aimed at removing stems with low ecological value from the midstory of maturing forests. The purpose of this work is to promote the establishment of a new age class of oak and hickory. By removing dense mid-story shade from the target forest units, more sunlight will be allowed to reach the forest floor and will stimulate the growth of new oak and hickory seedlings. This work was completed in the fall of 2011. ForestWatch has been conducting follow up inspections of the completed work over the last few months, and have found the work to have been satisfactorily completed. While most of the post treatment acres surveyed appear to have been implemented appropriately, we recently discovered some project areas on the Blue Ridge Ranger district that had numerous dogwood and sourwood stems cut unnecessarily. We feel that cutting dogwoods is inappropriate in any scenario. This species is typically sparsely distributed throughout the under and midstory of forest stands, and seldom grows to a height greater than 30 feet in a forested setting; therefore, this species poses little threat to "oak regeneration". The US Forest Service-Silvics of North America manual reports that over 36 species of birds utilize dogwood seed/fruit, including quail, roughed grouse, and wild turkey. Numerous other game and non-game mammals also utilize dogwoods as a food source. Dogwoods, unlike most other trees and plants, have the ability to "mine" calcium from rocks and mineral subsoil, making this species very important for calcium cycling and availability in forest soils. We have conveyed our disapproval of the foolhardy practice of removing dogwoods to the Forest Service personnel, with the intent of preventing this action from reoccurring in future management proposals.

Chattahoochee Transportation Analysis Process: The Forest Service is initiating a Transportation Analysis Process (TAP) for the Ranger Districts on the Chattahoochee. Districts to be evaluated are: the Conasauga River, Blue Ridge, and Chattooga River Ranger Districts. The process is expected to be completed by the end of 2012 and is part of a larger national initiative to conduct TAPs for all national forests by 2015. According to the Forest Service:

"This transportation study will help us find a way to use our limited resources to balance the needs for access to the forest with the protection of clean water and a healthy forest. The transportation study is not a proposal or decision, but is intended to help guide us in planning future road management.

The number of overdue road maintenance projects continues to grow, while public use of our roads is increasing. Roads that cannot be adequately maintained can be dangerous to visitors and threaten forest health. They can increase sedimentation into rivers and streams, degrading water quality and impacting fish and wildlife."

Possible options that may be considered for each road include:

- Maintaining at the current standard
- Changing the level of maintenance (ex., from passenger car to high-clearance vehicle)
- Adding seasonal restrictions
- Implementing year-long closures
- Decommissioning

Any member of the public is invited to submit comments on individual forest roads, or the TAP process by April 13, 2012. See http://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/conf/home/?cid=STELPRDB5355100&width=full for comment forms, maps, and more information.

Chattooga River Ranger District

Upper Chattooga Boating: The push by the U.S. Forest Service to get boats on the Wild and Scenic Upper Chattooga

Welcome New Members!

Barbara Gray
Linda Doherty
Susan Rice
Richard Sullivan
Gary Winsett
Marcia Okula
Margery Rubin

River is in a most fluid stage – with the agency determined to get whitewater paddlers on the river as soon as possible, and Georgia ForestWatch, along with other conservation and recreation groups, just as determined to slow that flow.

As previously reported, ForestWatch has teamed with the Georgia Sierra Club and Wilderness Watch to appeal the Forest Service's latest decision in this multi-year effort. The decision would, for the first time in more than 35 years, permit unlimited numbers of boaters and so-called "creekers" on 17 miles of the 21 miles of Upper Chattooga at high water, December 1 – April 30.

Included in the 17 river miles that would be open to boaters are several miles that traverse the Ellicott Rock Wilderness Area. We believe that increased use, removal of fallen debris to permit passage of boaters, additional parking area, and other development and concessions would negatively impact the character of this congressionally designated wilderness area. Wilderness areas are parcels of forest land with few roads and infrastructure development that are "set aside" to preserve what little trace of "wild" still exists in north Georgia and elsewhere in the eastern United States.

Since details of our legal challenge to the Upper Chattooga boating decision are likely to be forthcoming about the same time this newsletter is published, please refer to the Georgia ForestWatch website for all updates (www.gfw.org/news).

Upper Warwoman Watershed Assessment: As reported in last quarter's Forest News, the District is moving along with the inventory and analysis of the Warwoman watershed. This process and several other projects are progressing slowly, due in part to the Forest Service's search for a permanent Chattooga River District Ranger. Work on the 6,000 acre Pine Thinning project is expected to ramp up moving through the fall of 2012.

Also of interest in this District was a recent Special Use Permit application from the producers of "Killing Season" – a film starring John Travolta and Robert De Niro – to shoot footage in Rabun County, including part of the national forest. Shortly after the production crew filed the application, ForestWatch and the Forest Service learned that filming had already occurred without waiting for a Special Use Permit, or paying application fees to the Forest Service. While Georgia ForestWatch supports commerce and tourism in our mountain counties, we firmly believe the procedures, laws, and regulations of the Forest Service must be followed, regardless of who is involved. Following our comment letter, and some good follow-up work from the agency, the production crew decided to pay the Forest

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Upcoming 2012 Georgia ForestWatch Outings and Events

Kathryn Kolb Photography Workshops

Dauset Trails Nature Center Outing and Picnic
April 14

Kelly Ridge Hike – April 14

Snorkel with the Fishes at the Conasauga River

Giff Beaton returns with another fascinating
Dragonfly and Damselfly outing

Patricia Howell, owner of BotanoLogos,
will be leading a Wild Edibles and Medicinal hike

Earth Day Celebration Weekend, April 21 & 22.
Choose from four fun and informative hikes!

Wild & Woolly Art & Nature Music Festival, May 5th
at the North Georgia Community Center in Ellijay, GA

Annual Fall Retreat at Vogel State Park,
September 28th & 29th

Keep checking our website for information
on these outings and other 2012 activities.

Breaking News: Mary Topa

(continued from page 3)

been working with the Forest Service in Ohio on monitoring for invasives and pathogens like the emerald ash borer.

She believes that we need to bring science down to the public level and educate the public about forest health and benefits. Mary has organized layman lecture series and taught courses on "What healthy forests are" and "What are the threats to native biodiversity".

Mary has the talents to be an outstanding Executive Director for Georgia ForestWatch. With the support of us all, volunteers and staff, we can make ForestWatch even more effective than it is now, build a strong outreach and membership program, and ensure a secure financial position for the future. Please join me in welcoming Mary to Georgia ForestWatch!

CoTrails: A precedent-setting venture

by Audrey Moylan : Georgia ForestWatch Advisor

CoTrails is a unique partnership between Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests management and the primary recreational user groups: hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians, and motorized drivers/ off-highway-vehicle riders. If you will recall, Wayne Jenkins, Georgia ForestWatchs' previous Executive Director, and George Bain, Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests (CONF) Supervisor, initiated the idea for a facilitated public collaborative process back in 2010. [See Forest News, Spring 2011]. This venture began when the U. S. Forest Service (USFS) approached these frequently competitive constituencies with two objectives in mind: (1) to have a mutual understanding between USFS and recreational users of the responsibilities, requirements, and constraints placed on forest management and (2) to have a level of mutual respect, a spirit of collaboration, and a working partnership among the users and between users and the USFS. Supervisor George Bain formed a core team of key representatives from each user group, including Wayne Jenkins, to define a process by which the objectives could be met.

Jeremy Whimpey discusses poor signage.

Jeremy Wimpey explaining what to look for when assessing a trail.

Toward that end, the team met and worked together, along with USFS Dispersed Recreation Program Manager John Campbell, to develop a workable plan, which became the *USFS-CONF Collaborative Trails Initiative (CoTrails).*

Following a series of public meetings in locations near the Chattahoochee and Oconee Forests, the CoTrails core team expanded to include the following working groups to address four areas of interest or concern brought up at the meetings: Communications, Education, Resources, and Volunteer coordination. Action plans developed by the four working groups (see www.CoTrails.org) were integrated into a comprehensive CoTrails Strategic Plan, which is a guide for implementing suggestions and recommendations currently under consideration by the team. CoTrails' long-term goal is to provide a diverse, quality trail experience that is maintainable and ecologically sustainable.

In January, the Forest Service and CoTrails presented the strategic plan to the interested public at a workshop that focused primarily on a project conceived by the core team: a professional analysis of specific problem trails in the national forests. More than 200 miles of problem trails were identified by the four Chattahoochee-Oconee Ranger Districts. Initial funding for the professional analysis comprised two grants, one from the Howard R. Dobbs Jr. Foundation, which Georgia ForestWatch secured, and one from the U.S. Dept. of Transportation's Recreational Trails Program (RTP), secured by the Forest Service. The main provisions of the analysis are an assessment of the problems and recommendations for repair, redesign, reroute, or closing, as appropriate, and an educational program for CoTrails volunteers who eventually will assist in trail work and in assessment of the other 600+ miles of forest trails not included in the professional analysis.

At the workshop, held at Unicoi State Park, two professional contractors, Trail Dynamics, LLC (www.traildynamics.com) and Applied Trails Research, LLC (www.appliedtrailresearch.com) presented some background information on trail usage, construction, and potential causes of problems. This was followed by contractor-led field trips to the park's mountain bike trail and the USFS's Anna Ruby Falls trail for first-hand observation of features discussed in the presentation. Since the initial workshop, the contractors, including Kay-Linn Enterprises LLC (www.kay-linn.com), have conducted more intensive hands-on workshops on a problem trail in each of the four Chattahoochee-Oconee Ranger Districts (Conasauga, Blue Ridge, Chattooga River, and Oconee). During these inventory workshops, participants were told what to look for when assessing a trail's current condition and what could be done to correct the problems. Inventory workshops were conducted on hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding trails.

Georgia ForestWatch members Robin Hitner, Marie Dunkle, Joe Gatins, Tom and Sally Colkett, Ben Cash, Kathy Stege, Charlie Seabrook, and Denny Rhodes, who attended the inventory workshops, reported that the contractors provided demonstrations that were well organized and conducted by highly skilled trail assessment professionals. Since water management is the primary concern on the problem trails inventoried, erosion control measures such as water bars, catch basins, reshaping, and re-routes to achieve appropriate drainage patterns were emphasized during the workshops. Another concern pointed out during the workshops was poor signage that was confusing and contradictory. In the assessment of the entire 200+ miles of selected problem trails, the contractors also discovered a number of "risk management" and safety situations. These also will be addressed in the contractor's report and recommendations, which are due to be made public in mid- to late May.

The inventory workshop conducted on the Willis Knob Equestrian Trail in the Chattooga River Ranger District is of particular interest because contract work done in the past year was shown to have actually damaged rather than repaired part of the trail system. If current specifications that promote sustainable trails had been followed, this trail should have a

Willis Knob Equestrian Trail in the Chattooga Ranger District

maximum tread width of 48 inches. However, an 80-inch dozer blade apparently had been used in scraping and reshaping efforts, impacting adjacent vegetation and altering drainage patterns. Also, according to Trail Dynamics, the contractor had scraped dirt, mainly clay, into low spots where, absent proper compacting, accumulations have become slick slurries about 8 –10 inches deep. Additional problems on this trail include many slopes that exceed the recommended maximum sustainable grade of 6 percent for equestrian traffic.

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Around the Forests

(continued from page 9)

Service a several -hundred -dollar fine, and resubmit their permit application for more filming this spring – thus, no "bad precedent".

Blue Ridge Ranger District

The District will continue to evaluate the Cooper, Coosa, and Youngcane creek watersheds. In addition to utilizing a watershed assessment framework in the evaluations, a more detailed Ecological Classification System (ECS) is being developed to help match desired future vegetation to ecological suitability. A similar system was developed on the Oconee National Forest, and preliminary field inspections indicate that ECS models are useful forest planning tools - when combined with on-the-ground field work to determine project suitability. Also, progress continues slowly on the Lake Nottely pine thinning project, Etowah River project, and Brawley Mountain golden-winged warbler habitat project .Weather, staff turnover, and retooling management prescriptions (methods and techniques to be administered to specific forest management at the individual forest stand level) have affected progress in this District.

Conasauga Ranger District

As mentioned in last quarter's newsletter, the District will continue to implement the 2008 Armuchee Ridges pine thinning project. As is the case throughout the Forest, operability and concerns related to road conditions and erosion cause the agency and project contractors to scale back or cease operations during the wet winter months. The District is partnering with the National Wild Turkey Federation, a Stewardship Contractor for the projects in the Armuchee Decision, to plant seedlings in some of the longleaf pine restoration sites.

Georgia ForestWatch recently had the opportunity to meet with district staff to discuss the upcoming Oak Crown Touching Release project in the Armuchee area. Aimed at releasing existing stems of oak, hickory, shortleaf pine, etc. from species with lower ecological value such as poplar, red maple, virginial pine, and sweet gum; this project is exactly the kind of restorative forestry that ForestWatch has been encouraging the agency to pursue. In this project, the district will revisit 140 acres of forest stands that were subject to what equates to clear cutting approximately 20 years ago. We believe the proposal is necessary to maximize the success of desirable species in these developing forest stands. Negative selection pressure on desirable species occurs as a response to the rapid removal of the forest canopy is rapidly. This action triggers the rapid "regeneration" of fast growing, shade intolerant, low wildlife-value species such as yellow poplar, Virginia pine, black locust, red maple and sweet gum. This growth response stresses desirable/beneficial species such as oak, hickory, dogwood, and shortleaf pine, which grow considerably slower during earlier phases of stand development.

Oconee Ranger District

Forest Health and Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project (FWHIP): The District is still moving toward implementation of this project. ForestWatch recently met with the new district ranger and silviculturist to visit some of the areas targeted for hardwood restoration under the FWHIP. This hardwood regeneration/restoration management prescription will assist in guiding stands largely populated with loblolly pine and sweetgum back to their historic oak-hickory-pine forest condition. We are excited to see some of this hardwood restoration work implemented on the Oconee; however, due to the constant threat of the southern pine beetle and the Red Cockaded woodpecker recovery project, this important work will not begin until 2013. ■

2011 Financial Report

Income	
Contributions	$75,622
Grants	$89,300
Membership Dues	$17,171
Program Fees	$4,852
Sponsorships	$10,988
Investment Income	$803
Earned Income	-$1,811
Total Income	$196,924
Expense	
Program	$132,215
Admin	$57,447
Total Expenses	$189,662
Net Income	$7,262
Total Assets	**$240,762**

CoTrails

(continued from page 11)

In April, contractors will conduct educational field demonstrations of repair and/or enhancement on four of the inventoried trails, including tread reshaping and hardening techniques and water management on the Willis Knob Equestrian Trail. Other demonstrations planned include water management techniques that enhance mountain bike experiences on the Lower Green Mountain Trail; transformation of a trail on an old roadbed (TROAD) into a trail having the feel and performance of a purpose-built singletrack, with better water management, enhanced user experience, and conflict mitigation; and tread maintenance and good water management structures on a semi-primitive hiking trail. The contractors will provide and operate trail machines, as necessary, and volunteers will learn how to perform finish work behind the machines.

Georgia ForestWatch members who are interested in appropriate, sustainable trail maintenance are encouraged to attend these demonstrations. The dates, specific trails, and other information will be posted on our website as soon as they are known.

These inventories and educational workshops are just the beginning of a lengthy project that requires Forest Service approval of the contractor's recommendations and biological evaluations of any proposed re-routes, closures or new trails, as well as long-term commitments from CoTrails volunteers and availability of resources, including financial, to do the work. Watch for updates in our newsletter, on our website and the CoTrails website – www.cotrails.org. ■

A Special Thank You…

Georgia ForestWatch hosted many fun and informative hikes and outings in 2011. I would like to extend a special thank you to the following dedicated hike leaders for sharing their passion for our national forests and giving their time and expertise to help make our outings program a success: Giff Beaton, Ben Cash, Tom and Sally Colkett, Brooks Franklin, Joe Gatins, Patricia Howell, Brenda Smith, Mark Zemmin, and Jim Herrig and Gary Williams from the U.S. Forest Service.

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The Georgia ForestWatch Directors, Advisors, District Leaders and Staff want to thank you very much for your generosity and support for protecting our National Forests in Georgia. This important work could not be accomplished without each and every one of you.

(Our apologies if we inadvertently omitted anyone.)

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