Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Summer 2012

Nimblewill, Your Efforts Rewarded

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From the Director

Fresh beginnings

Mary Topa
Executive Director

Let me start by saying, I am really excited about joining the extended family at Georgia ForestWatch, and am honored to have been chosen to lead GFW on issues that are near and dear to my heart. I look forward to the challenges of this job as together we continue and expand the fine work of GFW.

Of course, there will be growing pains. Please know that my office is always open, and I am looking forward to meeting you all and listening to your ideas regarding next steps and new opportunities. I have much to learn about GFW and big shoes to fill, so please be patient. Georgia ForestWatch has an incredible history, and, to quote Robin Hitner, I will stay the course on many issues. But I also hope to expand our partnerships, become more involved in issues that impact all forests in Georgia, and focus more attention on educational outreach activities.

I have been passionate about forest conservation all my life, having been raised by a father who spent every spare minute in the forests learning their secrets. I chose to express that passion through science for most of my career, focusing on forest health issues. However, during the last 10 years, I have become increasingly alarmed by the loss of forest land due to urban sprawl; the large number of invasive insects and diseases that are decimating beloved keystone species such as hemlock; and lastly, the overall impact of climate change on our native forest diversity.

There is an urgent need for creative and collaborative approaches to solve these problems, and forest management plays a key role. It is difficult to predict what our forests are going to look like in 100 years, but I do know one thing – more forest land and native diversity will be lost without the help of groups like Georgia ForestWatch and individuals who are passionate about forest conservation and sustainable management of our forests. That's why public outreach, volunteer training and student internships are important. There is also a need for scientists and students to work with forest managers to solve real-world problems – and as GFW, we can facilitate this interaction. Training the next generation of conservationists is critical for the future of our forests!

It is important for non-profits like GFW to work with the Forest Service through collaborative partnerships such as CoTrails, while keeping our legal and administrative tools honed. Georgia ForestWatch needs to ensure that unique and rare forested ecosystems are conserved, old growth forests are protected, that large tracts of contiguous forests remain for interior species and to assist species migration, and science-based management practices are used to promote healthy and diverse forested ecosystems, soils and watersheds.

I am a firm believer in diverse partnerships. Multiple partnerships are the only way to develop science-based management strategies for climate change issues, and to address sprawl and land conservation issues at a regional level. We are blessed with large, contiguous tracts of federal land in northern Georgia and throughout the southern Appalachians. But the turnover of private forest land into primary and secondary homes is fragmenting these forest tracts and reducing forest cover. Georgia ForestWatch can and should play a key role in helping to conserve *all* forest land and minimize this sort of private development. Why you may ask? Because the majority of forest land in the USA is owned by private landowners, and the southeastern USA is experiencing some of the highest rates of forest loss in the world.

When I get asked the $64,000 question, "Why should I care about forests?", I talk about the fundamental life-support services that forests provide and humans depend upon – ecological services that we often take for granted until they are gone. Forests provide wildlife habitat and diversity, provide critical watershed services such as flood control, minimize soil loss and regenerate soil fertility, purify air and water, detoxify and decompose wastes, pollinate crops and natural vegetation, store carbon, and provide aesthetic beauty that lifts the human spirit and stimulates the intellect and artist in us all.

But I am preaching to the choir here. As GFW members, you know about and appreciate these services, and like me, are passionate about our forests. Thank you for all that you do for GFW. Please continue to work with me and the wonderful staff at Georgia ForestWatch spread this important message.

Mary A. Topa

A warm welcome for Mary

by Ted Doll : Board Member

Guts and Grit! That's what it takes to pick up and move your household 700 miles to a new job and culture. And not just any job – one with huge responsibilities – a combination of visionary, spokesperson, manager, scientist, conflict mediator, financial analyst, and fundraiser. The role of Executive Director for an environmental group like Georgia ForestWatch is one of the most challenging I can imagine.

As if it weren't enough to be living out of boxes for weeks, events conspired to make the transition even more hectic for Mary. First the moving truck couldn't get up the drive to Mary's rental house and burned out an engine in the attempt. Then surprise – the third day on the job, her house appears in the list of pending foreclosures in the Ellijay newspaper! And that wasn't the end. Mary's two Australian shepherds came down with bloody diarrhea from food contaminated with salmonella.

Add to this the tedium of listening to 33 different opinions on any given topic from the 11 board members. Oh, and most taxing – learning to guzzle beer and gobble massive amounts of pizza at District Leader meetings!

Ah, but in a more serious vein, we expect an awful lot of our executive directors at ForestWatch. Each ED has his or her own style and takes the organization to a new stage of development. Wayne Jenkins was an outstanding ED and left some "big shoes to be filled." He encouraged collaboration with the Forest Service whenever possible. Under Wayne's leadership the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest was spared the worst of timber production in the name of "early successional habitat" and "restoration" much more effectively than our neighboring national forests in North Carolina and Tennessee. With the aid of David Govus, he made major strides in reducing resource damage by off-road vehicles. And among many other accomplishments, Wayne initiated the CoTrails initiative.

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Cover photo credit: Darren Wolfgang

Return to Nimblewill

by David Govus : District Leader

Arising on the north side of Black Gap just below the terminus of the Appalachian Trail at Springer Mountain, Nimblewill Creek is the beginning of the mighty Etowah River. As a child growing up in north Georgia, the name Nimblewill had an aura of mystery to it, reinforced when I read the great Georgia poet James Dickey's poem "Hunting Civil War Relics at Nimblewill Creek." My first actual encounter with Nimblewill was a trout fishing trip to the creek in the late 1960s. Atlanta then was an area of less than a million people and even though Nimblewill was barely 60 miles north of the metro area, it seemed remote and untouched. The water was clear and cold and the fishing was good. I drank out of the stream. Then, as now, to access the creek one passes by the handsome old Nimblewill Church and drives up – Forest Service road 28, which parallels the creek. This road eventually climbs up to Nimblewill Gap and the approach to the Appalachian Trail. By the late 1960s, the Forest Service had possessed most of the land in the upper Etowah watershed for 30 years, and the damage caused by private logging had healed. To my then untrained eye, the forest looked pristine.

My outdoor activities took me to areas more remote than Nimblewill and decades passed without visiting. ForestWatching duties brought me back to the creek several years ago, and unfortunately, time has not treated the Nimblewill watershed well. The Forest Service clear-cut hundreds of acres in the 1970s and FS 28 was joined by roads 28-E and 28-D as well as a host of 'temporary' roads built to extract timber. Although proceeds from the timber sales paid for the road construction, the annual Forest Service budget is never sufficient to maintain the vast network of roads created in the clear-cut days. The result is several years of maintenance backlog and a failing system.

With the 28-county metro Atlanta area having exploded into the 6-million-person monster that it is today, many residents have sought out Nimblewill as a recreational area, now just a few miles from major highways. The simple campsites created by the Forest Service in the 1980s have been overwhelmed by huge groups. Large sections of the riparian area have been denuded, and many of the campsites are polluted with garbage. Off-road enthusiasts have turned 28-E and 28-D into mud bogging courses and opened up many of the old temporary roads the Forest Service had closed. Off-road vehicles extended 28-E illegally across the creek and all the way to Bearden Falls. Vehicles actually drove up and down the creek.

Three years ago, Georgia ForestWatchers documented this damage with photos and notified the Forest Service – to no avail. Repeated letters and calls, as well as pictures of joy riders in the creek, finally brought results this April. The Forest Service blocked the end of 28-E and closed the illegal roads. Surveillance cameras were set up, and cases have been made against two individuals for destroying resources and violating closure orders. Large fines and restitution payments are expected. Meanwhile the problem of large groups of up to 12 vehicles camping in the riparian zone, littering and the proper disposal of human waste remain. A greater Forest Service presence would certainly help. Georgia ForestWatch plans a cleanup day in June and we hope to fashion and place signs encouraging people to care for their own forest. ■

A Warm Welcome

(continued from page 3)

Although I hesitate to speak for Mary, her talents and inclinations indicate we can expect continued collaboration with the Forest Service whenever appropriate. Mary's strong science background will facilitate that approach, and lead to even more sophisticated responses to scopings and interaction with the Forest Service. We can also expect to see a major new emphasis on educational outreach to members, surrounding communities, and area universities and colleges, among others. Some of this educational outreach may be done in collaboration with other environmental organizations, like watershed protection groups. And indications are that Mary would like ForestWatch to have a larger presence statewide and in the southeast region. Mary will undoubtedly add to and modify this list in the coming months – I know we all look forward to working with her to protect our incredible national forests.

Of course all this will take time and hard work and, most important, the help of board members, district leaders, advisors and other volunteers. To paraphrase John Kennedy, ask not what your ED can do for you – ask what you can do for your ED and ForestWatch! ■

Around the forest

by Darren Wolfgang : Forest Ecologist

Forest-wide

Chattahoochee Transportation Analysis Process: The Forest Service has begun to implement a forest-wide Transportation Analysis Process (TAP) for the three Ranger Districts on the Chattahoochee National Forest. Part of this process involved soliciting the public for local knowledge of specific road use and condition. ForestWatch once again took to the woods to photograph and document specific roads we've been monitoring and believe should be eliminated, permanently or seasonally gated, and/or are in dire need of maintenance or attention. We did not file comments for system roads that we believe are in decent shape and are necessary to provide user access to the National Forest. An example of a "necessary" road would be Forest Service 64, a major access route to the vast Cohutta Mountains. ForestWatch has no interest in shutting down the forest and denying access to users. We are primarily interested in working with the Forest Service to develop an environmentally and fiscally sustainable road system on the Chattahoochee NF. We believe this issue is critical due to the current level of maintenance backlog (several years) as well as ever increasing budget cuts suffered by the agency.

Conasauga River Ranger District

For the past year Georgia ForestWatch (GFW) has been cooperating with the Forest Service in the Collaborative Trails Process (CoTrails). The initial step in the CoTrails process involved a professional analysis of 200+ problem trail miles identified by the four Ranger Districts (RD) on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. Through a generous grant from the Dobbs Foundation, GFW funded half of this professional evaluation. To educate CoTrails volunteers who will conduct assessments on additional trails identified by the Forest Service and also aid in maintaining all system trails in a sustainable manner, the professional program included an on-site assessment inventory and a demonstration of trail repair and/or enhancement in each RD. The Forest Service contracted a team of professional trail builders to do this analysis. GFW members have been participating in these demonstrations and have learned a good deal about analyzing trails, taking into account expected use, physical condition, grade and sight distance.

Due to our specific interest in the Mountaintown Creek area, GFW recently conducted our own independent survey of the Mountaintown trail with the aid of members of the Blue Ridge Chapter of Trout Unlimited. GFW's survey of the Mountaintown trail was performed using a GPS unit for geospatial location and a laser range finder to ascertain grade and sight distance. The results of our survey support GFWs longstanding position, which is Mountaintown trail is not suitable for bicycle use. GFW has been actively opposed for the past 12 years to the Forest Service's illegal decision to allow bike use on the trail without conducting an appropriate environmental and social effects analysis. This decision opened the trail for bike use on one of Georgia's best and pristine wild trout streams. We believe bike use is incompatible with this trail for a variety of reasons, among them: the fact that this trail is very steep, narrow, has limited sight distance, and over a dozen stream fords. These fords were hardened a few short years ago and are already in disrepair. It should be noted that while GFW is certainly supportive of a wide variety of recreational activities, including mountain biking, we feel bikes pose a serious threat to pedestrians using the Mountaintown trail. Municipalities forbid bikes from riding on sidewalks for very good reason.

Above: Forestwatch volunteer stands in an erosion trench several feet deep. This trench is located in the headwaters of Tickanetley Creek on Forest Service 665-2 and is a prime example of what we deem to be "troubled roads".

Due to our insistence, the Forest Service agreed to follow the correct laws and procedures and is conducting a complete environmental analysis of the issue. We hope that this new information will give the Forest Service the courage to do the right thing and ban bikes from Mountaintown. For the complete story on Mountaintown please see http://www.gafw.org/mountaintown.html. ■

2012 Blue Ridge Southern Fire Learning Network Meeting

by Darren Wolfgang : Forest Ecologist

The Nature Conservancy in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) recently hosted the seventh annual Fire Learning Network meeting in Lake Logan, North Carolina. The three-day workshop and field trip session focused on promoting awareness and sharing knowledge of the use of "prescribed fire" in the Southern Appalachians. The mission of the Fire Learning Network (FLN) is to bring together private land managers, concerned citizens, environmental groups, leading regional fire researchers and scientists, as well as state and federal land managers from the Southern Blue Ridge (SBR) region of the Southeast for the purpose of discussing the appropriate use and safe application of controlled burning on public and privately held lands.

The 2012 FLN centered on the Cold Mountain Game Lands in western North Carolina, where prescribed fire has been used for over 2 decades. Cold Mountain contains various fire and silvicultural research and demonstration sites, many of which focus on studying the outcomes of various management prescriptions in high elevation northern red oak forest community types. The workshop included updates and presentations by managers and researchers from across the SBR FLN and sister Central Appalachian FLN demonstration landscapes, which include GA, VA, TN, NC, SC, WV, KY, and PA.

Several highlights from this year's FLN meeting:

• Cumulative impacts of smoke: Where there is fire there is smoke. Smoke management, especially in areas relatively close to populated places, poses serious challenges for prescribed fire managers. Presentations on this topic were made by USFS, North Carolina Department of Air Quality, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the North Carolina Forest Service. Several aspects of smoke management were discussed, including regulatory compliance, construction of locally specific weather/smoke management data sets using on-the-ground weather conditions, interagency communication and coordination across state boundaries regarding burn and smoke management efforts, and predicting and modeling fire and smoke behavior prior to burns to minimize adverse or unintended risks to humans via poor air quality.

• Using prescribed fire in conjunction with mechanical thinning treatments to maximize restoration outcomes: This year's workshop included visiting various burn units that were subject to a variety of experimental management treatments, including growing season/spring burning, dormant season burning, repeat burning, and shelter wood regeneration systems for restoration and maintenance of oak-hickory-yellow pine forest types. The "shelter wood-burn system" usually consists of a mid-story removal, followed by the removal of 50-60% of the overstory to allow enough light to reach the forest floor to trigger growth of target species (oaks, hickories, etc.). After a period of 3 to 5 years of no management activities to allow for acorn production and germination (regeneration), a prescribed burn is conducted to reduce oak competitors (maple, poplar, white pine, sweetgum, etc.), and then a final entry to remove all or a portion of the remaining 40-50% of the over-story trees. It should be noted that there are various potential modifications to this "system". Some of these concepts, though not new, have yet to be thoroughly studied and widely applied in the highly diverse forest communities in the Southern Appalachians. It was nice to see researchers and on-the-ground land managers working together to collect data, conduct research, develop coherent experiments, and retain untreated control areas for comparative purposes. Researchers giving presentations on the experimental program at Cold Mountain were the USFS Southern Research Station Bent Creek Upland Hardwood Ecology Lab, Western Carolina University, and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, among others.

While progress is being made on the appropriate timing, location, and use of fire to restore disturbance-associated and fire-dependant ecosystem components, more long term and extensive research and monitoring will be needed across the diverse Appalachian landscape to fully understand and predict the effects of prescribed fires. Fire managers collectively agree that areas with the highest degree of fire-associated vegetation should be conservation priorities. The dialogue regarding using fire to mimic natural fire regimes (i.e. lightning strikes) and the seasonality of burning is increasingly evolving in a progressive direction. Since growing season (spring/early summer) burning and dormant season (fall/winter) burning produce considerably different results, evaluating burn seasonality is extremely important. Various state, federal, and non-government managers and scientists including members of the Consortium of Southern Appalachian Fire Managers are conduction ongoing and long term research to gain a deeper understanding of the how, when, where, and why should fire be used.

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Congratulations and thanks to Robin Hitner!

by Ted Doll : Board Member and Peg Griffith : Board Vice President

Wild South's Roosevelt-Ashe Society recently announced the winners of its annual Conservation Awards. These awards honor outstanding conservation work in the South. Our own Robin Hitner received the award for "Outstanding Volunteer-Advocate in Conservation."

According to Tracy Davids, Wild South's Executive Director, these awards recognize conservation heroes for their contributions to protect wild places and wild things across our region.

At ForestWatch, we're pleased but not surprised. Robin is that uncommon kind of volunteer who "does it all." Robin began his service to Georgia ForestWatch as member in 2008, and later that year began learning the ropes of the District Leader (DL) program. With a degree in Forestry, the DL program was a good fit for him.

After serving as a DL for several years, he dropped in on a board meeting. It was apparent that he was a level-headed hard-working kind of person, and he was quickly asked to join the board.

Then about a year ago, ForestWatch lost its office manager. Not to worry – Robin stepped into that role. He was and is the ultimate volunteer, answering phones, opening mail, cleaning up clutter and even washing windows! (No, washing windows is not a part of the Office Manager job description.) When an office manager was hired, Robin returned to the board. But it didn't end there. When Wayne Jenkins resigned last October, Robin was drafted to fill in as Interim Executive Director. Robin did a yeoman's job as our Interim ED from November of 2011 until May of this year, signing payroll checks, fielding questions from members, DLs, and board members, and generally being the ForestWatch "face" to the environmental community and public.

We are deeply grateful and indebted to Robin for his service in all of these roles. We look forward to his continuing to serve on the board, as a DL, and on committees. Robin – Thanks for your willingness to "be there" and do what it takes for ForestWatch! ■

Fire Learning Network Meeting

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The Fire Learning Network is also valuable for developing professional relationships with landscape partners. Making and expanding our professional contacts assists in furthering Georgia ForestWatch's on-the-ground conservation goals. We hope that land managers will remain open minded and observant as they proceed with implementation of landscape restoration activities. Georgia ForestWatch appreciates the opportunity to participate in this year's meeting and is looking forward to learning more about fire use, hearing of new progress, and discussing land management issues and techniques at future meetings. ■

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Meet your hike leader ...

by Honor Woodard : Board Member

I recently had a chat with our Joe Gatins about leading ForestWatch hikes. Joe's hikes are special in their own way – his enthusiasm for these forests and, of course, his jovial laughter bellowing through the woods.

Having hiked extensively with the Nantahala Hiking Club frequently as hike leader, and having maintained a 2.5 mile section of the Appalachian Trail from Beech Gap to the top of Standing Indian in the Southern Nantahala Wilderness (by hand, with only a swing blade and a folding handsaw for tools), Joe earned his chops.

Of Joe's first ForestWatch hike (in 2001, soon after Brent Martin prevailed on him to join the organization), he says "It was a winter tree identification hike in the Lake Russell Area led by Jim Sullivan. We were able to identify the trees from dead leaves, bark and also from tree crown shapes, and he showed us how to distinguish various types of pines based on how needles are arranged and such. It was a fascinating hike."

About why he leads hikes, Joe says, "It's interesting to do and a way to give back to the forest. Introducing newcomers to the forest in a safe manner is a great way to inspire members and introduce city folks to the ways of the forest. I have learned so much about flora and fauna and I love to share this with others. Also a wise old neighbor, Jesse Ray Owens, took me under his wing and showed me a treasure trove of special places nearby, which have become heritage hikes – old Indian areas, home places, mines, etc., and I love to share these with interested members."

Photo by Margery Diamond

What makes a hike with Joe Gatins special? Joe says, "You tell me! What I've got that some don't emphasize is a feeling for heritage and oral histories I have gathered from some local gems. If I bring something that others don't always, it's knowledge of the oral history of an area. Like back in the 20s and earlier, there were eels that would come all the way up to Rabun and up into the West Fork and North Fork of the Chattooga River from the ocean in spring, and the men of the families would all go on fishing and camping trips and harvest the eels."

What has he learned from leading hikes? Joe said, "Now I know the difference between a sourwood and dogwood. I could rattle off 20-25 native plants I never knew before – indian cucumber, squaw root, pipsissewa, rattlesnake plantain, trilliums, the lady slippers, various oaks and pines. By dint of repetition, one can learn these native plants and trees, and this is pretty fascinating. There are also some spots populated by huge trees, and the forest becomes so majestic it's awe-inspiring. Alone or with a couple others, you come across a spot that is just so drop-dead gorgeous you say 'holy s***', that is just beautiful!" ■

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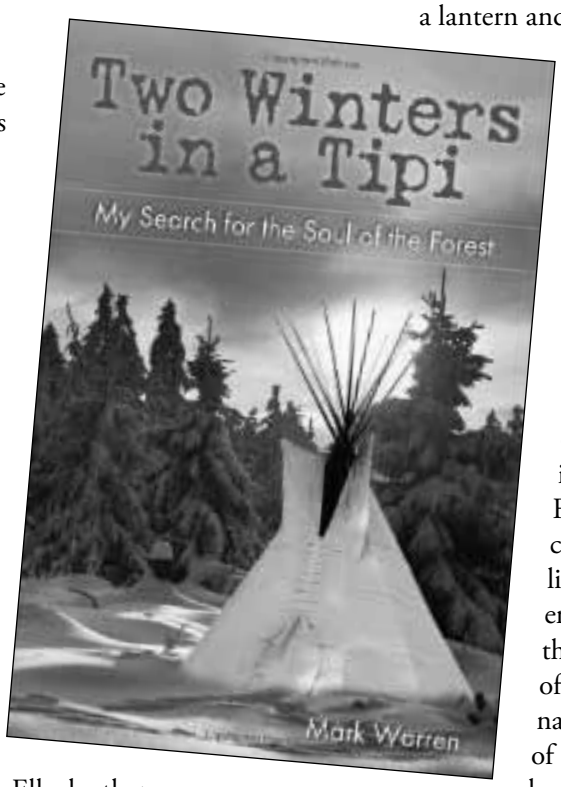
Book review:
Two Winters in a Tipi: My Search for the Soul of the Forest

by Tom Colkett : District Leader

Two Winters in a Tipi: My Search for the Soul of the Forest, by Mark Warren.

Mark Warren, who lives near Dahlonega, is a naturalist, writer, teacher and musician, as well as a passionate student of the forest. An active friend of and contributor to Georgia ForestWatch, he runs Medicine Bow, a primitive school of earth lore in the north Georgia Mountains. Here he teaches the "old skills" of plant identification, including medicinal plants, tracking, fire making, survival skills and the ways of the original Cherokee inhabitants of these mountains.



In his new book, *Two Winters in a Tipi*, Mark recounts a small part of his history with the forest in a very readable and entertaining fashion. He writes with warmth and humor, revealing the core of his sense of the sacredness of the everyday nature of the forest and mountains. Led to live outdoors 23 years ago by a fire that destroyed his home and almost everything he owned, Mark, already familiar with much of the technology of tipi making, sets up camp near the Etowah River. With his dog Elly, he then begins the process of building and living in nature.

Mark makes it clear that living in a tipi is living in the forest, as a part of it. Unlike a house, a tipi doesn't separate one from nature but instead provides an organizational structure and protection from some of the more unbearable elements while permitting one to live as part of the whole. Animals frequently walk right in for a variety of reasons, including shelter, food and just plain curiosity. Rain runs down the support poles on the inside and is led away from the living area. Stepping through the tipi opening is not so much stepping outdoors as it is just moving to another part of the outdoors. The moon shines through the walls, the stars can be seen through the smoke flaps. Snakes come in to find the mice that are attracted by the food. An old raccoon comes to visit, choosing to die there in that more supportive environment. Night sounds are immediate and unmuffled by thick wooden walls. From the outside, at night, when the fire is burning inside, the entire tipi glows like a lantern and this light, too, becomes part of the natural environment, a light that other life forms can rely on and find useful. The book tells us many stories that depict the immediate connection with nature that results from living like this.

The reader cannot help but be influenced by the author's holistic sense of the natural universe, which stresses the sun as the source of all energy and trees as the first and most important processors of that energy. From trees we get food, shelter, and clean air, as well as for the more mobile living entities, which then share their energy down the line with other living things. Pervading the book is this sense of participating in a complete way with nature, as a part of it, and a realization of how disconnected we've become because of our busy lives and a somewhat debilitating craving for comfort.

Throughout *Two Winters in a Tipi* there also is a sense of the author's ability to see himself in the environment from the eyes of its other inhabitants – from the viewpoint of the environment itself – a viewpoint that results in always being mindful of one's impact, of being responsible for one's actions. This constant checking is a source of inspiration as well as humor, as Warren never seems to take himself too seriously, or to overrate his own importance in the big picture. Get this book, read it; you'll be glad you did! ■

Hemlock woolly adelgid: Predator lab update

by Mary Topa : Executive Director

As a forest ecologist, my research has always focused on how trees respond to environmental stress, and why some species are more tolerant of stress than others. Trees are pretty remarkable organisms since they cannot walk away from stresses such as flooding, drought or insect outbreaks. Resistance to insect pests pretty much boils down to genetics. Trees co-evolved with potentially harmful organisms such as insects or pathogens, and have adapted defense strategies that often include the production of natural pesticides. These natural pesticides can target either a range of pests or a specific pest, conferring tolerance of the host tree to the pest(s). Another line of defense comes not from the tree, but from natural enemies or predators that keep the pest's numbers in check in its native range, resulting in minimal damage to the native host trees. Sadly, we are seeing the unfortunate consequences of what can happen when an alien or non-native insect such as hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) is inadvertently introduced into an area outside its native range where few, if any natural enemies exist. As you are all aware, eastern hemlock *(Tsuga canadensis)* and Carolina hemlock *(Tsuga caroliniana)*, have little to no known natural resistance to HWA, and biological control by native predators or pathogens have not been effective at controlling its deadly effect. Hemlock woolly adelgid was first reported in the eastern USA in the 1950s in Virginia, and has now been detected in 17 states in the eastern USA. Without treatment, hemlocks die within 5-10 years after infestation, with quicker mortality rates observed in the south.

Biological control of HWA offers the best hope for long-term management of HWA in forests where chemical control is impractical or unsustainable, particularly since resistant populations of native hemlock have not been found. Since 2007, Georgia ForestWatch funds have helped support biocontrol research, more specifically, a rearing project of HWA predators. Mark Dalusky at University of Georgia recently indicated that, "2011 was a pretty good year for the biocontrol project. We now have predator release sites that have been on the ground for over four years with confirmed establishment of at least one HWA predator, predominantly *Laricobius nigrinus (Ln)*. And thanks to the hard work of Cera Jones from North Georgia College and State University, Georgia has the best record of recovering the original Chinese lady beetle, *Sasajiscymnus tsugae (St)*." Dalusky is encouraged by their 2011 field surveys that found hemlock mortality in forests from Blue Ridge, GA, eastward to be high except for those sites where beetles have been released or soil injections of the pesticide imidacloprid have occurred. Dalusky commented, "While the hemlocks at most of our predator release sites may not look that great, the tree mortality is not significant. On some of our release sites, the trees actually look good, in part because of the excellent growing conditions for hemlocks in both 2010 and 2011."

Meanwhile, the beetle lab at North Georgia College and State University has been rearing the *St* beetle for over four years, and has recently started rearing some *Ln* beetles for research in the last year. Beetles have been released at 14 sites and researcher Cera Jones found beetles at 10 of the 14 sites in 2011. Although the majority of the recovery data is one-year post release, Jones has found *St* beetles two years after their release at two sites. Jones is cautiously optimistic and believes that, "although it is still a little too early to say they are definitely established, it looks hopeful". She will continue to monitor these sites this year and will be looking for *St* and *Ln* predator beetles two years after their release at nine and 11 sites, respectively. The lab at North Georgia College and State University will also conduct research to learn more about dormancy of the beetles during the summer and emergence during the fall.

The beetle lab at Young Harris College suffered a setback this spring because the *St* colony that they had reared since 2005 developed a microsporidian infection. Dr. Paul Arnold, Professor of Biology and founder of the Hemlock Project at Young Harris College, said they had to get new start-up beetles from the beetle lab at North Georgia College and State University, and are currently building up populations. Arnold has recently purchased a new instrument that will hopefully provide further insight into how HWA impacts tree health and function under varying degrees of infestation, and quantify efficacy of current treatments (predatory beetles and/or chemical treatment) on those trees. In addition, two student research projects have recently been completed: one student examined the effects of HWA density on adult St beetles, while the other looked at possible non-target impacts of the pesticide imidacloprid on vegetation surrounding chemically-treated hemlocks. Georgia ForestWatch will post results of these studies on our website upon their publication.

Finally, Dalusky indicates that another promising predator, the *Scymnus coniferarum (Sc)* conifer lady beetle, occurs in the

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Sun, fun, and music

by Diane Freer : Office Manager

Planned and organized by committee chair Jennifer Lopez, the Wild and Woolly Festival this year was a resounding success. The festival included familiar elements from prior years – native plant sale, book signings, forest information displays, and a spread of delicious soups, sandwiches, and homemade sweets – but was expanded to include all day music, art and crafts vendors, nine different raffle prizes, and a birds of prey exhibit.

We want to thank our volunteers and acknowledge the many long hours they put in before and during the event to make sure the day would be enjoyable for everyone. Thank you for scouting, calling, shopping, emailing, preparing, carrying, delivering, and cleaning up. You were a great team: Claudia Burgess, Collin Chambers, Tom Colkett, Sally Colkett, Ted Doll, Lynda Doll, Andy Edwards, Melinda Edwards, Diane Freer, David Govus, Peg Griffith, Michael Griffith, Sue Harmon, Ann Helton, Robin Hitner, Julie Jordan, Myra Kibler, Ida Long, Jennifer Lopez, Dennis McClure, Audrey Moylan, Dennis Stansell, and Darren Wolfgang.

The raffles were held late in the day and were one of the many highlights of the event. Many thanks go out to those business and individuals who provided such wonderful prizes for our fundraising.

Patagonia..... Coats, shirts, and pack
Peter McIntosh..... Framed Photo
North GA Mountain Outfitters..... Water filter
Kathryn Kolb ..... Book
Amicalola Lodge.....Night's Stay for two
Len Foote Hike Inn.....Night's Stay for two
Lori Jenkins..... Placemats and napkins
Cara Busch.....Pillows and Book Ends
Audrey Moylan.....Garden Cart

A special thanks to Audrey Moylan (bird houses) and Jack Johnson (plants) who donated 100 percent of the proceeds from their sales to Georgia ForestWatch, and to Jilly's who provided us with plenty of delicious wings.

We also wish to thank others who contributed monies to support this event: Eston and Peggy Melton, George Lee, Joe Gatins, Robin Hitner, Nancy Sharp, Rennie Davant, Audrey Moylan, Guynelle Robbins, Dorothy Myers, Jim Campbell, Howard and Lavonne Markel, and Margaretta Taylor.

The success of the fundraiser was due in large part to our strong and faithful group of sponsors who contributed to make the event possible:

Pete and Sally Parsonson
Dick and Jill Key
Susan Harmon
George Lee
Lanier Shelnutt
Donna Born
Francine Dykes & Richard Delay
Myra Kibler
Mitchell Jacoby
Doug and Elaine Riddle

Anonymous
Dennis McClure and Julie Jordan
Bent Tree Lake & Wildlife Committee
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Dennis and Jan Stansell
Roger and Jean Johnson

Becky and Tom Callahan
Craig and Sue Richardson
Joanna and Al Adams
Laura Mitchell and George Krall
Ron and Debbie Sauder
Andy and Melinda Edwards
Jerome Walker
Brooks Franklin
Margaretta Taylor

Progress is being made on Upper Chattooga issues

Long-standing efforts to force boating on the 21-mile headwaters of the Wild & Scenic Upper Chattooga River are coming to a head on two fronts: in the Forest Service's administrative process and in federal court. Your help is needed to keep the headwaters wild.

Background

One of the last free-flowing rivers in the Southeast, the Chattooga River winds its way through high cliffs studded with waterfalls and a green tunnel of remarkable biodiversity, including the Ellicot Rock Wilderness, Chattooga Cliffs, and the Rock Gorge Roadless Area. Recognizing the uniqueness and importance of this place, the Chattooga was among the early rivers designated Wild & Scenic by Congress. Located close to major population centers, even early managers realized that one of the greatest threats to the Chattooga would be too much recreation. To avoid conflict and protect the special solitude the upper reaches offer, travel by boat historically has been was religated to the lower reaches, where there are now approximately 80,000 trips per year.

The Forest Service is now considering allowing boating in the portions of the Chattooga River above the Route 28 Bridge and through the Ellicot Rock Wilderness where it has been prohibited ever since uses were designated for the newly Wild & Scenic-designated Chattooga in the 1970s. Georgia ForestWatch and its allies continue to push back, maintaining that the Forest Service can and must limit visitor activities that threaten the wild character of the headwaters. Specifically, some of the issues ForestWatch has raised are the Forest Service's:

- Ad hoc management of the River rather than development of the Comprehensive River Management Plan the law requires;
- Failure to put in place a plan that will avoid degradation of the River rather than respond after it is already damaged;
- Plan to add a new parking area for boaters off an unofficial road; and
- Direction to boaters to use trails the Forest Service does not have money to maintain and that are already eroding.

Georgia ForestWatch is working hard with its allies, the Georgia Chapter of the Sierra Club and Wilderness Watch, to ensure a balance between recreation and protection. ForestWatch's goal is to preserve the long-term health of the Chattooga for future generations of people and the other hundreds of species that depend on this rare place.

Take Action!

Action by ForestWatchers is needed to let the Forest Service know that keeping the headwaters wild remains important.

Staffers with the three national forests involved in the Chattooga decision – the Chattahoochee, Sumter, and Nantahala – scheduled a series of field trips to present their boater access plans to the public. Georgia ForestWatch sent out an alert with the details of these field trips and also posted them on our web page.

If you did attend, please let us know how you felt about the field trips by sending us your observations in an email.

Internal Forest Service Decision Process

In March 2012, Georgia ForestWatch, Wilderness Watch, and the Georgia Chapter of the Sierra Club achieved a temporary "stay" of plans to allow boating on the Upper Chattooga until the Forest Service makes a decision on the allies' appeal of the proposal. The Forest Service's final decision is expected in July at the earliest, and then the allies will have to decide whether to challenge in federal courts.

The stay did not cover further planning for boater access and portage trails, so the Forest Service is pushing ahead on that front. Georgia ForestWatch is concerned because the planned access routes are old eroding road beds, and the Forest Service plans construction of a sizeable parking area on one of them. You might say that by planning access before it even knows whether and where boating will be, the Forest Service is putting the cart before the horse, and we'd agree.

Federal Court

Georgia ForestWatch was recently granted permission to

intervene in a federal case in Greenville, South Carolina, brought by a group of paddling organizations, led by American Whitewater, who are attempting to bypass the Forest Service's administrative process and open the entire Upper Chattooga to unlimited boating all the time. Although American Whitewater requested that U.S. District Judge J. Michelle Childs hear the case before completion of the administrative appeal process, Judge Childs has agreed to wait until the Forest Service's review is completed this summer so that she has a full record to review. Watch for this case to heat up in the fall.

Georgia ForestWatch and its partners are represented by Greenfire Law and its most able principal, Rachel Doughty, in the appeal and trail access matters. Georgia ForestWatch separately has secured the very able pro-bono representation of the Atlanta firm Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton LLP for the Greenville, S.C., federal court case. ■

Hemlock Woolly Adelgid

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Pacific NW and appears to be an effective predator of HWA. During summer sampling of hemlock foliage over the last four years in GA, University of Georgia personnel have observed dramatic surges in HWA population with the advent of the second generation. Dalusky and others attribute this surge in HWA population to lack of significant predation on this generation of the pest. They believe that the *Sc* lady beetle, native to areas west of the Mississippi River, may be the answer to this dilemma. In the Pacific Northwest, the *Sc* lady beetle seems to be a primary predator of the progrediens generation of HWA. Although there is no guarantee that the *Sc* lady beetle will be as effective in controlling HWA in eastern hemlock forests, to date, none of the approved exotic lady beetles have shown significant impact on HWA despite massive releases since 2004 in Georgia. Dalusky and colleagues from the Forest Service, APHIS (USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service), and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University are working this promising insect through the agonizing slow permitting process. If you would like to help facilitate approval of the *Sc* beetle for biocontrol of HWA, please write to your Congressman to encourage speedy publication of the Environmental Assessment supporting *Scymnus coniferarum* in the Federal Register. Contact information and suggested text can be found on Georgia ForestWatch's website, in the Issues link. ■

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: _____

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

❒ Yes! I want to go paperless!

CHOOSE YOUR GIVING LEVEL

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❒ Enclosed is cash or check payable to Georgia ForestWatch

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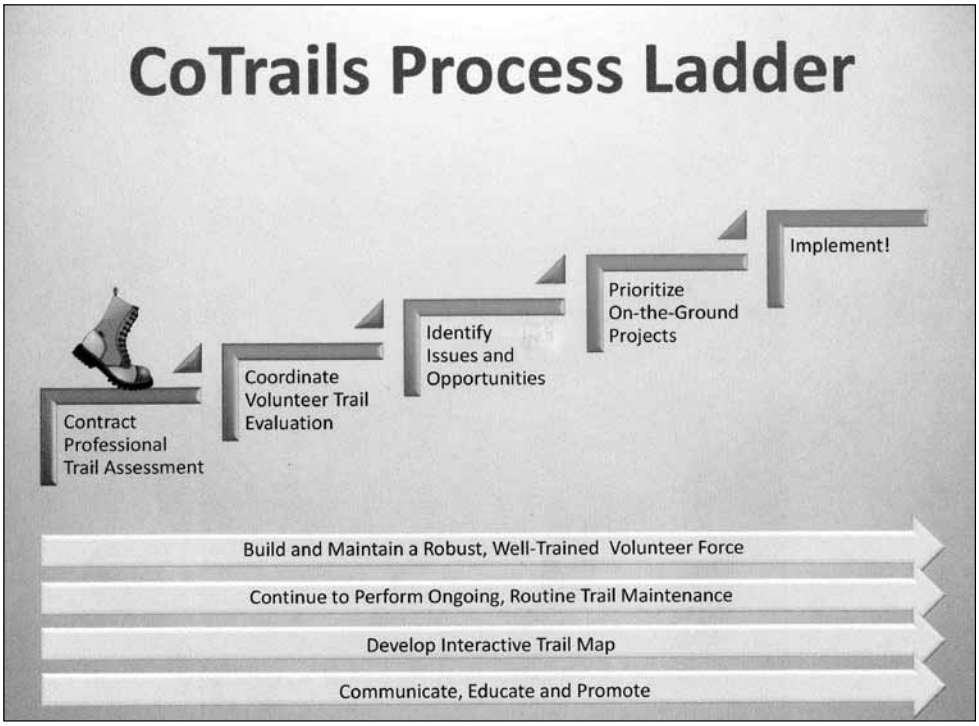
CoTrails: The completion of step one in this collaborative trail assessment on the CONF

by Audrey Moylan : Board Advisor

As shown in a step-by-step picture recently created by the Forest Service, the first milestone in the CoTrails process is completion of the professional evaluation of the 200 + miles of problem trails, as described in GFW's spring 2012 newsletter. To date, Trail Dynamics and subcontractors have submitted a draft report of the trail assessment analysis, and the Forest Service has reviewed it and prepared a list of comments to be addressed in the final report. The final report is scheduled to be posted by May 27 on both Forest Service and CoTrails websites (www.fs.usda.gov/conf and www.CoTrails.org), and a synopsis of the analysis is scheduled to be presented at a general CoTrails meeting on June 12 at the CONF headquarters in Gainesville.



While the field inventory and online survey data were being analyzed, the contractors conducted five onsite demonstrations of trail repair and enhancement: two on the Chattooga River Ranger District (Bartram hiking and Wllis Knob equestrian trails) and one each on the Blue Ridge (Lower Green Mountain biking trail), Conasauga (Bear Creek trail on a road), and Oconee (Ocmulgee Bluff equestrian trail) Ranger Districts. The primary focus of the demonstrations was water management, emphasizing the need to keep water flowing off the trails and erosion control. Water management techniques demonstrated included construction of rolling grade dips with wide outslopes to effect a sheet flow of water off the outer edge of the tread, and filling and smoothing ruts followed by compaction to harden the tread and help prevent standing water.

The contractors' instructions to participating CoTrails volunteers included names, uses, and proper ways to carry and rest hand tools, as well as general safety measures for working on trails, whether repairing, rerouting or performing routine maintenance activities. On the narrow hiking only Bartram trail, volunteers actually constructed rolling dips and outslopes using hand tools. On the multiuse trails, where the contractors used machines to rough out water management and/or enhancement features, volunteers performed finish work with hand tools.

All of the demonstrations were carried out as originally proposed by the contractors with two exceptions: Work on the two Chattooga River District trails was shortened to a half day each due to rain on the first scheduled day. On the rainy day, Trail Dynamics presented an all-day seminar on trail repair, enhancement, usage, and socioeconomic value. The second exception was a decision to forego plans to transform the lower section of the Bear Creek trail on an old roadbed into a single track trail – a decision that was based partly on observed environmental factors and partly on comments from ForestWatch volunteer David Govus. The upper section of the Bear Creek trail, high on a ridge with no riparian concerns but significantly impacted by drainage from the entire parking lot, was successfully converted from a narrow old logging road to a single track trail with effective water control features. Photographs of the before and after work on the Lower Green Mountain and Bear Creek trails are on the CoTrails website.

Georgia ForestWatch members who attended these final activities of the contractors' educational commitment generally were encouraged by the number and enthusiasm of participating CoTrails volunteers. A quote from Ben Cash, who had a fun time operating the excavator machine a bit on the Willis Knob horse trail, sums up the CoTrails experience: "CoTrails provides an excellent opportunity to learn more about our national forest and participate in its management."

Volunteers will become even more involved with on-the-ground Forest Service activities during the next step of the CoTrails process. This step, scheduled to be implemented during the summer and completed by September 1, is volunteer evaluation of part of the 600 CONF trail miles not included in the professional analysis. Believing that more than half of the 600 trail miles do not need further evaluation, the Forest Service has identified only – 250 miles, most of which are in the Conasauga District, for CoTrails volunteer assessment. The F S has suggested that CoTrails designate district leaders who will coordinate volunteer activities, including training, with district personnel. A three-person team, comprised of a hiker, equestrian and biker, is suggested in order to get a "well rounded" evaluation of each trail.

Subsequent steps and target dates for their implementation are: identification of issues and opportunities, which includes evaluation of unauthorized trails and identifying opportunities for new trails using digital maps and on-the-ground observation (fall 2012 - winter 2013); prioritizing trail system projects using analyses of professional and volunteer trail evaluations and the need for formal environmental evaluations (spring 2013); and finally, development of a five-year plan for implementation of proposed projects.

As mentioned in the spring newsletter, the ultimate success of the CoTrails Initiative depends on obtaining private and government funding and recruiting and maintaining volunteers for the long term, as well as continued communication with the local and statewide public. ■

Ben Cash helps out.

Welcome New Members!

Diane Wood
Carlos and Carol Martel
Charlie Cottingham
Kathie Layton
Donna Werner
Lynn Beach
Martha Brock
Jason Head
Terry Newton
Marta Wood
Gina and Gordon Rogers
Beverly Connolly
Mulberry Gap Mountain Bike Get-A-Way
Dondi Fontenot
Jacqueline Hollman
Jo Davis
Sandra and Elder Pearce
Amy Robbins
Christine Curtin
Kim Rowland
Francois Lecoin
Joni House
Barbara Davis

Save the Date!

FOREST WATCH RETREAT

Don't Miss It!

September 28–30, 2012

It's the annual Georgia Forest Watch retreat – good people, good information and lots of fun. Be sure to plan to attend for the full exciting weekend this year. Come Friday night for a meet and greet and a night at the movies with popcorn.

We'll spend Saturday looking at the future of our forest resources with a main speaker, a panel of experts, poetry, music and moving testimonials from Georgia Forest Watch members and friends. Bring a big bowl of your best chili for the lunch cook-off contest with prizes for the tastiest recipes. Saturday night dinner will be our traditional Barbeque followed by a campfire with singing and stories.

Sunday's program will include a choice of hikes, a teaching on the ways of the original Cherokee inhabitants of these mountains, a tour of the CCC Museum and an optional early morning meditation walk around Lake Trahlyta.
See you there!

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