Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Spring 2014

The 40th Anniversary of the Wild & Scenic Chattooga River

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From the Director

Camp Merrill Update: Legislative provisions not adopted

Mary Topa
Executive Director

As you know, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014 (H.R. 1960) that passed in the House of Representatives on June 14th, 2013, carried a last minute amendment (#291) introduced by Representative Doug Collins from the 9th District of Georgia. Amendment #291 sought to transfer 282 acres of Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest land, the site of Army ranger training base Camp Frank D. Merrill, from the Department of Agriculture (Forest Service) to the Department of Defense. We are happy to report that the Senate Committee-reported bill that passed in late December contained no similar provision, **so Camp Merrill will remain under the administrative jurisdiction of the Department of Agriculture – at least for now.**

This 282-acre parcel of land includes the headwaters of the Etowah River, and is surrounded by thousands of acres of Forest Service land. Camp Merrill has operated efficiently for the last 60 years under a lease agreement and memorandum of understanding between the Department of Defense and the Forest Service. The administrative cost to the Army for Forest Service administration of this permit is approximately $55,000 per year.

The Secretary of the Army and the Secretary of Agriculture have entered into discussions to address procedures for management and administration of the property, and to ameliorate any concerns that the current agreement may be inadequate to support existing missions of the Department of Army. The Secretary of the Army and the Secretary of Agriculture have been urged to expeditiously conclude these discussions to preserve and enhance the training and military readiness capacity at Camp Frank D. Merrill. The Secretary of the Army will submit a report to the congressional defense committees on the status of negotiations not later than 90 days after enactment of this Act, and another summarizing the results of the negotiations not later than 90 days after an agreement is reached. However, it appears that this resolution is not satisfactory to all parties. On January 29th, 2014, Rep. Collins introduced Bill H.R. 3960 in the House of Representatives, which was referred to the Committee on Agriculture, as well as the Committees on Transportation and Infrastructure, and Armed Services for their consideration. This bill would provide for an exchange of administrative jurisdiction between the Secretary of the Army and the Secretary of Agriculture involving certain Federal property administered as part of the Chattahoochee National Forest, but permitted to the Secretary of the Army for Camp Merrill, and certain Army Corps of Engineers property adjacent to Lake Lanier in Gainesville, Georgia.

If passed, the Forest Service would assume administrative jurisdiction over a 10-acre parcel of land adjacent to Lake Lanier (outside the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests) and turn administrative jurisdiction of the 282-acre parcel of land in the Chattahoochee National Forest that includes Camp Merrill over to the Army. Aside from the obvious very large acreage discrepancy in this "exchange", one has to wonder why Rep. Collins thinks the Forest Service, with their limited resources, should assume or would want to assume administrative jurisdiction of a small property outside the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.

As stated in our Fall 2013 *Forest News*, land transfers with the Department of Defense are already regulated by the "Interchange with Department of Defense Act of 1956", which assures that the public's interests and access are protected, the exchange of land is mutually beneficial, and the process is transparent. This mechanism not only ensures that the public is compensated for lost forest resources and public access, but allows citizens to have a voice in the process. Collins' earlier amendment and current bill call for unilateral transfer of land without review and the opportunity for public input. The Collins bill sets a dangerous precedent that could result in loss of public land and access not only in Georgia, but nationwide.

Georgia ForestWatch does not support the transfer of Camp Merrill to the Department of Defense. We'd like to thank you all for helping defeat the earlier amendment - we will keep you informed on the progress of Bill H.R. 3960.

Further information on H.R. 3960 can be found on the following website: http://beta.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/house-bill/3960/text.

Mary A. Topa

Happy 40th Anniversary to the Wild & Scenic Chattooga River!

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 Ellicott Rock Wilderness Area, Chattooga Cliffs, and the Rock Gorge Roadless Area. Recognizing the uniqueness and importance of this place, the Chattooga River was among the early rivers designated Wild & Scenic by Congress on May 10, 1974. For the last 40 years, the Chattooga River has been protected along a 15,432-acre corridor as a National Wild and Scenic River. It begins in mountainous North Carolina near Cashiers as small rivulets, nourished by springs and abundant rainfall, and ends its 50+ mile journey at Lake Tugaloo between South Carolina and Georgia, dropping almost 1/2-mile in elevation. The Chattooga River straddles three National Forests – the Nantahala, Sumter and Chattahoochee – with 41.6 miles designated as Wild, 2.5 miles as Scenic, and 14.6 miles as Recreational.

Please join Georgia ForestWatch in celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Chattooga River's Wild & Scenic designation with conservation partners, The Chattooga Conservancy and the Georgia Chapter of the Sierra Club on June 21st, 2014, at the Stekoa Creek Park in Clayton, Georgia. Festivities will begin in the morning with some hikes to the river or its tributaries, followed by a celebration at Stekoa Creek Park with good food, music, and friends of this remarkable river! ■

Welcome New Members!

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Catherine Martin
John Mauro
Diane Monroe
Anthony Presley
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Cover photo credit: Peter McIntosh
Chattooga River – Dick's Creek Ledge

Around the Forest

Blue Ridge Ranger District:

Special Use Permit Applications: Georgia ForestWatch responded to a recent Special Use Authorization scoping to use National Forest System lands for the following recreation events during the first half of 2014: the Southern Cross cyclocross/mountain bike event on February 22; the Georgia Death Race on March 15-16; the Blue Ridge Mountain Adventure Race on April 12; the Dahlonega Ultra-Marathon event known as the Georgia Jewel on May 16-18; the Atomic Adventure Race on May 31 through June 1; and the Dahlonega Ultra-Marathon Association event known as Merrill's Mile on July 4-6 on the gravel track around the air strip at Camp Frank D. Merrill near Dahlonega.

Georgia ForestWatch has responded over the last several years to an ever increasing number of Forest Service Scoping Notices for large-scale, often for-profit recreational demands on our forests. While we are very "pro recreation", we generally do not endorse extremely large organized groups using the forest and its trails for a variety of reasons. These reasons are mainly related to increasing potential negative impacts to infrastructure and natural resources; waste disposal concerns; the timing of the scoping notices to interested parties to avoid the appearance and/or fact of rubber stamp approvals; the running of these events in wet conditions that would increase the already harmful impact on soils, water quality and native plant communities; and the ever increasing detriment to the peaceful and, what we consider, truly "nature-based" enjoyment of this extraordinary resource. As in past notices, these permit applications and websites for these events did not include designation of rain dates or other wet weather contingencies. In our response letter, we asked that race organizers and the Forest Service follow the Blue Ridge Ranger District's "Advance Planning Guidelines for Recreation Events" dated May 24, 2011.

The Georgia Death Race and Georgia Jewel both utilize sections of the Benton MacKaye Trail. We question the fairness of asking volunteer trail maintainer groups (like the Benton MacKaye Trail Association) to absorb the potential negative impacts that these large, often for-profit events may have on their trails, straining their already limited resources. As in the past, Georgia ForestWatch feels very strongly that the Benton MacKaye Trail is one of Georgia's and Appalachia's great recreational treasures, and as such, should be protected from this kind of destructive overuse. We remain convinced that these types of large one-time event competitions should be relegated to forest service roads and not be held in wild, or ecologically-sensitive areas.

We join with other interested parties in suggesting that a meaningful dialogue between the Forest Service and the various interested user groups be scheduled to look at the question of **"how much is too much?"** There needs to be some discussion as to the real impacts of these competitions relative to the forest plan and designated use for these areas. Given the rising popularity of these large events, pre- and post-event monitoring should be conducted to assess impact on soil, plant communities, water resources, habitat, and trail conditions. We realize that this is not an easy topic and that there are many different opinions on the matter; but we are concerned that there is too great a likelihood of these events continuing to grow in size and number. Consequently, it is best to be pro-active and have this discussion now, before it is too late.

Chattooga River Ranger District:

Locust Stake: The Chattooga River Ranger District of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest has released a scoping notice for a proposed trail maintenance and reconstruction project at the Locust Stake OHV (off highway vehicle) trails, located in Habersham and Stephens Counties in the North Fork Broad River watershed. These trails have a long history of erosion and sedimentation problems. As long ago as 1996, a Forest Service assessment of the trails documented "unacceptable" erosion and recommended that the trails be closed. Sixteen years later, in January 2012, after again finding "unacceptable" natural resource damage, the agency temporarily closed the trails.

Photo credit: Darren Wolfgang

Since then, Georgia ForestWatch and Southern Environmental Law Center have been engaged in an ongoing effort to document the trails' unacceptable condition and to offer detailed recommendations for the study and future management of the system. For example, last summer we urged the Forest Service not to reopen the trails before completing an environmental assessment. We have been expecting the Forest Service to initiate an environmental assessment to study the impacts of the trail system, and this winter we offered specific recommendations on the scope of the assessment that must be completed and alternatives that must be considered, including complete closure. We particularly urged the Forest Service to initiate water quality monitoring immediately in order to evaluate the trail system's impacts both in its closed condition, and if it potentially reopens.

This scoping notice formally announces the agency's plans to assess the OHV trail system and to embark on a project to "address soil erosion and water quality degradation occurring within and downstream of the Locust Stake OHV system," among other needs. The notice outlines the agency's initial proposed action to meet these objectives and invites public comment on the project. Fortunately, the Forest Service is proposing to permanently close and rehabilitate about 3 miles of trail, including the most deeply gullied section of the Trestle Loop Trail featured in prior *Forest News* articles, as well as to rehabilitate several denuded and eroding OHV "play" spots. We are disappointed, however, that the Forest Service is proposing to keep the remainder of the system open by reconstructing about 6.5 miles of trails and rerouting approximately 1 mile of trail, to try to reduce erosion. Importantly, the agency has committed to include water

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quality monitoring protocols as part of the project design. However, it is critical that monitoring actually begin now, so it can better inform the assessment about potential negative impacts.

We remain skeptical that this highly erosion-prone area can ever be sustainably utilized as an OHV system. For this reason, ForestWatch and the Southern Environmental Law Center will be urging the Forest Service to consider other alternatives for future management and restoration of the area, including complete closure. We also will continue to urge the Forest Service to complete the assessment before reopening any trails or making further decisions about or investments in the system. As of now, the trails remain closed, and we hope that the Forest Service decides to maintain the temporary closure during the course of the environmental assessment.

We urge members who are concerned about the resource degradation that has occurred at Locust Stake to submit comments via email to janicepmiller@fs.fed.us, or via surface mail to Edward Hunter, Jr., Chattooga River District Ranger, 9975 Highway 441 South, Lakemont, GA 30552. Comments are due by March 28, 2014. Write "Locust Stake OHV Trail Maintenance & Reconstruction Project" in the email subject line or on the envelope.

Conasauga Ranger District

Cashes Valley ATV activity: The Cashes Valley watershed is approximately 12,000 acres with the vast majority of the land owned by the Forest Service. Cashes Valley contributes nearly half the acreage of the Mountaintown Roadless Area. The privately held land in Cashes Valley is centered around the abandoned town of Ai and is accessed by a 'public' road that is maintained by no one. The wildest part of the Benton MacKaye Trail in Georgia winds around the rim of the Valley and over the years parts of the trail have resembled an ATV course more than a foot trail. Georgia ForestWatch has partnered with the Forest Service on several occasions to identify and block illegal ATV trails (see Summer 2013 issue of *Forest News* for more details).

We are happy to report that a recent thorough survey by Georgia Forest Watch showed no active ATV trails in Cashes Valley. For years the Benton MacKaye Trail from Flat Top Mountain to Hatley Gap has had the worn double tread of ATV travel. This survey revealed a faint single track left by a hiker.

Conasauga Road/Trail Decommissioning Project: The Conasauga Ranger District is proposing the complete or partial decommissioning of two National Forest System Roads and two System trails, and the seasonal closure of several off-road vehicle (ORV) trails. The purpose and need of these closures are to reduce soil erosion and sedimentation of nearby streams, and to maintain an appropriately sized and environmentally sustainable road system that is responsive to ecological, economic and social concerns. Georgia ForestWatch is supportive of all these decommissioning projects for the reasons listed below, and applauds the Forest Service's efforts to reduce soil erosion and improve stream health.

1) The Forest Service is proposing to decommission (close and obliterate) Patterson Creek Road (Forest Service Road # 124) on National Forest land. Patterson Creek Road is an open road connecting Tumbling Creek Road (Forest Service Road # 22) and a Fannin County Road (Hell's Hollow Road), after traversing approximately 1.5 miles of National Forest land and 0.6 miles of private land. Patterson Creek Road is a source of sediment being deposited into Tumbling Creek, which is detrimental to water quality and aquatic species habitat. Tumbling Creek is a popular rainbow trout stream, and is also one of the few streams in Georgia with a population of the rare eastern hellbender salamander *(Cryptobranchus alleganiensis),* a candidate for federal listing as threatened or endangered.

   After crossing Tumbling Creek, Patterson Creek Road parallels Patterson Creek, crossing it several times at unimproved fords that are almost impassable at times due to deep mud resulting from four-wheel-drive vehicles. This situation is causing resource damage to both soil and water quality, and aquatic habitat. The Forest Service is proposing to: eliminate access to Patterson Creek Road from Forest Service Road 22 and the National Forest boundary on the east end of the road; remove culverts; reshape the roadbed to restore natural drainage; stabilize damaged stream banks; and apply grass seed and straw to all disturbed sites.

2) The Forest Service is proposing to decommission a 1.6 mile section of McClure Creek Road (Forest Service Road # 796) past the McClure Creek crossing in Fannin County. McClure Creek Road is a dead-end road located at the end of Wehunt Road, and this segment is in poor condition, with deep gullies and erosion contributing sediment to McClure Creek.

Photo credit: David Govus

Downed gate at McClure Creek Road

3) The Forest Service is proposing to decommission two segments of Tibbs Trail (Forest Development Trail 78G). Tibbs Trails is an ORV trail located in the Holly Creek drainage. Formerly a road that required frequent heavy maintenance due to its steep, highly erodible soils, it is now a system trail that has been damaged by ORVs and erosion. An upper 1.5 mile segment that is causing continuous soil and water resource damage, and the upper trailhead on Forest Service Road # 68 would be eliminated. Decommissioning would involve removal of culverts, reshaping the former roadbed to restore proper contours for drainage, seeding and mulching, and blocking access from both ends.

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Etowah River Watershed Project

by Jim Walker : District Leader

Forest watching does not end with submission of a response to the Forest Service's scoping of potential projects; Georgia ForestWatch staff and District Leaders also check the implementation of projects. Three of us recently surveyed progress on the Etowah River Watershed Project that was scoped in April 2007 and approved by a decision notice in January 2008. The project covered over 750 acres on numerous separate sites, and involved eight different objectives: restoration of table mountain pine communities, oak/oak-pine

Photo credit: David Govus

Tom Colkett and Jim Walker admire a large shortleaf pine spared from harvesting.

communities, and canebrakes; southern pine beetle prevention; creation of early successional habitat; road maintenance; soil and water improvement; and stream habitat improvement. The project has not been, and may never be completed, presumably due to lack of demand for the timber.

Our first stop was along Two Run Creek, where an oak/oak-pine forest restoration was proposed by removing 50% or more of the timber. Georgia ForestWatch objected to this part of the project for two reasons: 1) the greater part of these stands was already a very nice, mature oak/oak-pine community, "an excellent example of the desired future condition," as we stated in our comments; and 2) the proposed action would result in heavy sedimentation of Two Run Creek. As a result of our comments, the acreage for this "restoration" was reduced from 119 to 54 acres. And we were very glad to see that as of January 2014, nothing had been cut.

Next we went to see the table mountain pine restoration part of the project. Table mountain pine is scarce and in overall decline on the Chattahoochee National Forest. Georgia ForestWatch had no objection to this restoration and it has been implemented as planned. Approximately two-thirds of the timber was removed, leaving all the table mountain pine, of which there remains a scattering of mature trees, but no regeneration. Since regeneration of table mountain pine is fire-associated, ForestWatch has encouraged the Forest Service to make burning of this area a priority.

The largest single section of the project (161 acres) was an area of mostly large white pines proposed to be thinned for southern pine beetle prevention. Georgia ForestWatch had reservations about this part of the project, since white pine is the least favorite target of southern pine beetle and is seldom affected by an outbreak. The thinning was very well done, and, if anything, the stand could have been thinned somewhat more.

We visited two other stands that were also slated to be thinned for southern pine beetle prevention. Georgia ForestWatch objected that large parts of these stands do not qualify as overstocked pine plantations, but instead have some of the largest and most numerous short-leaf pines to be found anywhere on the forest. These short-leaf pines mixed with hardwoods (mostly oak) have obviously withstood all previous southern pine beetle infestations. We were glad to see that there has been no timber harvest in these stands. ■

Around the Forest

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4) Taylor Ridge Trail is a 2.7 mile, minimally-developed ridgeline trail designed as a year-round hiker-only trail. It is located along Taylor Ridge with no associated facilities and no connection to other trails. It has not received recent maintenance and does not have any active volunteer organization maintenance agreements. Usage of the trail is low and primarily associated with hunting activities. Hunters and other users can access the same area utilizing a gated, well-maintained roadbed that parallels the trail. Decommissioning this trail would allow district trail resources to be utilized on more critical, high-usage trails.

5) The following ORV trails are proposed for seasonal closure (approximately January 1 through April 15, annually): Windy Gap Trail which also accesses the Milma Creek Trail and Tibbs Trail; and the trailhead for the Rock Creek ORV loop. ■

Scull Shoals Hike – Oconee National Forest

by Daniel Force : Outreach and Development Coordinator

In early February, on an unexpectedly warm winter day, we met on the corner of Highway 15 and Macedonia Road in the Oconee National Forest. Finding a good meeting place in this area was difficult due to very few pull-offs and the fact that aside from the main roads, we were surrounded by Forest Service roads. Luckily no one lost their way, and everyone was able to find each other. The hike leader for our trip was Georgia ForestWatch's own District Leader for the Oconee National Forest, Dr. John Paul (JP) Schmidt. JP is an Assistant Research Scientist at University of Georgia's Odum School of Ecology, and was able to provide us with great insight into our surroundings with his extensive knowledge of the area.

Once everyone came together, we headed out down Forest Service Road 1234 led by JP. It's a good thing he had us wait by the highway, as navigating Forest Service roads would have certainly left the group lost and scattered before we even started. After navigating the dirt Forest Service road for a few miles we made it to our trailhead. The weather was perfect for an early morning hike, allowing most people to shed layers along the way. Before the hike had started, everyone was sharing their stories about the recent winter storm that hit Georgia. We couldn't believe that just days earlier the state had been in lockdown. And now we were enjoying what may have been the warmest day of 2014 thus far.

Photo credit: Daniel Force

Hike leader JP Schmidt gives a quick introduction to the history of the Scull Shoals area.

The established trail took the group through a slope and floodplain forest along Sandy Creek, a tributary to the nearby Oconee River. The fact that we were in a floodplain forest became quickly apparent as the muddy conditions slowed us down through a few creek crossings and lower, swampy sections of the trail. The trail grew faint as we continued, and at times was hard to follow. It was obvious that the trail had not been maintained in quite some time. We navigated through overgrown trails, making sure not to let anyone get hit with the snapback of a limb. We saw an abundance of Chinese privet – an invasive species found throughout the Southeast – along the lower portions of the trail, with much of it rising above head height.

As we reached the halfway point, the group had the option to backtrack on the same route or hike on the hills above the more swampy areas. The group opted to walk above the swampy areas to see things from a different perspective, and avoid the mud and bush that made the first part of the hike a little more difficult than expected. It was easy to get turned around in this part of the forest due to the faintly-marked trails and few noticeable landmarks. Luckily, JP knew the Scull Shoals area well and was able to guide us back to the road. This is certainly an area I would recommend having a GPS if you are unfamiliar with the territory.

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Photo credit: Daniel Force

A view of Sandy Creek, a tributary to the Oconoee River

2013 Supporters, thank you!

The Georgia ForestWatch Directors, Advisors, District Leaders and Staff want to thank you for your generosity and support of our mission – protecting your National Forests in Georgia. We could not do this important work without each and every one of you.
(Our apologies if we have inadvertently omitted anyone.)

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Scull Shoals Hike

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We encountered more hills on the way back, but everyone agreed it was better than the lower areas. It continued to warm up as we made our way over the somewhat difficult muddy creek crossings and back to the cars. The hike ended up being close to three and a half miles, though it felt longer due to the slow conditions on the first half of the hike and hills on the second. Everyone left the hike in great spirits and was excited by the fact that JP would be leading another hike for Georgia ForestWatch in the Oconee National Forest in the spring. JP talked about the beautiful spring wildflowers that come out in certain areas of the Oconee National Forest leaving everyone eager to get out on the trails again in a couple of months.

Many of the hikers left from the trailhead to visit the nearby Historic Scull Shoals Mill Village before heading home. The Scull Shoals area is best known for being home to Georgia's first paper mill, water-powered saw mill, grist mill and textile mills.

It was a great day out in the Oconee National Forest, and we were happy to visit with and meet hikers from areas such as Athens, Eatonton and Atlanta who may have a harder time making it to our hikes in the Chattahoochee National Forest. We hope you can join us on a hike this year and look forward to seeing you out on the trails!

UPCOMING HIKES

March 22nd
Stroud Creek
Kelly Ridge Roadless Area
Ben Cash

April 5th
Oconee National Forest
JP Schmidt

April 12th
Coosa Backcountry Trail
Tom Colkett

April 12th
Buzzard Knob and
Rattlesnake Knob
Ben Cash

April 19th
Stonewall Falls
Marie Dunkle

April 26th
Warwoman Dell to
Martin's Creek
Brenda Smith

May 3rd
Cohutta Wilderness
Denny and Lois Rhodes

May 16th
Medicinal Herbs and
Wildflowers of Spring
Patricia Kyritsi Howell

May 17th
Rabun Bald
Ben Cash

May 24th
Hambidge Property
along Betty's Creek
Brenda Smith

June 21st
40th Anniversary celebration
hikes for the Wild and
Scenic Chattooga River

July 26th
Brasstown Bald to
Young Harris
on the Wagon Train Trail
Brenda Smith

August 27th
Panther Creek Falls
to Angel Falls
Brenda Smith

We are finalizing the details for more hikes and will post them on our website. To receive hike alerts and registration information you need to join our email alert program found on our website at www.gafw.org.

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An interview with Georgia ForestWatch volunteer, Peter McIntosh

by Marie Dunkle : District Leader

Peter McIntosh lives on a mountaintop overlooking the Persimmon Valley and Tray Mountain Wilderness. It is a grand view and inspiration for a photographer whose style expresses best the grandness of our North Georgia forests. On the evening of our interview, McIntosh chose for us to sit outside to take in this scene and the changing light. It was cold, but ample blankets, a glass of single malt scotch and a sunset to die for made our conversation warm.

McIntosh has been a Georgia ForestWatch volunteer for a dozen years, providing nature photos for our newsletters and website, leading photography hikes and donating prints of his work for our organization's fundraising programs. Attesting to his special talent, McIntosh photographs are often featured in the Travel Section of the *Atlanta Journal & Constitution* and have appeared in many publications including *National Geographic Traveler, Wall Street Journal, Budget Travel Magazine, Southern Living* and *Oxford American.*

No one is born a nature photographer so I was curious about Peter's start. McIntosh is a fifth generation Atlanta native whose mother was a successful interior designer and father was an architect. As a boy he often visited Tray Mountain and hiked on the Appalachian Trail with his father. That instilled a special appreciation for our wilderness areas and created a bond that eventually brought him to move full time to Rabun County 15 years ago. There were many turns in the road of life before this became home.

As a teenager, McIntosh was drawn to writing and at an early age wrote independent sports articles for the *Marietta Daily Journal*. He eventually studied journalism and currently writes copy for Turner Classic Movies.

Photo credit: Peter McIntosh

Photo credit: Honor Woodard

But the photography bug caught McIntosh at an early age when he enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He was assigned the career path of Aviation Photographer's Mate and learned the technical aspects of how to use a camera. When McIntosh left the service he continued to dabble in photography and got reacquainted with the North Georgia mountains of his childhood. Together, these two interests called to him like the Greek sirens of myth. Photographing our mountains became his passion. Soon he began to seriously study the work of professionally published nature photographers.

With the advent of the Web, McIntosh saw a way to share his pictures with a wider audience and his photos started to get some recognition. People liked what they saw and they wanted copies to decorate corporate offices and homes. That got McIntosh into the part-time business of photography. Then, as digital photography became the norm, his skills took an artistic leap. The digital world gave him the opportunity to take lots of pictures and to really analyze his work and cull the good photos from the truly eye-popping ones.

But it was his move to the Georgia mountains in 2001 that really motivated McIntosh to excel at photography. He was able to immerse himself in his mountain environment. He saw great photos at every turn of the road but explained that, "Sometimes you see a great photo but it does not want to be photographed. The time of day matters a lot. The light is everything."

McIntosh talked about how he has hiked into the forest or up a mountain in the early morning darkness with a headlamp to wait for the light to peek over a hillside and illuminate a common scene in an uncommon way. The result was a photo to be treasured.

McIntosh is also a man who understands human weakness and how easy it can be to stay in a warm bed on a cold winter morning. He explained how when that perfect photograph can only be achieved by braving the bitter morning cold and dark, he removes all obstacles and excuses by organizing and preparing the night before. The car is gassed up, flashlights have fresh batteries, camera and tripod are packed, and all-weather gear is laid out to quickly don and get out the door. That's passion in action!

As a professional, McIntosh is committed to improving his art and craft. Recently taking photos from an aircraft has helped him understand how clouds catch and bounce light. This understanding has given him the opportunity to capture some remarkable photos from above the mountaintops. He is also anxious to understand the perspective of those who view his work and he uses the Facebook "like" system to gauge photo appeal with the public.

Peter compares his passion for nature photography with the passion some have for fishing – it is a reason for getting out and experiencing the mountains, the forest and the rivers in between. As a conservation photographer, McIntosh has worked with and supported many local organizations in addition to Georgia ForestWatch. We all appreciate his generosity and the role he plays in communicating the need to protect our precious mountains, streams and woods.

Peter McIntosh photos are represented by Timpson Creek Gallery in Rabun County and can be purchased on-line through his website www.mcintoshmountains.com. ■

Photo credit: Peter McIntosh

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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**

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