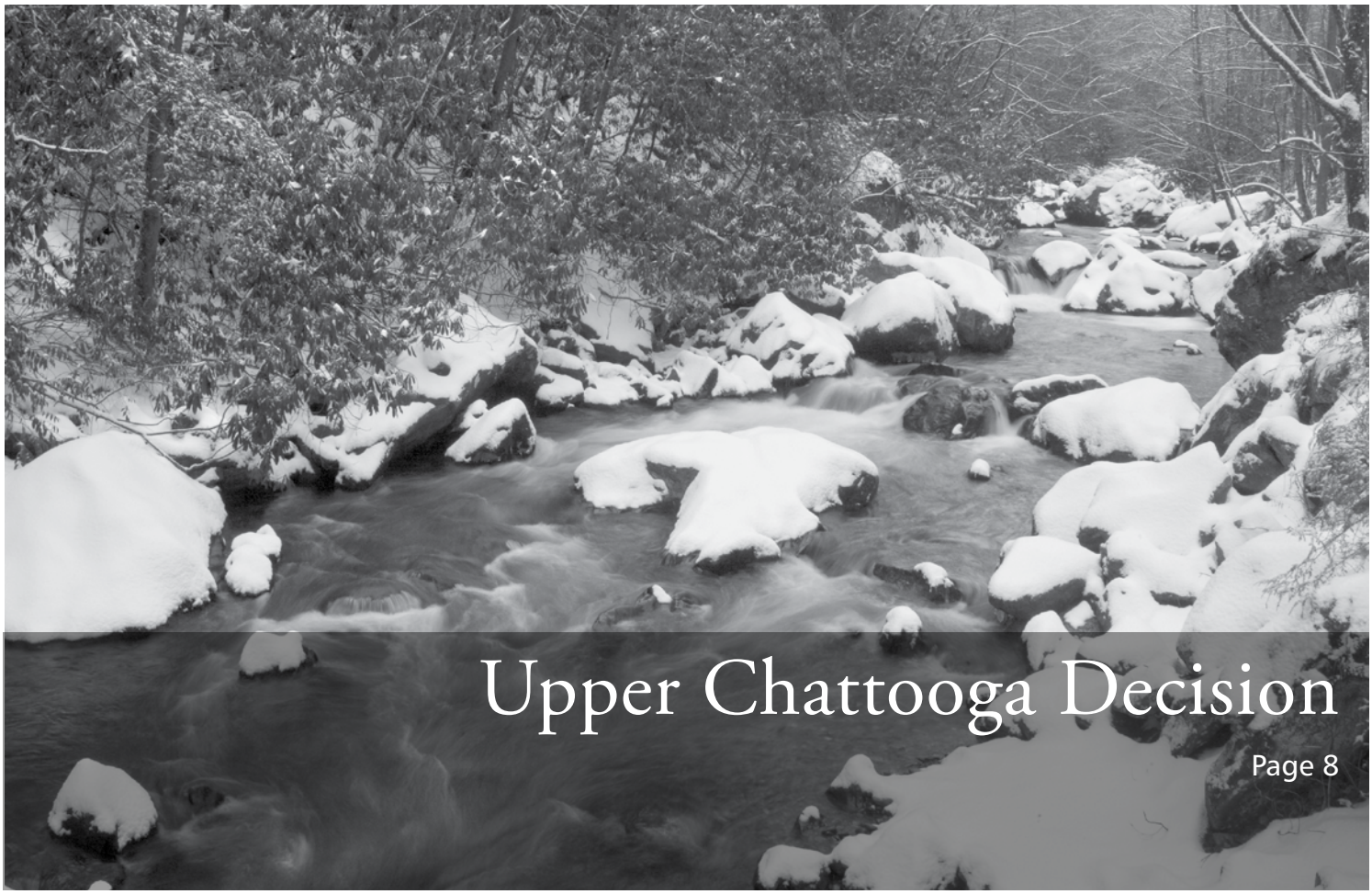
Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Winter 2015



Upper Chattooga Decision

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From the Director

Forest monitoring and advocacy efforts in 2015

Mary Topa
Executive Director

The Forest Service is changing the way it does business in our national forests. As we found out with the Cooper Creek Watershed Project, the Forest Service is moving towards bigger timber sales and projects that have increased impacts on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. Combined with limited timeframes for comment and a more restrictive NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) process for challenging damaging proposals, it is becoming more difficult for the public to respond to these projects.

If Cooper Creek is any indication of future timber management projects in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest, ForestWatch will have to engage *more* knowledgeable volunteers to help with our boots on-the-ground efforts, and expand our forest monitoring efforts *by hiring a forest ecologist*. In recent conversations with long-time partners at the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC), it is clear that the presence of Georgia ForestWatch has never been more critical. We ARE the only organization in north Georgia solely dedicated to protecting Georgia's national forests, and we have to grow in order to protect our public lands and better serve our members.

Photo credit: Georgia ForestWatch archives

A "young" Jess Riddle in search of old trees.

Thanks to a generous two-year matching grant challenge from an anonymous donor and matching donations from our members, we now have the funds to hire a new forest ecologist. It is my pleasure to announce that a long-time member of the Georgia ForestWatch family, *Jess Riddle, has accepted the forest ecologist position and will start in early February*. The Georgia ForestWatch Board of Directors, staff and volunteer District Leaders are all looking forward to working with Jess in 2015, and are very excited that we were able to bring him home to north Georgia!

You may recall that Jess led Forest Watch's old-growth survey in the Chattahoochee National Forest in 2001-2005 with the help of volunteers from ForestWatch, the Patagonia Atlanta store and the Chattahoochee National Forest headquarters office (http://gafw.org/pdf_files/chattahoochee_og_site_characteristics.pdf). In addition to his passion for protecting north Georgia's mountain forests and familiarity/botanical knowledge of these forests, Jess has the academic training and research experience, with a Master of Science in Ecology from SUNY-College of Environmental Science & Forestry – all skills that will be necessary to meet the upcoming challenges in 2015.

ForestWatch is effective at instituting change in Forest Service timber management practices because of our on-the-ground monitoring; effective advocacy; knowledge of our mountains, forest management practices and the NEPA analysis process; and tenacity in responding to all public notices with science on our side. We work with Forest Service staff on issues, and as a last resort, pursue legal action with our legal partners. The Southern Environmental Law Center has helped us navigate our way through recent NEPA procedural changes and weigh in on proposals such as the Cooper Creek timber sale, **but many citizens do not have access to such legal expertise.**

The recent Cooper Creek scoping was a steep learning curve for ForestWatch. Most alarming was the sheer size of the timber sale, and the cutting or heavy "thinning" of some of the oldest oak stands in the watershed on steep slopes that are highly inappropriate for commercial harvest. Combined with the new, more restrictive process for public comment and objection to activities on national forest lands, these changes pressure ForestWatch to do the near-impossible. We are being asked to conduct field surveys, investigate the full scope of these larger projects, and craft a response based on local knowledge, sound science, and the applicable laws within a very brief 30-day comment period. For example, the scale of the Cooper Creek Watershed Project is such that our volunteer District Leaders could only survey about 30% of the 127 forest stands during the 30-day comment period. Reducing the size and impact of the Cooper Creek Project is a high priority for us in 2015.

We know more large-scale timber management projects in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests will be proposed in 2015 and 2016, with more proposals for intense logging (e.g. 205 acres of some of the oldest oak stands in Cooper Creek are proposed to be essentially clear-cut for early successional habitat creation), more misguided and inappropriate "restoration" proposals, and a one-size-fits all approach to prescribed burning. We also know that planning will start in the coming years for the new forest management plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. ForestWatch needs to be prepared for these activities, and our new forest ecologist, Jess Riddle, will bring his passion and boots-on-the-ground knowledge to help lead this effort and work with our many partners to affect change in management of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest.

Mary A. Topa

Board welcomes new members

The Georgia ForestWatch Board welcomes three new members: Laurie Blackmore, Tom Crawford and Michael Wall. We are very excited to have Laurie, Tom and Michael join our Board – their non-profit, fundraising, Information Technology (IT) and marketing experience will strengthen the skill set of our Board. Congratulations and welcome to Laurie, Tom and Michael!

Laurie Blackmore has been a Development Associate in Foundations and Public Funding at the Atlanta Botanical Garden since 2009. She is also owner and manager of Full Circle Trade, a web-based business that supports conservation and sustainable livelihoods, since 2009. Her professional focus has been in non-timber products, set within the context of environmental and socially sustainable development, and has over 20 years of experience working in rural development and research in North America and Africa. Laurie has an M.S. in Forest Resources from the University of Idaho, and a B.S. in Forestry from the University of Washington. She has worked in the Peace Corps in agroforestry in Guinea, West Africa, as a Forester in the US Forest Service at the Rocky Mountain Research Station in Moscow, Idaho, and as a Field Coordinator in Cameroon, Africa. Laurie has experience working in the academic, public, private and non-profit sectors.

Tom Crawford is a native Atlantan with an appreciation for how important Georgia's national forests are to our state. Tom received a B.S. in Civil Engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology, and following a brief military career, also received an M.S. in Civil Engineering from the same institution. Tom made a career change from Engineering to Information Technology (IT), and taught IT and non-IT topics at businesses, government military groups and universities, impacting thousands of people in a positive and forceful way – his dream job.

Photo credit: Jim Dawson

As a retired Information Technology instructor, he is looking to utilize his skills and talents to the benefit of Georgia ForestWatch. He is married to Jeannette and has two children, Kevin and Alina. He also serves on the Board of Directors of the Georgia Chapter of the National Speakers Association, and provides audio/visual expertise to capture their meetings for audio distribution. In addition, Tom likes golf, bridge and reading about WWII and apocalyptic fiction. With his experience in audio and video production, he is looking forward to helping increase the visibility of Georgia ForestWatch. He will also be focusing on developing programs to grow our membership.

Michael Wall is the Director of Programs at Georgia Organics, where he manages the organization's key outreach efforts: the Farmer Services, Advocacy, Farm to School, Communications, and My Market programs. He previously served in public relations at the Atlanta Regional

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Cover photo credit: Peter McIntosh

Through Georgia ForestWatch, we are protecting our state

by Michael Wall : New Board Member

It's been awhile, but I was a journalist for close to 15 years. I covered the environment and business, which means I've been cussed out by mayors, U.S. Senators, governors, CEOs, Congressmen, and plenty of environmentalists.

I've only received one death threat. It was 11 years ago, in an email that read, "[expletive] you and the [expletive] trees you hug. Id drag you behind my jeep up and down rich mountain to rip your head off and I'll be coming to atlanta to do it soon."

This person was very angry about an article I'd written about Georgia ForestWatch's involvement in a lawsuit that sought to stop off-road vehicle access to the Rich Mountain Wilderness Area.

In the article, I was objective as I could be: allowing the off-road vehicles did indeed violate the U.S. Forest Service's own studies, it violated the Wilderness Act, and it most definitely shredded the heck out of miles and miles of the Chattahoochee National Forest and a state-owned Wildlife Management Area.

When enough evidence points to a single conclusion, it becomes impossible to ignore: off-roading in a national forest messes it up. I didn't want my national forest messed up. (In fact, I want it to be the Chattahoochee National Park, but that's for another day – just think on it.)

So, you may have noticed I call it "my" national forest. It's all ours, for sure, but I'm Georgian. Deep Georgian. Seven generations, from Dooly (Mom's) and Terrell (Poppa's) counties. I grew up on R.E.M. and joined an environmental club in college (mostly because of a girl at first, I'll admit). By the time I wrote that article about off-roaders on Rich Mountain, though, I wanted to protect my state from marauders, whether they be Fortune 500 companies or short-sighted thrill seekers.

I wrote several articles about Georgia ForestWatch's efforts to protect my mountains and when I look back on those times, I should have just quit my journalism job and donated some money to Georgia ForestWatch.

And eventually, that's exactly what I did. I now work at a non-profit (Georgia Organics) and think I have more of an impact on the health of my state there than I ever did as a journalist. One of the highest honors in my life was being asked to serve on the board of Georgia ForestWatch.

My mountains need protecting. They need someone to watch over them. No one does that better than this organization. And they do it exceedingly well.

Photo credit: Michael Wall

Michael and his wife Jennette Gayer on a recent hike near Cherry Log, Georgia

For example, off road vehicles are no longer allowed in the Rich Mountain WMA. Take that person who threatened to kill me (but also just found some other place to tear up).

There are plenty more threats to my mountains out there. The battle over Coopers Creek is just the beginning. My mountains need Georgia ForestWatch now more than ever, and they need your help even more. Your support comes in many forms: phone calls, petitions, talking to neighbors, making donations, volunteering, and more.

Here are just a few other things you should know about me: the mountains of north Georgia are my church, and my ashes will be spread there. My wife and I hiked the Georgia section of the Appalachian Trail last summer for my 40th birthday and got engaged at the state border (on the Georgia side!). I fish, bird watch, camp, hike, kayak, and I will not go down without a fight.

If you've ever supported Georgia ForestWatch in any way, thank you for helping to protect this great state. ■

Expanding military training activities in Cooper Creek

by Jim Walker : District Leader

Don't be surprised to encounter Army Rangers in the Cooper Creek area.

I have long been accustomed to seeing soldiers and signs of their activity in the vicinity of Camp Merrill, the Ranger training base in the Etowah watershed, and as far away as Hickory Flat in the Noontootla watershed. They even use the Appalachian Trail. But until this year, to my knowledge, they have never operated as far away from the camp as Cooper Creek.

Back in June, Georgia ForestWatch District Leader David Govus came across two soldiers on foot and one in a pickup truck near Bryant Creek, a tributary of Cooper Creek. Talking with them, he learned that they were scouting out potential helicopter landing zones in the area because, as the sergeant said "the colonel wants to step out."

The first confirmation that this has been accomplished was on a Sunday in early November. While David was leading a hike in the Cooper Creek area, he met six big army trucks. A soldier on foot in the lead was very helpful in squeezing the wide trucks past the hikers' vehicles on the narrow road.

Then in December, I had an opportunity to observe the whole operation in action. Accompanying a Forest Service employee going out to core some trees and survey a couple of older stands included in the proposed Cooper Creek project, we came upon a blazing fire. Expecting hunters, instead we found six soldiers with two jeeps, two trailers, and a very large canvas tent, maybe 200 square feet. Not

Photo credit: David Govus

Ranger convoy in Cooper Creek

wanting to interfere with their operation, we talked with them to make sure that we would not get in their way. No problem, they said. They would be conducting a three-day training exercise, but the bulk of the troops would not be arriving until later. They also told us that these exercises would be happening on a regular basis, and "you can expect to be seeing a lot more of us."

With the soldiers' permission, we went on up the ridge to measure the diameters of selected trees and core them to determine their age.

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2014 Annual Fall Retreat & Membership Meeting

by Laura Stachler : Outreach Coordinator

Blustering cold winds didn't stop ForestWatch members and friends from enjoying the festivities at the 2014 Annual Fall Retreat & Membership Meeting this past October. Everyone gathered to celebrate Wilderness indoors and out because we all know, tradition is tradition.

Naturally, with 2014 marking the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, the theme for the retreat was "Celebrating Wilderness." We kicked off the weekend at Vogel State Park on Friday with the best potluck to-date! After grazing on the smorgasbord of a family-style buffet and enjoying each other's company, we hit the lights and held the first of many showings of *Forever Wild*. This amazing film celebrates wilderness in America by highlighting the struggles and triumphs of the courageous few who set out against all odds to save our nation's last wild places. Sound familiar? We thought so.

Led by ForestWatch Executive Director Mary Topa, the Saturday morning program had a packed house with little standing room left. Keynote speaker Pat Byington, Executive Director of Wild South, tugged at the heart of why we fight to protect our wild places. Renowned photographer Peter McIntosh kept us entertained with tales of his experiences in backcountry photography and the not-so-elegant side of his profession. With the help of our Wilderness Panel, we were able to delve into the current challenges in getting Wilderness designated from many perspectives, including the Forest Service, Southern Environmental Law Center, The Wilderness Society and the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards, Wild South, and some interactive Q&A from the audience.

View of Lake Trahlyta

With the musical stylings of member Luke Stachler and Board member Brian Wills in the background, the chili cook-off got off to a tasty start with six different entries from Melinda Edwards (first place), Greg & Sherri Richardson (second), Tom Colkett (third), Patty Lowe, Wilma Turner, Patricia Plishka, and Luke & Laura Stachler. Needless to say, there was more than enough to go around and no one left for the afternoon hikes hungry. A big thanks to Tom Colkett for organizing and providing the prizes!

As always, a plethora of hikes were offered over the weekend including *Plants: The Food, Medicine, and Craft Materials of the Cherokee* with Mark Warren, Lichen Hike with Seen Beeching, Nature Photography at Helton Creek Falls with Peter McIntosh, Cooper Creek Issue Hike with District Leader Jim Walker, a late

BBQ, Stew & Oysters Oh My!

Wilderness Panel from left to right: Bill Hodge, The Wilderness Society and Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards; Sarah Francisco, Southern Environmental Law Center; Pat Byington, Wild South; and Betty Jewett, Forest Service

Success

at Vogel State Park

night Owl Prowl with Janet Westervelt and myself (we had at least three owls show up), and Blood Mountain Hike with Ben Cash. Thanks to all of our fearless hike leaders!

Led by Board President Kasey Sturm, our Annual Membership Meeting included programmatic updates from Mary Topa, outreach updates from myself, Conasauga Ranger District updates from District Leader Jim Walker, Blue Ridge Ranger District updates from District Leader David Govus, and the election of new Board member Michael Wall. Melinda Edwards was also presented with the coveted Georgia ForestWatch Volunteer of the Year Award for organizing and preparing countless meals at our retreats and Wild & Woolly events over the years. Congratulations Melinda and thank you for all of your selfless hard work and delicious meals!

No ForestWatch retreat would be complete without the delicious BBQ provided each year by David Govus, and all the other dinner fixings prepared by Melinda Edwards and kitchen volunteers. David tends the feast all day long to prepare a belly-filling delight for all to enjoy. Lucky for us he made so much this year that it kept us warm into the night, making it all the more easy to brave the plummeting temperatures for some campfire fellowship before turning in. A big thanks go to David and Melinda for preparing yet another great dinner for retreat attendees to share with friends and family.

We would like to thank our sponsors, donors, speakers and volunteers for all they did to make the 2014 retreat a huge success, with a big shout-out to Sherri Richardson, our Office Manager, for all her hard work. Mark your calendars for next year – the 2015 Fall Retreat dates have been set for October 2nd, 3rd and 4th at Vogel State Park.

Thank you to our 2014 Fall Retreat sponsors, contributors, volunteers & speakers!

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Mary Topa
Wilma Turner
Jim Walker
Mark Warren
Janet Westervelt
Brian Wills

ful BBQ feast!

Chili contest judges taking their job very seriously

Keynote Speaker Pat Byington of Wild South

Photo credits: Laura Stachler

Upper Chattooga decision: Appellate Court rejects boaters' arguments

by Mary Topa : Executive Director

On November 5th, 2014, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit in Richmond, VA, **rejected American Whitewater and other boaters' arguments that the Forest Service must allow more boating on the Upper Chattooga**, supporting the March 30th, 2013, decision of the U.S. District Court in the District of South Carolina. This judgment was in response to appeals that both ForestWatch (represented by Rachel Doughty (Greenfire Law), and Susan Richardson and Alex Bullock (Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton)) and American Whitewater filed in December 2013. Most importantly, the Court of Appeals held that boating is *not* an ORV (Outstanding Remarkable Value) that must be protected before other values (scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural). This is consistent with our interpretation of the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act and tremendously good news for the Chattooga and other Wild and Scenic Rivers.

ForestWatch got involved in the boaters' case as an intervenor because the boaters' arguments challenged the Forest Service's ability to regulate recreation, placing management of particular recreational pursuits above conservation as a priority on Wild & Scenic Rivers and in Wilderness Areas. Forest Watch was concerned about the terrible precedent a ruling in favor of the boaters could set, not just in the Chattooga Corridor, but nationwide. So this recent Appellate decision supporting the Forest Service's ability to manage recreational activities in the Wild & Scenic Corridor accomplishes much of what ForestWatch set out to protect, and all the folks involved in this fight (particularly Joe Gatins, Wayne Jenkins and our legal partners, Rachel Doughty, Susan Richardson and Alex Bullock) should be proud of ForestWatch's staying power and role in facilitating this decision!

Although this appellate decision puts an end to the American Whitewater and boaters' lawsuit, Georgia ForestWatch still has a pending case. In December 2012, ForestWatch lawyers filed a complaint and motion to enjoin boating on the Upper Chattooga, challenging the Forest Service's failure to protect the exceptional natural resource values which caused the Chattooga to be designated a Wild & Scenic River. Our arguments cited the Forest Service's failure to appropriately plan access to the Chattooga Corridor, including reliance on user-created access trails, lack of a single comprehensive management plan for the Corridor, failure to complete a visitor capacity analysis, and self-registration by boaters at locations prohibited by their own federal regulations. Although we filed a motion to consolidate this case with the boaters' case, our motion was denied. That case is still alive, and if we are unable to settle with the Forest Service, briefing will be completed in the first half of 2015.

Since filing our complaint and motion to enjoin boating in December 2012, the Forest Service has started addressing some trail access issues we raised in their recent Chattooga Boating Access Environmental Assessment (EA). However, this EA does not go far enough to ensure the creation of sustainable trails, relying on user-created features on soils that are described as having "high erosive potential." The actions proposed still do not address the fact that the current boater permitting system will encourage boaters to violate Federal Regulations. The EA fails to discuss that registration stations are provided at the new upstream put-ins which are not among those permitted by Forest Service regulations. In the alternative, it fails to analyze the impacts of requiring boaters to register at downstream locations before putting-in at the newly proposed upstream locations. The Forest Service is in this predicament because it did not examine the impacts of access before locking itself into allowing boating on the Upper Chattooga in the first place.

Even with our case pending, as always, we will continue to work with the Forest Service to ensure that all access trails are sustainable and minimize soil erosion and sedimentation of the Upper Chattooga, and that the issues with the boater permitting system be resolved. ■

Welcome New Members!

Jessica Courtney
Loretta English
Sarah & Jack Frierson
Donna Gawlas
Josh & Leigh Saint of Hiker Hostel
John Jones
Katy Ross
Nancy Sauls
Darrell & Melissa Sheffield & Family
Lisa Simpson

Welcome New Board Members

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Commission and Georgia State University. In his former career as an investigative journalist, he received awards from the Society for Professional Journalists and the American City Business Journals for business and environmental reporting. Michael is a seventh-generation Georgian and lives in Atlanta with his wife Jennette Gayer, who runs Environment Georgia. He fly fishes, hikes, camps, bird watches, and jumps into rivers and streams all over the state. He also serves on the boards of the Atlanta Audubon Society and the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Work Group. Michael is excited about joining ForestWatch's Board of Directors and contributing articles to *Forest News* – read his first article on page 4. ■

Expanding Military Training Activities

(continued from page 5)

About an hour later, I heard two helicopters approaching and could see that they were heading toward a food plot about a mile and a half away. Because of the terrain, I could not see them land, but they were out of sight only briefly before returning the way they came. The helicopters made four or five trips to the same location, and as we passed by their campfire on our way out, the soldiers verified that those were their guys coming in.

In an apparently unrelated incident, I recently happened to be at Wilscot Gap, where the gated road to Brawley Mountain (FS45) begins, when a big pickup truck turned in toward the gate. I thought it must be Forest Service employees and went over to talk with them. But the truck was not a Forest Service one. The driver was not in military uniform, but the passenger who got out to unlock the gate, was. We had a brief, friendly conversation during which he informed me that, "This is a military road."

"No," I contradicted him, "it's a Forest Service road." ■

Wild & Woolly
Annual Spring Fundraiser

May 2, 2015
Bull Mountain Lodge
Dahlonega, GA

Mark Your Calendars!

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Cashes Valley illegal ATV update

by David Govus : Board Member and District Leader

History

Cashes Valley lies at the head of Fightingtown Creek northwest of Ellijay. The upper part of the valley is in Gilmer County while the lower part is in Fannin County. The valley can only be reached by an old public road that fords Fightingtown Creek four times. The road was built by the early settlers of the valley, and is neither claimed nor maintained by Fannin County, Gilmer County or the Forest Service. During winter or periods of high water, the deteriorating road becomes virtually impassible. Local law enforcement is nearly non-existent in this area.

Parts of the Cashes Valley watershed comprise the eastern end of the 12,000-acre Mountaintown Inventoried Roadless Area, the largest Roadless Area in the Chattahoochee National Forest. Formally identified Roadless Areas are afforded special protection and are eligible for Wilderness protection. The Mountaintown Roadless Area was in fact proposed for Wilderness protection in all the draft versions of the current Forest Plan, only to be dropped at the last moment after the 2000 elections.

At one time Cashes Valley contained the village of Ai, a school, several churches and several hundred residents; two remaining cemeteries remind us of its history. Electrical service never reached Cashes Valley, and the last resident of Cashes Valley, Boyd Johnson, died in the early 1990s. The Forest Service by this time owned 90% of the land in the valley, while some of the remaining land is owned by descendants of the original settlers. The wildest section of the Benton MacKaye Trail in Georgia curls around the top of Cashes Valley for over a dozen miles.

With the rise of All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) in the late 1980s, Cashes Valley became a playground for illegal off-road activity. ATV trails emanated in all directions from the public road. The Benton MacKaye Trail came to resemble an off-road vehicle course rather than a foot travel only trail. Many of the structures in Cashes Valley were looted and burned to the ground including the beautiful 100-year-old Church of Christ.

Beginning in 2000, Georgia ForestWatch initiated a campaign to end illegal ATV activity in the valley and to protect the integrity of the Mountaintown Roadless Area. At the urging of Georgia ForestWatch, the Forest Service made several attempts to block illegal trails. These efforts were not robust enough and failed. A major problem was that ATVs were allowed to ride the public road in the valley with impunity,

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in clear violation of Georgia law. As a former Forest Service Law Enforcement Official (LEO), Jim Wilson noted, "how can we keep them out of the woods if we can't keep them off the roads?"

In 2006, Georgia ForestWatch petitioned then Forest Supervisor George Bain to allow Forest Service LEOs to enforce the law and to prohibit ATV travel on public roads crossing Forest Service land. Unleashing the LEOs in Cashes Valley made a huge difference. Georgia ForestWatch surveyed the remaining illegal ATV trails, and joint Georgia ForestWatch-Forest Service work projects in 2008 and 2013 created robust blocks of the remaining illegal ATV trails. A more detailed account of this history can be found in the summer 2013 edition of *ForestNews* (http://www.gafw.org/newsletters/2013summer_newsletter.pdf).

Mud bogging update

This past year Georgia ForestWatch turned its attention to another long-term problem in Cashes Valley ... mud bogging. The road into Cashes Valley fords Fightingtown Creek twice in a short span. A large, flat riparian zone containing a beautiful, rich bottomland forest with native wildflowers occurs south of the road in an area known to locals as the Double Ford. Over the years, Double Ford has been subjected to repeated mud bogging activity. Individuals driving four-wheel drive vehicles off the road to spin their wheels have destroyed this riparian zone, simply to experience a perverse thrill. At times, areas larger than an acre have been ripped to shreds.

Photo credit: David Govus

Driving I-beams in Cashes Valley

The Forest Service made many attempts over the years to protect this riparian area from vehicles, but berms and fallen trees were ineffective. Vandals sawed up the fallen trees, drove over berms and pulled down barricades.

This fall, former Georgia ForestWatch Board member and longtime volunteer Dan Bowden came up with the idea of driving steel I-beams along the edge of the road in order to create a barricade to stop this senseless destruction. Dan purchased 50 surplus 5-foot I-beams, hauled the heavy load to Double Ford, and coordinated with the Forest Service to drive these I-beams into the ground. Conasauga District Ranger Jeff Gardner and his assistant Rex Rymer showed up with a small excavator, and after a long day with help from Dan and another Georgia ForestWatch volunteer, drove the I-beams into the ground.

Thanks to Jeff, Rex and Dan, another step forward has been made in the 20-year-struggle to rid Cashes Valley and the Mountaintown Roadless Area of off-road vehicle abuse. However, the deteriorating public road faces another threat. Large Jeep convoys out of Atlanta and elsewhere schedule trips to Cashes Valley seeking opportunities to test their vehicles during bad weather, and their rough tread tires have the ability to destroy even a good road. This activity is not confined to the Cashes Valley road but is happening on Forest Service roads all across north Georgia. Many of these roads weren't designed to withstand this type of high-volume, concentrated activity during wet weather. These large convoys are highly damaging, improper and selfish, but legal. These forest service roads provide a place for convoy enthusiasts to play with their expensive toys, but this happens at an environmental cost and places even more pressure on the Forest Service's limited road maintenance funds. ■

UPCOMING OUTINGS & EVENTS

January 15
UNG Outdoor Pursuits 3rd Annual Cosmic Climb
with Laura Stachler

January 22
Chattahoochee Nature Center Nature Club Presentation
Laura Stachler

February 11
Grassy Ridge Hike
with Ben Cash

May 2
2015 Wild & Woolly

Email lstachler@gafw.org to reserve your spot today!

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

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Photo credit: Darren Wolfgang

Wishing you a bright New Year from the Staff and Board of Directors of Georgia ForestWatch!