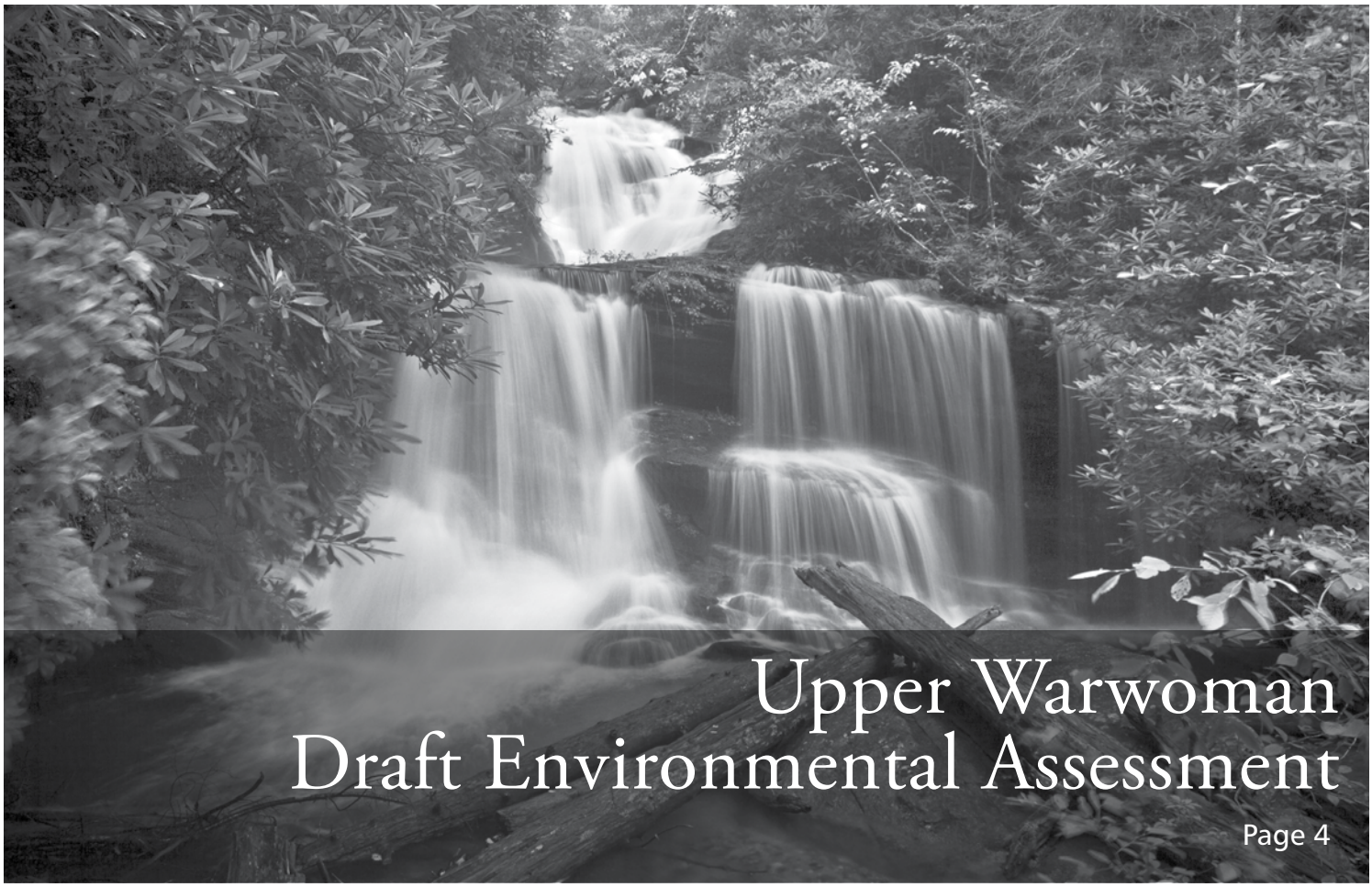
Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Spring 2015



Upper Warwoman Draft Environmental Assessment

Page 4

Inside This Issue

From the Director 2

Welcome New Staff Members Lyn Hopper & Jess Riddle.....3

Draft Environmental Assessment for Upper Warwoman 4

Chattooga River Ranger District Update 6

Ted Doll: Tree Hugger & Instigator 7

A Fond Farewell to Sherri Richardson 8

Thank You, 2014 Supporters! 10

From the Director

Update on the Chattahoochee-Oconee Land Adjustment Act H.R. 470

Mary Topa
Executive Director

Congressman Doug Collins of Georgia's 9th Congressional District introduced the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Land Adjustment Act (H.R. 470) on January 22, 2015. The full text of this bill can be accessed on the GovTrack website (https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/114/hr470/text). This bill would authorize the sale of certain parcels of land in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest (CONF), and the proceeds could be used to purchase critical lands within the CONF from willing sellers. According to the Ninth District Republican, "This bill would eliminate federal waste, saving taxpayer money, and provide more opportunities to Georgians from around the state to enjoy our beautiful region."

The 30 tracts of land referenced in this bill are disconnected from core lands of the CONF, and total approximately 3,841 acres. The US Forest Service, along with The Nature Conservancy and The Conservation Fund, believe that the locations of these parcels in isolation make them suitable for sale. More specific comments provided by The Nature Conservancy and The Conservation Fund can be found on their respective websites: www.nature.org and www.conservationfund.org.

According to Judy Toppins, Staff Officer for Public Affairs, GIS, and Environmental Coordination at the CONF office in Gainesville, the National Forest routinely evaluates parcels of land for potential land adjustment opportunities, including acquisition, conveyance, or exchange under agency authorities. These adjustments are based on their forest plan goals and objectives, such as providing public access and enjoyment of publicly-owned lands. The CONF provided a select list of tracts that had been previously identified as potentially incompatible with current forest plan objectives, primarily because they are disconnected, isolated tracts or have restricted public access.

Proceeds from the adjustment will go into a federal account that the US Forest Service may use only to buy critical properties within the CONF from willing sellers. In other words, the generated funds will only be spent purchasing land for sale inside the existing US Forest Service proclamation boundary in Georgia, and cannot be used to support salary or other annual operating expenses.

Chapter 26 of the Forest Service Handbook provides some information on the process that the Forest Service will implement to sell individual tracts if the Collins' bill passes. The process provides opportunities for the public to voice concerns over the Forest Service's decision to sell (or not sell) certain tracts and bring important issues to the agency's attention, such as the presence of rare or endangered species or habitats. Some level of NEPA analysis will be required before the sale of any individual tract, but the NEPA process won't begin until, and if, the bill passes (granting the Forest Service authority to sell these tracts). The agency's regulations allow the transfer of land by Categorical Exclusion in limited circumstances, and the presence of any endangered species or habitats will weigh against use of a Categorical Exclusion. Regardless of whether the Forest Service chooses to implement the sale via Categorical Exclusion, Environmental Assessment, or Environmental Impact Statement, the regulations require scoping and a public comment period.

The legislation is similar to a bill introduced in the 113th Congress by U.S. Senators Chambliss and Isakson (GA) in July 2014, and is modeled after legislation at other National Forests including those enacted into law in Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, Texas, and Virginia during the last decade.

While Georgia ForestWatch does not generally support the sale of public lands, the sale of some of these isolated tracts may in this instance make sense. For example, those isolated tracts that do not support locally-rare or endangered species, habitat, or critical headwaters, and those that are highly disturbed from adjacent private landowner activities are likely candidates. This legislation has the potential to provide the Forest Service with much-needed funds to acquire critical lands within the CONF, and to protect the forest and watersheds these lands contain from further development and fragmentation. Georgia ForestWatch has begun ground-surveying these tracts and is researching possible ramifications of this legislation if passed. ForestWatch will continue to follow the progress of H.R. 470 and will provide updates as they become available.

In the meantime, urge your Congressional representative to restore funding for conservation and recreation programs that will ensure access to our public lands and adequate care for our national treasures. Budget shortfalls in the Land and Water Conservation Fund year after year have left many projects unfinished and pieces of land unprotected. This popular program supports conservation of our lands and waters, from national forests and parks to state parks and community ball fields. Help protect Georgia's mountain treasures!

Mary A. Topa

Welcome new staff members Lyn Hopper and Jess Riddle

Lyn Hopper, Bookkeeper/Office Manager

Lyn Hopper

We are happy to have Lyn Hopper as the new Bookkeeper/Office Manager here at ForestWatch. She is already fitting right in to the office dynamic and is picking up the routine with ease. It's no surprise that Lyn is transitioning so nicely as she is retired from a 30-year public library career. This career includes service as an independent consultant for libraries and nonprofits, Georgia's Assistant State Librarian for Library Development, and Director of the Chestatee Regional Library System. She holds post-graduate degrees from Emory University and Florida State University. Lyn lives north of Dahlonega and enjoys a view of the Chattahoochee National Forest from her front deck. Welcome to Georgia ForestWatch, Lyn – we're glad to have you on board!

Jess Riddle, Forest Ecologist

Jess Riddle

Welcome back, Jess! Jess Riddle grew up hiking in the Chattahoochee National Forest where he developed an interest in everything in the forest that didn't run away from him. He earned his MS from the SUNY-College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, NY, by studying how climate influences tree growth and how that influence varies depending on whether a tree is growing at the southern or northern edge of its range. Since then he has participated in investigations of riparian forests along the Missouri and Sacramento Rivers. He also conducts research on maximum tree sizes, and led Georgia ForestWatch's old-growth project. Jess has already hit the ground running with the Draft Environmental Assessment for the Upper Warwoman Landscape Management Project and the Cooper Creek Watershed Project. We look forward to incorporating Jess's expertise and knowledge of Georgia's national forests into our forest monitoring efforts as ForestWatch presses ahead into the future.

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Cover photo credit: Peter McIntosh

Draft Environmental Assessment for the Upper Warwoman Landscape Management Project

by Jess Riddle : Forest Ecologist

The Chattooga River Ranger District has proposed an extensive vegetation management project on the slopes of Rabun Bald, Georgia's second highest mountain. The Upper Warwoman Landscape Management Project area encompasses roughly 12,500 acres of federal land in the upper Warwoman Creek watershed, and is broken into five components: vegetation management (timber sales); fisheries enhancement; prescribed fire; wildlife opening daylighting; and water quality protection. Georgia ForestWatch and the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) replied to the project scoping notice issued two years ago. In January, the Forest Service issued a detailed Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) that provides more information on the project and reflects comments made by ForestWatch and others. The draft EA can be found on the Forest Service's website at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/UpperWarwomanProject.

Project overview

According to the Forest Service, the project's goals focus on encouraging oak and yellow pine (shortleaf, pitch, and table mountain) regeneration, and producing more open canopies in oak and yellow pine forests. Prescribed fire would be used to both reduce competition in the shrub and sapling layer (understory) from other species, especially red maple and white pine, and kill patches of overstory trees. Timber sales would be used to open the canopy and increase light to the understory.

Currently, mature oak forests cover the primarily south-facing slopes of the project area, and yellow pines dominate some of the ridges. However, seedlings and saplings of those species are hard to find. Many studies across the eastern United States have documented a similar lack of oak regeneration (e.g. Abrams *et al.* 1995), indicating that there are not enough oak seedlings and saplings to replace current canopy trees. Several studies attribute that lack of regeneration to fire suppression and an associated increase in shade-tolerant, fire-intolerant species in the understory. However, alternative explanations, such as long-term precipitation patterns and fluctuations in herbivore populations, remain little studied (McEwan *et al.* 2011). Experiments trying to regenerate oaks with prescribed fire have yielded mixed results (Brose *et al.* 2013). When fire is combined with canopy opening the results have been better but still inconsistent.

Some timber harvests proposed in the project would convert oak and yellow pine forests to woodlands. Stands would be left with widely-spaced trees and more open sky than canopy. The higher light conditions in such stands provide habitat for species that cannot survive in closed canopy forests. Lack of disturbance has allowed some sites in the Southern Appalachians that were once woodland to gradually fill in and become forest. However, the extent and location of those woodlands is an open question, so selecting appropriate sites for restoration demands careful attention to existing site characteristics.

The two other proposed timber harvest treatments, oak regeneration and thinning, both aim to regenerate oak and pine. Oak regeneration treatments are similar to woodland treatments, but differ in that the regeneration is intended to eventually fill in the canopy. Thinning treatments retain more of the canopy. One third to one half of the trees are removed, so a closed canopy with many gaps remains. These two types of timber harvest would be commercial, while some of the woodland treatments would be non-commercial (cut-and-leave).

The cool, shaded tributaries of Warwoman Creek provide trout habitat. To enhance that habitat, the project proposes to cut and drop trees into the streams, and to modify culverts for easier fish passage.

To supplement the early successional habitat (areas with few trees over 10 years old) provided by burning and timber harvest, 200-foot buffers around some wildlife openings would be harvested down to slightly less canopy than the woodland treatments (daylighting). Similar daylighting would occur along selected roads.

The EA contends the road daylighting will also address water quality issues by allowing additional sunlight to reach roads, which will speed drying, reduce maintenance costs, and reduce soil erosion. Two streams within the upper watershed are impaired for sediment, so protecting water quality should be a priority for this project. Sedimentation from roads has been identified as the primary source of impairment in the Chattooga River Watershed. Erosion and drainage along 11 miles of road would be addressed by adding/improving road drainage structures such as broad based dips. Additionally, two miles of road would be decommissioned including the steep, problematic section of the Tuckaluge Creek Road, while the Tuckaluge Spur Road would be extended by a mile.

Issues for consideration

The draft EA includes three alternatives: a "no action" alternative, the proposed action, and a modified proposed action that reflects comments the Forest Service received from ForestWatch and other groups in response to the scoping notice. At this point, we understand the "modified proposed action" to be the agency's preferred alternative. To address concerns over water quality, the modified proposed action: converts 330 acres of commercial cutting for woodland treatments to non-commercial; drops 281 acres of commercial harvest for oak regeneration and thinning in the difficult to access Henry Page area; and reduces road reconstruction for tractor-trailers from 11 miles to 2 miles. We welcome these alterations since

they will protect water quality by eliminating commercial harvest directly adjacent to impaired streams and reducing sediment input from roads. To address concerns over lack of early successional habitat, the new alternative adds 228 acres of commercial harvest woodland restoration treatments.

Several problematic elements remain in the modified proposal, including the scale of prescribed burning. The project would add 6,008 acres of prescribed burn units to the 2,681 acres already in the watershed. That addition would see 69% rather than 21% of National Forest land scheduled for burning every 3-5 or 5-10 years. The presence of fire-adapted species like table mountain pine in the watershed justifies some use of fire in the area, but we believe the Forest Service's biodiversity and habitat related goals could be achieved with a more limited burn program. We also understand that fire would be set only on ridges and south-facing slopes, and would be allowed to naturally die out as it reaches moister ravines and north slopes. Hence, the actual area burned will be somewhat less than indicated in the draft EA. The Forest Service may also reduce prescribed fire frequency once fire-intolerant species like red maple stop sprouting back, which has taken about four burns on other parts of the district. Problematically though, the EA lacks a clear commitment to these details. If the Forest Service is going to conduct burns in this area, the details of how the burns will be implemented needs to be clearly specified in the final EA and Decision.

The Forest Service has sited the non-commercial woodland treatments on south- and west-facing slopes and ridgetops, often with thin soils. These low productivity sites are the kind of areas that may have supported woodland in the past, and will likely benefit from the prescribed treatments. Conversely, some of the commercial woodland treatment stands in the Sandy Ford area occupy dissected and north-facing terrain and support white pines over 130 feet tall. Such productive sites are not appropriate for woodland, and would not sustain woodland without human intervention. The entire watershed is inappropriate for the oak regeneration treatments, because the treatment removes much more of the canopy than common natural disturbances that the ecosystem has adapted to. Additionally, all commercial timber sales in the project contain areas with slopes over 35%, and in 12 stands over half the area consists of slopes over 35%. Ground-based logging on such steep slopes puts stream and soil health at risk and should be avoided.

Non-native invasive species that are currently restricted to road sides and other disturbed areas, like princess tree *(Paulownia tomentosa)*, may disperse much more widely into the forest due to burns and road daylighting. The burns increase light levels and reduce competing vegetation giving the invasives an opportunity to establish. Similarly, daylighting provides higher light corridors that invasive species may exploit to invade otherwise intact forest. The draft EA provides information on precautions for invasive species that will be taken prior to and during any soil disturbing, logging, or road related activities. However, no information is provided on whether these areas will be monitored and treated after these activities occur. These activities combined with the large acreages of prescribed burning have the potential to increase the density of existing non-native invasive species and facilitate the spread of non-native species into new areas.

Finally, water quality and associated road issues are also problematic. Recreation demand makes total closure of the problematic Tuckaluge Creek Road an unrealistic option, and leaving the road as is only perpetuates longstanding sedimentation problems. The Forest Service's preferred alternative, which they consider the most sustainable, is to bypass the area by extending Tuckaluge Spur Road by one mile while decommissioning the steep section of the Tuckaluge Creek Road. Unfortunately, that option would impact the Windy Gap uninventoried roadless area and require construction of a new mile of road adjacent to Tuckaluge Creek. In our scoping comments, ForestWatch asked the Forest Service to consider paving the problematic section of Tuckaluge Creek Road, but the agency continues to contend that paving is not a viable option. We are glad the agency is taking steps to address water quality problems in this area, but question whether building a new mile of road is the best approach.

ForestWatch has conducted repeated site visits to the project area over the last several weeks and is working to further understand the agency's analysis. This project demands careful evaluation, because

(continued on page 9)

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Chattooga River Ranger District update

by Marie Dunkle : District Leader

In far northeast Georgia, January through March is usually a time of slow business activity and few tourists. These are months many of us spend relaxing with friends by the cabin fire or even taking a few weeks to visit tropical climates to forget the cold mountain winter. But this year winter activity on the Chattooga River Ranger District (CRRD) kept Georgia ForestWatch volunteers and staff hopping.

Upper Warwoman

In the recently-scoped Upper Warwoman Landscape Management Project, the U. S. Forest Service has proposed treatment of 8,689 acres of National Forest System lands over the next 10 years. We learned in early January that comments for the draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for this Project would be due in 30 days. The Forest Service had been working on this very detailed, 200+ pages draft EA for nearly two years, and proposed some major changes to the original project. Consequently, Georgia ForestWatch, the Southern Environmental Law Center, and the Chattooga Conservancy requested additional time to review the project. The Forest Service graciously extended the comment period by an additional 30 days, with comments now due on April 6th.

The project with its modified alternatives challenged many of us to wade through the draft EA plus 15 maps and numerous appendices describing the ecology, watershed assessment hydrology, rare species and pesticide risks related to the project. To access these documents, visit the Forest Service's website at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/UpperWarwomanProject. As of this writing, Georgia ForestWatch staff and some volunteer District Leaders are still preparing our comments with Southern Environmental Law Center attorneys. Numerous ForestWatch field trips have examined areas proposed for thinning, controlled burning, road relocation and mechanical creation of early successional habitat around wildlife openings. Boots on the ground allow us to verify conditions reported by the Forest Service and in some cases, to report that the field conditions do not support the Forest Service- stated objectives.

Photo credit: Marie Dunkle

Martins Creek Falls, Warwoman WMA

According to the Forest Service, implementation of the plans for Upper Warwoman may begin as early as November 2015 with preparation of sales packages for planned timber harvests. Controlled burns of designated areas in Upper Warwoman may start by January 2016. One to three thousand acres per year are scheduled to be burned. By May 2016 other planned activities may start, including forest thinning and designated work on forest roads.

Forest Land Sales

Proposed sale of land in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest got our attention this winter. There are 13 land parcels in the CRRD that could be put up for sale if the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Land Adjustment Act (H.R. 470) passes. Specific information on these parcels, including maps was posted by the Forest Service for public access at http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/conf/notices/?cid=STELPRD3829225. According to CRRD Ranger Ed Hunter, the land parcels were strategically selected in an effort to consolidate Forest Service lands, with proceeds from these sales used to purchase high priority lands that are adjacent to National Forest land from willing sellers. Some Georgia ForestWatch members had voiced concern about the sale of National Forest land that may contain rare or endangered species. According to Ranger Hunter, in the selection of parcels within the CRRD due consideration was given to areas where rare and endangered species had been identified.

Locust Stake

Locust Stake, a Forest Service trail system for off highway vehicles (OHV) located in the North Fork Broad River Watershed also falls within the CRRD. This area has become infamous for the extensive erosion and sedimentation caused by OHV activity. After two years of meetings, official comments, and numerous field visits concerning the Forest Service proposed Trail Maintenance and Reconstruction project, Locust Stake continues to receive Georgia ForestWatch staff and volunteer attention. But hopefully this will come to resolution in 2015 or 2016. The CRRD commissioned the Coweeta Hydrologic Laboratory to conduct a water quality study beginning this winter with selection of sampling points to monitor water quality. A draft EA for Locust Stake is due to be issued by the Forest Service in late April 2015. We are hopeful that the draft EA will provide the CRRD Ranger with the appropriate information required to take important steps needed to protect this area from further damage.

Stonewall Falls

Stonewall Falls is in the Tiger, GA, area of National Forest land and includes an extensive series of trails for mountain biking and hiking, as well as a scenic series of waterfalls and streams. Georgia ForestWatch volunteers have long been concerned with conditions in the immediate area near the Stonewall Falls and have repeatedly reported extensive trashing, sanitation issues, tree cutting, evidence of four-wheeling in the creek, and roadway runoff to the creek. This fragile area finally made it onto the CRRD radar this winter. Forest Service employees inspected the area, removed a significant amount

(continued on page 8)

Ted Doll: Tree hugger & instigator

by Audrey Moylan : Georgia ForestWatch Member

Many of you know Ted as a faithful and enthusiastic supporter of Georgia ForestWatch and its mission. But, did you know he also is a Dill Pickle? That's right, and playing the dulcimer in the ragtag, ragtime trio Dill Pickle is just one of many activities Ted engages in for fun and fundraising. When he's not making syncopated music, painting acrylic abstracts, or talking up ForestWatch to anyone who'll listen, he likely is immersed in one or two of his several environmental and community-centered projects. Then again, he and Lynda may be traveling, visiting family or foreign lands. To keep fit and able to sustain his perpetual motion days, Ted does a four-mile jog twice weekly around Sautee-Nacoochee, where he lives, appropriately, on Hemlock Lane.

Artist: Jack Cassady

Ted and Lynda, who also is generous with her time and talent, retired to their foothills valley cabin in 2005 following careers at Georgia Tech and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. With an undergraduate degree in Engineering Sciences and a Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology, Ted held joint appointments as Research Scientist and Professor of Psychology at State University of New York at Stony Brook for five years and at Tech for 25 years. By the time he retired, Ted had been active in environmental and community organizations for many years and had already become involved in the Sautee-Nacoochee Community Association (SNCA) and Georgia ForestWatch.

In Atlanta, his notable volunteer efforts included serving on the executive committee of the Atlanta Group of the Sierra Club during the 1980s, and leading week-long Sierra national backpack trips in western U.S.A. for 15 years. He was president of the congregation and board member of the Northwest Unitarian Congregation, Atlanta in early 1980s, and remains an active member of the local Unitarian congregation in Dahlonega. In Sautee-Nacoochee, working with the Environmental Group of SNCA in early 2000, he founded the Heritage Tree Program, which documents the dimensions and history of old trees in White County and neighboring areas.

The Heritage Tree Program was only the first of Ted's tree-related initiatives. Coordinating with the White County Chamber of Commerce and SNCA, he secured two grants from the Georgia Forestry Commission to plant landscape-size trees in public locations in Helen, Cleveland and Sautee-Nacoochee. With the help of fellow ForestWatcher, Jim Sullivan, he founded SNCA's *Save the Hemlocks Program* for which he received the Georgia Urban Forest Council's Award for Outstanding New Initiative. Highlights of this program included a community training lecture by Jim, and a demonstration of the soil injection method for controlling the hemlock woolly adelgid.

Ted's most recent start-up project is the Sautee-Nacoochee Conservation Initiative, a group that aims to preserve the historic nature of the Sautee and Nacoochee valleys. This follows two successful environmental preservation efforts on the local and regional level. He was active in the preparation and adoption of the widely opposed White County Mountain Protection Ordinance, which places restrictions on landscaping and tree removal on land with 25% or greater slope. Opponents included developers as well as many prominent White County residents. As a Board member and president of multi-state WaysSouth/Stop I-3, he played a major role in stopping the construction of this ill-conceived interstate highway that would connect Augusta, GA with Knoxville, TN. I-3 was proposed by a congressman from Augusta and had the backing of several federal agencies and local governments.

Add to those above Ted's leadership role in Georgia ForestWatch and conservation of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. How he became a member of ForestWatch is interesting, involving hemlocks in a roundabout way. ForestWatch had placed an ad in the Sierra Club newsletter soliciting donations for the woolly adelgid predator lab at the University of Georgia, and Ted sent a sizable check. Likely sensing a good catch, the late Joe Gatins, ForestWatch Board president at the time and a passionate recruiter, soon called and asked Ted to meet over dinner. Ted was hooked, of course, and ever since has been an ardent ForestWatch supporter and recruiter in his own right. He has been a Board member since 2006, was Board president 2009-2011, and as head of the personnel committee, spearheaded the rigorous process that brought Executive Director Mary Topa to ForestWatch. Outside the Board room, Ted regularly helps plan, sponsor, and participate in ForestWatch fundraising activities, including the annual Wild & Woolly spring celebration and Fall Retreat. Ted has been emcee, speaker, entertainer, and slide-show presenter at these functions, which generally take weeks to organize.

Ted also is a tireless promoter of Georgia ForestWatch. For instance, he takes the presentation he prepared from Jess Riddle's old-growth data and photos on the road to educate the public about the value of old-growth stands and ForestWatch's efforts to protect them. Notably, for several years this presentation was included in the Forestry segment of the Georgia Master Naturalist Program at Smithgall Woods State Park, thereby reaching an especially interested audience. But whether given to budding master naturalists, senior citizens, boy scouts, parishioners, or whomever, Ted's presentations are always well-received. He is a wonderful ambassador for ForestWatch. Ring him up if you know of a group he can speak to. ■

Chattooga River Ranger District update

(continued from page 6)

of trash and identified other problems, including road conditions that impact the water quality and evidence of unsavory activity in adjacent camping areas. The Forest Service plans to close off the road leading directly to the Stonewall Falls early this year, including installing a gate and berms to prevent vehicular traffic. Georgia ForestWatch volunteers have long requested Forest Service attention to the Stonewall Falls area and appreciate this action.

Chattooga River Sediment

In January of this year, Georgia ForestWatch members hiking near the junction of the Warwoman and Overflow Roads observed and reported heavy red sediment in the West Fork of the Chattooga River. We alerted the CRRD and asked them to identify the source. The Georgia Environmental Protection Division was also notified, but after some investigation it was determined that the source of sediment was not in Georgia, but North Carolina. Forest Service activity was ruled out as the problem, and private landowner activity in North Carolina is the suspected source of sediment. Georgia ForestWatch volunteers observed clear waters on the West Fork several weeks later; however, the investigation continues, and we will continue to monitor these waters.

Trails Maintenance Project

In February we learned that the CRRD is considering a district-wide Trail Maintenance Project to relocate sections of some trails to a more sustainable and maintainable grade. Proposed trail projects are located on National Forest System lands in Habersham, Rabun, and Stephens Counties and would address both safety and resource concerns. Trails slated for work include portions of the Bartram Trail, Frady Branch Loop/Frady Branch, Panther Creek, Three Forks Trail access to Holcombe Creek, Willis Knob near Earls Ford Crossing, and Sourwood and Lake Russell Trails. The Forest Service was advised by the volunteer Co-Trails group on selection of trails for repair, and much of the work may be performed by volunteers with the Forest Service providing equipment and supplies.

As we rush into 2015, there will be plenty of other activities on the CRRD. Here are a few additional Forest Service priorities and plans we will be keeping a Georgia "ForestWatchful" eye on.

Road soil and water projects

In addition to the Stonewall Falls area mentioned above, the Charlie's Creek and Glore Road areas are slated by the CRRD to receive repairs. Barriers will be erected to prevent jeep activity in these areas that has damaged soil and impacted water quality.

Similar actions are being taken in the Lake Russell area at Farmers Bottom where vehicle access has already been prevented.

Prescribed Fires

The year 2015 began with burns at Browns Bottom performed by the Forest Service with assistance from the State of Georgia. Community complaints were received because Lake Russell Wildlife Management Area was closed to the public during the burn and for four days following. Additional burns are planned in other areas of the CRRD and will be scheduled contingent on weather conditions according to the Ranger's office.

Timber Sales

In 2014 Forest Service timber sales were accomplished for the following CRRD areas and these areas will be harvested this year: Cliff Creek, Bynum Branch and Lee Mountain. In 2015, 350 acres are to be offered for new timber sales in the CRRD.

Herbicide treatments

The Forest Service will continue spot treatments of pines and some undesirable hardwoods on the CRRD. The Lake Russell area is slated to receive herbicide treatment to encourage native coneflower and Georgia aster to move further back into the woods, thus expanding its local distribution. The majority of their herbicide treatments will be focused on controlling non-native invasive species. ■

A fond farewell to Sherri Richardson

Sherri Richardson has been an invaluable asset to Georgia ForestWatch over the past couple of years. She has accomplished much in her position as Bookkeeper/Office Manager, and we are proud to acknowledge her contributions to our organization as we wish her the fondest of farewells.

Sherri was incredibly instrumental in moving our entire organization from Ellijay to Dahlonega. We had to move 28+ years of history, so there was a lot to move both physically and virtually. Sherri made the process seamless, helping us put our best foot forward into our new community.

Sherri has been a great ambassador for ForestWatch, and an energizer-bunny when it came to organizing our fall retreats. Her strong background in volunteer service speaks to her humility, as she always went above and beyond with her work, never leaving any stone unturned and always reluctant to receive a compliment. She made the changing of the guard a smooth transition while she came in one day a week to help train our new Bookkeeper/Office Manager Lyn Hopper. She has shared her tricks of the trade to make Lyn's introduction seamless.

We wish Sherri the very best in all of her future endeavors and appreciate everything she's done for ForestWatch over the past couple of years. We will miss you, Sherri – the forests and it's "watchers" thank you for all that you've done!

Upper Warwoman Landscape Management Project

(continued from page 5)

it confronts complex issues (for example, road-related water quality issues) and proposes treatments with limited track records in the southern Appalachians (woodland restoration and large-scale burning). We will continue working to ensure this area receives the protections it deserves.

ForestWatch encourages our members to comment on this project. Please note that under the new Pre-Decisional Objection Regulations, only persons who respond during this comment period are eligible to file an objection when the Forest Service releases a draft decision and final EA. Written comments are due on April 6, 2015, and should be sent to: District Ranger Ed Hunter, Chattooga River Ranger District, 9975 Highway 441 South, Lakemont, GA 30522. You may also submit your comments electronically to Ranger Hunter at comments-chattoogariver@fs.fed.us with the subject line "Draft Environmental Assessment Upper Warwoman Landscape Management Project." To preserve objection eligibility, you must provide your name, address, and the title of the proposed activity with your comments. ■

References

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Wild & Woolly
FOREST FESTIVAL

Georgia ForestWatch will be hosting its 11th Wild & Woolly Forest Festival at the

BULL MOUNTAIN LODGE

135 Troutman Trace
Dahlonega, GA 30533
on

Mark Your Calendars!

Saturday, May 2nd, 2015
3 pm until 7 pm

Richard Judy, Board president of the Len Foote Hike Inn, will be doing a book signing and a reading from his latest novel *THRU: An Appalachian Trail Love Story*

Other activities include a pre-festival hike led by Jess Riddle and Ben Cash, a native plant sale, educational tables, raffles, silent auction, live music and food.

Order tickets now & get advance ticket prices!

Call 706-867-0051

$20 on or before April 24th; $30 after
$10 for students; children 12 and under free

Be sure to make plans to attend!

District Offices of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests

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Atlanta, GA 30309
404-347-4177

Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture, USDA
James L. Whitten Bldg.
1400 Independence Ave., SW
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The Georgia ForestWatch Directors, Advisors, District Leaders and Staff want to thank you for your generosity and support for protecting our national forests in Georgia. This important work could not be accomplished without each and every one of you.

(If you have made a $100+ donation during 2014 and your name is not listed, please accept our apology and call us so we can correct our records. Thank you!)

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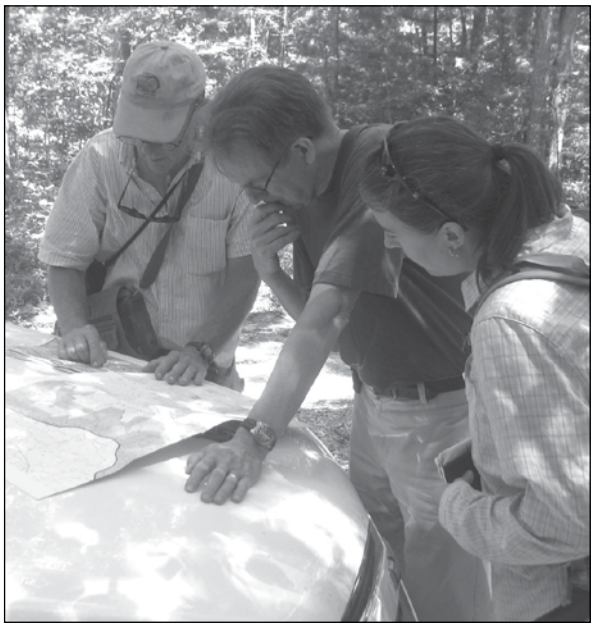

From left: David Govus, Jim Walker and Sarah Francisco in the Coopers Creek Watershed Project area

From left: Ben Cash, Jim Walker and Patrick Hunter at Brawley Mountain

Jack & Beckie Hilton
Robin & Janet Hitner
Joni House
Shepherd & Sarah Howell
Steven Hurder
Brock & Patty Hutchins
Katie Hutchison
Mitchell Jacoby
Tom James
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Julia Serences
Nancy Sharp
Lanier Shelnutt
Bill & Laura Slaugenhop
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Marie Dunkle and Laurence Holden at Stekoa Creek Park celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Chattooga River's Wild & Scenic designation

Randolph Smith
Michelle Smith
Helen Stacey
Dennis & Jan Stansell
Ted & Marilyn Stapleton
Kasey Sturm & Quentin Mostoller
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Marie Dunkle
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Robin Hitner
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And Our Event Volunteers!

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