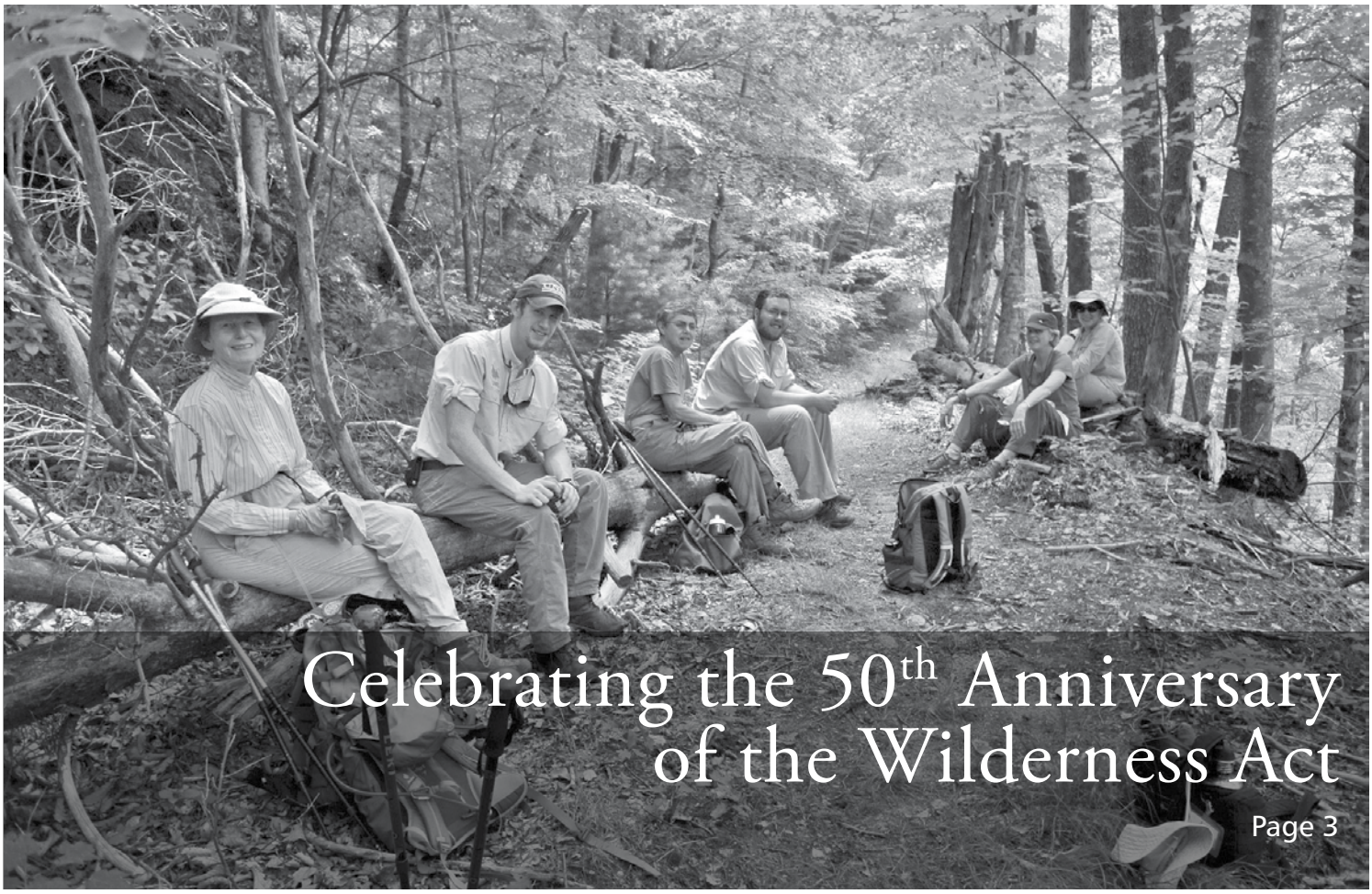
Forest News

Georgia ForestWatch Quarterly Newsletter Fall 2014



Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act

Page 3

Inside This Issue

From the Director.....2

For 50th Anniversary of Wilderness, A Season of Stewardship on the Chattahoochee.....3

You Can Snorkel in the North Georgia Mountains?.....4

Book Review: Teaching the Trees – Lessons from the Forest.....5

Inspiring Stewardship – Wilderness 50th Event.....7

Upper West Armuchee Creek Watershed Project.....8

Outreach: It's Becoming a Movement.....10

From the Director

Celebrating wild places

Mary Topa
Executive Director

2014 has been an important anniversary year for the conservation of wild places, both regionally and nationally. For 40 years the Chattooga River has reigned as the crown jewel of the Wild and Scenic Rivers system in the Southeast. 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. Georgia ForestWatch celebrated its 40th anniversary with the Chattooga Conservancy on June 21st at the Stekoa Creek Park in Clayton, Georgia.

Stekoa Creek is a major polluted tributary feeding the Chattooga River, and has been the single greatest threat to the Chattooga's water quality for over 30 years. Indeed, in the time since the river received its Wild & Scenic designation, Stekoa Creek's water quality has declined The Chattooga Conservancy has made the neglected issue of improving water quality in Stekoa Creek one of their top priorities. We chose the venue at Stekoa Creek Park to highlight the ongoing community effort that is helping to clean up this polluted creek, and to emphasize the importance of stewardship in helping keep Wild & Scenic Rivers pristine.

September 3rd marked the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. The Wilderness Act is considered one of America's greatest conservation achievements. Former Wilderness Society Executive Director Howard Zahniser is often called the "Father of the Wilderness Act", and he began drafting the Wilderness Act bill in 1955. Bills based on Zahniser's draft were introduced in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives in 1956. After eight years, 18 hearings, and 66 revisions of the bill, the Wilderness Act was passed; unfortunately, Howard Zahniser did not live to see the momentous signing of the Wilderness Act on September 3, 1964. But his vision helped create the National Wilderness Preservation System which offers the highest level of government protection to the wildest of our wild lands; and it has grown to include more than 109 million acres of protected Wilderness areas for all Americans to enjoy.

For the last half-century, these places of "primeval character" have been maintained to preserve their "natural conditions." But keeping these places wild and pristine in the face of climate change, increased recreational use and reduced federal resources available for maintaining Wilderness (and other public lands), is a present-day challenge that will require a community of stewards – land managers, conservation leaders, scientists, recreational users, volunteers, funders, etc. – to work together. The Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) program is a wonderful example of a conservation organization working in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service to not only help solve some of these challenges, but inspire stewardship in the next generation of conservationists.

Sponsored by The Wilderness Society, SAWS volunteers help maintain trails in designated Wilderness Areas, keeping them open and accessible to visitors. Georgia ForestWatch has had the pleasure of working with two SAWS Rangers this past summer, Charlie Smillie and Nathan Mynatt, who cover the Blue Ridge and Chattooga River Ranger Districts. You can learn more about this wonderful stewardship program on page 3.

Georgia ForestWatch celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act with the Forest Service, multiple conservation partners, trail maintainer groups and others on September 6th at Hancock Park in Dahlonega. Our theme for the event was "Inspiring Stewardship", and how we all must be involved in keeping these places wild and pristine for future generations. Personally, I was inspired by the various groups and people who volunteer their time and resources to help keep these places we love wild. It indeed takes a village. I'd like to thank our members for being a part of this village and helping protect these special places.

Mary A. Topa

For 50th anniversary of Wilderness, a season of stewardship on the Chattahoochee

by Charlie Smillie : SAWS Ranger

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, one of the most important conservation measures in our nation's history. Georgia ForestWatch commemorated this milestone at the recent Fall Retreat, with a Celebrating Wilderness theme. But the crucial protection Wilderness provides in the forests of Georgia has been in the spotlight all year long.

As part of a 10-year effort to improve how Wilderness is managed, this spring, the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest (CONF) partnered with Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) – currently a program of The Wilderness Society. As a result of that partnership, Nathan Mynatt and I were hired for a 6-month stint as Wilderness Rangers on the Blue Ridge and Chattooga River Ranger Districts. We're privileged and honored to have spent the last 5 months patrolling Blood Mountain, Raven Cliffs, Mark Trail, Tray Mountain, Brasstown, and Rich Mountain Wilderness.

The primary goals of our season of Wilderness Rangering are two-fold. First, we outlaid (and are now implementing) a new protocol on the CONF for monitoring Opportunities for Solitude. Essentially, we count how many people we come across while using different sections of trails. This project is directly linked to a new effort by all the federal land management agencies to make the upkeep of "wilderness character" (as described by the Act) more rigorous and concrete. By the time our season ends, the Forest Service will have hard data on the books – a baseline for

Photo credit: Stephanie Campbell

Nathan Mynatt

Photo credit: Charlie Smillie

Charlie Smillie

(continued on page 9)

Contact Information
Georgia ForestWatch

www.gafw.org

81 Crown Mountain Place, Building C, Suite 200
Dahlonega, GA 30533
706-867-0051

Georgia ForestWatch is a 501(c)3
Nonprofit educational corporation.

Forest News edited by Laura Stachler and Mary Topa

Layout by Eleanor Thompson.

STAFF
Mary Topa, Executive Director
Sherri Richardson, Office Manager
Laura Stachler, Outreach Coordinator

BOARD MEMBERS
Kasey Sturm, President
Brian Wills, Secretary
Sally Colkett, Treasurer
Laurie Blackmore
Tom Crawford
James Dawson
Ted Doll
David Govus
Robin Hitner
Michael Wall

ADVISORS
Butch Clay
Sarah Francisco
Peg Griffith
Bob Kibler
Charles Seabrook
James Sullivan

GEORGIA FORESTWATCH DISTRICT LEADERS

Chattooga River Ranger District
Marie Dunkle 770-335-0967
(Rabun, Towns and White Counties)
Wally Warren 706-754-0150
Ben Cash 706-968-3841
(Habersham, Stephens & White counties)

Blue Ridge Ranger District
Dennis Stansell 706-747-5892
(Dawson, Union, Lumpkin & Towns counties)
Tom & Sally Colkett 770-316-7609
(Dawson & Lumpkin counties)
Jim Walker 706-273-3465
(Fannin, Gilmer, Lumpkin & Union counties

Oconee National Forest
JP Schmidt 706-613-8483
Caleb Walker 706-248-4910
(Greene, Jasper, Jones, Monroe, Morgan, Oconee, Oglethorpe & Putnam counties)
Larry Winslett 404-375-8405
(Greene, Jasper, Jones, Morgan, Oconee, Oglethorpe & Putnam counties)

Conasauga Ranger District
Robin Hitner 678-294-3256
(Chattooga, Gordon, Murray, Floyd, Walker & Whitfield counties)
David Govus 706-276-2512
(Fannin & Gilmer counties)

Cover photo: SAWS Rangers with Wagon Train Trail volunteers
Cover photo credit: Jay Noe

You can snorkel in the north Georgia mountains?

by Laura Stachler : Outreach Coordinator

This question was one that I heard more than a few times this summer. Yes, believe it or not, there is pristine snorkeling in the north Georgia mountains. So pristine in fact, that the native fish diversity in the Conasauga River (though only 93 miles long) consists of over 76 species of extravagantly colored fishes, more than the Columbia and Colorado Rivers combined (a total of 2,693 miles)!

I'm not sure who first discovered this amazing display of aquatic biodiversity in the heart of the Cohutta Wilderness, but I'm sure glad they did. This ForestWatch outing has made a lasting impression on me, and on many other participants like Sally Brumbill, who was making the trip out for a second time. Making a tradition out of this trip may very well be something I incorporate into my summers in the future as well.

Initially, we had only intended on scheduling one snorkel outing for summer 2014, but that quickly proved it wouldn't suffice. The demand was so high that we ended up scheduling an additional trip for a back-to-back weekend of freshwater fun. After raiding the local Subway in Cisco, GA, the carpool caravans made their way down the seemingly endless Forest Service road through the Cohuttas until finally landing near the river where we met up with our Forest Service guides, spotting deer, a snake, and a turkey along the way.

Let me tell you, if you have ever put on a wetsuit in less than 20 minutes, I applaud you with all that I am. Not only was this ForestWatch outing leader the last one to get suited up, but I succeeded in putting on my newly-donned blubber suit inside-out. Yes, I left it that way. Luckily my husband had also put his on inside-out so I wasn't alone (no, not by accident) – we're two of a kind.

The Forest Service guides introduced us to the river, the Conasauga Watershed (the river and the area of land that drains into the river), and to all of the different fishes we might spot along our float. The

Photo credit: David Clark

Karen Holt and David Clark pause for an underwater photo.

Photo credit: David Clark

section that we snorkeled had different depths, all housing different species that had adapted to the specific conditions of those depths. Time flew - what looked like just another mountain river from above was astounding when experienced from below!

"I see a turtle!" *(chokes, coughs, laughs and chokes again)* – I was still getting used to the whole talking-under-water-with-a-snorkel-in-my-mouth process. In the deeper areas we'd see drum, bass and bream, and on both trips saw a river cooter the size of your Grandmother's largest serving platter. It was incredible how large the fish were in the deeper areas, some pushing six pounds. Surprisingly, the larger fish were more skittish than the little ones (what aquatic biologists call darters and shiners) that would let us swim right up to them and almost let us reach out and touch them. Who knew summer learning was so much fun?

As we floated our way up towards shallower water where the riffles were (by the way, my not-so-favorite blubber suit was great for buoyancy), we felt the current getting slightly stronger and had more bubbles rushing by our masks as we identified stonerollers (whose ingenuity in securing a day's meal was more than impressive), Alabama shiners, blueside darters, and everyone's favorite, the holiday darter. The transition areas between the deeper and shallower pools had multiple species of sunfish, and was where I spotted my personal favorite, the hogsucker. Know that garden hose laying in your yard out back? Shrink it down in size and that's what the mouth of a hogsucker looks like.

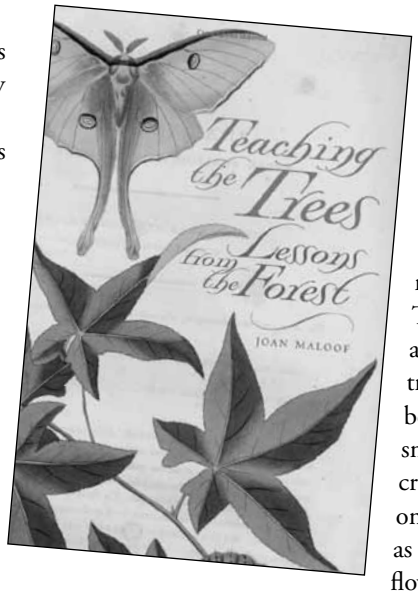
I'd never seen participants eat their lunch so quickly on an outing. Everyone was so eager to get back in the river. When 2:00 pm rolled around, none of us wanted to leave, we all reluctantly (yes, even myself) peeled off those wetsuits and got into our dry clothes. Already ravenous again, we all spoke of what we were having for dinner that night as we made our way back out to our vehicles, exhausted from a day on the water. We thanked the knowledgeable and helpful Forest Service guides and piled into our cars to make the long journey home, a trip well worth the drive. ■

Book Review:
Teaching the Trees: Lessons from the Forest

A review by Tom Colkett

Teaching the Trees: Lessons from the Forest, by Joan Maloof
The University of Georgia Press, Athens and London.

Joan Maloof has crafted a short and easily readable book for the non-scientist introducing us to the fascinating ecology of trees. There are many more interactions between organisms in, on and around the trees than we know. These interactions are often tiny and occur so slowly that we, in our normal scurry about the planet, are unlikely ever to notice; but they are all important interactions and reflect the incredible interdependence and balance underlying life on the planet Earth.



Many of the chapters are named for a particular type of tree, and each lists some properties of the tree that you probably didn't know. Here are a couple examples: black locust trees *(Robinia pseudoacacia)* have "extra-floral nectaries". They produce nectar outside the flowers, in small ducts near the leaves. This nectar is not to attract pollinators, but to encourage ants to populate the trees. And the ants return the favor by acting as tree cleaners, attacking and eating other insects that would tend to eat the leaves! Also, sweet gum trees *(Liquidambar styraciflua)* have a pleasing star-shaped leaf, producing "fat stars" in the spring and "skinny stars" later in the summer. The theory is that these later-growing "skinny stars" or leaves, often found at the end of branches, have the majority of their cells closer to the main, water supplying veins than a "fat star", and thus, are less likely to dry out during a summer drought. However, the science on this isn't complete and we still have more to learn.

The book is at its best when the author begins to "go deeper" and describes complex interactions that are very unlikely to be detected by any other than the most patient and detailed observer. Here's an example: The tway-blade orchid *(Listera australis)* survives in a very complicated interaction in the shade of beech trees *(Fagus grandifolia)*. On the ground, as the fallen beech leaves are being broken down by a fungus, a small gnat lays its eggs in the organic matter being created in this process. As the eggs hatch the larvae feed on the fungus. If all goes well, the larvae pupate, emerge as gnats and fly up to pollinate the tway-blade orchid flowers which are much too small to attract bees. Timing is everything and the orchid must be in bloom at the right time or it will miss the pollinators. If all goes well, the plant will form tiny seeds. These seeds contain no nourishment to attract the normal seed eaters and so they must depend on the interaction with another type of fungus on the ground that can crack open the

(continued on page 6)

U.S. Senate

Senator Saxby Chambliss
U.S. Senate, 416 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-3521
Fax: 202-224-0103
E-mail: www.chambliss.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?P=Email
-or-
Regional Representative Darren Kendall
c/o Sen. Saxby Chambliss
100 Galleria Parkway, Suite 1340
Atlanta, Georgia 30339
770-763-9090
Fax: 770-226-8633
E-mail: darren_kendall@chambliss.senate.gov

Senator Johnny Isakson
U.S. Senate, 120 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-3643
Fax: 202-228-0724
E-mail: www.isakson.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/email-me
-or-
Field Representative Denise Clopton
c/o Sen. Johnny Isakson
One Overton Park
3625 Cumberland Blvd., Suite 970
Atlanta, Georgia 30339
770-661-0999
Fax: 770-661-0768
E-mail: denise_clopton@isakson.senate.gov

U.S. House of Representatives

Representative Paul Broun
3706 Atlanta Hwy, Ste. 2
Athens, GA 30606
Phone: 706-549-9588
Fax: 706-549-9590
https://broun.house.gov/forms/writeyourrep/?zip5=30606&zip4

Representative Austin Scott
127-B N. Central Ave.
Tifton, GA 31794
Phone: 229-396-5175
Fax: 229-396-5179
https://forms.house.gov/htbin/formproc_za/austinscott/webforms/zipauthen.txt&form=/austinscott/webforms/contact-form.shtml

Representative Tom Graves
702 South Thornton Ave.
Dalton, GA 30720
Phone: 706-226-5320
Fax: 706-278-0840
E-mail via web form: https://tomgraves.house.gov/contact/email-me.shtml

Representative Doug Collins
111 Green St. SE
Gainesville, GA 30501
Phone: 770-297-3388
Fax: 770-297-3390
Email via web form: https://dougcollins.house.gov/email-me

Book Review: Teaching the Trees

(continued from page 5)

seed. If successful, the seed will feed on the moisture and nutrients of the fungus and begin to form an embryo for another adult plant. Here the author adds, "There are probably connections we don't yet understand between the fungus that enables the orchid seeds to germinate, the fungus that lives on fallen beech leaves, and the fungus that feeds the gnat larvae." Another area worthy of additional study!

Another revelation serves to answer my question as to why black locust trees seem to be suffering when I see them in the forest. The locust long-horned wood-borer *(Megacyllene robiniae)* is most often found on goldenrod flowers eating the pollen and mating. After mating takes place, the female flies to a locust tree and deposits her eggs in the bark. When the eggs hatch, the larvae begin chewing their way into the wood of the tree. They will "hibernate" there until warmer weather, and then feed on the wood until fall when they pupate into adult form. As adults, they fly off to the local goldenrod "singles bar" to feed and mate, completing the cycle. The chewing process itself does not harm the tree; however, the openings left in the locust tree allow the spore from a particular fungus to enter and begin feeding on the tree and eventually rotting the roots. As a result, most black locust trees are less than a hundred years old. "Their lifespan roughly matches our own."

Although the book is for the most part simply written, there is enough detail about complicated interactions as listed above, that the reader comes away with a deeper sense of and appreciation for the interconnectedness of things. I found it awe inspiring. Maloof comments: "Biochemists have worked out the intricate pathways of photosynthesis and aerobic respiration, and have even mapped the human genetic code: but the field we call ecology, the connections between organisms and their environment, is a huge canvas of the unknown." And later: "Many nonscientists assume that we already know these facts about most plants but the truth is that these details are unknown for the majority of non-crop plant species."

Maloof also philosophizes that our "...very time-style is what has divorced us from ecological time – the time we most need to be in if we are to cure the earth's ills and reconnect with other species and future generations of humans." The text of the book is interspersed with some beautiful related poetic conceptions, especially from Rainer Maria Rilke, and ends with this very appropriate selection from "The Ninth Elegy":

"...because everything here is so much, and everything
seems to need us in this fleeting world, and
strangely speaks to us. Us, the most fleeting. Once
for everything, only once. Once and no more. And we, too,
only once. Never again. But to have been here,
this once, if only this once:
to have been of the earth seems irrevocable."

I hope you will buy and read this book and enjoy it as much as I did. Dr. Joan Maloof teaches biology and environmental studies at Salisbury University in Salisbury, Maryland. She is also the founder of The Old-Growth Forest Network dedicated to preserve, protect and promote the country's few remaining stands of old-growth forest (very similar to the focus of Georgia ForestWatch). You can find her online at http://www.oldgrowthforest.net. ■

District Offices of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests

Ranger, Jeff Gardner
USFS Conasauga Ranger District
3941 Highway 76 • Chatsworth, GA 30705
jeffgardner@fs.fed.us
706-695-6736

Ranger, Andrew Baker
USFS Blue Ridge Ranger District
1181 Highway 515
P.O. Box 9 • Blairsville, GA 30512
albaker@fs.fed.us
706-745-6928

Ranger, Edward Hunter
USFS Chattooga River Ranger District
9975 Highway 441 South
Lakemont, GA 30552
ehunter@fs.fed.us
706-754-6221

Ranger, Thomas Dozier
USFS Oconee National Forest
1199 Madison Road
Eatonton, GA 31024
706-485-7110

Forest Service Contacts

Betty Jewett – Forest Supervisor
USDA Forest Service
Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests
1755 Cleveland Highway
Gainesville, GA 30501
bamathews@fs.fed.us
770-297-3000

Elizabeth (Liz) Agpaoa – Regional Forester
USDA Forest Service – Region 8
1720 Peachtree St. NE
Atlanta, GA 30309
404-347-4177

Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture, USDA
James L. Whitten Bldg.
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Inspiring stewardship – Wilderness 50th event

by Judy Toppins : Forest Service Staff Officer

Hundreds of people joined the U.S. Forest Service and many valued partners to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act with a celebration in downtown Dahlonega on September 6, 2014. The event, titled "Inspiring Stewardship," took place in Hancock Park and included thought-provoking speakers, wilderness experts, vendors, educational exhibits, traditional skills demonstrations, live music and activities for kids. The keynote speaker for the event was Dale Bosworth, who served as Chief of the U.S. Forest Service from 2001 to 2007.

On September 3, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Wilderness Act, establishing the National Wilderness Preservation System. As a result of Americans' support for wilderness over the past 50 years, Congress has added more than 100 million acres to this unique land preservation system. The 1964 Wilderness Act defines "Wilderness" as areas where the earth and its communities of life are left unchanged by people, where the primary forces of nature are in control, and where people themselves are visitors who do not remain.

"The 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act provides us all with an opportunity to celebrate the importance of its continued preservation for future generations," said Betty Jewett, Forest Supervisor of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. "Wilderness benefits everyone, whether you visit a wilderness or simply appreciate the continued existence of areas where the Earth and its community of life are not controlled by humans."

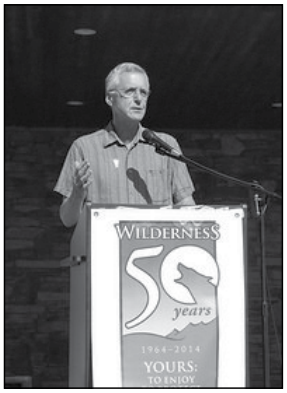


Photo credit: Judy Toppins

Dale Bosworth, 15th Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, presents the keynote speech.

Georgia has all or portions of 14 Wilderness Areas, ranging from northern mountains to the coast. The Chattahoochee National Forest is home to 10 of these, covering more than 117,000 acres. These include the Cohutta, Mark Trail, Brasstown, Southern Nantahala, Tray Mountain, Rich Mountain, Raven Cliffs, Blood Mountain, Ellicott Rock and Big Frog Wilderness Areas.

Wilderness provides opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, including hiking, horseback riding, fishing, hunting, photography, and off-trail exploration.

"Among many benefits, wilderness gives us time to reflect and find solitude and solace to offset the busy world around us, and provides clean water and air, habitat for animals, and healthy landscapes for rare and endangered species to thrive," said Jewett. "Protecting these special places requires active stewardship and responsible use. Wilderness is everyone's to share and enjoy."

Protect wilderness by learning more at www.wilderness.net and being a responsible visitor using Leave No Trace ethics at www.LNT.org. For more information on how to get involved with volunteer efforts on the national forest, contact the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests office at (770) 297-3000 or visit the website at www.fs.usda.gov/conf. Smartphone and tablet users can also view news and events, including volunteer opportunities, by using the forest's free mobile app. Download the app by visiting www.fs.usda.gov/goto/mobile-app. ■

Judy Toppins is the Forest Service Staff Officer for Public Affairs, GIS and Environmental Coordination at the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests in Gainesville.

Welcome New Members!

David Clark
Rick & Susan Dawsey
Anne Hughes
Mary & Ronald Ibarra
Mimi LeMay
Dee & Teresa LeMay
Scott Looper
Thomas MacMillan
Iris Mead
Samuel & Sheilia Moss
Phyllis Robinson
Maria Rodeghiero
Pamela Womack

Upper West Armuchee Creek Watershed Project

by Jim Walker : District Leader

The Conasauga District of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests is proposing an extensive project in and around the Upper West Armuchee Creek Watershed, calling it the UWAC Project, which they helpfully tell us is pronounced yū-wăk. The project is in the Ridge and Valley Province, mostly atop Taylor Ridge, and is primarily intended to restore shortleaf pine (179 acres), longleaf pine (304 acres), and oak (104 acres), and also to promote forest health by commercially thinning overstocked pine plantations (1,074 acres). While these are commendable goals, Georgia ForestWatch does have certain misgivings about their feasibility and implementation.

It is very difficult to get a forest to do what you want it to, rather than what it wants to do. In the case of UWAC, the attempt to restore shortleaf, longleaf and oak involves massive, and in some cases repeated, use of herbicides and burning of up to 3,469 acres on a 3–7 year return interval. As usual, the burn plan does not include any consideration of CO_2 emissions and climate change, much less the possible danger of spreading herbicide residues in the smoke of prescribed burns.

Previous efforts to restore longleaf pine in the area have been mixed at best. In a recent survey of what was supposed to be an intermediate successful longleaf restoration stand, Georgia ForestWatch did find some longleaf saplings, no more than three feet high, hiding in a sea of hardwood stump sprouts. Restoration of shortleaf and oak stands

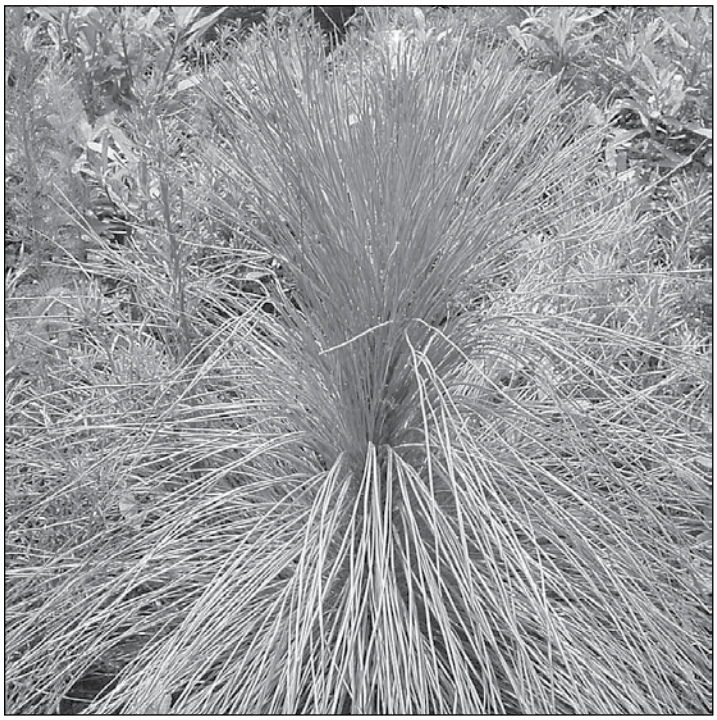
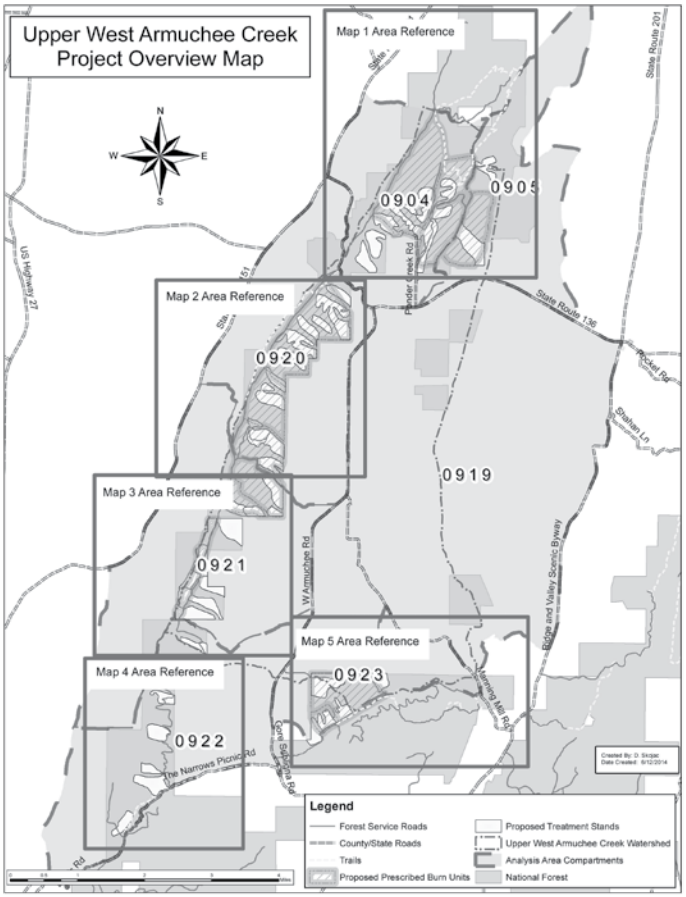


Photo credit: Martin Cipollini

Grass stage of longleaf pine



seems only slightly less problematic, but there is no difficulty, of course, in thinning overstocked pines. In some of the thinned stands, shortleaf pine seedlings will be planted under the remaining overstory.

The project also includes 115 acres of woodland "restoration". While the Ridge and Valley Province may be a somewhat more suitable location for woodland than the Appalachian Mountains, we do not believe that woodland ever occurred naturally in the proposed area. It will be interesting to see if intensive efforts with handtools and herbicide to subdue the vegetation remaining after removal of most of the overstory can succeed here.

All this logging activity will require construction of approximately 10.4 miles of temporary roads and reconstruction and maintenance of 20.2 miles of existing roads. It is important to point out that the Armuchee region is already the most heavily roaded area of the Chattahoochee National Forest.

(continued on page 11)

A Season of Stewardship on the Chattahoochee

(continued from page 3)

what kind of solitude the Wilderness Areas on the Chattahoochee provide. Though the process is time-consuming, the protocol and the information we've gathered will help the US Forest Service make future decisions on Wilderness trails. For example, areas that experience heavy use could see stronger protection, and big changes to recreational use in new areas could be implemented and managed adaptively.

Our second mission is to broadly advance the National Forest's Wilderness Education program. From the Atlanta metro-area to the Appalachian Trail shelter in Tray Mountain, we've been talking to as many people as we can about Leave No Trace ethics, the benefits of the Wilderness resource, and the rules and regulations put in place to protect wilderness character. This aspect of our work is harder to quantify. However, talking to folks about Wilderness and helping empower them to protect it is usually the best part of our job.

Another highlight came at the end of June, when we partnered up with Georgia ForestWatch and the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club to tackle a unique clean-up project on the Whitley Gap trail in Raven Cliffs Wilderness. Volunteer Section Maintainer Dayton Miller noticed a particularly large fire scar on top of Wildcat Mountain about the same time Nathan and I were just starting our season. We noticed it as well, not only because it was huge, but because it contained an astonishing number of rusty nails.

Shortly after we made this discovery a student from the University of North Georgia informed us that groups from the college, nearby in Dahlonega, often used the site for huge gatherings. Upwards of 80 people, apparently, would gather on the bald outcrop. The nails came from old wooden pallets, handed up fireline style for almost a full mile. With a few volunteers, we helped Dayton take care of a little routine maintenance along the trail, and using a shop magnet and 5-gallon buckets, removed over 180 pounds of nails from the

Photo credit: Jack Rogers

Logan Turnpike Trail crew

Photo credit: Charlie Smillie

The Appalachian Trail in Raven Cliffs Wilderness

Wilderness. We hope to speak to groups on the UNG campus this fall about Leave No Trace and what they can do to help keep Wilderness pristine.

In between all that, Nathan and I have picked up a truckload of trash, hiked countless miles, laid eyes on a few black bears, snacked on a few blueberries, and generally enjoyed the myriad blessings that life as Wilderness Ranger bestows upon us. Wilderness Areas are critically important refuges for wildlife and unhindered natural communities, but also serve as critical refuges for two-legged creatures. Nathan and I know ourselves to be incredibly lucky to work every day in the untrammeled beauty of Georgia's Wilderness.

We've also been lucky to have Georgia ForestWatch as friends. A special thanks to Mary, Laura, and Sherri in the Georgia ForestWatch office for their support and hospitality. They welcomed us with open arms and an *ad hoc* empty-conference-room office when we had just arrived in Georgia, knowing little about the area and less about the people. We owe a great deal of the success of our time here thus far to the conservation community of Georgia. Hopefully we can thank you in person out on the trail soon! ■

Outreach: It's becoming a movement

by Laura Stachler : Outreach Coordinator

How can we protect our national forests if no one is aware that they have a say in what happens to these public lands? That's where Georgia ForestWatch outreach comes in. The United States Census Bureau estimates that the 2013 population for the state of Georgia was upwards of 9.9 million. Out of those 9.9 million, a little over 600 are active members of Georgia ForestWatch. If we want our forests here for future generations to enjoy, the time to reach out is now.

Even though our membership is modest, it spans nationwide. More and more people are learning about what we do, and want to support our organization. I received a call over the summer from Russ Plaeger, Program Director at BARK, a forest watch organization in Portland, OR. News about Georgia ForestWatch had traveled 2,600 miles. He wanted to know more about how we deal with issues in the forest as well as more information about the CoTrails program we helped create that has already gained national recognition. He was complimentary of our work, could relate to our struggles and let me know they were only a phone call away if we ever needed anything – I gratefully reciprocated.

Since our transplant to Dahlonega, ForestWatch has begun to reach out to the community. We have joined the Dahlonega-Lumpkin County Chamber & Visitors Bureau and I am now serving as a Chamber Ambassador which enables us to have a broader reach into the community. We have gained new members and outing participants from this active membership, and have been invited to interview with THUNDER 104.3FM which reaches over 45,000 listeners at any given moment with a projected daily audience of 250,000 from all over north Georgia. In addition, we were recently chosen to be the non-profit beneficiary of the raffle proceeds from the Chamber "Business After Hours" membership gathering hosted by the Dahlonega Arts Council at the historic Olde Cannery Arts Center in downtown Dahlonega.

Being situated in Dahlonega has also brought two more influential ForestWatchers through our doors. Charlie Smillie and Nathan Mynatt, Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS), have collaborated with us over the past few months in organizing partnership workdays, helping plan the "Inspiring Stewardship" Wilderness event sponsored by the Forest Service, contributing to the current edition of *Forest News*, and will be leading a hike with us before winter sets in. We are always glad to see them when they visit the office to catch up on their electronic correspondence. They are stationed out in the Chestatee Wildlife Management Area on Dicks Creek just west

Photo credit: Dahlonega–Lumpkin County Chamber & Visitors Bureau

Georgia ForestWatch ribbon cutting ceremony on the Historic Dahlonega Square

of Turners Corner where satellite reception is non-existent. When Brent Martin, previous ForestWatch Executive Director and now Southern Appalachian Regional Director of The Wilderness Society, contacted me to encourage us to reach out to them, I responded that Charlie and Nathan were one step ahead of us and had already come by to introduce themselves. We can rest assured knowing that these two are out there protecting our Wilderness.

Getting the message out that the public can make a difference in how our forests are managed is vital in maintaining the ecological health of our national forests. To ensure that more and more people are becoming aware of this, we have recently made our way into multiple, local publications. Some of these publications include: *The Gainesville Times, The Dahlonega Nugget, Smoke Signals – News and Views from Big Canoe and around North Georgia*, and *Appalachian Country Magazine*. If you or someone you know is affiliated with any publications that would be receptive to our story and mission, please let me know at lstachler@gafw.org.

In other news, Dr. Rudi Kiefer, Professor of Physical Science and Director of Sustainability at Brenau University, serves on the Steering Committee of the Georgia College Sustainability Network as well as the Board of Directors at EarthShare of Georgia. Together, we shot a video

(continued on page 11)

about the mission of Georgia ForestWatch with a scenic view of the Chattahoochee National Forest in the background. This footage will be the featured video on the new EarthShare of Georgia website that is scheduled to be launched very soon. Over $250 million has been raised by the EarthShare network and we have proudly been a member organization for the past 6 years. We are striving to move forward with more audio and video content in our outreach programming, as this form of communication is not only more effective but it greatly speaks to the younger generation who will be the ForestWatchers of tomorrow.

Attempting to reinvigorate the ForestWatch family with more young people, we have been in contact with multiple faculty and staff at the University of North Georgia, our new next door neighbors. I recently introduced Georgia ForestWatch to the Environmental Club with an updated PowerPoint presentation that Board members Jim Dawson and Tom Crawford have been working on. This vibrant presentation contains beautiful images contributed by nature photographer Peter McIntosh, audio and video, and a wealth information about who we are, what we do, and how easy it is for the public to get involved in protecting their forests. The presentation has been engineered to fit any audience by simply removing and adding slides as necessary. It will soon be available for use by the ForestWatch family as we extend our outreach efforts even further into our communities.

Amidst all of the outreach programming is the invaluable support of our members and volunteers. With over 867,000 acres of national

Laura Stachler with the UNG Environmental Club

forest in Georgia and only two full-time and one part-time ForestWatch staff, our appreciation for our ForestWatch family is immeasurable. Consistently and generously you sponsor our events, give to our appeals, and give up your weekends to lead outings and bring in new members. You help with marketing and bushwhack through the forests in the heat of summer all for one reason: to make the public aware of the critical role we play in protecting, preserving and restoring Georgia's national forests so that others may join in the effort and make a lasting difference with us. Want to be a part of the movement? Please contact me at lstachler@gafw.org. Thanks for all you do to keep our mission alive and thriving in our state! ■

UPCOMING OUTINGS & EVENTS

October 22
Locust Stake Issue Hike
with Ben Cash & Ed Hunter

November 1
Atlanta Audubon Society
Hike at Stone Mountain
with Chris Showalter

November 15
Cooper Creek Issue Hike
with Jim Walker and
David Govus

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 hike alerts and registration information you need to join our email alert program found on our website at www.gafw.org.

Upper West Armuchee Creek Watershed Project

(continued from page 8)

In addition, the project proposes to convert the 6.2 mile Chickamauga Creek trail from foot travel only to a combined mountain biking and hiking trail. Georgia ForestWatch does not support this change, nor was a consensus reached regarding this trail conversion in the district-level CoTrails discussions with recreational user groups. It was our understanding that projects involving the creation of new trails or change in status of existing trails would only move forward in the trail-planning (CoTrails) process if there was consensus on that project.

The Chickamauga Creek trail is narrow and in places steep, with numerous sections in fragile riparian areas of Ponder and Chickamauga Creeks. Mountain bikes displace significant amounts of soil with their braking and skidding and are damaging to wet or steep areas. Bikes on narrow trails with limited sight distance present a very real hazard to pedestrians. Mountain bikers have many other riding opportunities in the immediate vicinity, such as the Pinhoti Trail, and keeping the Chickamauga Trail for pedestrian use only in no way restricts their access to the forest, since they can hike the trail like anyone else.

Georgia ForestWatch submitted comments on the UWAC project on September 5th, 2014. ■

JOIN NOW! Complete this form and mail to:
Georgia ForestWatch, 81 Crown Mountain Pl., Building C, Suite 200, Dahlonega, GA 30533;
or call 706-867-0051 to join via phone. Want to go paperless? Join online at **www.gafw.org/join_give.html**

Georgia ForestWatch Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

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

❒ Yes! I want to go paperless!

CHOOSE YOUR GIVING LEVEL

❑ $2,500	President's Circle
❑ $1,000	Benefactor
❑ $500	Patron
❑ $250	Supporter
❑ $100	Friend or Small Business
❑ $35	Individual
❑ $20	Student
❑ $ _____	Other amount

PAYMENT INFORMATION

❑ Enclosed is cash or check payable to Georgia ForestWatch

❑ Charge my credit card: ❑ AMEX ❑ MasterCard ❑ VISA

Signature: _____

Account Number: _____

Expiration Date:_____ CVV _____

Georgia ForestWatch
81 Crown Mountain Place
Building C, Suite 200
Dahlonega, GA 30533
706-867-0051

GEORGIA FORESTWATCH

Member of EarthShare Georgia

Visit Us Online at
www.gafw.org

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
ELLIJAY, GA
PERMIT #4749