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## FORESTWATCH JOURNAL

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### Foothills Landscape Project Public Meeting

The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests will host its first annual stakeholder meeting for [Foothills Landscape Project \(FLP\)](#) implementation **in one hour at 1:00 p.m.** at [Cohutta Springs](#) in Crandall, Ga. USFS staff will share project updates and initial plans for the upcoming year, including the [draft Implementation Plan for the Mooneyham Implementation Area](#) that includes prescribed burning, commercial timber sales and thinning, herbicidal applications, and stream enhancements on over 3,225 acres in the Mooneyham region of the Conasauga Ranger District next to the Cohutta Wilderness.

The USFS indicates this large project will not be publicized for public comment, and your only opportunity to provide input is during this scheduled meeting.

See the [full meeting notification here](#). A remote viewing option is available by the USFS available [HERE](#). It is unclear if the link is only available for viewing or if you will be able to ask questions through the portal.

In the coming weeks, GAFW will conduct field visits to gain first-hand site knowledge of the locations and the proposed activities. Despite the lack of a formal public comment process, we will submit a comment letter and encourage all forest stakeholders to also submit comments.

If you are planning to attend in person or remotely, please consider asking the following questions:

- Will this project exacerbate or remediate climate change?
- What is the USFS doing to ensure our forests are alleviating climate change?
- Will this project increase or decrease the amount of carbon sequestration in the proposed areas?
- Will this project affect the existing status or future viability of this site being considered as Old Growth & Mature or otherwise protected from logging?
- Will the herbicide applications be broadcast sprayed over large areas?
- What other roads can be permanently closed under this project? How can we increase the number of gated or closed roads?
- Can resources used in this project be prioritized for road and trail maintenance instead of prescribed fire?
- Can the Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) or culvert projects be prioritized over the other proposed projects?
- Can the roads identified for AOP projects be permanently closed and the culverts be removed?
- Can the commercial logging portions of the project be limited to existing pine plantations?
- Why is this project not eligible for public commentary per the NEPA guidelines?

## Short Notice - Input Requested



All fees and commercial activity within a national forest require a [Special-use Permit \(SUP\) Application](#) that must go through a public comment process. Many proposed SUP requests are focused on recreational activities and are often, but not always, supported by GAFW.

*GAFW policy is to fully support recreational use, including commercially, within the CONF IF the activities are fully vetted and do not have a negative impact on the ecology or natural balance of the forest or other users or beneficiaries.*

However, with less than three weeks to the event, for-profit corporation [Run Bum Tours LLC](#) is requesting the issuance of a temporary recreation event permit for the [Sky to Summit trail race event](#). The event is scheduled for November 5th through November 6th, 2022, for 450 participants and 50 spectators. Find the [full notification here](#).

The event includes four (4) trail running races (100k, 50k, 25k, and 8 miles). The following Forest Service system roads and trails on National Forest System land (located in Rabun County) would be utilized for the event, including trail/road routes for each course is as follows: Darnell Creek Trail (TR-61), Darnell Creek Horse Trail Loop (TR-61A), Rabun Bald Trail (TR-211), Holcomb Creek Trail (TR-52), Bartram Trail (TR-164), Courthouse Gap Trail (TR-47), Pinnacle Trail (TR-58), Walnut Fork Rd (FSR-155), Sarah's Creek Rd (FSR-156), Chintilly Rd (FS-156A), Addie Gap Rd (FSR-7A), and Hale Ridge Rd (FSR-7).

**Preliminary Concerns with this event include:**

- **Selective Feedback** – USFS appears to be gathering feedback from limited forest stakeholders. GAFW only received notification via blind copy on an email from the USFS. As of the same day the email was received, no public project notification was posted on the [USFS website project page](#) nor the [USFS CONF Facebook page](#). It remains unclear which limited group of forest stakeholders are aware of this opportunity to weigh in on this important matter.
- **Limited time to reply** – GAFW received notification of this permit application on 10/11/22 with a submission date of 10/25/22 and an event date of 11/5/22. The standard procedure to receive input from forest stakeholders is 30 days, but for this event, the USFS is only accepting two weeks of input, and the event ([already actively promoted with payments being accepted by participants](#)) is less than 30 days from the notification.
- **Event Size** – This is a very large event with 450 participants and 50 spectators. In addition to the number of participants and spectators, the event will require a substantial number of staff members, including a support crew for each runner.
- **Parking** – Will parking be limited to private property in Sky Valley, or will participants, spectators, Run Bum LLC staff, and support crew be allowed to park along the roads in the national forest and/or in the limited pullouts? Run Bum Tours LLC suggests that 450 cars or “*one car per runner*” be allowed at each of the six “aid stations” located at various points within the national forest.
- **Rain Policy** – The rain policy for this race goes against GAFW's road and trail activities recommendations. We suggest that “A ‘rain plan’ must be established, submitted with the SUP permit, and communicated to participants and the community. Events should be postponed or canceled if 1 inch or more rain is forecasted”. The Run Bum Tours LLC policy is “*Expect and prepare for any and all weather, as the race will proceed in rain, shine, or snow.*” Depending upon the level of precipitation on the day of the event, or the days leading up to it, this could be damaging for our roads, trails, and waterways.
- **Previous concerns** – You may recall our partner Chattooga Conservancy's (CC) [concern with a proposed race by Run Bum Tours LLC](#) in April 2022. The CC's concerns with this vendor included short notification of a proposed racecourse through the Chattooga Wild & Scenic River Corridor and in the Ellicott Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas. Run Bum Tours LLC appears to be blaming the CC for upholding the congressionally

mandated protections on our national forest lands and for their lack of planning. *“As most of you know, we had major changes in our Shadows of the South 100 / 50-mile route where we went down by the Chattooga River. Due to the Chattooga River Conservancy threatening to sue the USFS, we were forced to change our route last minute.”* This posting from Run Bum Tours LLC suggests they are less interested in protecting our public lands, are only interested in adhering to those legally required protections and view our national forests as a platform for generating revenue.

- **Trail Building 1** – Run Bum Tours LLC is actively seeking volunteers to support this race for work inside the national forest for *“doing intense digging to widen the trails.”* GAFW is concerned with what appears to be an aggressive approach to trail maintenance. GAFW supports quality trail maintenance activities by the USFS and volunteer groups but is not supportive of “trail widening” or “intense digging,” which goes against the Leave No Trace trail ethic of **“Encourage travelers to stay within the width of the trail”** and **“By concentrating traffic onto a narrow ribbon of soil, trails help protect natural areas by limiting the trampling of vegetation and disturbance of habitat.”**
- **Trail Building 2** - In the **race handbook for this event**, Run Bum Tours LLC states they are planning for future increased capacity for this race. *“Note: we are currently working on building a new trailhead/connector trail, but this will not happen this year.”* GAFW asks if this trail is being planned on private property or within the boundaries of the national forest?
- **Forever?** – GAFW applauds Run Bum Tours LLC for moving their event date... *“Another note about time, the race this year had a forced date change to move from the second weekend of November to the first because the 100k race entered the WMA, which has a scheduled deer hunt. So for this year, we moved the race. Next year we will tweak the route / look at hunt dates so that we are FOREVER the 2nd weekend in November.”* However, the use of the word *“Forever”* raises red flags for those interested in the long-term protection of our public lands. Even fully approved SUPs have a five-year limit before a re-application is required.

**We need your help.** If you are aware of the applicant's reputation, incidents, or history of use in the forest, positive or negative, or if you have specific knowledge of the impact on the listed locations for this race, please let GAFW know at [outreach@gafw.org](mailto:outreach@gafw.org) ASAP, and we will use your input to craft our submission.

## GAFW Welcomes Rachel Ness





Rachel joined the Georgia ForestWatch team this week as our Development Coordinator. She has been involved in the nonprofit field since 2014 and has three years of experience in development and fundraising, with a special interest in grant writing. She holds a postgraduate degree from Georgia State University.

Rachel is excited to combine her interest in nonprofit development with her love of Georgia's forests, in support of Georgia ForestWatch's work in protecting the state's forests and natural resources.

If you are aware of grant opportunities, please reach out to us at [grants@gafw.org](mailto:grants@gafw.org).

## A Conversation About Indigenous Peoples' Day



GAFW is proud to be a membership organization and appreciates the engaging feedback received from our most recent ForestWatch Journal supporting our decision to close for Indigenous Peoples' Day and our concerns with General Winfield Scott.

Comments received (edited) from forest stakeholders included broad support, to questioning our role in the conversation, to victim blaming:

- I have Cherokee blood and...support changing Lake Winfield Scott's name to a Cherokee name.
- If...the devil...was not in people, these things would not have happened. Unfortunately, they did occur. Native Americans were constantly at war with each other.

- Thank you for defending the culture that emerged within our Southern forests, particularly in Georgia. We would do well to learn from the Cherokee since they have had centuries to learn from the land. Let's build on that; the Cherokee are simply waiting on the rest of us to ask.
- I propose that GAFW stay within the scope of its mission and focus directly on our forests, its natural elements, and protection and health thereof.
- This is another of the many reasons that you are my favorite organization. You are honoring our FIRST PEOPLES. Thank you for all that you do to protect OUR PRECIOUS MOTHER EARTH.

It is a fair question to ask why an organization whose mission is to support the ecological health of our state's national forest lands would engage in the conversation around the human history of our public lands. If our vision of the future of the forest were simply to ensure it was biologically healthy and standing, we would advocate for putting up "no trespassing" signs around the perimeter and for humans to leave the forest alone to heal in its most natural state. However, GAFW supports not only a naturally healthy forest but also the forest's role in our past and future collective humanity. We (humans) need the forest much more than the forest needs us.

GAFW seeks a path that supports the natural processes inherent in the forest's ability to "manage" itself AND the role it plays in our lives. Ironically, we support finding a way to live in harmony with our natural surroundings that our Indigenous ancestors deeply understood for over 10,000 years before General Oglethorpe's landing on a bluff of the Savannah River in 1733, where the Yamacraw tribe warmly welcomed him. It only took 96 years from this "founding" of Georgia to begin the active removal of our indigenous neighbors after discovering gold in Dahlonega in 1829.

It is only through the understanding AND reconciliation of our past mistakes that we may avoid them in the future.

GAFW is always open to feedback from members and all forest stakeholders. Feel free to reach out to us at [communications@gafw.org](mailto:communications@gafw.org) or take our [survey here](#).

## Volunteers Needed

Don't miss out! Only three more weekends left to help monitor and record visitors to the most popular Wilderness areas in the forest this year.

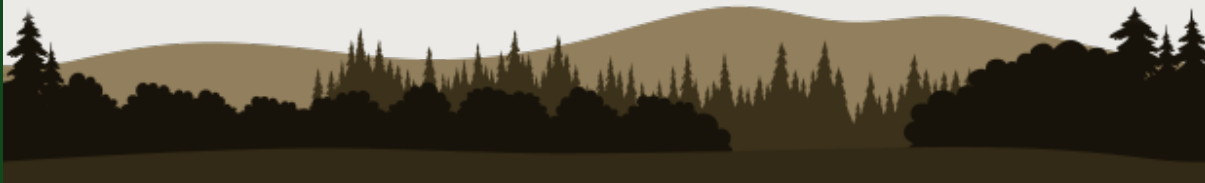
If you are interested in hiking Woody Gap or Blood Mountain on an upcoming weekend in October [SIGN UP HERE](#).

## Not to be Missed Events



# Our Mission

Our mission is to enhance the health of over 867,000 acres of Georgia's national forest by protecting our forests and streams, advocating for natural processes, and identifying opportunities to improve forest management. Visit [Georgia ForestWatch](#) (GAFW) to learn more.



Connect with us



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