GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
PRESERVE PROTECT RESTORE GAFW.ORG

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GAFW Exceeds Fundraising Goal

Thank You for helping GAFW exceed its Spring Fundraising Goal.

We are wrapping up the most successful spring appeal in GAFW's history, and we could not have done it without our members and community. To everyone who generously donated during our spring appeal, we cannot thank you enough for your support.

We raised $23,316 to match longtime member Kathy Stege's $20,271 challenge gift for a total of $43,292. While donations going forward will not be matched, it is not too late to contribute if you missed doing so during the appeal and, as always, make sure your membership is up to date.

In other good fundraising news, The Sapelo Foundation chose GAFW as a recipient of a $50,000 general operating grant to support our organization and mission. While the support is unrestricted, its intention is to support, develop, advance, and evaluate GAFW's climate and energy work in Georgia and start new and deepen existing partnerships that can advance our climate & energy goals.

This initiative explicitly includes developing partnerships with Native American communities and tribes in Georgia. With this important funding, GAFW will collaborate, build networks, and engage in setting agendas across organizations that work on climate & energy in Georgia to

implement energy & climate-related goals that align with GAFW's ongoing work through an environmental justice lens.

Around the Forest

New District Ranger

Steverson Moffat has been named the new District Ranger for the Blue Ridge Ranger District (BRRD) of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. Georgia ForestWatch has already developed a good working relationship with Ranger Moffat and looks forward to many years of partnership in ensuring the BRRD remains healthy and ecologically sound.

Union County Approves Gun Range

Since its inception in 2018, GAFW has been a vocal and outspoken critic of the proposed gun range on U.S. Forest Service property in Union County. The proposed location is two miles from Brasstown Bald, adjacent to the Mark Trail Wilderness. The Appalachian Trail is downrange of the gun range.

Unfortunately, after several years of welcome delays, Union County approved the award for the construction of the gun range to Milestone Construction, LLC for $3,780,000.00 on June 16, 2022.

This means approximately fifteen acres of springs, trout stream, mixed forest, grassland, and early successional habitat bordering two wilderness areas and the most traveled hiking trail in the world will be clear-cut, razed, and leveled. Instead, a large unnecessary gun facility will be constructed at your expense.

This project is not only dangerous but also expensive. Originally estimated to cost $2.4M, it has now ballooned to $3.78M making it one of the most expensive gun ranges in the southeast. The project only received two bids, with the other coming in at an astronomical $4.9M, reflecting the concern that with today's inflation, the project is almost guaranteed to increase in cost before completion.

The project cost will be split between the state of Georgia, funding the lion's share of 90% ($3.4M), and Union County making up the remaining 10%. Originally proposed at a 75/25 split, Union County Sherriff Mack Mason went to State Senator Steve Gooch to ask the state to provide 100% of the full grant amount resulting in the increased 90/10 split.

To make this "public" project even more distasteful, the private, member-only Union County Gun Club is being given full operational control of the facility allowing for only limited public access. With all the other funding needs for our state, why are we wasting nearly $4M on a gun range built in our limited and precious national forest to be used almost exclusively by a private gun club?

Concerns with this project include:

- There is no need for another gun range as the existing and

underutilized Chatuge Gun Range is only 3.5 miles away.
- The spring of a sensitive trout stream is located adjacent to the proposed property, and facility construction will require unnecessary disturbances to the stream. There are also lead poisoning concerns about leaching from the used bullets that will flow into the Hiawassee River watershed.
- Concerns by neighbors regarding the potential for incessant firearm noise all day, every day, year-round. Additionally, the noise will intimidate hikers along the Appalachian Trail and other forest users. Noise abatements are slated to be built into the facility but are not expected to eliminate the grating noise of gunfire.
- Proprietary use of the facility by the private Union County Gun Club despite the entire project being funded by public tax dollars.
- The Appalachian Trail running adjacent to the proposed site is only 9/10ths of a mile away (1,636 yards). The range is not directly perpendicular to the AT. However, the distance between the two is within range of many pistols and virtually all rifles.
- $3.8M of our tax dollars will be wasted on this unnecessary range. Even if you do not live in Union County, your tax dollars are being used to build a facility that none of us need, want, or will ever use.
- The 3.8M construction does not include the costs to the U.S. Forest Service to conduct an Environmental Assessment and other preparatory materials and actions to approve a project that most do not want. Additionally, $100K+ was spent on design fees, $30K+ on noise studies, and incalculable federal, state, and local staff hours have already been lost to this project.
- Sherriff Mason incorrectly declares that this range is needed for police training and certification; however, the Chatuge Gun Range already reserves one day per month for law enforcement use by any agency.

GAFW remains steadfast in our opposition to this project and seeks to conduct baseline lead testing in the trout stream at the proposed site. We will keep you updated on this project.

Still, in the meantime, especially if you are a resident of Union County, you can contact the county's Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris at commissioner@uniongov.com or 706-439-6000 and Sherriff Mack Mason at 706-439-6066 to let them know how you feel about this project and the use of your tax dollars.

In the Media

Georgia ForestWatch is a proud partner of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club (GATC) and celebrates the naming of Clayton, GA, as the newest Appalachian Trail Community. GAFW participated in the festivities and was noted in the *Clayton Tribune's* "Nature, Hospitality found 'AT' Clayton."

Additionally, also see GAFW's letter to the editor that appeared in the May 5, 2022, issue of the *Dahlonega Nugget*.

GAFW Partners

Located almost entirely within Habersham County, The Soque River Watershed Association's (SRWA) mission is to protect and restore the Soque River; its tributaries and watershed have two open positions. One for Executive Director and another for Watershed Protection Specialist. More information on both positions can be found here.

The Georgia Botanical Society (GBS) encourages research, conservation, and education that focuses on native flora throughout Georgia. Currently, the GBS is seeking applicants to the Marie Mellinger Field Botany Research Fund to support field-oriented research focused on documenting, protecting, and conserving native plants in Georgia. Funding requests up to $5,000 will be accepted until July 15, 2022. For more information, please email gabotany@comcast.net.

The Atlanta Firefly Project is a community initiative that assists researchers at the Odum School of Ecology at the University of Georgia in studying firefly conservation in Georgia. You can help from your own home. Whether you live in an apartment, townhome, detached home, or wherever you call home, your observations are valuable! All it takes is a commitment to monitor outside your home. Ideally, for two evenings in June and two evenings in July (if you cannot do that many, it is OK - do whatever you can), and submit information using our entry form. All observations are valuable, whether or not you see fireflies! Go here to learn more about how you can help.

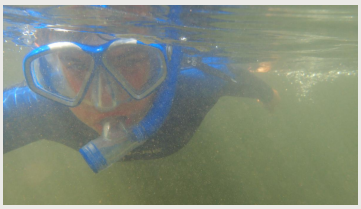
If you have not done so, please take a moment to support the Benton MacKaye Trail Association's (BMTA) effort to make the BMT the twelfth National Scenic Trail. Go here to Use Your Voice.

GAFW Outings

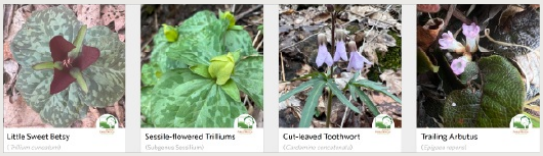
Photos! Recent Outings

Upcoming Outings!

*Registration Required
Friday, July 22
Snorkel the Conasauga



iNaturalist @gaforestwatch
Community Science and
species identification!



Upcoming Events

Wednesday, June 29–Seeing the Forest for the Queers: LGBTQIA+ community-building space in forestry and natural resources webinar @ 7:00 p.m.

Thursday, June 30–Dogwood Alliance webinar –Re-imagination Through Land Conservation @ 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, September 10–Elachee Wildlife Festival, Elachee Nature Science Center. Tabling event. Gainesville, GA

Saturday, September 24 & Sunday, September 25–Annual Trail Skills Workshop (TSW) @ Lake Winfield Scott - Preregister

Saturday, October 22–Wurst Festival GAFW fundraiser at Fannin Brewing Company

Wednesday, November 9–Georgia Water Coalition Autumn Membership Meeting - Covington, GA

If this email was forwarded to you, please register here to receive updates from Georgia ForestWatch.

News You Can Use

Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area To Close Portion of River for Bridge Installation

According to a Facebook post from the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, a portion of the river will be CLOSED to install a bridge. The area extends from McGinnis Ferry to Abbots Bridge.

Ways to Help GAFW

Shop at Kroger

GAFW is now enrolled in the Kroger Community Awards program. This program makes fundraising easy by donating to local organizations based on your daily shopping. Once you link your Card to GAFW, all you have to do is shop at Kroger and swipe your Shopper's Card. Please take a moment today to sign up for Kroger Community Awards and make Georgia ForestWatch your designated organization.

Save the Date

Reservations will open soon for our annual retreat on Saturday, October 15, 2022, at Lake Winfield Scott.
Remember you must be a member to attend.
Join or renew your membership today.

Planning to join us at Lake Winfield Scott for the annual retreat? Send us an email at info@gafw.org if you would like to reserve a camping spot at Lake Winfield Scott or Vogel State Park.

The Saturday following our retreat, everyone is invited to join us for the Wurst Festival fundraiser for GAFW on Saturday, October 22, 2022, at the Fannin Brewing Company.

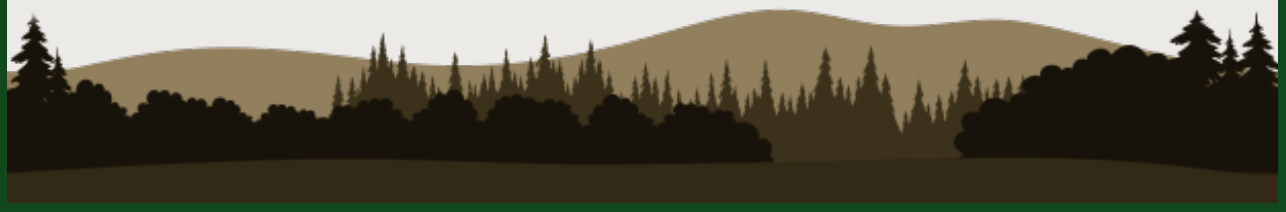
Thank You

Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

Please support our mission by ensuring your membership is up to date and providing additional support as you are able.

On behalf of our entire national forests in our beautiful state, we thank you for your support.

Connect with us

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.