GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
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Forest Management and Georgia Gives Day

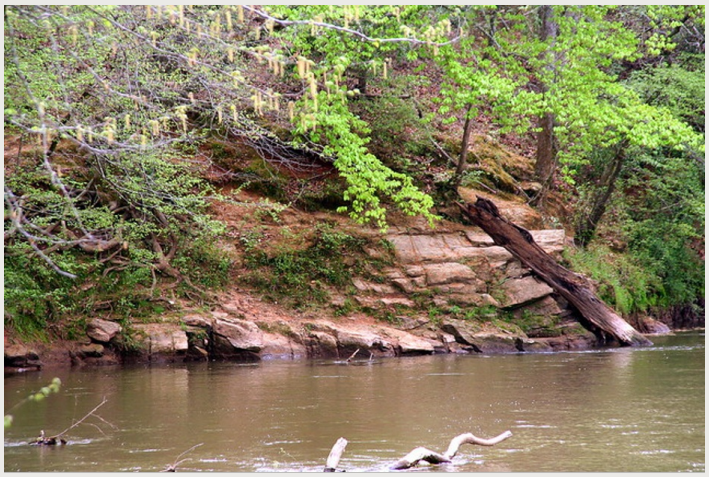
Many of the concerns Georgia ForestWatch (GAFW) has with aggressive forest "management" on our state's national forest lands stem from a history of incorrect "management" decisions made by humans. From prescribed burns turning into wildfires in New Mexico earlier this year to a history of commercially selling timber from old growth and mature forests, human interference in the health of our forests is indisputable. GAFW strongly believes in allowing "natural processes" to take the lead on our public lands. Had previous generations adhered to that guidance, our forests would be much healthier and stronger (and full of old growth) than they are today.

Now to "address" the current state of our forest that has our human fingerprints all over it, we again assume, supposedly having learned from our previous mistakes, that humankind still knows better than the forest how to manage its health. So, we continue to cut the lesser desirable trees to make way for the ones that were here originally. We clear forests for the benefit of single species, most often a single game species that has an economic value, over the complex health of the full forest ecological system. We mislead others into believing that clear cuts, commercial timber sales, and burning wood pellets for energy do not have a negative impact on the climate crisis. We are fed lies that younger forests sequester more carbon than older mature forests. We are told there is not enough money for road maintenance to ensure our streams run clean, but ample funding exists to host a timber sale.

If you feel the same way and are now asking what you can do to advocate for natural processes within the Chattahoochee-Oconee

National Forests, you can donate to GAFW. Today, on Georgia Gives Day, **we thank you for your membership in GAFW**. We also ask you to [make an additional donation] to ensure that GAFW has the resources and expertise necessary to review every proposed "management" project put forward by the U.S. Forest Service to ensure we are not making the same mistakes again.

New Oconee District Ranger



GAFW welcomes Stephanie Israel-McRae as the new Oconee District Ranger. Ranger Israel-McRae joined the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests team in 2018 to lead the design and implementation of the Foothills Landscape Project. The Oconee Ranger position is a result of her almost 20-year career with the Forest Service, including positions in the Nez Perce-Clearwater NF in Idaho, the Lewis and Clark NF in Montana, the Chugach NF in Alaska, and as a Forestry and Firefighting Training Instructor. Ranger Israel-McRae is scheduled to report for duty on February 13, 2023, and GAFW looks forward to working closely with her and the entire Oconee District team.

In the interim, Oconee District staff Kandra Scott and Deyonte Johnson will share temporary Acting District Ranger responsibilities until Hector Socias assumes the role of Acting District Ranger on December 5, 2022. GAFW also sends our full appreciation to Acting District Ranger Towdy Tipton for being on loan to the Oconee District from the Blue Ridge Ranger District for the past three-plus months. GAFW applauds the entire Oconee District team for pulling together during this time of transition to ensure our national forest lands remain well protected.

Headquartered in Eatonton, GA, the Oconee National Forest, and Ranger District lies approximately sixty miles southeast of Atlanta. The Oconee National Forest is often overlooked as the lesser sibling to its north Georgia counterparts. While the highest point in the forest is only 645 feet above sea level, it is easier to visit from many parts of the metro area. This national forest land offers camping, the largest lake in the state, hiking and horseback trails, Oconee River paddling, fishing, hunting, and the ruins of Georgia's first cotton gin and paper mill.

The Oconee District is an important part of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests and is a district GAFW has identified as

needing to be on our radar more often. Equally as important to our mission and the state, the Oconee District encompasses 116,452 acres (13% of the CONF) across nine middle Georgia counties, with the largest tract in Putnam County.

The Oconee Forest Health & Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project (OFHWHIP)

Dating back to 2008, with a final decision made in June 2011, the OFHWHIP is an adaptive and ecological strategy to restore the forest to healthy conditions. The project intends to improve forest health, diversity, and habitat for wildlife, including the Red Cockaded Woodpecker, a federally listed endangered species. Project objectives include thinning overgrown forest stands, replacing certain tree species with other species more suitable to certain forest areas, and controlling invasive vegetation re-growth using hand tools, herbicides, and prescribed burning. The OFHWHIP Decision Notice and related projects document can be found here.

As part of the OFHWHIP agreement, a community stakeholder meeting is held annually to assess past projects and review upcoming proposed projects. This year's Oconee District annual OFHWHIP meeting is scheduled for **9:30 am on Wednesday, November 30, 2022, at the Oconee Workcenter Conference Room at 1199 Madison Road in Eatonton, GA.** Following the presentation, participants are invited to travel to project sites where the USFS will discuss forest health issues and improvements.

GAFW would have preferred the USFS provide at least 30 days' notice for all public meetings, but despite the short notice provided by the Oconee Ranger District, we encourage all stakeholders to attend this important meeting to ensure you remain informed about the management of your public lands. For those in the Atlanta metro area who want to be more involved in your public lands, this is a great opportunity to get your feet wet. If you plan to attend, the USFS asks you to **please RSVP** to deyonte.johnson@usda.gov to let them know you are coming. Please also cc outreach@gafw.org when you register so we can introduce ourselves to you at the presentation. GAFW will be attending both the presentation and the site visit.

We look forward to seeing you there.

If this email was forwarded to you, please register here to receive

GAFW updates.

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Thank You

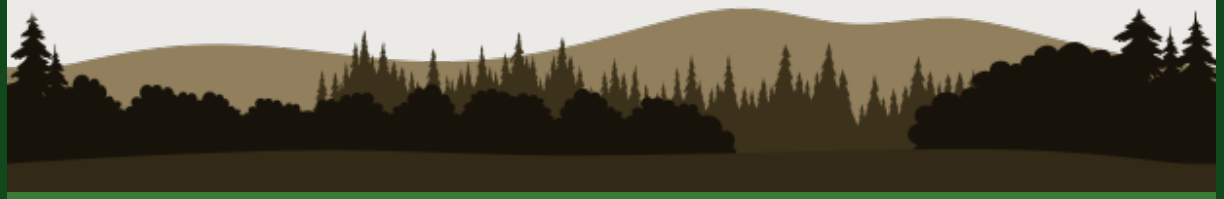
Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

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.

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.



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