GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
PRESERVE PROTECT RESTORE GAFW.ORG

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Become a Recurring Donor & Get a T-Shirt

Thank you to all who have graciously donated towards our year-end appeal thus far. If you have not done so already, please consider becoming a monthly recurring donor at $10 or higher and, in return, you will be eligible to receive a free GAFW t-shirt.

In addition to resting easy knowing that you are making a difference in how our forests are sustainably managed, your membership is always up-to-date and active. Becoming a sustaining donor is easy – simply go to our donation page and check the box to "Make this donation monthly."

Donate Today

Invasive Species Highlight

By GAFW Intern Makayla Folds

Although the portecting native species is a significant part of the Georgia ForestWatch mission, GAFW also works to identify and remove invasive species in our national forests. One invasive plant that can heavily impact our forests is the autumn olive (Elaeagnus umbellata). With silvery under-leaves and bright red berries, this shrub causes trouble by the sheer speed at which it grows and spreads. If it is not controlled, autumn olive can completely take over a section of disturbed forest within two years. During this time, they not only grow out but up as well. Quickly, they become shrubs the size of small trees instead of bushes.

The effects of autumn olive can be seen ecologically and economically. Ecologically, other native shrubs and young trees are choked out from lack of resources, and economically it can be a long, difficult process to remove established populations successfully. This is where Georgia ForestWatch and wonderful volunteers come in. GAFW removed a section of autumn olive at Frank Gross Campground in November 2022 under a service agreement with the Blue Ridge Ranger District. More invasive species still need to be removed, and more volunteers are needed. This activity is a great way to fill needed service hours, gain field experience, or spend an afternoon outdoors. Returning and future volunteers can sign up at GAFW.ORG/get-involved to keep up to date on future invasive species workdays and other events.

Cocaine Bear?

It sounds ridiculous because it is, but have you ever heard of the true story of a black bear from the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest near Blairsville, GA, that overdosed on cocaine? The true story began on September 11, 1985. While on a drug run from Colombia to Kentucky, smuggler Andrew C. Thornton II realized his small plane was overloaded. He dumped several packages of cocaine over our north Georgia national forest land before jumping. Thornton did not survive the jump as he became tangled in his parachute and plummeted to the ground, dying on a Knoxville, TN, driveway. The plane flew by itself until it crashed near Hayesville, NC.

At the time, that appeared to be the end of the story. However; a black bear was found dead three months later in north Georgia alongside 40 opened plastic containers of cocaine. The bear is currently on display at the Kentucky Fun Mall in Lexington, KY, which coined the name "Cocaine Bear" in 2015. The total amount of cocaine eaten by the bear was 75 pounds, valued at the time at $2 million. The chief medical examiner who conducted the autopsy reported that its stomach was "literally packed to the brim with cocaine."

We bring you this incredulous story because it is being turned into a movie aptly entitled *Cocaine Bear,* to be released theatrically in February 2023. The film appears sensationalized with little adherence to facts other than the overall premise of the story. Perhaps it would be more interesting to GAFW readers had the movie been filmed in north Georgia and not in Ireland. For GAFW, we will put this one in the truth is stranger than fiction file.

You can see the official preview here (warning – not for all audiences).

Upcoming GAFW Outings

Wednesday, December 21, 2022 - Winter Solstice hike to the swinging

bridge with Melanie. Celebrate the first day of winter hiking 7.2 miles on the Benton MacKaye to the 270-foot suspension bridge over the Toccoa River. We'll picnic by the river before heading back to our cars. Pets allowed. Register on Meetup

Sunday, January 1, 2023 - **MEMBERS ONLY EVENT** FIRST DAY HIKES AND POTLUCK. Start the year off right by hiking with forest-loving friends, followed by a potluck lunch (cuz you gotta eat your greens and black-eyed peas) at the Vickers home in Rabun County! Two options to choose from: Rattlesnake Knob 9-3pm with Keith | Coleman River Trail 10-3pm with Eddi

Monday, February 6, 2023 - Len Foote Hike Inn OVERNIGHT Hike ~5 miles to the sustainable and comfortable State Park facility nestled in the Chattahoochee National Forest and enjoy home-cooked meals, hot showers, fresh linens, an evening presentation, and an educational hike out the next day. Discounted rates for Georgia ForestWatch Members!

Interested in leading a hike or other outing for GAFW?We are searching for additional leaders who are willing to share their favorite parts of the forest. Let us know at outreach@gafw.org.

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

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Thank You

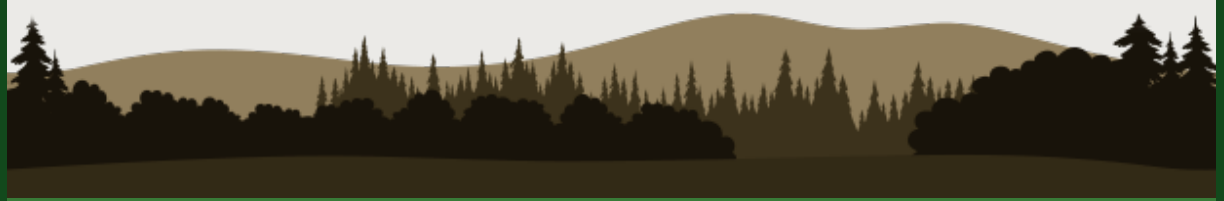
Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

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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