GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
PRESERVE PROTECT RESTORE GAFW.ORG

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Year-End Fundraising Success

Thank you! GAFW had a very successful year-end fundraising season, and while we did not (yet) make our $50,000 goal, we increased our fundraising over 2021 and raised a record-setting $47,577.40, or 95% of our goal.

One hundred eighty-six individual contributions (some members donated multiple times during the appeal) gave an average of $205.09 each, including a Facebook Fundraiser from one longtime member. Additionally, we thank each of our recurring monthly donors whose December 2022 contributions were attributed to the total. We deeply appreciate The Thomas M. and Irene B. Kirbo Charitable Foundation and The James E. Huffer and Betty J. Huffer Foundation Trust for their gifts.

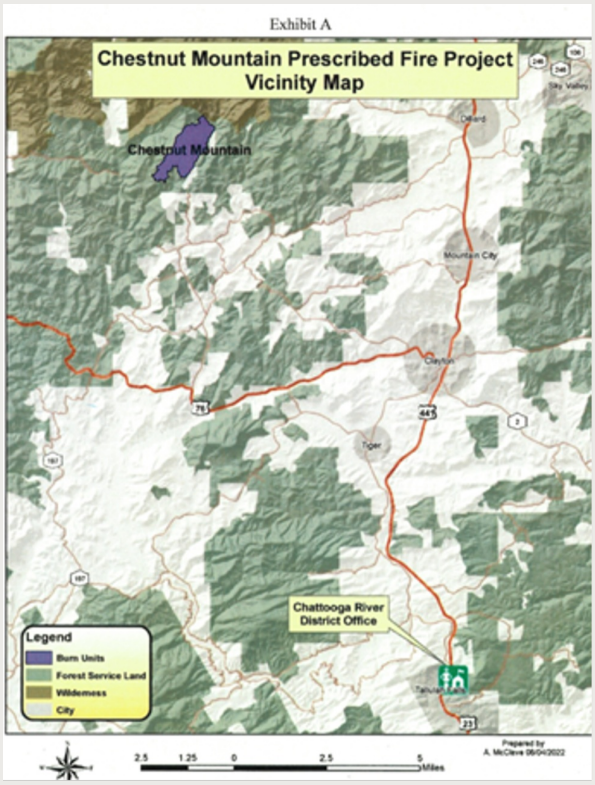
Lastly, as you know, GAFW has needed a new vehicle to "watch the forest" since our old pickup passed away in 2020. We are delighted to inform you that a longtime anonymous member donated their immaculately clean and superbly maintained 2014 Subaru Forester to GAFW (see photo above). This member even detailed the car and filled it with gas before dropping it off. On behalf of GAFW and, most importantly, the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, we cannot thank this member enough. If we include the value of this car in our total, we overwhelmingly exceed our $50,000 goal.

Unless you indicated otherwise, each donor would have their membership renewed at the highest level afforded by your donation. In the past, GAFW has provided donors with a detailed list of their previous year's donations for tax purposes. Going forward, we will not be automatically providing that service unless requested. If you would like GAFW to provide a list of your 2022 donations, please contact us at info@gafw.org.

Thank you again to all members and forest stakeholders who made this season's appeal a success. If you did not get a chance to give, there is still time. It is only by the generosity of the community that GAFW can continue to pursue our mission of *enhancing 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.*

Donate Today

Chestnut Mountain Prescribed Fire Project



Last week GAFW submitted our comments to the Chattooga River Ranger District's proposed Chestnut Mountain Prescribed Burn. As you recall, GAFW actively solicited input from our membership on this project, and thank you to all who provided your insight. GAFW commits to our members to always solicit your input on forest management positions and reflect the most up-to-date, scientific, data-driven facts in our comments.

Based on your input and the expertise of Forest Ecologist Jess Riddle GAFW submitted the following comments. While not directly in line with every member's position on prescribed fire (Rx), GAFW stands by our

comments supporting Rx fire in this location with the following caveats:

- GAFW acknowledges fire has an undisputed historical role in the evolution of our national forests and supports prescribed burning at Chestnut Mountain due to the presence of fire-adapted vegetation.
- The Rx fire return interval should be extended to ten years.
- The USFS should address associated erosion through additional unit monitoring and increased fire line maintenance.
- The USFS should make the pre- & post-Rx fire report and site monitoring reports available in a publicly accessible location.
- The USFS should halt all vegetative management projects until a system for calculating the effects on climate change is developed and only those projects which are carbon neutral or result in increased carbon sequestration then be allowed to proceed.

There have been no Rx burns in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests since May of 2022 when the USFS implemented a national moratorium on Rx burning. GAFW will keep you informed on the status of this project and all other proposed projects coming our way in 2023.

News You Can Use

-Outside of the national forest but for five days in 2023, allNational Park Service sites will be free of charge! Make sure to put a hold on your calendars for January 16, April 22, August 4, September 23, and November 11. Click here for more details.

-The USFS has begun seasonal road closings in the Conasauga Ranger District (CRD). The CRD covers the western third of the Chattahoochee National Forest. These roads will reopen on March 3, 2023.

- Forest Service Road (FSR) 64 will be closed from Jacks River Field Campgrounds to Potato Patch.
- FSR 68 from Potato Patch to Lake Conasauga, FSR 49 from Lake Conasauga to Grassy Tower, and FSR 17 from the intersection of FSR 68 to FSR 630 will all be closed.
- Johns Mountain Overlooks Road (FSR 208) will also be closed. There will also be no vehicle access to the following trailheads: Three Forks, Chestnut Lead, Tear Britches, Buddy Cove, and Betty Gap.

-Blue Ridge Ranger District Jake Mountain campground is partially closed to protect visitors while hazard tree removal and forest

management activities occur in the vicinity. Three Jake Mountain primitive campsites (A, B, and C) will remain open. Trail users and other visitors should exercise caution to avoid heavy equipment and trucks in the area. Work is planned through the end of 2023 but will be suspended for October during the peak fall-color season to increase visitor safety.

-While out in the north Georgia mountains, keeping an eye and ear out for ruffed grouse can benefit research examining grouse genetics. Reporting "drumming" log locations, fecal samples from those sites, and road-killed grouse can assist the research. More information is here.

-Red Top Mountain's Makeover. Now that 2023 has begun, we will work earnestly on making our October 14, 2023, annual retreat at Red Top Mountain State Park the best in our 38-year history. Red Top Mountain State Park visitors enjoy many new upgrades at this Lake Allatoona destination. The campground now offers full hook-ups, ADA improvements, power upgrades, waterline replacement, and cable. A new yurt village welcomes "glampers," and 20 new cottages offer screened porches with pretty views. Additional improvements include new comfort stations, a new playground, renovated beach area with accessible pathways, and picnic sites. Come play at this lakeside escape. If you are interested in joining the retreat committee or want to reserve your cabin or campsite now, please contact us at retreat@gafw.org.

-Tricolored bats are facing the impacts of white-nose syndrome. Recently the Fish and Wildlife Service proposed federally listing tricolored as endangered. These small bats have suffered estimated declines of more than 90 percent range-wide, with GA DNR winter cave surveys in north Georgia revealing a 93 percent drop, all largely attributed to the devastation caused by white-nose.

-Georgia DNR is asking interested citizens for input on developing hunting regulation proposals for the 2023-2025 hunting seasons. Virtual and In-Person Scheduled Meetings are listed below (all meetings take place at 7 pm). Additional information is here.

- *1/12*: Virtual Facebook meeting.
- *1/17*: Two in-person meetings: Americus & Milledgeville.
- *1/18*: Two in-person meetings: Lumpkin Co. Library (56 Mechanicsville Rd. Dahlonega) and Hinesville. **Come see GAFW staff at the Dahlonega meeting.**
- *1/19*: Two in-person meetings: Dallas & Hazlehurst.

-The Conasauga Ranger District is looking for volunteer Campground Hosts Lake Conasauga for the summer 2023 season. More information and apply here (7/7/23-8/29/23) and/or here (9/1/23-10/31/23). This position is a perfect way to enjoy the summer at one of the most magical locations in our national forest, and you can also help GAFW keep a "watch" on this region.

Upcoming GAFW Outings

Thursday, January 19, 2023 - Ivy Pull with Melanie at Warwoman Dell. Join us in Rabun County - we'll be going after the English Ivy that is trying to return after our previous pulls.

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.

GAFW Outings on Meetup

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

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Thank You

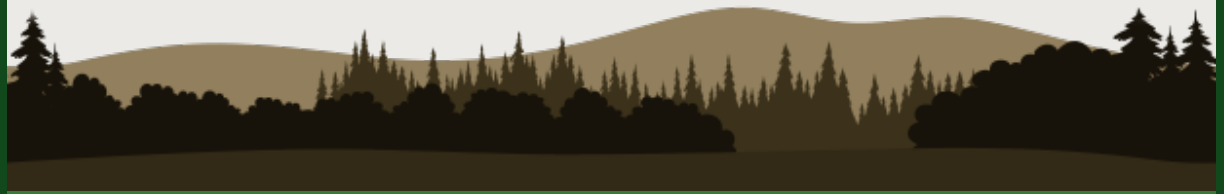
Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

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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