GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
PRESERVE PROTECT RESTORE GAFW.ORG

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Georgia General Assembly

Our General Assembly is now in session, including for the first time in recent history, with a confirmed schedule that takes us through Day 40 (sine die) slated for Wednesday, March 29, 2023. GAFW, one of the few organizations willing to monitor the Georgia timber industry and advocate for a cleaner, climate-friendly, natural process in managing our forest lands, is also an active member of the Georgia Water Coalition (GWC) including, being on the GWC legislative team.

As a proud GWC member, GAFW will be asking you to use your voice to support/oppose bills that may be outside of 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* but still have a profound impact on Georgia's environment.

As the session gets underway, we are asking you to:

- If you have not done so, it is time to reach out to your state senator and representative. Develop the relationship before you need them to know your stance on specific legislation. A simple email letting them know you are paying attention is sufficient.
- Sign up for Action Alerts from GWC's Protect Georgia and explore the site for helpful resources to ensure your voice is heard.
- Forward this email to friends and family interested in following our lawmakers' work through a climate-friendly lens and ask them to register for GAFW notifications.

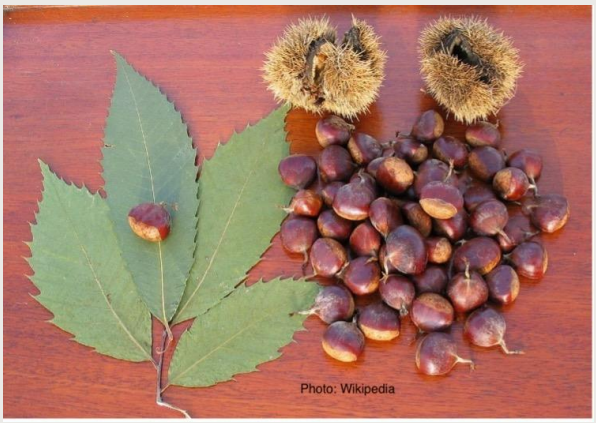
After the sudden passing of well-respected Speaker David Ralston last year, Jon Burns (R-Newington) was elected by his peers as Speaker of the Georgia House. Speaker Ralston will be missed as an advocate for north Georgia and calming presence in the GA house.

Speaker Burns has a long history of supporting the timber industry, including last year's constitutional amendment reducing taxes on timber companies. The new Speaker owns 4,515 acres of timber land in south Georgia (in addition to other land holdings), is a partner at three timber harvesting companies, and both of his children lead the Georgia Exports Co., one of the largest timber companies in the nation.

While GAFW is pleased with Speaker Burns's reputation as a moderate, we will be paying close attention to his work this year.

Donate Today

American Chestnuts



Native to eastern North America, the mighty American chestnut once stood to watch over most of Georgia's forest lands. Prized for its wildlife habitat, edible nuts for humans, wildlife, and livestock, and outstanding wood "superior in quality to any found in Europe," chestnut trees were used in furniture, split-rail fences, shingles, home construction, flooring, piers, plywood, paper pulp, and telephone poles.

A fungal disease from Chinese chestnut trees introduced from Asia in 1904 resulted in the chestnut blight that killed an estimated 4 billion American chestnut trees by the mid-century. Very few mature American chestnuts remain standing today. In 2006, a biologist with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources spotted a stand of several trees near Warm Springs, Georgia. One of the trees is approximately 20–30 years old and is the southernmost American chestnut tree known to flower and produce nuts.

Now the genetically modified "Darling" chestnut has been developed from an acid-detoxifying gene from wheat, allowing the trees to

survive infections by the blight fungus. In the closing months of 2022, the USDA welcomed comments to nonregulate the status of the "Darling" chestnut allowing it to be widely planted. Many of the comments contained concerns such as the potential for gene flow to wild relatives, the potential to spread and become invasive; potential non-target impacts, specifically to beneficial fungi, the microbiome, mycorrhizal networks, and the forest ecosystem; potential impacts to wildlife, including pollinators, and threatened and endangered species; and potential human health impacts from consuming nuts as well as potential allergies from pollen.

While GAFW did not submit comments, we are cautiously supportive of ultimately finding a chestnut variety capable of revitalizing the majesty of the past. We sincerely hope that a new cultivar is eventually successful. However, in adherence to our oft-stated position on "natural processes," we are opposed to using our national forest land as a testing ground for this new chestnut cultivar. There are ample non-national forest lands to experiment on, and only when a new chestnut cultivar has been proven beyond a doubt to have no adverse effects on our fragile environment should they be introduced to our public lands.

We are Hiring

GAFW is still recruiting for an Outreach Coordinator. In hopes of attracting a wide diversity of candidates, we have posted the position at the Queer Outdoor & Environmental Job Board, Justice Outside, and reposted it to Work For Good.

The ideal Outreach Coordinator is openly passionate about Georgia's national forest lands and wants to share their passion for GAFW and the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests (CONF) with others. The model candidate will have a zealous enthusiasm for reaching out to community members and other stakeholders. They will consistently and proactively seek out both formal and informal opportunities to share their love of our national forests, elevate and educate about our forests' ability to sequester carbon, address climate change, and advocate for natural processes in managing our forests.

The ideal candidate is willing to work a full-time but flexible schedule, will proactively seek out tabling and speaking opportunities, gain their audience's attention, and professionally discuss GAFW and the CONF at every opportunity. This is a dream job for the right person who enjoys interacting with community members, students of all ages, and all forest stakeholders. Qualified candidates should submit a resume and cover letter in pdf format to jobs@gafw.org.

Once the position is filled, you can expect a significant increase in GAFW Outings and other educational and recreational activities. Please forward this posting to those who may be interested in applying.

The USFS is also Hiring

The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest will soon fill various positions, including current vacancies and potential backfills, through USAJobs. Find current jobs here. Learn more about Employment in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest here.

GAFW is happy to support the USFS in finding qualified applicants to fill its open positions and, by sharing USFS postings, encourages applicants who believe in natural processes to apply. If you are interested in applying, GAFW can also assist in getting your application to the appropriate Ranger. Reach us at outreach@gafw.org.

Upcoming GAFW Outings

Friday, January 20, 2023 - Ivy Pull with Melanie at Warwoman Dell. *RESCHEDULED* (Previously January 19) 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

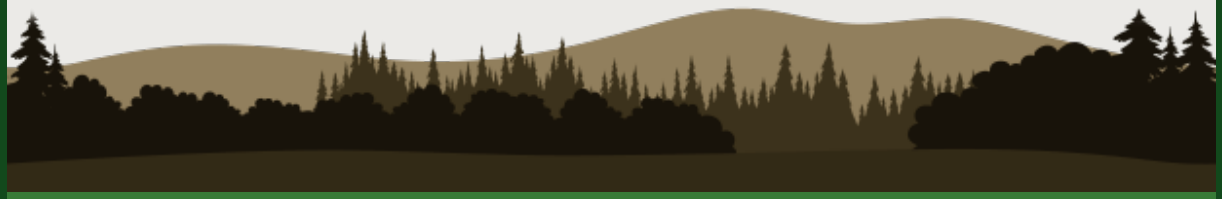
Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

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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