GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
PRESERVE PROTECT RESTORE GAFW.ORG

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News You Can Use

- The second annual **Environmental Justice and Climate Protection Conference** is scheduled for June 15, 2023, at Emory University. The event brings together community leaders, concerned citizens, elected officials, academics, and industry experts. Together we will break information silos through information sharing focused on identifying solutions to heal and improve the environmental health of all Georgians. Speaker submissions to break information silos and identify solutions to heal and improve the environmental health of all Georgians are accepted until 2/24/23. **Learn more and apply here.** GAFW has applied to speak.

- From our partners at the **Dogwood Alliance** is an action alert to tell your legislators to **take meaningful climate action to protect forests now** . Nothing on Earth is better at removing and storing carbon from the atmosphere than mature, standing forests. Forests are natural climate stabilizers. We can't prevent climate collapse without protecting forests. If policymakers don't act on climate now, no one will be safe from the worst effects of the climate crisis. We need policies that reduce carbon levels. Substituting wood in place of fossil fuels for energy is not a solution. Treating forests as an unlimited, renewable, extractable resource is outdated. **Take action now** in asking your federal legislators to:
    - Conserve 50% of US lands, including forests and wetlands. This will

keep key ecosystems working as carbon sinks and prevent them from becoming carbon emitters. Intentionally focus on lands and communities that have faced systemic underinvestment, over-extraction, and poor infrastructure, such as the Southern US.
    - End taxpayer-funded subsidies to the logging and biomass industries. We could invest these dollars in truly clean energy sources instead.
    - Prioritize addressing the cumulative health and environmental impacts of industrial logging and biomass occurring in Black, Indigenous, and low-income communities.
    - Invest in regenerative economic models and forest-saving incentives. Promote green recreation jobs and create financial incentives for landowners to keep their forests standing.
    - Stop any legislation that falsely claims that biomass energy is carbon neutral.
    - No more clear-cuts or off-sets. A tree planted today can take anywhere from 30 - 100 years to store the same amount of carbon as a mature, standing tree. We don't have time to lose.

- The federal bipartisan bill (no GA co-sponsorships) **H.R.4489 - National Forest Restoration and Remediation Act** passed last year was recently signed by President Biden. The new law **allows the USFS to hold onto interest from settlement funds**, which previously the agency had to surrender. Settlement agreements arise when the USFS sues for damages to its managed land caused by negligence. Unlike the Department of Interior and the Environmental Protection Agency, the Forest Service was not empowered to collect interest on such settlements as they were paid over time. The interest money collected will be set aside to fund the restoration of public lands damaged by wildfire.

- Reauthorized every five years, the Farm Bill is an omnibus package with provisions ranging from nutrition assistance to **forestry policy**, global food programs, assistance for farmers, and much more. The last Farm Bill was enacted in 2018 and expires in 2023. Given the importance of the programs included in the package, this is likely to be a legislative priority for Senator Warnock, who sits on the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, and Congressmen David Scott GA-13 (ranking member), Austin Scott GA-08, and Rick Allen GA- 12 who sit on the House Committee on Agriculture. **Read the Congressional Research Services primer on the Farm Bill**.

- Nature is important and provides value to the lives of all Americans. To increase our knowledge of nature in the United States and its links to global change, the **Office of Science and Technology Policy** , on behalf of the **United States Global Change Research Program** (USGCRP), requests input from the public to help inform the framing, development, and eventual use of the **first National Nature Assessment** (NNA). USGCRP committed to

conducting a National Nature Assessment on April 8, 2022, under the authority of the **Global Change Research Act of 1990**. President Biden reinforced and elevated this assessment's importance to national policy by calling for it in **Executive Order 14072**. Deadline 3/31/22 **Full description here.**

- **Were you born in 1950 or earlier?** 73 has become a very important birthday. As of January 1, 2023, **a new law requires you to start making withdrawals** — or taking "required minimum distributions" (RMD) from IRAs and 401(k)s — by April 1 after the year you reach age 73. The age for taking RMDs will increase to 75 in 2033. **GAFW has a solution**. You can use a "**qualified charitable distribution**" of up to $100,000 to satisfy your RMD. This involves transferring money directly from your account to a qualified charity, and the amount is excluded from your taxable income. GAFW is happy to provide our bank routing and account number upon request at **info@gafw.org**.

- GAFW is working to have the ATV forfeiture bill from the last session reintroduced in the Georgia General Assembly. We have also provided language permitting any law enforcement officer (LEO) to impound any ATV/OHV used in unpermitted mechanized land-disturbing activities on the property of another so that USFS and county LEOs can **stop the vandalism of our public lands that leads to unsafe conditions and stream sedimentation**. To strengthen our advocacy efforts in support of this measure, we are asking our members and community to share your photos and reports of illegal OHV use within Georgia's national forests with us. If you have photos or stories of illegal OHV use (including E-bike use on bike trails) within the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, please send them to us at **outreach@gafw.org**. We will compile these, report them to the USFS, and use this vital information to get this bill introduced and passed.

- Also at the state capitol, the **Georgia Forestry Association** (GFA), not to be confused with the **GA Forestry Commission**, has retained not one, not two, but eleven lobbyists from three different lobbying firms this year to pursue their goals of **increasing the weight of logging trucks** on your roads (to 90,000 lbs.) and for **timber companies to pay less** than you do in taxes (a 60% reduction). More on this as the session unfolds.

- According to a **recent study** by a team of ecologists at Purdue University, **North American trees are migrating west** at a rate of 9.5 miles per decade. The group studied USFS data from 1980 to 2015, where they tracked the populations of 86 eastern tree species to determine migrating patterns and found a trend defying scientific predictions about migration patterns that assumed species would be aggressively migrating north to adapt to climate change. Surprisingly the population centers of 73% of trees were migrating west, compared to 62% migrating north. Northbound trees also move slower than their westward counterparts, migrating 6.8 miles per decade. Only a

small number of tree populations have moved east or south in the same period.

- Those of you who have visited **our office in Dahlonega** know how much we love our window bird feeder. It is a steady source of action and drama with Cardinals, Tufted Titmice, House Finches, Downy Woodpeckers, and Carolina Chickadees consistently swooping in to enjoy sunflower seeds and suet. We know many of you also enjoy your feeders. Now **Stacker**, using data from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's **Project FeederWatch**, has compiled a **list of the most common birds seen near feeders in Georgia** .

Donate Today

Upcoming GAFW Outings

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

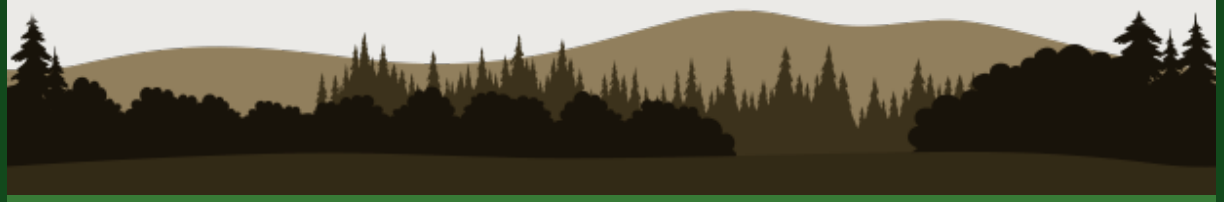
Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

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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