GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
PRESERVE PROTECT RESTORE GAFW.ORG

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Gov. Kemp uses a drip torch during a demo prescribed burn. Credit GA DNR.

Rx Burns - The Return of Prescribed Fire

Governor Kemp declared February 5-11 **"Prescribed Fire Awareness Week"** in Georgia. The declaration focuses on the 24 million acres of private monoculture tree farms located primarily in mid and south Georgia, as much of north Georgia forests are public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Prescribed (Rx) fire south of the mountains is a valuable tool whose benefits include the reduction of wildfire risk, improvements in wildlife habitat, and enhancing reforestation processes. Humans had proactively used fire to manage the landscape in Georgia for thousands of years before General Oglethorpe landed on Yamacraw Bluff in 1733. Many of our native species have evolved to be fire-adapted or fire-dependent. Native longleaf pines are a well-known fire-dependent species that require low-intensity burns every two or three years. Additionally, native wildlife such as turkeys, red-cockaded woodpeckers, and indigo snakes are all adapted to withstand the fires needed to keep their habitats healthy.

In the fiscal year 2022, 1.4 million acres of private forests in Georgia successfully received Rx fire applications; however, since last spring, no acres within Georgia's national forest lands were Rx burned. In May 2022, a national moratorium on Rx fires on national forest land effectively ended the program until recently. It was not until last month that Rx fire was re-introduced in Georgia's national forest land. The first Rx fire since May 2022 was implemented in the Oconee Ranger District (ORD)

approximately 7 miles NW of Eatonton, GA, in Putnam County on February 8, 2023, when approximately 1,029 acres were burned to remove hazardous fuels such as leaf litter, dead vegetation, and debris and to improve wildlife habitat. Since this first 2023 Rx fire, approximately 11,455 national forest acres have received prescribed fire, including 416 acres in the north Georgia Conasauga Ranger District (CRD).

The ORD is situated firmly in middle Georgia, well south of the mountains to our north, and virtually the entire district is a landscape that needs occasional fire to remain healthy. GAFW supports the use of Rx fire in many situations, such as within the ORD; however, in the mountains, where annual rainfall can reach 100 inches or more, where streams meander down the mountainsides, and underbrush remains moist year-round, fire is still important but is needed less frequently. Instead of 2–3-year cycles, mountain terrain can remain healthy with fire every decade or even a dozen or more years.

In a perfect world, which does not exist, Rx fire would be one of many well-funded programs prioritized by the USFS and Congress, along with law enforcement, recreation, and road/trail maintenance. Unfortunately, Rx fire is well funded but at the expense of other priorities. GAFW continues advocating with the USFS and Congress for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests to get the funding and resources they need to address every important concern, not just Rx fire.

Donate to GAFW Today

Our Climate Forests

The **Climate Forests Campaign** works to ensure a lasting, durable rule that would protect mature and old-growth trees and forests on federal lands as a cornerstone of US climate policy. These forests are our best large-scale, natural, low-cost climate solution. No current technology can match these forests for atmospheric carbon removal and storage at scale.

Last Earth Day, President Biden announced an **Executive Order** that directs federal agencies to define, inventory, and develop policies to protect mature and old-growth forests on federal lands. As we approach the one-year anniversary, groups are rallying across the country to increase our public presence and call for a lasting, durable rule that protects these essential forests from logging. This petition is another tactic to demonstrate widespread support for safeguarding our essential climate forests.

Our goal is to receive 500,000 signatures on this **petition** across all platforms - and we need your help!

Support Us While You Shop at Walmart

Customers shopping on Walmart.com or in the Walmart app can choose to round up their totals to the nearest dollar and have the change donated to GAFW.

It gets even better… Walmart just announced their **Million Dollar March Round Up campaign.** Throughout the month of March, Walmart is **matching their customer's round up donations 2:1**. Support GAFW next time you shop and let Walmart triple your donation!

How to get started:

1: Visit **walmart.com/sparkgood** and create or sign in to your Walmart.com account
2: Search for GAFW
3: Go to the Round Up box and click "Select this Charity"
4: Start rounding up to GAFW every time you shop

Upcoming GAFW Outings

Thursday, March 9 - Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests' Blue Ridge Ranger District Open House, Blairsville, GA. 4:30 pm.

Saturday, April 8 - Private Hike & Tour - **Lula Lake Land Trust with Debbie**, Lookout Mountain, GA. 11:00 am.

Thursday, April 27 - **Keown Falls & Johns Mountain with Bill & Leslie,** NW GA, near Resaca, GA. 10:00 am.

Saturday, May 6 - **Cooper's Creek-Old Growth "Valley of the Giants" with Melanie & Cliff**, 10:00 am.

Saturday, October 14 - Save the Date! GAFW Annual Retreat at Red Top Mountain.

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

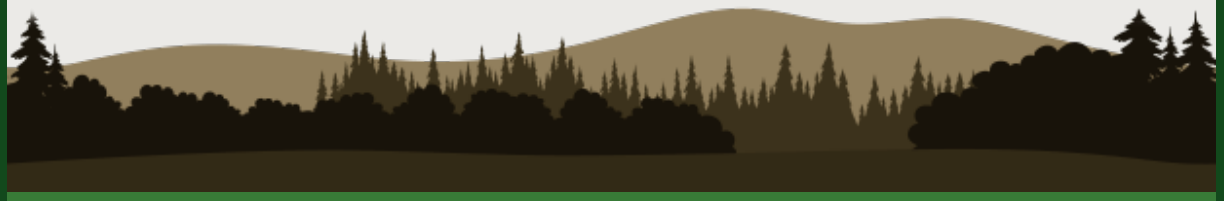
Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

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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