GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
PRESERVE PROTECT RESTORE GAFW.ORG

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An excavator with tree sheer tool attached. Credit: USFS

The Climate Cost of Logging

GAFW recently signed onto two comment letters (**here** and **here**) with partners internationally asking the Biden Administration and the **Council on Environmental Quality** (CEQ) along with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to improve their recommendations concerning how agencies should address emissions from logging. Specifically, we ask for improved guidance on using "methods and models that represent high-quality information and accurate scientific analysis when undertaking environmental reviews of logging projects on federal lands."

All commercial logging not only devastates ecosystems but also exacerbates climate change, and this practice must be reined in if humanity is to survive beyond the next few generations. A healthy and standing Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest is not the sole answer to addressing climate change, but there is no set of solutions to climate change that does not include standing national forest lands in Georgia and nationally. The **USFS agrees** that "timber harvesting, and not land use change or fire, was the largest source of gross emissions from U.S. forests between 2006 and 2010."

Misinformation regarding the forest benefits of logging makes for oft-used talking points by logging companies and the legislators who support them. Land management agencies routinely assert that the impacts of logging on carbon stores will be minimal because carbon from logged trees will be stored long-term in forest products. Such assertions are contrary to research indicating that much of the carbon stored in removed trees is lost in the near term and that little carbon is stored long-term in wood products. A recent study in Washington concluded that

the failure to calculate the decomposition losses amount to as much as a 25% underestimation of carbon emissions. Paper and wood chips, for example, have noticeably short lifetimes and will release substantial carbon into the atmosphere within a few months to a few years of production.

Product disposal in landfills (like those mail-order boxes we all now regularly receive) results in anaerobic decomposition that releases methane. Methane has a global warming potential of about 30 times that of carbon dioxide over 100 years and over 80 times that of carbon dioxide over 20 years, magnifying the impact of the disposal of short-term wood products. Longer-term wood products can store carbon for many decades, but a study modeling carbon stores in Oregon and Washington from 1900-1992 showed that only 23% of carbon from logged trees during this time was still stored as of 1996. Many of these emissions could be avoided if these trees were left standing.

Undercalculating the long-term sequestration of finished wood products is only one source of carbon loss from logging. The visible destruction of a clearcut forest is staggering alone, but what is the true cost of conducting this task? We also requested that when preparing for vegetative management projects, the USFS should disclose direct and indirect climate pollution from the removing, transporting, and milling of wood. This includes emissions from loss of stored carbon during the removal and manufacturing process, including the fossil fuel emissions attributable to machines and vehicles used to:

·construct, reconstruct, or maintain logging access routes;
·cut down trees;
·transport trees to mills; and
·mill the wood.

Finally, let us not forget the carbon lost in the impacted soil remaining after **feller bunchers** (trigger warning) and logging trucks have done their damage. The **amount of carbon stored in soils is often greater than the amount stored aboveground** in both living and dead plant biomass, and the USFS calculates that approximately 50% of forest carbon is stored in and under the soil. *"**Soil carbon is generally considered very stable**, meaning it does not change much or quickly in response to vegetation dynamics except when soils are disturbed significantly, such as tilled for agriculture, with soil erosion, extreme fire events, or with permanent changes in certain types of vegetation cover" ….* such as clearcutting. The compacted soil remaining after logging operations is unsuitable for retaining carbon or regrowing without extensive remediation. That Georgia red clay we are familiar with turns into concrete when dry and compressed, decreasing its water-holding capacity and organic matter, inhibiting its ability to nourish any plant or underground creatures, and leading to waterway sedimentation.

Current USFS policy on carbon sequestration is antiquated and concerns "The U.S. Forest Service balances multiple goals for the public benefit, and thus, carbon does not have priority over the many other services that forests provide." GAFW believes that if the full calculation of the carbon cost of logging projects is accurately assessed, there will be a clear conclusion that the commercial clearcutting of our national forest lands is a driver of climate change and is dangerously unsustainable. Michael Polanyi, Policy and Campaign Manager at Nature Canada, captures the issue's seriousness in his statement, "Canada and the US won't meet their 2030 emission reduction targets unless they clearly recognize – and address – the climate impacts associated with industrial logging."

If you are interested in **submitting personal comments** or your organization is interested in **joining the partner letter**, please submit them directly by April 10, 2023.

Winter Issue of *Forest News*

Be sure to check out the latest issue of our quarterly newsletter, ***Forest News***. The winter issue features a brief history of Brasstown Bald, an update on Fightingtown timber sales, and more.

Want to receive your copy of *Forest News* in the mail? **Join GAFW today**. Our members receive *Forest News*, our quarterly newsletter; Action Alerts regarding time-sensitive environmental issues; the ForestWatch Journal e-newsletter; and Outing Notifications to find out about exciting hikes, outings, and events.

Join GAFW Today

Graffiti Removal at Curahee Mountain

Sometimes our forest lands get help from sources we might not normally consider.

Thanks to the efforts of **Tread Lightly**!, 27 volunteers came together in December to remove graffiti and trash from Curahee Mountain, a historic site in the Chattooga-Oconee National Forest.

Currahee Mountain is the site of early WWII Army paratrooper training based out of Camp Toccoa. This historic landmark in Georgia has experienced graffiti vandalism over the years, requiring the removal of graffiti paint using special biodegradable cleaners. A local volunteer group called Currahee Cleanup Project and rock climbers in Georgia conduct cleanup events twice a year. However, it has been hard to keep this landmark clean of graffiti. Eighteen members of Venture Unknown Off-Road adventure group and Tread Lightly! joined the Curahee Cleanup Project removal team along with five support members of the US Forest Service Chattooga River District. Though rain slowed down the early morning progress, the group successfully removed graffiti from the area as well as removed 12 full bags of trash, totaling 225 lbs., improving 3 miles of trail.

Thank you to Tread Lightly! and their partners who made this possible:

- US Forest Service Chattooga River District
- Currahee Cleanup Project
- Venture Unknown
- Southeast Climbing Coalition

"Restoring this scenic area to its natural beauty was really gratifying. Tread Lightly!'s goal is to balance the needs of the people who enjoy outdoor recreation with the need to maintain a healthy environment. It's great to be part of the solution to protect the adventure for everyone. "– Lowell Eckart, Tread Lightly!

For more information, see the **Tread Lightly! Impact Record**.

(Article and photo reprinted with permission)

Upcoming GAFW Outings

Wednesday, April 5 - Tour the Chattahoochee Forest National Fish Hatchery, Suches, GA. 10:00 am.

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

Thursday, April 13 - **Raven Cliffs Falls Restorative Hike with Jessica & Maria** , Helen, GA. 11 am.

Saturday, April 22 - Wildflowers & Waterfall Hike at Mount Airy Creek with Jess, Dahlonega, GA. 10 am.

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

Thursday, April 27 - GAFW Book Club Meeting, Zoom, 7:00 pm.

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

Thursday, May 11 - **Cradle of Forestry Guided Tour** , Pisgah Forest, NC. 1 pm.

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

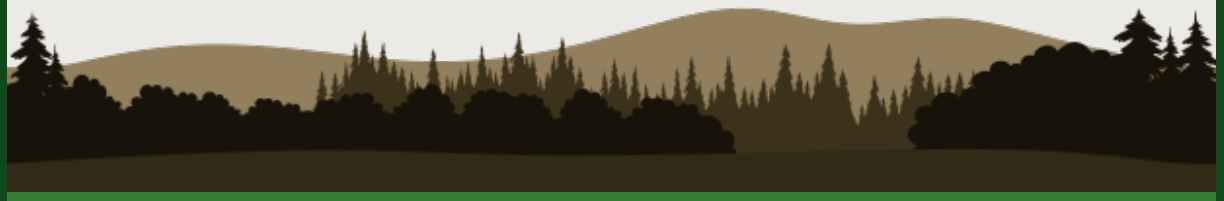
Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

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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