GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
PRESERVE PROTECT RESTORE GAFW.ORG

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Too Thick to Drink and Too Thin to Plow

As you know, GAFW has been a leading voice on clean streams free of sediment. While the burning of fossil fuels resulting in the release of greenhouse gases and the effects those gases have on **our planet's climate** is the primary and most pressing pollution concern in our state, country, and globe, the most visually obvious source of pollution is sedimentation in our surface water. The Environmental Protection Agency lists sediment as the most common pollutant in our rivers, lakes, and streams.

Sediment from dirt roads ranks second only to row cropping (agricultural operations are excluded from the **Georgia Erosion & Sedimentation Act**) as a primary source of erosion in the state. Perhaps **the most harmful damage to Georgia's land and water resources** is incurred through unchecked and uncorrected erosion and sediment deposition.

According to the **Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission**,

"*Sedimentation is the process where soil particles settle out of suspension as the velocity of water decreases. The heavier particles, gravel and sand, settle out more rapidly than fine silt and clay particles. The characteristic reddish color of Georgia's streams results from suspended microscopic clay particles. Unfortunately, these particles are easily transported and settle out very slowly. It is difficult to totally eliminate the transportation of these fine particles.*"

The best way to address sedimentation in our streams is to keep it out in the first place.

It's just dirt! We have all heard it, but sedimentation is devastating, costly to the ecosystems we rely on, and expensive for taxpayers. Sediment in clean streams can have various negative effects on water quality, ecosystems, and human activities, including:

- Disrupting the natural food chain by destroying small stream organisms' habitats leads to declines in fish populations.
- Preventing sunlight penetration and inhibiting the growth of natural vegetation in water.
- Clogging fish gills reduces resistance to disease and affects fish egg and larvae development.
- Increasing the cost of treating drinking water and causing odor and taste problems.
- Carrying other pollutants, such as nutrients, heavy metals, and pathogens, can harm aquatic life and water quality.
- Altering water flow and reducing water depth making navigation and recreational use more difficult.
- Flooding and damage to surrounding land.

GAFW takes sedimentation in our state waterways seriously. The source of most of the drinking water enjoyed by Georgia residents and visitors (and a portion of those in Alabama, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Florida) originates in, flows out of, and/or flows through one or more of the four districts that make up the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest.

The thing humans cannot survive more than a couple of days without – clean water – is a direct result of the health of our national forest ecosystems that clean, filter, recycles, and pumps to your local municipal water supply station. The cleaner it is when it arrives means, the less expensive it is for you and your fellow taxpayers to fund the cost of getting it to your tap.

Success!

GAFW has been pursuing our vision of intact, healthy ecosystems by specifically addressing the sedimentation resulting from unauthorized and/or poorly designed dirt roads, over & inappropriate use by off-road vehicles, and lack of funding for ongoing maintenance within the boundaries of our state's national forest lands. In doing so, we identify the worst offenders and advocate for remediation, ongoing maintenance, and/or closure.

One road at the top of our list of concerns for at least a decade has been a 1.4-mile

section of **Flatlands Road** in the Blue Ridge Ranger District (BRRD) in Suches, GA (Union County). Long identified by off-road enthusiasts as a road without rules where you can **drive through the creek itself** and test the limits of your vehicle. The resulting sedimentation from Flowers Cove Branch Creek runs into Suches Creek and downstream to the Toccoa River before draining into Blue Ridge Lake (eventually finding its way into the mighty Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico).

GAFW has advocated for a decade with the USFS to either improve and maintain this road or close it. Last week the BRRD announced taking **official action** on Flatlands with a proposal to close this section of the road permanently. The USFS, in partnership with **Trout Unlimited**, proposes gating both ends of the problem section and constructing erosion control features to allow the land to heal.

GAFW thanks Trout Unlimited for providing the funding needed for this project and Blue Ridge District Ranger Steverson Moffat for addressing this longstanding concern. In advocating for this resolution, GAFW recognizes that our organization and the USFS have long been on the same page in identifying Flatlands as a priority.

Unfortunately, **the USFS is chronically underfunded for basic road and trail maintenance by the U.S. Congress.** The USFS was as much, or more, concerned about Flatland, and other roads in similar conditions, as GAFW; however, as a government agency, they can only do what their budget allows. This is why GAFW prioritizes partnering with the USFS in identifying and resolving concerns and advocating for Congress and USFS national leadership to ensure our District Rangers have the resources they need to keep our forest healthy.

In addition to the Flatlands project, the BRRD proposes temporarily closing the **Three Sisters** parcel in Lumpkin County. A beautiful 1,150-acre island parcel hosting the headwaters of Ward Creek, the main source of **Lake Zwerner** and the main source of drinking water for Dahlonega, GA. GAFW will comment supporting both project proposals (full info **here** and **here**). If you have suggested input you suggest GAFW consider in our submitted comments, please let us know at **report@gafw.org**.

2023 Spring Appeal & Mother's Day

Thank you to those who contributed to our 2023 spring fundraising appeal. We are well on our way to meeting our $20,000 goal. For those active members, please consider **renewing** or making **an additional generous contribution today**. If you are not a member, or your membership has lapsed, please **become active today** at the

highest level possible.

Another way to contribute to GAFW's mission **to preserve and protect our national forests** is by giving gift memberships. Mother's Day is this Sunday, May 14, and if you act now, GAFW will send our full new member welcome package, including a large tote bag, a copy of our most recent ***Forest News***, a welcome letter referencing your gift, and a hand-signed Mother's Day card from the GAFW staff. It is easy; go to our **donation page** and scroll down to the "gift membership" option. Please note, if you want to send this in time to be received by Saturday, 5/13, please make the gift no later than Thursday, 5/11.

Donate to GAFW Today

Upcoming GAFW Outings

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

Thursday, May 25 - **GAFW Book Club Meeting** via Zoom.

Thursday, June 29 - **GAFW Book Club Meeting** via Zoom.

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

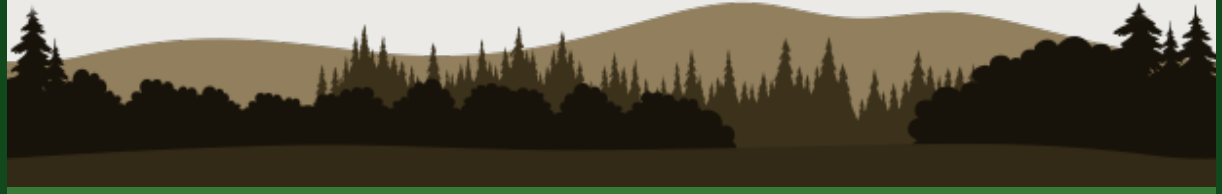
Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

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 preserve and protect our national forests.



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