GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
PRESERVE PROTECT RESTORE GAFW.ORG

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Recreation is Not Conservation

...**but both can be supported**

GAFW is a conservation organization that utilizes non-commercial recreational activities such as hikes and other opportunities to explore our natural world to educate, enlighten, and motivate our members and community. We have many supporters who do not live adjacent to our state's national forests nor have the time or ability to visit our forests very frequently. But just because they do not enjoy the forest daily or even monthly, they still understand the importance of the forest's existence in their lives and its ecological value for all of humanity. We also support and recognize that there is a correlation between those who recreationally enjoy the forest and those who will use their voice to advocate for its long-term health and protection.

GAFW has a policy of **fully supporting recreational use, including commercially, within the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest (CONF) IF the activities do not have a negative impact on the ecology or natural balance of the forest or other users or beneficiaries.** However, over the past thirty years, with the pandemic rapidly accelerating visitation, the forest has seen dramatic increases in visitors to the forest, especially the three north Georgia districts. On the one hand, this is a wonderful development as more users become enchanted with the forest's beauty and available adventures. On the other hand, is there a limit to the number of recreational users leading

to a scenario of "loving the forest to death?"

A few use analyses are being conducted in limited locations such as **designated Wilderness areas**, but we do not have a comprehensive baseline of past and current recreational use throughout the CONF to determine if the anecdotally observed increases in use are having a negative effect on the land. The evidence certainly suggests a greater impact, and USFS staff, including law enforcement, have indicated concern about the impact of increased visits.

Currently, there is a USFS comment period open for **proposed commercial recreation special use permits** (RSUP) in the **Chattooga River Ranger District** for two commercial companies: **Run Bum Tours LLC** for the **Helen Half Marathon** and **Run the Cohuttas** for the **Rabun Half Marathon**. Without a baseline of recreational use (especially), including commercially, conducting a proper analysis of these annual events and their impact is difficult.

GAFW is researching and drafting comments for submission specific to these two commercial providers and the events, including the courses, and will submit by the May 31, 2023, due date. Our comments will include a request to the USFS to conduct a recreational use analysis before any future commercial recreation permits. Once the comments are available, we will share them with you, but in the meantime, if you have any feedback on these events, the commercial providers, the course, and/or the impact on the forest, please let us know at **report@gafw.org**.

Ecosystems Do Not Follow State Boundaries

GAFW is a grassroots organization with a limited budget and resources (**consider a donation today**); however, as with all good community stakeholders, it is in our interest to keep an eye on the current events, happenings, news, and status of other public lands in our, and neighboring, states.

Cumberland Island National Seashore

On April 12, animal rights groups and a Cumberland Island homeowner sued the National Park Service (NPS), seeking the removal of Cumberland Island National Seashore's feral horses. The NPS management has allegedly caused harm to both the horses and the natural resources of the Seashore, violating the National Park Service Organic Act, Wilderness Act, and Endangered Species Act. **More details here** and **take action here.**

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge

American Rivers has named the Okefenokee Swamp one of the ten most endangered rivers of 2023. The Okefenokee is on the list for the second time since 2020 because of a heavy mineral mining proposal near the southern boundary of the swamp. GAFW remains a member of the **Okefenokee Protection Alliance**, a coalition of more than 40 organizations leading the effort to protect the largest blackwater wetland in North America. **More details here** and **take action here.**

Nantahala Pisgah Forest Plan

Directly north of the Chattahoochee National Forest and sharing a boundary with several north Georgia counties, including Rabun, Towns, and Union, is the Nantahala National Forest. One of the first national forests in the east has been under USFS management for more than 100 years. Every national forest has a Land and Resource Management Plan, usually called the Forest Plan, that describes how the forest will be managed for 15-20 years after adoption. North Carolina has four national forests, but the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests in western North Carolina are managed under a single management plan. Last updated in 1994, the process of updating the plan for these forests has been underway since 2012 and was **recently completed**; however, not without significant controversy. Recent updates from our partner **MountainTrue** do an excellent job of explaining the unfortunate concerns stemming from the updated plan. **More details here.**

The current **Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Plan** is reaching its lifespan (last updated in 2004) and is anticipated to begin the process in the coming years. When this project begins, it will be the primary focus of GAFW and is anticipated to take a decade to finalize. We have learned much from watching our NC and national partners engage in the process and will use what we learned to engage in the process fully.

Ocoee Whitewater Center

Almost one year ago, in April 2022, the Whitewater Center, located in the Cherokee National Forest and initially constructed for the 1996 Olympics, burned to the ground. Currently, the upper parking lot and footprint of the Ocoee Whitewater Visitor Center remain closed, but the remaining day-use site and adjoining trails are open, along with the rafting and paddling outfitters. Now the USFS wants the public and river users to help guide the future of the center and its grounds through a collaborative planning process.

More details here.

Cop City

Cop City is the name protesters gave the planned Atlanta Public Safety Training Center in DeKalb County. The 85-acre parcel was originally owned by the Muscogee people, who referred to the area as the Welaunee Forest. It was purchased in 1863 by the City of Atlanta for use as a cemetery but was never used for that purpose. The federal government purchased the land in 1917 to be used as a prisoner-of-war camp and used as the Atlanta Prison Farm from 1920 until 1995. Since 1995 it has been vacant and used as an undeveloped green space by Atlantans. Former Atlanta mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms announced the plan to turn the location into a state-of-the-art training facility in April 2021, which has since turned out protesters en masse in opposition. Those opposed to the facility come from differing points of view, including defending reductions in urban forests, opponents of law enforcement, and neighbors who do not want more development. **More details here** and **take action here** or **here** or **here**.

Pine Log Wildlife Management Area

The 14,134-acre **Pine Log Wildlife Management Area** in Bartow County. Privately owned, this area has been in a long-term lease with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources as public land for almost half a century. Now the family that owns one of the largest undeveloped parcels of private land in the state is looking to sell. While they are actively talking with the state to purchase the land, the family is also pursuing a development backup plan in case talks fall through. The development plan calls for 16,500 residential units, 16.5 million square feet of industrial space, 800 acres for commercial development, and nearly 4,000 acres for mining and debris recycling. Approximately 5,000 acres would be preserved as greenspace more reminiscent of a city park than a natural wilderness. **More details here** and **take action here**.

2023 Spring Appeal

As of this morning, we have raised $4,111, or 21%, of our $20,000 spring fundraising goal. For those of you who have already given, we cannot thank you enough. For those of you who have not yet given, please consider making **a generous contribution today**.

Another way to contribute to GAFW's mission **to preserve and protect our national forests** is by including GAFW as a beneficiary in your will or living trust. As an environmental organization with an ecological focus, our ultimate goal is to ensure the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest is healthy and standing for our children's children, making a legacy gift an optimal option for many of our members and stakeholders.

Like the stewardship concept that originated with the Iroquois, GAFW believes that our decisions **today should result in a sustainable world seven generations into the future**. Current generations, such as ours, should consider our impact seven generations ahead and live, work, and make decisions based on how they will affect our descendants. What would our lives be like today if our ancestors from seven generations ago had adhered to this concept?

Benefits of including GAFW in your will or living trust include:

- Failing to plan your estate will result in the state directing your property to be distributed under a one-size-fits-all statutory formula called **intestate succession**. This prioritizes immediate family members and almost certainly will not fully reflect your wishes.
- The mixed blessing of a legacy gift to GAFW allows the organization to set aside much-needed funds for financial reserves, capital projects, and program expansions to address the organization's future needs.

Because this would be an unbudgeted influx, it could be used for mission-expanding opportunities rather than general operating expenses.

- In discussion with you, and your family, GAFW could offer recognition opportunities as appropriate, or you could remain anonymous at your preference. For those who prefer recognition, a plaque or inscription is popular. Other forms of remembrance, from published thanks to dedicating a program, newsletter, or scholarship to the donor, are also possibilities.
- GAFW will soon be celebrating our 40th birthday, and our mission is as relevant today as it was in 1985 and as much as it will be in 2085 – maybe even more. Our organization is well-established, healthy, dependable, and growing, and we will be here for a long time. No need to worry if we will exist to use your gift in the future.
- Your bequeathal can reduce estate taxes. Charitable bequests can reduce (or even eliminate) the estate tax your beneficiaries will owe. See an estate attorney to find out more.
- Your legacy will be upheld, and you will have the peace of mind of knowing you are supporting the long-term sustainability of Georgia's public lands. Your children's children will appreciate it even if they do not have the opportunity to thank you personally.
- It is easy to do. Ask your will or living trust preparer to include the following language: **"I give ($____ dollars) or (____ % percent of my estate) to Georgia ForestWatch, a Georgia charitable organization, tax ID 58-2188475 located at 81 Crown Mountain Pl Building C, Suite 200 Dahlonega, GA 30533, for its general purposes."**

On behalf of all future generations, we thank you.

Donate to GAFW Today

Upcoming GAFW Outings

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

Friday, May 26 - Wild Herbs Walk with Patricia Howell, RH (AHG)

Saturday, June 3 - National Trails Day at Vogel State Park

Saturday, June 17 - **Consauga River Snorkel Trip**

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 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

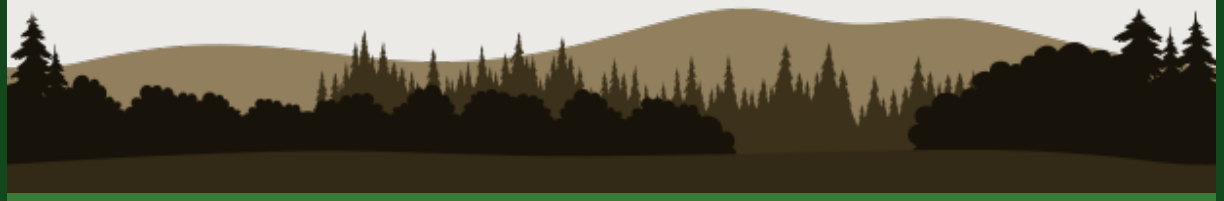
Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

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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