GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
PRESERVE PROTECT RESTORE GAFW.ORG

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# FORESTWATCH JOURNAL

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## Comments submitted to the Blue Ridge Ranger District (BRRD)

GAFW pursues our vision of intact, healthy ecosystems by specifically addressing the sedimentation resulting from unauthorized and/or poorly designed dirt roads, over- and 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.

In support of road closing, GAFW recently submitted the following comments on the BRRD's welcome proposal to close **Flatland Road** in Suches and the **Three Sisters** area near Dahlonega.

The USFS classifies maintenance of **National Forest System roads** into five levels: 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Maintenance level 1 roads are closed to motor vehicle use. Maintenance level 2 roads are maintained for high-clearance vehicles. Maintenance levels 3, 4, and 5 roads are maintained for passage by standard passenger cars during the normal season of use.

**GAFW's policy on unpaved roads within the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest (CONF)**

- **Permanent moratorium on temporary and permanent road construction within existing or future CONF boundaries.**
- **Roads not providing a specific stated purpose or leading to an essential destination should be permanently closed and the land allowed to heal.**
- **Roads not meeting contemporary construction standards should be reconstructed to meet or exceed contemporary standards or closed permanently.**
- **Roads that meet contemporary construction standards (including culverts) should be consistently maintained to reduce/eliminate sedimentation into waterways. If budgets do not allow for annual maintenance at this level, they should be permanently closed or closed until adequate annual maintenance is budgeted.**
- **Roads that cross through waterways should be permanently closed on both sides of the stream crossing or, if essential, be gated to prevent vehicular traffic into waterways.** Examples include Charlie's Creek and Earl's Ford in Rabun County.
- **Violators of existing USFS road policies, including gate vandalism, should be fully prosecuted.**

While the USFS may not fully agree with every aspect of GAFW's unpaved road policy, many within the agency would welcome additional road funding to address the maintenance backlog. However, it is Congress, not the USFS, who has the responsibility to fully fund the needs and priorities of the USFS, including increases in law enforcement and road maintenance. That makes it our job as constituents to ensure our federal representatives meet the need for increased USFS funding. Look for future targeted opportunities to use your voice to advocate for these and other much-needed priorities.

As always, if you know of poorly designed, unmaintained, or overused unpaved roads within the CONF, especially those upstream or adjacent to waterways, please let us know at **report@gafw.org**.

## Remember the Removal

One hundred and ninety-three years ago, on May 28, 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the **Indian Removal Act** into law. Passed just days earlier by the U.S. Congress, it is one of the darkest days in our country's history that led to the forced migration of Georgia's indigenous people. The Cherokee worked together to stop this relocation but were unsuccessful; they were eventually forcibly removed by the United States government in an act of genocide.

Before the removal, Native Americans lived throughout the contemporary boundaries of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. By the decade's end, very few natives remained in the southeastern United States. Working for white settlers who wanted the land, the United States government forced the Cherokee and others to become refugees by walking hundreds of miles to a specially designated "Indian Territory" across the Mississippi River. This difficult and oftentimes deadly journey is known as the **Trail of Tears**.

The **Remember the Removal Bike Ride** was started by the **Cherokee Nation** in 1984 for Cherokee youth to retrace the Trail of Tears and get a glimpse of the hardships their ancestors faced when they made the same trek on foot years before. The ride became an annual event starting in 2009.

Of the estimated 16,000 Cherokees forced to make the original journey, an estimated 4,000 died due to exposure, starvation, and disease. Remember the Removal bike riders travel on the Northern Route, one of six removal routes, in honor of their ancestors. This year's ride will start in northeast Georgia at the **New Echota State Historic Site** in early June and cycle across seven states before ending their 950-mile journey in Tahlequah, OK. For more information about the ride or to follow their progress, click **here**.

## It Can Be Done

As of today, we have raised $6,406, or 35%, 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 **becoming a member** and making **a generous contribution today**.

GAFW's mission **to preserve and protect our national forests** is not uncommon or dissimilar to other organizations around the world that serve to protect our most precious natural resources. Globally there are many similar communities that prefer standing trees to barren clearcuts. This past week the government of **Victoria in Australia permanently ended commercial logging** in their native forests. Similar to our home state Victoria has more than enough private timber lands to accommodate the needs of the timber industry, and just as everywhere, logging of our public lands is senseless, damaging, unsightly, and a significant contributor to carbon pollution.

*By the end of the year, Victoria's trouble-plagued native forest industry will end. The state's iconic mountain ash forests and endangered wildlife will, at last, be safe from chainsaws.* **The Conversation**

Closer to home, the wood pulp paper mill in Canton, NC, is **closing this summer** after a century of polluting the Pigeon River and where much of our original old-growth trees went to be slaughtered. While GAFW is sympathetic to the loss of jobs in the community, this waterway, known for its beauty and recreational opportunities, was once considered a dead river and dumping ground due entirely to the mill's effluent. Situated on the northeast boundary of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, where timber was once sourced for the mill and whose founders argued against the park's creation. Ironically **they supported making it a national forest** so they could continue clearcutting within the boundaries of one of the most revered natural areas in the southern Appalachians. It is estimated that the river will begin healing within days of the mill's closing.

As stated above, it can and is, being done. All we must do is come together and make our voices heard. Ending commercial logging on our public lands is within grasp, but GAFW and organizations with similar missions, need your financial support and voice. If we do not stand for our forests, then our forests may not be standing for our children's children. **Please give generously** and **join or renew your membership** today, and on behalf of all future generations, we thank you.

Donate to GAFW Today

## Upcoming GAFW Outings

Join Georgia ForestWatch and Travis McDonald, South Zone Fisheries Biologist, Cherokee National Forest, for our annual snorkel trip on the Conasauga River. (Space is limited - register below)

The ancient age of the Southern Appalachian Mountains has enabled aquatic species in small watersheds to attain extreme levels of diversity compared to the much larger western watersheds. In the clear waters of the snorkeling sites on the Conasauga, it is typical to see 15 to 20 species of fish on any given day.

Over 45 species of fish have been documented at or near individual sites. Freshwater drum as large as 6 pounds swim in schools in the deep pools; sporting fish, such as bass and bream, are seen in their natural habitats. Colorful darters and shiners may be seen spawning and feeding. Several thousand fish will be present on any given day. The experience is like swimming in an aquarium full of fish. Turtles, tadpoles, and salamanders are all usually present.

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**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.

GAFW Outings on Meetup

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## Thank You

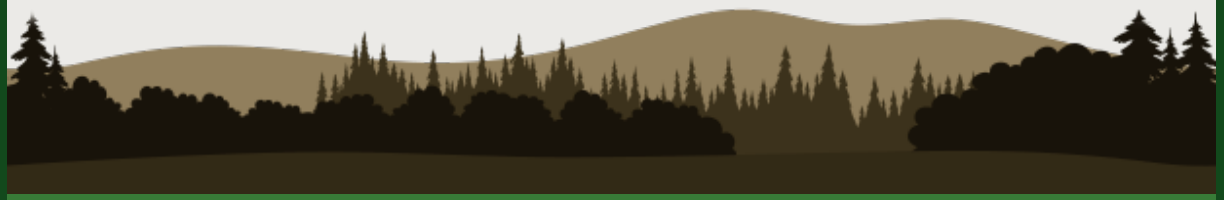
Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

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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