GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
PRESERVE PROTECT RESTORE GAFW.ORG

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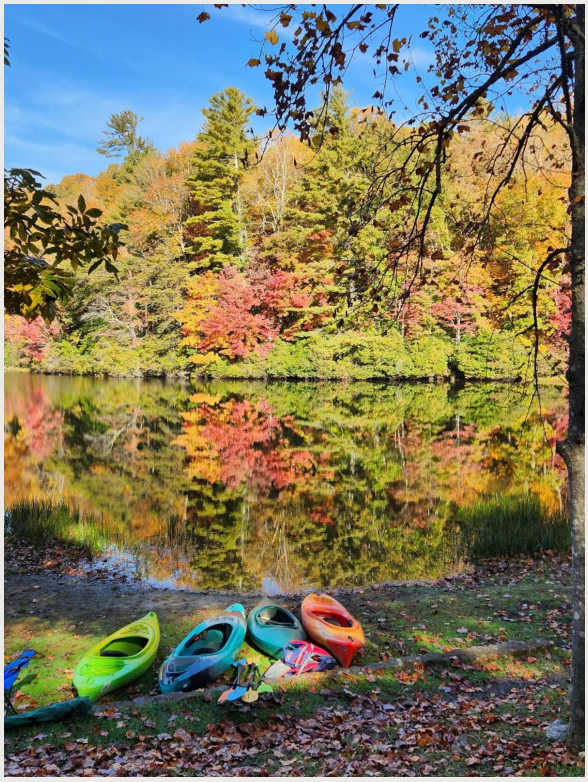

Diversity is a Fact. Inclusion is a Choice.

"Y'all Means All" is a popular slogan in the welcoming communities of the southern Appalachians. North Georgia forests and our public lands do not solely belong to those who live adjacent to the forest's boundaries, can afford to visit regularly, or do not question their safety while traveling remote roads or camping overnight. Our public lands belong to us all, no matter our skin color, amount of taxes paid, language spoken at home, job title, or how we spend our Sunday mornings.

Communities need to be welcoming when new and diverse people visit our forests and must be proactive in addressing the unwelcomeness in our rural communities that prevent new visitors from fully experiencing our public lands. When we ask ourselves why there is limited diversity amongst visitors in our forests, the answer reveals itself when we set aside our privilege and empathetically view the challenges faced through the lens of those not traditionally seen visiting and recreating in north Georgia. Unwelcomeness is readily

apparent every time you visit north GA with the free-flying Confederate and Gadsden flags, antigovernment militia stickers on trucks, and Sons of Confederate Veterans roadside signs. When we see these symbols and the hate they represent, it is not difficult to grasp that mountain communities can feel, and in fact, be, unsafe for minority visitors.

Why does GAFW, primarily an environmental organization, have a position and focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and supporting welcoming communities? Some say we should focus on the bees and the trees, but GAFW understands that unless everyone has an equity stake in the preservation of our public lands and is welcome in using their voice, our public lands are never really preserved for future generations. Therefore, GAFW will continue to work towards expanding access to the forest and elevating a diversity of voices in managing our public lands.

Proud Partner of Get Black Outside

Speaking of welcoming communities, this past Saturday, GAFW joined the USFS Blue Ridge Ranger District staff, **Get Black Outside**, **Atlanta Underwater Explorers**, **Tennessee Aquatic Project**, and **Friends of the Urban Food Forest at Browns Mill** at the Lake Winfield Scott picnic pavilion to share a meal and each other's company. Hosted by lead organization Get Black Outside (GBO), dozens of community supporters, members of each organization, and young people from the Atlanta metro area spent the weekend snorkeling in Cooper Creek, swimming in the lake, and enjoying some unseasonably cool nights camping out.

GAFW is proud to support GBO and its mission to "bring outdoor programming to black audiences" and looks forward to partnering again soon. GAFW also thanks **The Sapelo Foundation** and their **Collaboration Development Fund** for providing important funding and support to ensure this event was successful.

Thank You

On behalf of the entire Chattahoochee Oconee National Forest and Georgia ForestWatch, we cannot thank you enough for the most successful appeal in GAFW's almost 40-year history. Thank you to the hundreds of donors, including one very generous major donor, who collectively contributed **an outstanding $90,711.39 – more than four and a half times over our $20,000 goal.**

This success speaks volumes about the present and future of the organization and our ability to pursue **our mission of preserving and protecting our national forests** and envision a **future where people enjoy forests that have reached their majesty and where intact natural processes support healthy ecosystems and thriving biodiversity for all.** Your confidence in our work and updated strategic direction is readily apparent, and we look forward to elevating our voice in managing our national forests.

Because it can never be said too often – Thank You Again – and for those interested in getting on board a growing and vibrant organization, please consider **joining or renewing your membership** and **making an additional contribution**.

Donate to GAFW Today

Increased Fees Proposed by the USFS

Both the **Chattahoochee Oconee National Forest** (CONF) and the

National Forests in North Carolina (the four forests Croatan, Nantahala, Pisgah, & Uwharrie, stretch across the entire state and are often linked together but managed separately) recently released proposals to implement and increase fees at popular destinations across a variety of districts.

GAFW is interested in hearing how you feel about the **CONF** (due 8/31/23) and **NFNC** (due 8/22/23) fee increases. Currently, GAFW recognizes the need (and routinely sees the impact) for increased revenue to support the recreational, facility, and law enforcement needs of forests facing significant increases in visitation. Parking lots of popular trails, campgrounds, swimming holes, waterfalls, and fishing spots are packed with enthusiasts from spring to fall. While we want more people to enjoy their public lands, we also need resources to prevent us from loving our forests to death.

The necessary funding to address increased use must come from somewhere, but GAFW does not place “blame” on the USFS for doing what is needed to enhance revenue. As a result of the U.S. Congress reducing available funding year over year, the USFS is chronically underfunded in virtually every budget category needed to support healthy forests for future generations.

The tentative GAFW policy is that Congress should increase USFS funding for recreation management (amongst other categories) and stop the chokehold it has on the USFS budget requiring them to pass along fees to forest users who already support forests through our taxes. These increases, and the source of the concern, lie with Congress, not the USFS. GAFW feels our job as constituents are to reach out to our federal representatives to advocate for specific categorical increases to the USFS budget (timber harvesting notwithstanding) to fund these needs.

GAFW is still drafting its policy on these fee increases and is open to feedback from members and the forest community. Please let us know how you feel about this or any topic at **report@gafw.org**.

Outreach Coordinator Search

GAFW has set clear goals to expand upon our recreational and educational Outing opportunities significantly and is working diligently to provide increased opportunities to match the diverse interests and abilities of our members - and future members.

Unfortunately, Jessica Morehead recently departed as GAFW's Outreach Coordinator. We thank her for three months in the role and wish her well in her future endeavors. In addition, we have begun recruiting for a new Outreach Coordinator.

Equally important to a keen interest in developing recreational and educational Outings in the north and central GA, including the Atlanta metro area, the ideal Outreach Coordinator will be openly passionate about Georgia's national forest lands and want to share their passion for GAFW and the Chattahoochee Oconee National Forest with others.

The ideal candidate will have a zealous enthusiasm for reaching out to community members and other stakeholders. They will consistently and proactively seek formal and informal opportunities to share their love of our national forests, elevate and educate about our forest's ability to sequester carbon, address climate change, and advocate for natural processes in managing our forests.

Please see the posting for the Outreach Coordinator position **here**. If you, or someone you know, has the interest, skills, and motivation to be a vocal leader in promoting our mission and the future of our public lands and a key member of the organization's leadership team, please send a resume to **jobs@gafw.org**. Diverse applicants are encouraged to apply.

Upcoming GAFW Outings

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

Friday, August 11 - **Museum of the Cherokee Indian** , Cherokee, NC.

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

GAFW Outings on Meetup

If this email was forwarded to you, **please register here** to receive GAFW updates.

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Thank You

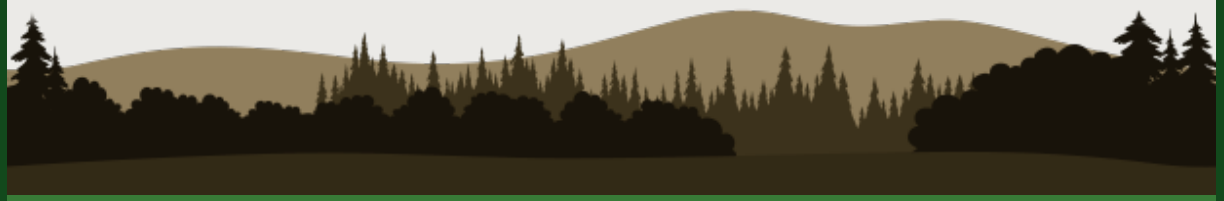
Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

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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