GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
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Photo: An unfortunate example of a vehicle crossing Warwoman Creek near the point where Earl's Ford Road should be closed in Rabun County.

Foothills Landscape Project - Your Input Requested

Next Wednesday, July 19, 2023, a Foothills Landscape Project (FLP) Collaborative Group meeting will be held. GAFW is an active member of this evolving group and will be in attendance. Unfortunately, this meeting will not have "a virtual attendance option," but GAFW will provide a post-meeting update later this month.

Please find the **proposed agenda and meeting packet here.** Despite the agenda holding space for "public comment," it is unclear how the public can listen or comment during the meeting with only members invited and no remote viewing. This is one example of how it can be difficult to find the most up-to-date information regarding the structure, schedule, membership, and proposed projects. If you are interested in staying up to date, please subscribe to ***GAFW's ForestWatch Journal*** and check the two primary sites **here** and **here**.

GAFW's analysis of the meeting agenda and packet

- **"Foothills Accomplishments"**
    - Convert the 3.36-mile **Rocky Flats OHV trail** (Murray County) to "**a seasonal road open for various hunting seasons**." GAFW conducted a site visit to this location on 7/5/23 and found the road closed and the gate locked.
    - Prescribed (Rx) burns
        - **Jigger Creek** (Murray County) – 26 acres
        - **Rocky Flats/Mill Creek** (Murray County) – 77 acres
        - **Slick Shoal/Tallulah River** (Rabun County) – 1,943 acres
        - **Stonewall Creek** (Rabun County) – 338 acres
- **"Foothills Activities associated with other Decisions"**
    - **Three Sisters** (Lumpkin County) road closure. Status: closed.
    - **Three Sisters** (Lumpkin County) timber sale. Status: forthcoming.
    - **Metcalf Creek** (Rabun County) culvert replacement.
    - **Earl's Ford** (Rabun County) dispersed camping reclamation. Status: forthcoming in conjunction with the proposed Earl's Ford FLP project (see below).
    - **Sumac Creek** (Murray County) timber sale.
- **Proposed Projects**
    - Project proposal to pave 1.2 miles of Old CCC Camp Road (Murray County) adjacent to Holly Creek from **Emery Creek Trailhead to the Dill Creek bridge**. The road adjacency to Holly Creek is contributing to sediment into the waterway.
    - Project proposal to place bollards or boulders at **the intersection of the Chattooga River and the GA side of Earl's Ford Road** but past **the crossing of Warwoman Ford**. This project will also restore the heavily used dispersed camping sites along the road, and Warwoman Creek mentioned above.
- **GAFW Questions and Concerns**
    - GAFW is considering supporting the permanent closure of Rocky Flats OHV Road instead of leaving it as a seasonally open road. It travels through an ecologically rich area, has no outlet, and does not intersect with other trailheads. Additionally, this area's mountain slopes are perhaps the best opportunity in Georgia for species to adapt to climate change by moving upslope. To elaborate, one of the main ways species will adapt to climate change is by moving towards climates similar to their present ones. Mountains are especially important for this process because they

allow organisms to reach cooler climates without traveling long distances. Conversely, roads, rights-of-ways, reservoirs, and other developments are barriers. Grassy Mountain is exceptional with its 2,900' base-to-summit elevation range—more than Brasstown Bald and third only to Rabun Bald and Bald Mountain. Its elevation range is significant because Rocky Flats Road is the only fragmenting feature on the western side, and a full 2,000' of elevation range is encompassed within this area's old-growth forests. Grassy Mountain's value as a climate refuge is not speculation; the mountain is currently home to northern species that are otherwise scarce and found only at higher elevations in north Georgia, including mountain maple, yellow birch, and starflower.

- GAFW is supportive of the closing of Earl's Ford Road before the Chattooga River. However, the concern remains that the road needs to be closed to all motorized vehicles **before the Warwoman Creek crossing**, an additional half mile earlier. It is generally understood that Earl's Ford Road is under the jurisdiction of Rabun County, with the road being "grandfathered" into the Chattooga River's wild and scenic status, leaving the USFS without the authority to manage the road. GAFW is investigating the potential to renew the conversation with the **Rabun County Commissioners** regarding closing the road at the earlier point.
- GAFW supports closing the roads in the Three Sisters area but is concerned about any attempts at timbering in this location. The two square miles of the Three Sisters site contain the headwaters of Ward Creek and **Lake Zwerner**. Also known as the Yahoola Creek Reservoir, this body of water has been the **sole source of Dahlonega's drinking water** since it was created in 2003. Known for its high quality, Dahlonega water ranks low for turbidity, with the lake capturing most of the sediment. The water is treated through a membrane filtration system and can currently treat six million gallons per day. However, the current membranes were replaced in 2021 after almost a dozen years, at an estimated cost of approximately $1 million. Membranes are estimated to last between 7-15 years, and any increase in sediment to the reservoir will reduce the lifespan of the membranes. Even shortening the membranes by a single year would contribute significant costs to city taxpayers. Additionally, after twenty-plus years the city has been discussing the appropriate time to dredge the shallow reservoir, again at cost to the

taxpayers. GAFW opposes any vegetative management projects, such as commercial logging, that will contribute to the sediment and cost of maintaining Dahlonega's water supply.

If you have any positive or negative insight or input you suggest GAFW carry on the public's behalf to next week's meeting, including suggestions for potential projects not listed above, please let us know at **report@gafw.org**.

GAFW will continue investigating the proposed projects' impact and provide updates as part of this ongoing conversation.

What Federal Climate Action Means for the South

DJ Gerken
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Topic: Capitalizing on This Historic Moment

Alys Campaigne
CLIMATE INITIATIVE LEADER

Topic: Building Climate Adaptable Communities

Josephus Allmond
SENIOR ASSOCIATE ATTORNEY

Topic: Transforming Coal Mines to Community Solar

Brian Gist
SENIOR ATTORNEY

Topic: Reimagining Our Transportation System

Learn how GFAW partner the **Southern Environmental Law Center** (SELC) is seizing a historic opportunity to translate recent

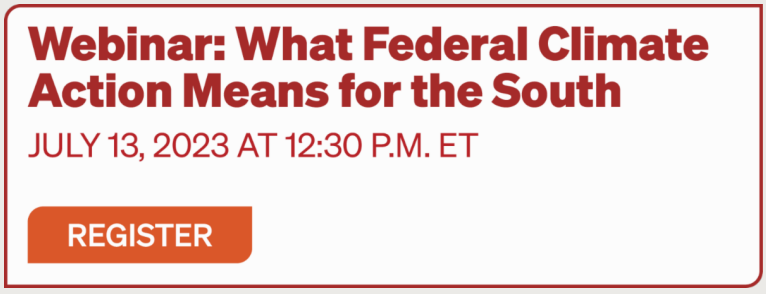
federal law and funding into real climate progress for the South and beyond. Join SELC, including GAFW Advisory Committee member Brian Gist, for a webinar on Thursday, July 13, at 12:30 p.m. ET to hear from SELC President and Executive Director DJ Gerken and SELC climate leaders on how we capitalize on this national momentum.

From building community-owned solar on abandoned coal mines to providing connectivity and better transportation choices for neighborhoods divided by bad road projects, the recent passage of legislation presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to accelerate solutions to climate change. Hear SELC's take on the potential for new federal funding and incentives and its role in ensuring state agencies, local governments, and partners across the South seize this historic opportunity.

Already, we see investments in our region from the recent passage of two bills in Congress; a bipartisan infrastructure bill passed in 2021 and last summer's Inflation Reduction Act. This, paired with a government-wide focus on agency action to tackle climate change and assist communities burdened by environmental injustices, creates an unprecedented opportunity for our environmental future.

Implemented wisely, we can cut our energy costs, create good jobs, and transform how our country addresses the climate crisis. If not, a generational opportunity could be squandered, and the funding could be used for projects that make things worse.

Register today to hear from SELC's leading experts on the plan to ensure these federal actions fulfill the promise of climate action for current and future generations.



Forests & Climate

As the USFS proceeds with plans to log more than 370,000 acres of forests on federal public lands, including 194 acres in the **Shirley Grove Timber Sale** near Clarkesville, GA, and 459 acres in the **Storey Mill Timber Sale** near Summerville, GA, the Biden Administration is asking the public to weigh in on how the agencies can better manage our forests. These announcements mark a historic opportunity to ensure federal mature and old-growth forests can remain standing for future generations, *yet the Forest Service isn't holding a single public hearing*. So **Save Public Forests** is teaming up with partners across the East to **hold our own hearing**!

Whether you are concerned with protecting mature and old-growth forests because of climate change, biodiversity, clean water, recreation opportunities, future generations, or all the above, your voice matters in this process - and the agencies need to hear it.

This virtual field hearing serves as a rallying cry and a chance to listen to and speak out alongside other activists, environmental experts, and community leaders from around the eastern US. We hope you'll take the virtual stage to share personal experiences, scientific insights, and heart-felt calls to protect and recover mature and old-growth forests.

Click here to learn more and RSVP for this once-in-a-generation opportunity to protect millions of acres of wild and wonderful Climate Forests!

Donate to GAFW Today

Upcoming GAFW Outings

Thursday, July 27 - GAFW Book Club Meeting, Zoom (*Wild Spectacle* by Janisse Ray)

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

Thursday, August 31 - GAFW Book Club Meeting, Zoom (*The Changing Blue Ridge Mountains* by Brent Martin)

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

Saturday, October 21 - The Second Wurst Festival Ever, Fannin Brewing Company, Blue Ridge, GA (Tickets on sale soon)

GAFW Outings on Meetup

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

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Thank You

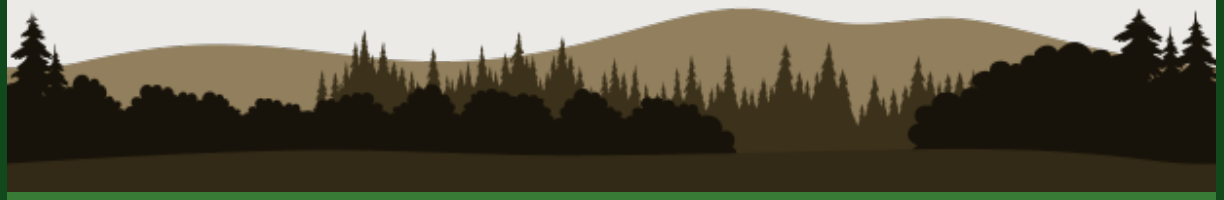
Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

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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