GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
PRESERVE PROTECT RESTORE GAFW.ORG

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GAFW Welcomes Sara Diaz

Sara Diaz joined Georgia ForestWatch as the Outreach Coordinator in August 2023.

Sara has spent the past eight years involved in various non-profits and ministries. She has a B.A. in Philosophy from the University of Florida. While at Florida, she played on the university's beach volleyball team. Sara is a die-hard Gators fan but hopes the Bulldogs will be kind to her! She has taught yoga since 2017 and hopes to train for a trail marathon within the next year.

She plans to use her passions and personality to encourage interest in preserving, protecting, and engaging with our national forests. You can reach Sara at **outreach@gafw.org**.

GAFW Retreat Individual Sponsorships

Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. We stand watch over the forest and protect the native plants, animals, and headwaters that depend on it.

You're invited to sponsor our 19th annual retreat at Red Top Mountain on Saturday, October 14th. Space will be limited, and by sponsoring this community event, you will support GAFW's critical mission and guarantee you have tickets to the must-not-miss event of the year. We hope you'll choose to show your support.

Award-winning author, **Janisse Ray**, will be our keynote speaker for the event. Individual sponsorships are $250 and include two retreat tickets and t-shirts. Stay tuned for more exciting updates about this year's retreat. We hope to see you there.

Please note that general admission will be open at a later date and will be available on a limited basis due to venue capacity limitations. Reserve your tickets today by becoming a sponsor at the link below.

Please **email** with any questions regarding sponsorship opportunities.

Sponsorship Registration

Reserve a Cabin/Camp Site for the Retreat

Are you planning to join us at Red Top Mountain for the annual retreat? We have reserved cottages, campsites, and group camping for the event. If you want to

reserve a spot, you may do so **here.** (General admissions event ticket sales will be released at a later date) Spaces are limited.

Pricing: (October 13-15)
Cottages - $450
RV Campsite - $90
Group Camping - Pay What You Can - **Tents only,** no hookups

Facility Information can be found **here**. (Do not book through Reserve America, this is for information only)

Please note that we will assign cabin locations in the order that reservations are received. The Retreat is a Rain or Shine Event. No refunds for camping reservations will be processed.

Please **email** with any questions regarding retreat accommodations opportunities.

From the USFS Southern Research Station

Photo Credit: *U.S. Geological Survey, Bee Inventory and Monitoring Lab* The small, solitary carpenter bee (*Ceratina strenua)* declined by 97% over the course of the study.

You may already be aware that the USFS has a mission ***to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.*** GAFW believes the USFS should focus more on forest "health" and less on "productivity," but we do respect the prioritization of science and data as they pursue their mission. You may not be aware that in addition to the districts we frequently visit and enjoy, the USFS also has five research stations across the country, including the S**outhern Research Station**, with an office in Athens, GA.

Recently the USFS Southern Research Station released a **report detailing a decline in pollinators throughout the forest**. The findings are alarming. Pollinators, such as bees and butterflies, are essential for the reproduction of many plants and the production of food for humans. However, their populations are declining around the world.

Some of the main causes of pollinator decline include:

- Habitat loss: Pollinators require natural spaces with vegetation and flowering plants in which to live and forage for their food. However, agriculture, mining, and human development have caused habitat loss, limiting food availability

and nesting sites for pollinators.

- Pesticides: Exposure to pesticides and other chemicals can harm or kill pollinators. Insecticides that don't directly kill may hamper the ability of pollinators to navigate or forage, while herbicides may kill important forage plants for pollinators.
- Diseases and parasites: Pollinators are vulnerable to diseases and parasites, such as mites and viral and fungal pathogens, which can weaken or kill them.
- Climate change: Changes in temperature and weather patterns can affect the timing and availability of flowering plants, impacting the survival of pollinators.
- Non-native species: Invasive species can compete with native pollinators for food and habitat, further reducing their populations.

The decline of pollinators has serious implications for food production and the environment. Without pollinators, many plants would be unable to reproduce, and the loss of plant species will have cascading effects on ecosystems. Previous pollinator studies showing declines in pollinators have focused on “landscapes highly altered by human activities.” This study was “among the first to address pollinator decline in forests largely undisturbed by humans.” This study “collected data on bees and butterflies over a 15-year period for three sites in northeastern Georgia” and found “the number of species present had fallen by almost 40%,” with bees decreasing by more than 60% and butterflies declining by nearly 60%.

The authors propose two factors as potential contributors to the decline: climate change and invasive ants. The **Asian Needle Ant** (*Brachyponera chinensis*) has become more widespread and numerous in the study area over the past few years. The authors suggest that bees and ants compete for nesting spots. They also suggest that the ants could prey on some butterfly species. Aboveground nesting bees are also more likely to be exposed to warmer temperatures. Climate change is also considered a factor because the average daily low temperature warmed by 1.2 degrees C near the research sites during the study.

Great Southeast Pollinator Census

Now you can help researchers better understand how pollinator populations are doing by taking part in the Great Southeast Pollinator Census on Aug. 18-19, 2023.

The Great Southeast Pollinator Census is a citizen science project created by the University of Georgia. This project is designed for everyone to participate and make a difference in pollinator conservation! Open to Georgia, South Carolina, and North

Carolina residents, the count requires only 15 minutes of watching one plant and recording the number of insects that visit.

More information and register here.

Donate to GAFW Today

Ocoee Whitewater Center

On April 26, 2022, the Ocoee Whitewater Center (OWC) was destroyed by fire. A legacy of the 1996 Olympic Games, the Ocoee Whitewater Center was a tremendous point of pride for the surrounding communities and a celebrated asset for the region. The loss is palpable. However, from this tragic event comes the opportunity to reimagine the entire venue.

The Forest Service (FS) is seeking broad public input to guide the future of the Ocoee Whitewater Center. The FS contracted with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of GA to compile information to create a vision for the future of the OWC. Your input will help to shape the future of the site and the redevelopment of the Ocoee Whitewater Center. **The survey should take less than 10 minutes .**

Upcoming GAFW Outings

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

Saturday, September 9 - **Foxfire Museum Guided Tour**

Thursday, September 28- **GAFW Book Club Meeting**, Zoom (*Deliverance*, by James Dickey)

Saturday, September 30 - **Project Chimps Private Group Tour**

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

Friday, October 20 - Core Preserve at Lula Lake Land Trust

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

Thursday, October 26 - **GAFW Book Club Meeting** , Zoom (*Haints on Black Mountain* by Ann Hite)

Thursday, November 30 - **GAFW Book Club Meeting** , Zoom (*Literary Field Guide to Southern Appalachia,* Edited by Rose McLarney, Laura-Gray Street, and L. L. Gaddy)

Thursday, December 28 - GAFW Book Club Meeting , Zoom (*The Lost Book of Eleanor Dare* by Kimberly Brock)

GAFW Outings on Meetup

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

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Thank You

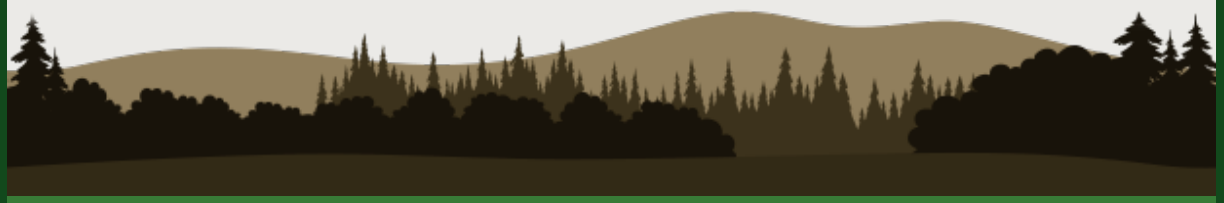
Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

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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Georgia Forestwatch | 81 Crown Mtn Place, Building C, Suite 200, Dahlonega, GA 30533

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