GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
PRESERVE PROTECT RESTORE GAFW.ORG

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Citizens' Climate Lobby

Join Us This Evening in Dahlonega

GAFW is thrilled to welcome partner **Citizens Climate Lobby** to Dahlonega for a public discussion entitled ***Charting a Sustainable Future: Climate Change Challenges and Solutions.***

The science behind human-caused climate change is indisputable and is the most pressing challenge modern humanity faces. Explore how this crisis affects our children's future and forests. Learn about proactive measures, rebates, and tax incentives under the Inflation Reduction Act, promoting sustainability and protecting our vital forests. Join us to make a difference for a sustainable future, and please bring your questions. **More information here.**

GAFW will also be available to answer your questions about our current work and organizational priorities. The event begins at 6:00 p.m. at the **Dahlonega Public Library** meeting room (entrance just to the right of the front door). The event is free, and all are welcome, but limited to the first 50 participants.

Federal Legislation Concerns

This Wednesday, October 25, at 2:30 p.m., the **Public Lands, Forests, and Mining Subcommittee** of the **Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources** will hold a **Hearing to Receive Testimony on Pending Legislation** . This hearing will discuss nineteen bills, with the majority relating to how the U.S. manages our forests and public lands; however, bills are specific to many of these states and agencies other than the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). GAFW has analyzed the three most impactful bills, including guidance below on how to make your voice heard most effectively.

Please note that these federal bills affect forest management and public lands nationally and not solely within the Chattahoochee Oconee National Forest (CONF). GAFW is working hard to develop our relationship with CONF leadership and appreciates our ability to have nuanced conversations on how national policies affect our forests locally.

S.2867 - Promoting Effective Forest Management Act of 2023

While having many positive attributes, **GAFW does not support this bill** without substantial changes. Pros and cons include:

- "Thinning Targets" requires the USFS to determine annual acreage targets for mechanical precommercial and commercial thinning, then to double and then **quadruple the number of acres clearcut** through fiscal year 2027. Acreage targets alone do not accurately depict whether the highest priority acres are treated or whether treatments are ecologically appropriate or effective in protecting communities. The term "thinning" has no consistent definition and is often synonymous with clearcutting. Instead, goals such as impacts on climate and water quality should be prioritized.
- "Transparency in Fire Mitigation Reporting" requires the USFS to report acres treated by prescribed fire to Congress. We support reporting **ecological outcomes,** such as whether watershed function has improved, in addition to simple empirical outputs, such as acres burned.
- "Regional Carbon Accounting" requires the USFS to determine **whether federal forests are carbon sources or sinks**. GAFW fully supports this provision, and if not passed in this bill, it should be included in every USFS-related bill until passed.
- "Targets for Wildlife Habitat Improvement" requires the USFS to determine whether the agencies are meeting the goals and objectives for wildlife habitat contained in existing land management plans, establish targets for wildlife habitat improvement, and a strategy to meet those targets. GAFW supports efforts to identify where improvements are needed to benefit rare species; however, overwhelmingly, most "forest management" actions taken to benefit **one species** focus on game species (deer, grouse, turkey, etc.…) **to the detriment of the ecosystem**.
- "Management of Old Growth and Mature Forests" is a disastrous nonstarter. This section mandates **"the term mature forest as a forest that has reached the merchantability standard,"** indicating the only definition of our children's old-growth forests is its current commercial value. This section also directs the USFS to focus logging activity on those mature forests. Clearcutting mature forests is an ecological disaster that will rapidly increase climate change and destroy North America's most biodiverse and carbon-rich forests.
- "Assessment of Process-Based Restoration Techniques" requires the USFS to establish a pilot program to evaluate process-based aquatic restoration techniques on experimental forests and ranges. **Natural climate solutions**, such as beaver restoration to increase water storage capacity in the national forests, are worthwhile restoration tools, and we support this section.
- "Utilizing Grazing for Wildfire Prevention," while thankfully not a concern in Georgia, requires developing a strategy to increase grazing on federal lands to reduce wildfire risk. This is the absolute wrong approach, as shown by available science, that **grazing increases wildfire risk**. GAFW is opposed to all grazing on public lands and, while not a likely occurrence, is paying attention to ensure it never occurs in the CONF.
- "Logging Workforce" would **subsidize clearcutting** with our tax dollars by creating logger training programs and a loan program to facilitate the

purchase of logging equipment at reduced rates. GAFW is opposed to public funds subsidizing the clearcutting industry.

- "Break-In-Service Consideration for Fire-Fighter Retirements" requires the Secretary of Labor to promulgate regulations to ensure that wildland firefighters who take a voluntary break in service of not more than nine months do not forfeit their retirement. Currently, wildland firefighters identifying as female, in particular, have been penalized with the loss of their retirement for taking maternity or family leave. This provision ensures **equitable treatment for caregivers,** and GAFW supports this provision.
- "Mandatory Use of Existing Authorities" requires the USFS to use existing statutory categorical exclusions (CE). The use of CEs is already overused and often **limits public disclosure of environmental effects,** ipso facto limiting your voice in forest management decisions.
- "Curtailing Employee Relocations" reduces USFS staff benefits. The USFS has a critical concern with staffing across the agency, including hiring new personnel, keeping quality team members, staff benefits, and opportunities for advancement. GAFW urges caution on any human resource restrictions on new and experienced staff and supports **increasing the USFS budget to incentivize recruitment and retention**.

S.1719 - FIRESHEDS Act

This bill has **no redeeming value,** and **GAFW is a hard no** on passing any version of this partisan gift to the timber industry. This bill actively undermines the **National Environmental Policy Act** (NEPA) by creating new categorical exclusions for a broad range of disastrous "forest management" activities, including "salvage logging" without size limits. "Salvage logging" is a word used by the commercial timber industry for clearcutting following a fire or other natural disaster and ignores the benefits of natural processes, including the habitats provided by snags (standing dead trees) needed by wildlife. It also restricts normal judicial review procedures, such as prohibiting courts from imposing preliminary injunctions in cases involving forest management activities. This would eliminate a vital tool needed to slow the process of commercial clearcutting to allow for a full analysis of the ecological impacts. This bill seeks to allow clearcutting to occur at an accelerated pace so the damage is done before organizations like GAFW can stop them or even evaluate the proposed project. Additionally, this bill allows these activities to occur within **Inventoried Roadless Areas**, one of the most valuable protections within the entire national forest system.

S.2991 - America's Revegetation and Carbon Sequestration Act of 2023

GAFW appreciates some aspects of this bill's proactive approach to climate adaptation on our federal lands. However, it has serious concerns with the "sale" of carbon offsets. **Without substantial edits, GAFW does not support this bill's passage.**

Specifically, the USFS should not be allowed to sell carbon offsets from federal lands. Offsets are a tool to motivate private landowners who do not otherwise have a legal mandate to manage their lands for public benefit. The federal government should be managing forests for optimal sequestration as a matter of policy and public benefit. These activities should be fully funded through the regular budget process, not private markets. Furthermore, credits from the large federal land base could depress prices in the offset market and thus reduce their effectiveness in motivating private landowners from undertaking management actions that sequester more carbon.

This also appears to be another example of Congress forcing the USFS to be responsible for raising their own income (similar to charging forest users to visit their public lands) instead of fully funding USFS needs from the U.S. General Fund. **GAFW believes the USFS does important work and the agency is deserving of being fully funded with tax dollars from the U.S. General Fund.**

While neither Senator Reverend Warnock nor Senator Ossoff are members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, they are influential in the direction taken by the committee, the final version of the bill, and if the above bills come to the floor for a full Senate vote. Please contact Senator Ossoff by **email** or 202 224 3521 and Senator Reverend Raphael Warnock by **email** or 202 224 3643 and let them know your thoughts on these bills before Wednesday afternoon's committee meeting.

Thank You for Another Great Weekend

Thank you to everyone who joined us this past weekend at the Second Wurst Festival in Blue Ridge, GA—special thanks to our hosts, **Fannin Brewing Company**, for another fun and successful day. If you live in the Blue Ridge area or are planning a visit, GAFW highly recommends stopping by year-round for a beer (or three).

Also, thank you again to everyone who made our annual retreat at Red Top Mountain State Park a success. We are still calculating our final fundraising numbers, but preliminary results suggest it was one of the highest fundraising retreats in the history of the organization. If you have not already done so, whether you were able to attend this year's retreat or not, please take one minute to complete our **retreat feedback survey**. One of our main goals for future retreats is to make the event accessible for more members from the Atlanta metro area to attend, and we are especially interested in hearing from you.

Upcoming GAFW Outings & Outreach

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

Saturday, October 28 - **Come See Us!** Tabling at Patagonia Beltline

Friday, October 27 - Outing! Core Preserve at Lula Lake Land Trust

Wednesday, November 1 - Outing! Metro ATL Midweek Walk 6 pm.

Saturday, November 11 - Tabling at Boy Scouts Conservation event, 11 am- 1:30 pm

Wednesday, November 15th - **Outing! Geology Hike to Ravens Cliffs Falls with Bill**

Saturday, November 18 - Save the Date! Trail Maintenance with the Mountain High Hikers

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 14th - **Outing! Geology Hike along Johns Mountain to Keown Falls**

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

GAFW Outings on Meetup

Donate to GAFW Today

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Thank You

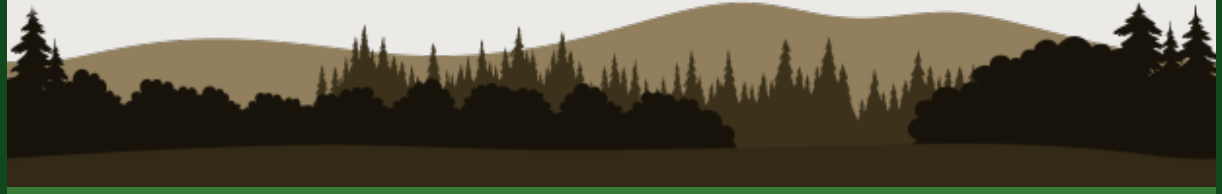
Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

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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