Chattooga Quarterly

Summer 2013

WOLF MOUNTAIN CELL TOWER: DEFEATED
This sweeping panorama of the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains in the Chattooga River watershed as viewed from Long Creek, SC, was recently saved from the visual blight of a cell phone tower.

Photo from the day of the Chattooga Conservancy’s balloon test, with an analogue cell tower structure. Image by W.S. Lesan, Chattooga Native Plant Society

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Nicole Hayler

Since this is my first “director’s page,” I thought it à-propos to state my origins with the Chattooga Conservancy, which all started many years ago....

It was 1990, and the Forest Service was gearing up for a timber sale that would clearcut and plow roads into the deep woods surrounding the last vestiges of the old “Long Creek Roadless Area.” I was fresh to public land issues and very concerned, as an idealistic young recruit into a cadre of citizen-activists all working to put the brakes on the Forest Service’s rampant clearcutting of the Chattooga River watershed’s native hardwood forest. In this instance, the deal was that after building a road, the large timber sale would go forward along the banks of a tributary to Long Creek and throughout the neighboring woodlands right next to the wild and scenic river corridor. Afterwards, what was formerly a nice stand of native hardwood forest would be converted into a pine plantation.

We had resolved to find a way to stop the clearcut, coupled with the notion of reasoning with the Forest Service to employ a gentler brand of forestry. This mission was foremost in my mind, as the morning sun peaked through low clouds that were quickly vaporizing after a night of pounding rain that broke that summer’s dusty drought. The sun finally burst forth, full force and hot, causing the sodden earth to steam and signaling that the river would be recharged and alive.

This mission expanded as our team of activists collaborated to found, and then fund the operations of the Chattooga Conservancy (known now as the Chattooga River Watershed Coalition). I was the organization’s first official employee, and my role as the development and program coordinator grew over the years from full-time effort in a diverse program of work. Now this experience and conviction has propelled my role to that of executive director.

Over the years, too, the Chattooga Conservancy has been fueled by its unique mission to protect, promote and restore the Chattooga River watershed, while likewise being propelled by our dedicated membership, staff and board of directors. Through these varied contributions, we all share in upholding this mission as well as the achievements made possible by unified trawls.

For instance, recent achievements rightly extolled in this issue of the Chattooga Quarterly include stopping the construction of an unsightly 195-foot cell phone tower next to the Chattooga River corridor, and derailing the Forest Service’s wacky plan to permit the construction of a theme park and tourist trap within the protected boundary of the wild and scenic river corridor.

What lies ahead for my tenure as executive director? A seamless transition into the work at hand has already occurred. And there is a inevitable mountain of work before us, including: closure on the Stokoe Creek Park project; executing two 319(h) grant work plans focused on improving Stokoe Creek’s water quality; completing the native river cane restoration effort near Chattooga Old Town; keeping tabs on the ongoing North Carolina Forest Plan revision process, and monitoring and oversight—as always—other Forest Service proposals; launching a “Get the Dirt Out” campaign, and preparing for the Land Trust Alliance’s accreditation process (both new projects, to be described in the next Chattooga Quarterly), and more. I appreciate this opportunity to step up and “carry the torch,” and shall work hard to fulfill expectations and continue racking up achievements to add to the proud grassroots history of the Chattooga Conservancy.

The Cherokee Indian Trader
Buzz Williams

Soon after the first permanent English settlement was established in 1607 at Jamestown, Virginia, a hardy and determined group of frontiersmen began making contact with the Cherokee Indians of the Southern Appalachian Mountains to establish trade. Sixty-three years later and further south in South Carolina, a new port called Charles Town was founded and an outpouring of the Ashley and Cooper Rivers, which provided an even more viable conduit for establishing trade relations with the Cherokee people. This trade was truly a dangerous and difficult activity involving extended travel into unexplored wilderness, and fraught with encounters with wild animals, harsh weather conditions, flooding, river crossings and hostile Indians. Like the extreme conditions they faced, the characteristics of early traders correspondingly included the extremes of human virtue and vice.

The exploits of many of the first traders among the Cherokee were never recorded. However, during the period between the mid-1600s, when Europeans traders began living in Cherokee villages, until about the time of the American Revolution, American history is colored with wild tales of men living on the cutting edge of exploring a new frontier.

The net effect of all of the cultural changes to Cherokee society that were precipitated by the availability of European trade goods was a shift from a sustainable, egalitarian society to one based on natural resource exploitation. For better or worse, the role in this tragedy played by the first European traders to make contact with the Cherokee people cannot be over emphasized.

The Cherokee Indians who inhabited the Southern Appalachian Mountains during the colonial period were exposed to both European and African races of people when the Spanish conquistadors Hernando de Soto and Juan Pardo visited the Cherokee in the 1500s during their search for gold and slaves. Yet further contact with Europeans was minimal, until the Virginia traders made their way into Cherokee villages and sought to establish a trade network. Even after 1670, when Charles Town was settled, colonists mostly traded with the numerous other coastal and piedmont Indian tribes, which buffered the Cherokee from European contact.

The colonial government pitted coastal Indian tribes against each other to feed a barbaric slave trade. Colonial policy was to encourage the tribes to raid each other to capture slaves that they would trade for guns, powder and other goods. Many of these Indian slaves were kept for domestic service, but the majority were sold to plantation owners in the West Indies. The British colonists believed that once Native Americans became dependent on trade for European goods, the colonists would have the upper hand in trade negotiations and could manipulate the Indians to reject the advances of British rival, which were the Spanish to the south and the French to the west, who were courting the Indians for trade and alliances as well.

The inter-tribal warfare resulting from competition for trade status with colonials, the ill effects of alcohol dependence, and death from foreign diseases as well as a breakdown of traditional mores devastated the numerous Native American tribes of the Carolina low country and Midlands. Tribes such as the Westos, Cusabos, Yamasees, Savanahs and Yuchies soon felt the sting of interrelations with their new colonial neighbors. The result was the Yamasee War in 1715, where an alliance of coastal tribes revolted against unfair trade practices and attacked their European suppressors. The Yamasee and...
During this period the Cherokee were becoming dangerously reliant on trade to supply them with more ammunition to kill more deer, and to produce hides to trade for cloth, trade beads, pots, axes, hoes, and most addictive, for rum.

An important part of the deerskin trade were tools such as this iron hoe.

The Cherokee Indian Trader

their allies burned many outlaying settlements and threatened others, but were finally driven back. This caused two of the big problems for the Carolina colonists: first, it destroyed the Indian trade and second, it left the colonists exposed to the threats of growing foreign influence from Spanish Florida, and the French moving in from the Mississippi valley to the west.

The demise of the coastal Carolina and midland Indian tribes destroyed the buffer between the colonists and the Cherokee people. It soon became apparent to the colonists that cultivating an alliance with the Cherokee would be the key to reestablishing a new bulwark against foreign threats as well as continued trade, which now focused on the lucrative fur trade.

Even before the Yemassee War, Colonel James Moore Jr. was one of the first South Carolinians to establish a relationship with the Cherokee. In 1713, with the help of trader Eleazer Wiggan, he recruited 310 Cherokee warriors to accompany him to assist Virginia during the Barnwell Campaign against the Tuscarora Indians.

Eleazer Wiggan was an Englishman who migrated to Cherokee country around 1711 and established a trade practice with the Cherokee. Wiggan also traded with the Yuchi Indians. He later resided at a village among the Overhill Cherokee, at a place called Tenasi on the Little Tennessee River.

Colonial records show a license issued in March 1711 to a company named “Cads, Shekels & Wiggan,” which was likely Eleazer Wiggan. The Cherokee called him “Old Rabbit” after the sly and tricky rabbit that reoccurs in many Cherokee stories. He was described as having a slight build and amicable character.

In the summer of 1715 when the Yemassee War broke out because of bad trade practices, trade networks with the Cherokee were yet insignificant. Consequently, Cherokee participation in the war was minimal. Trader Wiggan, who was an adopted member of the Cherokee tribe, seized the opportunity to lead a delegation of Cherokee chiefs to Charles Town to negotiate peace and to establish a greater trade practice with the Cherokee. As a result, the South Carolina government sent Colonel James Moore’s brother Colonel Maurice Moore to Cherokee country on a diplomatic mission to gain the allegiance of the Cherokee.

So in the fall of 1715, Colonel Maurice Moore and 300 English soldiers, including two companies of Negro troops, arrived at the Lower Cherokee town of Tugaloo on the upper Savannah River. Charlie Hayge, a powerful chief at Tugaloo, was known to be sympathetic to the Creeks, who had been allies with the Yamassee during the war. Creek warriors got wind of the Moore expedition and sent warriors to Tugaloo to play on Hayge’s sympathies and attack Moore. Unfortunately for the Creeks, two Cherokee chiefs aligned with Wiggan massacred the Creek envoys before they convinced Hayge to take their side. Largely as a result of Wiggan’s efforts and influence, the Cherokee became allies of the Carolinians.

Later, Colonel Maurice Moore visited Cherokee country to gain their allegiance and establish a trade network, a mission at which he was successful. In 1717, he made an agreement with Charlie Hayge that set prices for trade. According to this agreement, a gun was worth 35 deer skins; a yard of cloth was worth 8 skins; a blanket brought 16 bullets; a hatchet was worth 2 skins; thirty bullets, a pair of scissors, a knife, a string of beads or twenty flints cost 1 skin; an axe cost 5 skins; a pistol cost 20 skins; a sword cost 10 skins; a shirt cost 5 skins, a calico petticoat cost 14 skins, and a red girdle brought 2 skins.

However, soon the thriving trade with the Cherokee attracted more and more traders, some of whom took advantage of the local Cherokee. Consequently, the governments had to deal with unhappy trade partners. In 1725 the Royal Governor of South Carolina sent Col. George Chicken to smooth things over. His interpreters were traders Eleazer Wiggan and Joseph Cooper.

The Cherokee reached their zenith of power in the period between 1725 and 1740. They now enjoyed a most favored tribe status with the British colonial government. The royal governor in Charles Town found it more favorable to establish trade with the Cherokee while withholding trade from the lower Creek Indians, who had sided with the Yamassee during the war. The principal trade out of Charles Town was deer skin leather, and the Cherokee were not only supplying most of the deer skins but were also carrying them to port cities on their backs. During this period they were becoming dangerously reliant on trade to supply them with more ammunition to kill more deer, and to produce hides to trade for cloth, trade beads, pots, axes, hoes, and most addictive, for rum.

Some sources claim that an Irish trader by the name of Alexander Dougherty was the first white man to marry a Cherokee woman in 1690. However, it is more likely that the first trader to live among the Cherokee was a man named Robert Bunning. Later came Cornelius Daugherty, Alexander Long, James Douglas, and James Beam. William and Joseph Cooper, traders were operating among the Lower Cherokee Towns in the headwaters of the Savannah River in 1698.

Another of the first traders among the Cherokee was Alexander Long, who had a trade store at the Yuchi village of Chestowee. Long, with the help of Wiggan, perpetrated one of the most shameful events in colonial history. History is not clear on the details, but it is well established that the remnant band of Yuchi Indians who lived in a village on the Hiawassee River were indebted to both Long and Wiggan for trade goods. The story goes that Long had an argument with a Yuchi warrior over the alleged debt, and that Long got the worst of it, leaving behind a chunk of his scalp. So Long employed the “Old Rabbit” as an accomplice in a plot for revenge, and the chance to recover debt. With his influence, the two powerful Overhill headmen named Flint and Caesar, and got them to agree to attack the Yuchi village of Chestowee in exchange for debt relief.

At dawn on a spring morning of 1714, the Cherokee attacked the Yuchi village of Chestowee, storming the palisade, and setting fire to houses and slaughter ing villagers. Many took refuge behind the walls, where they were surrounded by the Yuchi warriors, seeing the hopelessness of their situation, killed every woman and child and then died by their own hands rather than submit to death or enslavement. In all, 5 women and 5 children, who escaped the slaughter. The traders held the survivors to be sold as slaves, to settle the Yuchi debt. Both Long and Wiggan were convicted by the South Carolina Commissioners of Trade of inciting the massacre at Chestowee. Their trade licenses were revoked, and the Yuchi captives were freed.

This disgraceful incident at Chestowee occurred one year before the Yamassee War, which was fought in the Carolina low country over dishonest trade practices. This should have been a wake-up call for the Cherokee, who would soon experience the same cultural downfall as the coastal tribes, as the tide of European influence rolled toward their land.

Long disappeared after the massacre at Chestowee; however, he did leave behind a very interesting account of his life with the Indians called “A Small Postscript of the Ways and manners of the Indians called Cherokees.” The more resilient Wiggan eventually regained his trader’s license and went on to be a central figure in another landmark event in Cherokee history.

The year was 1730, when the flamboyant Scotsman named Alexander Cumming made his historic expedition into Cherokee country to extract a product of the Cherokee pledge of allegiance to the British. His guide was trader Joseph Cooper from Keowee Town. Cumming took seven Cherokee Indians to England to sign a treaty that lasted thirty years, and the interpreter that accompanied the Cherokee to England was none other than Eleazer Wiggan. Trader Ludovic Grant documented this historic event in “Historical Relations of Facts Delivered by Ludovic Grant, Indian Trader For His Excellency, The Governor of South Carolina.”

In the year 1735, the Cherokee could field 5,000 warriors and stand firm against the Spanish and the French, who were stirring up trouble with the Creeks and other southeastern tribes against the British. After a feeble attempt by the colonial government to reform trade practices, the unfair practices that had caused the Yamassee War were reemerging. Thus, the critical allegiance of the Cherokee...
The Cherokee Indian Trader

Cedric Williams

In early March of this year, rumors were flying around Long Creek, South Carolina, that a cell tower was going to be built on Wolf Mountain, just 7 miles west of Keowee River, which is very near the Thrifts Ferry area of the Chattooga River. Opinions about this possibility varied within the community. Landowners adjacent to the rumored cell tower site were concerned about spoils views and lower property values. Other property owners in the nearby view sheds, including the Chattoo Belle Farm, which depends on offering their customers the pristine, sweeping views of the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains along the Chattooga River, were also alarmed. And other folks worried about the visual effects within the Wild & Scenic Chattooga River Corridor. On the other side, however, a few locals in favor of the cell tower were pointing out the need for better cell phone coverage. Another category of people in the community sat cautiously on the sidelines. The Chattoo Conservancy, whose mission includes protecting the scenic beauty of the wild and scenic river corridor, immediately began monitoring the situation.

This issue became more real when a local resident living near the area in question called and reported that he and others living around the intersection of Chattoo Ridge Road and Highway 76 had been contacted by SCI Inc., a Florida-based company that builds and leases cell phone towers, about leasing a site for a tower. Evidently, SCI had identified an area occupying the west-facing slope of Wolf Mountain, at about 1,780 feet in elevation and oriented towards a well known dead spot in cell coverage that exists along Highway 76 and across the Chattoo River into an existing site for building a new tower to service the spotty coverage. The caller and several more nearby residents had declined SCI’s offer. But we soon learned that an absentee landowner had subsequently signed a lease for the cell tower, because a man living on the caller’s property had observed survey crews marking out the site.

On April 3rd, we were informed that a local American Whitewater (AW) representative had requested a balloon test to assess the “area of potential impact” to the Chattooga Wild & Scenic River Corridor, and had determined those areas to be within a 1-mile radius from the proposed tower site, yet even then failed in considering visual impacts to adjacent landowners and residential districts.

A visit to an affected property owner, who lives near the southeast leg of the tract where the tower site had been surveyed, revealed that the site was only 40 feet from his property line. setback requirements from neighboring property for cell towers permitted in Oconee County, S. C., are the height of the tower plus 50 feet. If the tower was an average height of about 200 feet, the proposed site would violate the county’s setback requirements by over 5 times the required distance.
Wolf Mountain Cell Tower

It became clear to the Chattooga Conservancy that we were possibly facing another “David and Goliath” fight against a corporation with big bucks. It also became clear that SCI had come to Oconee County with an “in your face” application targeting a site right next to a national wild & scenic river, and with a bold disregard for private property rights.

The balloon test was indeed conducted on April 26th. The test’s objectives as defined by Stone Point Services to set the logistics for the test to assess the visual impacts on selected sites in the Chattooga River corridor. The balloon test was conducted on April 26th. The test’s objectives as defined by Stone Point Services to set the logistics for the test to assess the visual impacts on selected sites in the Chattooga River corridor. The balloon test was indeed conducted on April 26th. The test’s objectives as defined by Stone Point Services to set the logistics for the test to assess the visual impacts on selected sites in the Chattooga River corridor.

Wolf Mountain Cell Tower

“volunteers” from “local groups” identified as "environmental groups," who presumably were concerned about the visual effects within the Chattooga River corridor. Further, Stone Point’s “area of potential impact” focused primarily on the Chattooga River corridor and those sites identified by the “volunteers,” which turned out to be just 1 mile in radius. But Oconee County Code required the visual impact analysis to include nearby residential districts. As a result of the limited radius, places like Chattooga Belle Farm and many residents in the Long Creek community were not surveyed in the analysis. So while the local “environmentalists” were deep in the Chattooga River corridor looking straight up at a tree canopy now totally covered in foliage with no chance of seeing anything, SCI’s consultants were out snapping pictures of the local residential districts only within the small area as defined by possible impacts to the Chattooga River.

On May 6th, we made a call to the director of the Oconee County Community Development Office, and were informed that SCI had augmented their application with answers to his questions. We submitted another FOIA request to obtain the new information. On May 14th, we received SCI’s new application, which answered 14 questions as per the Oconee County Code. Most of the questions were technical in nature, but several—with SCI’s answers—were telling, as follows. “Based on the plan submitted, it appears the minimum setback requirements are not met” (Oconee County Code 32-134.m.) SCI answered by admitting that set-back requirements had not been met and requested a variance, stating that “In order to meet the required setback to all property lines, we would impact the future usability of the property for future development.” When I showed this statement to adjacent property owners, they were incensed: What about the future usability of their property?!

SCI made one feeble attempt to address the obvious potential impact to adjacent property owners with the statement, “We are willing to accept a condition that would require us to design breakpoints in the tower; in the unlikely event of a failure, the tower would collapse within the property boundary of the subject parcel.” This questionable statement was debunked by a consultant attorney, who pointed out that ice storms are one of the most likely causes of a tower failure. We googled “cell tower ice,” and were amazed at the number of tower failures and damage to property from ice build-up, and ice falling. The attorney summed it up: “If they can’t design them to stand up, they sure can’t design them to fall.” Long Creek has frequent ice storms, and with the proposed tower being so close to 2 adjacent property owners, the concerns were obviously great. So much so that future house sites already planned by both adjacent property owners would have had to be abandoned.
Wolf Mountain Cell Tower

SCI would have to come up with a reason that this was the only feasible site that could meet the needs of the community. Their answer was, “Specifically, based on land availability this location is as close as we can get to the Chattooga River. One of the vital services this tower will provide will be the ability to utilize wireless technology in the event of an emergency along the river.” SCI knew that many people might be sympathetic to the need to aid emergency situations on the Chattooga River, which is famous for its inherent dangers that have caused many accidents and deaths.

Yet to the many experienced, veteran outfitters as well as search and rescue personnel, this clearly was not the case. In fact, Chattooga River rafting companies now carry cell phones and are able to make calls from almost anywhere in the river corridor simply by climbing up a ridge, and search and rescue personnel use specialized radios as well as incident command stations that allow communications to and from virtually anywhere inside the wild and scenic river corridor. And the fact is that experienced river people, almost to every person agreed, that cell phone service would not have saved one single life that has been lost on the Chattooga River. SCI’s statement most certainly was a big, red herring.

On May 25th, the Chattooga Conservancy conducted our own balloon test on a fair, calm day with winds predicted to be less than 5 miles per hour. We rented a helium tank, filled our red weather balloon and flew it aloft on a 200-foot string that was anchored right next to the proposed cell tower site. We had a local law enforcement officer measure our string to confirm its accuracy. We were amazed at the height it achieved. The “official” balloon test submitted by SCI showed photos of their balloon being carried away by the wind, which Chattooga Conservancy officials claimed was not the case because the SCI software had helped retrieve it after the test, and also testified that the SCI software had on the morning of the test claimed the proposed cell tower would look like. So we and a handful of concerned citizens quickly traveled around the community and took photos at the same places. We also took additional photos from places like Chattooga Belle Farm, which is outside the 1-mile radius that SCI used for their photo. Again, the difference between their photos and ours was dramatic, with ours showing the true visual impact.

On May 28th—just 2 days before the public hearing—SCI called the Chattooga Conservancy office and said they had “heard” there were community concerns about the proposed cell tower. We assured them that that was absolutely right, and that we and others planned to fight them all the way. The next day we received a call from the Oconee County Community Development Office saying that SCI had requested postponement of their application at the public hearing, and that the zoning appeals board would likely grant SCI’s request. This news was spread through the network of citizens opposed to this site, so folks could rushedly attend the hearing for the next hearing.

On May 30th, the meeting to hear concerns about the cell tower was held at the Oconee County Council Chambers in Walhalla, S.C. The zoning appeals board voted 5 to 1 to grant SCI’s request for an extension. About 30 people showed up any way, and almost all were against the cell tower, which undoubtedly sent a clear message to the board. Media had heard about the meeting and interviewed adjacent land owners and others. The next day, the story broke on both radio and in the Seneca Journal. Nicole Hayler, our executive director, was quoted as saying, “We were ready to argue our case tonight and we will be back in 30 days.”

But that day was not to come. On June 21st, just a few days before the rescheduled hearing, SCI withdrew their application. Our strategy, combined with strong community support, scored a resounding win—in this round. We expect that SCI will re-group and re-jump for finding the cell tower sites that would enable blanket broadband coverage, while pocketing the considerable profits gained by making this happen.

But in the meantime, there is much to celebrate about a successful community action that preserved private property rights, and saved the best view in Long Creek of a majestic mountain range deep in the Chattooga River watershed.

Watershed Update

Upper Chattooga - New Trails Proposed

Comments Needed By Aug. 28th

Ironically, the Forest Service—the agency in charge of protecting the wilderness—has yielded to the pressure of special interest groups and failed to recognize a more equitable alternative as proposed by the Chattooga Conservancy to resolve the controversy about whitewater boating on the Upper Chattooga. SCI’s new proposal of the alternative provision that we had not required any new access construction into the wild and scenic river corridor. Managing for a back country experience is one of the primary management objectives for a “wild” river, and a bedrock principle of back country management is nothing kills wildness quicker than too much access. But now, the Forest Service is requesting public comments on building/designing new trails. The Chattooga Conservancy, which was completely neglected taking photos from at least 3 adjacent balloon sites that obscured the view of their balloon. It was obvious that SCI’s test lacked credibility.

One of our major concerns is for the fate of the Chattooga Cliffs area, due to the unusual terrain. One of the vital services this tower will provide will be the ability to utilize wireless technology in the event of an emergency along the river. SCI knew that many people might be sympathetic to the need to aid emergency situations on the Chattooga River, which is famous for its inherent dangers that have caused many accidents and deaths.

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Watershed Update

were approximately 75 comments posted on the Forest Service’s website, that ranged from outrage to disbelief at the audacity of the Andrew Pickens Ranger District’s plan to permit building a theme park/ tourist trap inside the wild and scenic river corridor. However, beware the “expeditiously enabled” parties who might step in in the future to “assist” the Forest Service with the “urgent preservation” of a place that burned to the ground in 1988.

Body Recovery at Soc-em Dog

On June 19th, an individual on a commercial rafting trip drowned on Section IV of the Chattooga River at the powerful Soc-em Dog rapid. The dedication of river guides and search and recovery personnel, who worked tirelessly for over 2 weeks to locate the victim, was exemplary. During the night of July 4th, the forces of the river finally released the body when high water of flood proportions is believed to have dislodged it from the depths beneath the drop.

In the course of the recovery operations at Soc-em Dog, and due to the prolonged time of working to locate and recover the body, an option was broached concerning the controversial tactic of placing a “coffer dam” structure in the river, to attempt diverting enough water so that greater access to submerged objects might possibly be obtained.

The first instance of installing a coffer dam under these circumstances occurred in 1999, during the prolonged effort to recover Rachel Trois’ body from Raven Chute Rapid (see Chattooga Quarterly Summer/Fall 1999, pp. 7-13). At that time, a coffer dam was installed (under protest from the Chattooga Conservancy) by drilling holes in the river’s bedrock to secure the structure, an action that set a dangerous precedent in violation of the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act, and which ultimately failed. The main controversy surrounding this incident involved employing extraordinary measures during body recovery efforts that would clearly violate the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act, which unequivocally states: “Alteration of the stream bed or modification of bedrock will not be permitted.”

The Chattooga is a beautiful, powerful and wild river with many rewards and dangers inherent in its wilderness. To save this treasure for present and future generations, the protections to the river offered by the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act must be upheld.

Stekoa Creek Watershed Management Plan

Over the past few years, the ambitious goal of improving water quality in Stekoa Creek has been one of the Chattooga Conservancy’s major projects. Fortunately, we have been successful in creating a partnership with the City of Clayton to begin the task of restoring Stekoa Creek, through receiving 2 grants from the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GA EPD) under its Clean Water Act Section 319(h) program to identify, restore, and protect streams from “non-point source” pollution, which is typically sediment and bacteria. We are beginning work on the second 319 grant project this year.

Unfortunately, many of the causes of degradation to Stekoa Creek are entrenched and chronic, and to deal with them, a foundation of contemporary data is necessary. So we’ve been focused on creating a water quality monitoring plan that will be approved by the GA EPD, and which will incorporate past water sampling work as well as serve as a new guide for 12 months of systematic water sampling at sites throughout the Stekoa Creek watershed. The purpose of the sampling will be to pin-point hotspots and sources of sediment and bacteria pollution, to serve as the basis for formulating a suite of potential management actions that will abate and prevent this pollution. These findings will be presented in a final report, which also is a required precursor for receiving any more 319 grant funds to address the non-point pollution sources.

We also hosted a Georgia Adopt-A-Stream (AAS) workshop led by Duncan Hughes of the Soque River Watershed Partnership & N. GA Technical College. The participants had a great day wading in Stekoa Creek at the Stekoa Creek Park site and identifying bugs, crayfish and worms, and learning how to test for pH, dissolved oxygen, conductivity, and E. coli (bacteria where high levels indicate the presence of harmful pathogens).

Upcoming is a meeting of a “technical advisory committee” (TAC) for the project, and the start of 12 months of water quality sampling and analysis. If you know of sites and stretches of Stekoa Creek or its tributaries that are sources of sedimentation or bacteria pollution, please let us know or come to the TAC meeting. The date of the upcoming TAC meeting will be posted on our website www.chattoogariver.org.
Members’ Pages

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Wallace B. Bruce
Sanford & Philip Dunklin
David & Betsy George
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Charles & Jacqueline Gruener
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THANK YOU VERY MUCH to everyone who recently contributed to the Chattooga Conservancy. Your generous donations will help us continue to work on the important conservation issues facing the Chattooga River watershed area.

Chattooga Conservancy

The Chattooga Conservancy is a 501(c)(3)
non-profit organization

Staff
Executive Director
Nicolle Hayler

Program Associate
Buzz Williams

Land Trust Attorney & Research Associate
Andy Smith

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Please send your response to:
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Thank you!
Mission:
To protect, promote and restore the natural ecological integrity of the Chattooga River watershed ecosystems; to ensure the viability of native species in harmony with the need for a healthy human environment; and, to educate and empower communities to practice good stewardship on public and private lands.

Goals:
Monitor the U.S. Forest Service’s management of public forest lands in the watershed, and work cooperatively to develop a sound ecosystem initiative for the watershed

Promote public choice based on credible scientific information

Protect remaining old growth and roadless areas

Promote public land acquisition by the Forest Service in the watershed

Educate the public

Promote sustainable communities

Promote conservation by honoring cultural heritage