



Chattooga Conservancy 2018 Programs

Monitoring, Oversight & Partnerships with the US Forest Service The Chattooga River watershed is approximately 190,000 acres located in the tri-state area of western North Carolina, northeast Georgia, and northwestern South Carolina. Seventy percent of the Chattooga watershed is national forest land, and includes portions of the Nantahala Ranger District/Nantahala National Forest in NC, the Andrew Pickens Ranger District/Sumter National Forest in SC and the Chattooga River Ranger District/Chattahoochee National Forest in GA. Through the “scoping process,” the Forest Service is required provide notice about plans and proposals for national forest lands, and opportunities for citizens to comment. We participate in the scoping process with comments geared to protect, promote and restore the Chattooga River watershed.

Current Forest Service proposals and projects include:

- Upper Warwoman Project (GA) The Upper Warwoman Project involves 1,115 acres of timber harvesting, 10,494 acres of prescribed burning and other actions. The area is located in the Warwoman Creek watershed in GA, which drains into Section III of the Chattooga River. The Chattooga Conservancy played a key role in convincing the Forest Service to redesign portions of the project, and we’re monitoring its implementation.
- Foothills Landscape Initiative (GA) The Forest Service is currently developing its “Foothills Landscape Project,” which encompasses 143,419 acres of public land including a large portion of the Chattooga River watershed in GA. We are pushing for the restoration of old-growth forests, native canebrake ecosystems and native forest types, as well as the protection of water quality, wilderness areas and roadless landscapes within the project area.
- Native River Cane Restoration Project (SC) In cooperation with the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians, Revitalization of Traditional Cherokee Artisan Resources and the US Forest Service, we’re working on a ground-breaking project to restore approximately 29 acres of native river cane along the Chattooga River in South Carolina. Native canebrakes are one of the most endangered ecosystems in the Southeast, and restoring river cane in this area will create habitat for important native species of flora and fauna, establish a filter strip for protecting water quality in the Chattooga, and provide a sustainable source of river cane for use by Cherokee artisans.
- Loblolly Pine Removal & Restoration Project (SC) The Andrew Pickens Ranger District is implementing a large project to remove non-native loblolly pine stands that were widely planted on the district during the 1960s-1990s. The project affects 5,542 acres and calls for replacing the loblolly pines with “native pine and hardwood ecosystems” by way of timber harvesting, road reconstruction and herbicide application. Now we’re monitoring its implementation, to call out any adverse effects to our public lands.
- More Commercial Use Proposed in the Chattooga River Corridor (SC) The Andrew Pickens Ranger District administers management of the Wild & Scenic Chattooga River Corridor. Back in September 2010, they issued a scoping notice proposing more commercial use inside the Wild & Scenic River Corridor, amounting to an increase of 2,567 commercial “user days” per year! Over-commercialization is one of the greatest threats to the Chattooga River, and is a threat to the river’s solitude and primitive experience. The Andrew Pickens Ranger District has yet to release an “environmental assessment” for this proposal. We’re tracking this and will challenge over-commercialization of the Chattooga River corridor.
- Nantahala National Forest Plan Revision (NC) The Chattooga River’s headwaters are located in the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forest in NC, and this forest is currently revising its “forest plan.” We’re involved in this process to promote protection of the Overflow Wilderness Study Area and Terrapin Mountain Potential Wilderness Area, and to push for Wild & Scenic River designation for Overflow Creek, and the East & West Forks of Overflow Creek.
- Southside Timber Sale (NC) We are opposing the Nantahala Ranger District’s Southside Timber Sale, which is proposing heavy-handed timber harvesting, road building and herbicide applications in sensitive areas in the Chattooga River headwaters. This project’s environmental assessment was released in Feb. 2018 and calls for cutting old growth trees as well as logging that would degrade the area’s scenic beauty, recreation activities, biodiversity and wildlife. Raising public awareness and challenging this project is high priority.

Warwoman Watershed Management Plan In cooperation with the GA DNR, we are composing a Watershed Management Plan (WMP) for the Warwoman Creek watershed area in Rabun County. The Warwoman watershed is an administratively drawn boundary approximately 61,604 acres in size, that includes the primary watersheds of Warwoman Creek and the West Fork of the Chattooga River. The WMP will identify sources of pollution in the area, and then identify management, educational and financing programs that would be committed to restore and protect water quality.

Stekoa Creek Restoration Campaign Stekoa Creek is a major, polluted tributary of the Chattooga River. Stekoa Creek is one of the largest tributaries to the Chattooga, and has been the single greatest threat to the Chattooga's water quality for over 40 years. Users of the Chattooga River have been cautioned by the US Forest Service that under certain conditions, contact with water below the Stekoa/Chattooga confluence may carry the risk of bacterial infections.

The Stekoa Creek Restoration Campaign consists of several interrelated projects:

- **Stekoa Creek Park** The Chattooga Conservancy built a new 3.5-acre city park next to Stekoa Creek and Highway 441 in Clayton, GA, which required removing a jungle of invasive plants and tons of garbage. We restored the land as greenspace by planting native shrubs, trees and wildflowers, and constructed a rain garden, nature trail, wildflower garden and community pavilion. We're currently working to maintain and nurture the park grounds.
- **Stekoa Creek Watershed Management Plan Implementation** In cooperation with the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission and the GA DNR, we're working in Rabun County to address "non-point" sources of pollution in the Stekoa Creek watershed by implementing our recently completed Stekoa Creek Watershed Management Plan. This year, we'll begin working with the Food Bank of NE Georgia on a green infrastructure demonstration project on Hwy. 441, where pavement within Stekoa Creek's 50-foot stream buffer zone will be replaced with rain gardens, tree islands and sections of permeable pavement, to mitigate stormwater runoff into the creek. We will also be working with the Rabun County Health Department to replace failing septic systems, and with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to implement an agricultural Best Management Practices project.
- **GA DOT Highway 441 Widening** The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) has plans to widen Highway 441 North, which will impact about 3 linear miles of Stekoa Creek. Further pollution of Stekoa Creek with sediment as a direct result of the DOT project would contradict Clean Water Act mandates, and lead to further pollution of the Chattooga River. We've requested that the DOT implement permanent structural designs to control stormwater pollution, and conduct streambank restoration activities at sites in the Stekoa Creek watershed as part of the highway widening project.

Land Trust The Chattooga Conservancy operates a land trust as a component of our environmental advocacy work. We entertain inquiries from private landowners seeking to place conservation easements on properties that possess significant conservation values, and accept the donation of conservation easements in compliance with Internal Revenue Service regulations. Our land trust work is "accredited" by the Land Trust Alliance for meeting high standards for conducting land trust transactions. Only 28% of the 1,363 land trusts operating in the US are accredited.

Chattooga Quarterly The *Chattooga Quarterly* is composed and published by the Chattooga Conservancy. This acclaimed publication features articles about the Chattooga watershed's natural and cultural history, as well as updates on program work, and membership news. The *Chattooga Quarterly* is posted on our website, and also appears in hard copy as a 12 to 20 page magazine that is mailed to our membership and distributed at public outreach events.

Alliances, Partnerships, Networks We are affiliated with numerous organizations to help advance programs, including Georgia River Network, Land Trust Alliance and Georgia Water Coalition.

Public Education & Outreach Community outreach work in support of program activities includes presentations to local governmental entities such as city councils, county commissioners and chamber of commerce groups; outreach to media contacts; publishing the *Chattooga Quarterly*; presentations to student groups, public gatherings and civic organizations; demonstration projects; op-ed pieces in print and electronic media; and, mentoring service and educational projects for students and civic organizations.