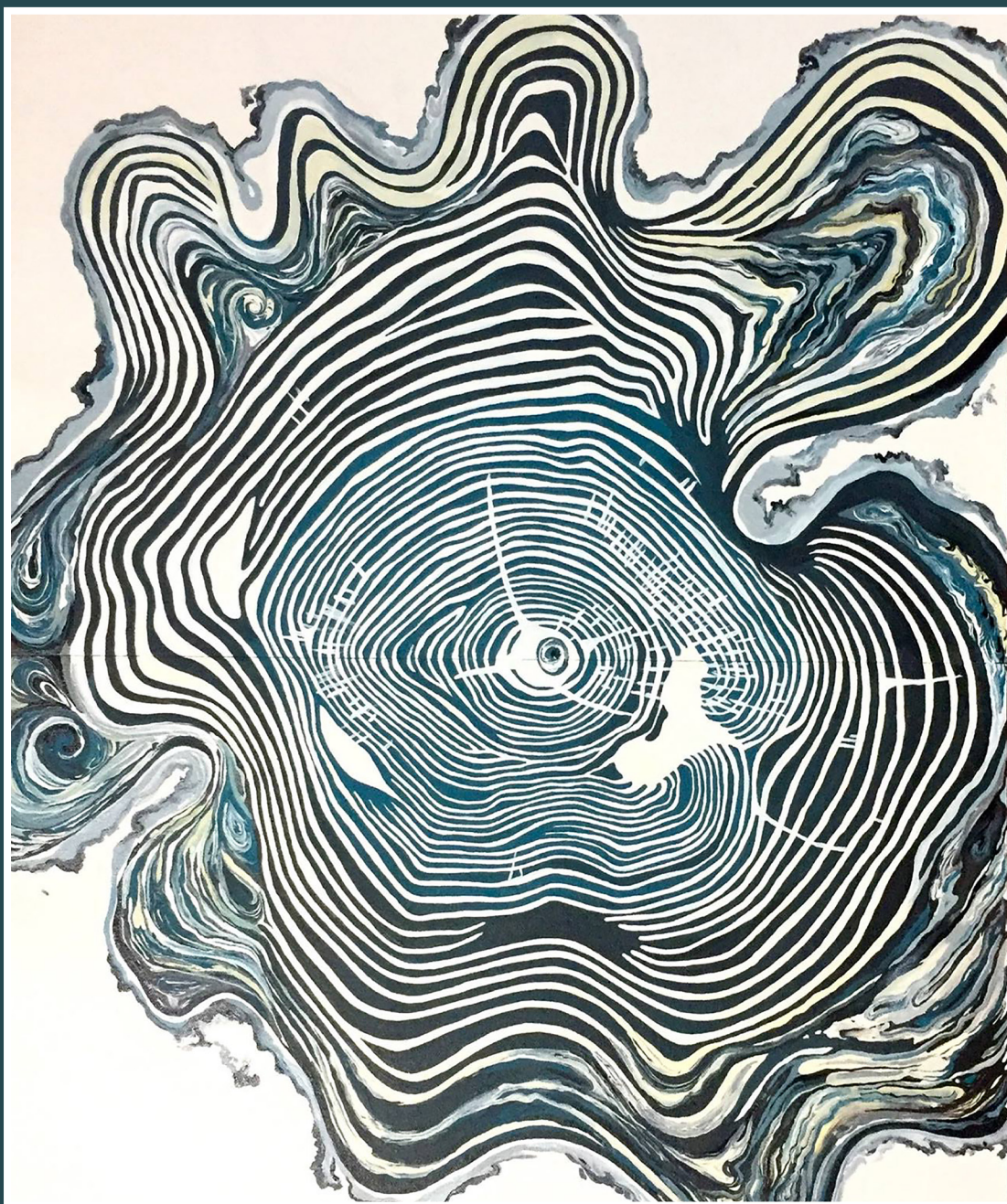




# Chattooga Quarterly

Fall ♦♦♦ 2019



**TREE RINGS**  
*by Molly Dougherty*

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# DIRECTOR'S PAGE

Nicole Hayler

*"Those who contemplate the beauty of the Earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts."*

—Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

Just a short time ago, during the last days of summer, the Washington Office of the US Forest Service (USFS) issued a call for comments on their extreme proposal to change the rules for when and how the agency engages the public and uses science in making important decisions about our national forest lands. This proposed rule change targets the USFS's implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, which is a landmark federal law known as the Magna Carta of our nation's environmental laws. The USFS wants to eliminate environmental review and cut public involvement for most USFS decisions in our area!

Specifically, the USFS wants to allow commercial timber harvests of up to 4,200 acres—including clearcutting—with no public notice or input, and no environmental review. They also want to allow bulldozing of new pipeline and utility rights-of-way, permitting other "special uses" of up to 20 acres in size, building up to 5 miles of new roads at a time, and closing access roads used for hunting, fishing and recreation—all with no public notice or environmental review. Thanks very much to everyone who voiced their opposition to this extreme proposal!

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a fundamental, critical law that calls for environmental analysis and opportunities for citizen input on a wide variety of actions affecting the environment, including activities on our national forest lands. The sweeping reach of NEPA has brought it to the forefront of most environmental groups' work and successes, and the Chattooga Conservancy is no exception. For instance, by exercising provisions of this law we were able to stop the ill-conceived "Southern Appalachian Farmstead" project, that would have irrevocably marred the Chattooga River by constructing a theme park and destination site inside the wild & scenic river corridor near the Hwy. 28 Bridge.

That said, NEPA-based fights against USFS operations have become more difficult to win these days, with the current presidential administration pushing the agency to harvest more timber and cut rare old growth trees such as we've seen in the Southside Project, where the USFS ignored good science and dismissed citizen input—a project which, we believe, has arguably run afoul of NEPA. Nevertheless, this law still offers one of the most powerful mechanisms for enforcing environmental safeguards, and is far better than the proposed,

adulterated NEPA provisions.

How did NEPA enter the environmental theatre and gain such a key role? By being the first important act. Many credit Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (published 1962) with setting the stage for the modern environmental movement. Carson's seminal book heightened public awareness and pressure for protecting the environment, which continued to gain momentum through the 1960's. Then the world's first oil tanker disaster occurred off the coast of England in 1967, spilling 119,000 tons of crude oil. In 1969, several million gallons of oil escaped from a drilling rig and spoiled the coastline of Santa Barbara, CA. Large TV audiences across the US viewed the environmental devastation of both disasters.



*Citizens protest at the Andrew Pickens Ranger Station (1990), adamant to have input in public land management.*

These environmental calamities fueled the NEPA legislation, which was signed into law by President Nixon on 1/1/1970 as the country's national policy to "encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment." The law required Environmental Impact Statements for major federal projects, and also established a new Council on Environmental Quality. Shortly thereafter, Nixon issued an Executive Order calling for a 3-year program to demonstrate federal leadership in combating pollution. This led to more federal laws for environmental

protection, including the Clean Water Act of 1972, Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the Superfund Act of 1980. NEPA has been widely credited for bringing environmental protection to the forefront of American policy.

But today—nearly 50 years later—scientists are sounding the alarm: One million species are at risk of extinction; bee-killing pesticides are driving songbird declines; Monarch butterflies have declined by over 90% in the last 20 years; and climate change, pollution and environmental destruction are leading us to the brink of a catastrophic collapse of nature's ecosystems. In spite of this, the administration issued an Executive Order in 12/2018 that mandated a 40% increase in logging on national forest land, which the USFS followed with their proposed NEPA rule changes to gut the agency's requirements for employing science and citizen participation.

In the face of incontrovertible evidence that our natural world and life support systems are at risk, NEPA's environmental protection rules should be expanded, not winnowed away to ineffectuality. We expect the Forest Service to publish their final NEPA rule revisions in summer 2020. The environmental community that strives to protect, restore and conserve our national forests is gearing up for a fight, and we are hopeful that you will join in support.

# NATIVE CANEBRAKES

**Buzz Williams**

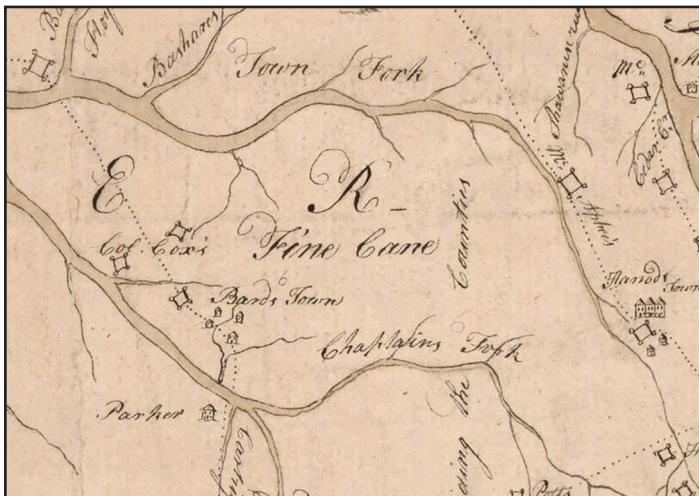
Canebrakes, sometimes referred to as bamboo forests, once flourished in flood plains along rivers, streams and savannas in the southeastern United States. Native cane, *Arundinaria gigantea*, is a species of North American bamboo that grows in thickets or “brakes.” According to historical accounts, canebrakes once occupied millions of acres from Kentucky down through the Mississippi Delta and from Virginia to Florida. Place names such as Caney Fork, Cane Creek, and Long Cane that appear on old maps reveal the extent of canebrakes at the time of European colonization. The dense, almost impenetrable canebrakes provided critical habitat for many species of plants and animals including bison, elk, red wolf, whitetail deer, black bear, bobcat, cougar, canebrake rattlesnake, wild turkey, Appalachian swamp rabbit, Bachman’s and Swainson’s Warblers and a host of butterfly species. It was once important habitat for the now-extinct Passenger Pigeon and Carolina Parakeet. Native cane was used extensively by Native Americans for building material, baskets, weapons, musical instruments and ornaments. Today only about 2% of this now-endangered habitat remains due to overgrazing and agricultural conversion. Only recently have conservationists begun efforts to restore native canebrakes.



Native canebrakes once covered much of the Southeast's bottomlands.

Image: canebrakes.com

One of the earliest references to native cane can be found in the chronicles of the Hernando de Soto expedition into the interior of southeastern North America in 1540. The Spaniards referred to the split cane baskets with lids, in which they carried food and possessions, as *petacas*. They considered the beautiful cane baskets made by Native Americans as the finest and most distinctive indigenous art form of the Southeastern tribes. Later, Indian traders, adventurers, land speculators, botanists and settlers described



Historic place names, like Fine Cane, Kentucky, appearing on Filson's pre-1800s map, provide clues to the extent of cane across the South.

the vastness of canebrakes. William Bartram, our first great naturalist who explored the wilds of the Southeast in 1775, referred several times to canebrakes in his famous book *Bartram's Travels* as “cane pastures,” “vast cane meadows” and “an endless wilderness of canes.” Bartram described a huge canebrake covering a deserted Spanish plantation near the Suwannee River in Florida: “Now at once opens to view, perhaps the most extensive cane-brake that is to be seen on the face of the whole earth... The canes are ten feet in height, and as thick as an ordinary walking staff; they grow so close together there is no penetrating them without previously cutting a road.” Indian Agent Benjamin Hawkins (circa. 1790) described a 3,000-acre canebrake on the Coosa River in Alabama just above the confluence with the Tallapoosa River. Ecologists have speculated that canebrakes actually expanded into vacant corn field during the early 1700’s due to a drastic reduction in the Native American population caused by diseases such as smallpox.

The canebrakes of Kentucky, however, were even more impressive. Almost 10% of central Kentucky was once occupied by canebrakes when Daniel Boone found his way there through the Cumberland Gap. The phosphorous-rich limestone soils of Kentucky produced the largest canebrakes in North America. John Filson, one of Boone’s protégés involved in land speculation in Kentucky, wrote in his book, *The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucky* (1784): “Here is great plenty of fine cane, on which the cattle feed and grow fat. There are many canebrakes so thick that it is difficult to pass through them.” Legend has



# NATIVE CANEBRAKES

it that Josiah Collins, an early settler in Kentucky, was lost for three days in a canebrake.

The indigenous people of the Southeast made good use of this abundant cane resource. Arrow shafts and spears straightened and hardened over fire were light and durable. Bartram wrote about how his Indian guide speared a 15-pound trout in the Broad River in Georgia using a cane spear. Cherokee dwellings were made using a method of plastering clay onto a woven lathe of native cane strips supported by a post and beam support system. The view walking into a Cherokee townhouse was compared to entering a huge inverted basket. Cane was used in many ways by Native Americans, mostly for utilitarian purposes,



Cherokee artisans have used river cane for basketweaving for centuries.  
Image: caseantiques.com

but the Cherokee also used cane for music and artistic expression such as flutes, decorative mats, wall hangings and intricately woven baskets with colorful, iconic patterns made with cane splits dyed from yellow root, blood root and black walnut hulls. The “double weave” baskets were woven two layers thick and so tight they would almost hold water. The technique was almost a lost art form; by the late 20th century, only eight Cherokee basket makers still made double weave baskets.

American river cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*) is one of three species of native bamboo related to the non-native Golden Bamboo (*Phyllostachys aurea*), an invasive species from China that is much larger with densely spaced culms that sometimes reach 5-6 inches in diameter. Our other two species of bamboo are *Arundinaria tecta*, often called switch cane, which is a smaller cane that grows on lower, wetter sites of non-moving water like swamps, and *Arundinaria appalachiana*, or hill cane, which is even smaller still (less than 1 meter) and is a deciduous cane that grows on hillsides on drier upland sites.

River cane is technically an evergreen, monopodial, leptomorphic grass. It is a woody perennial with slender stems, or culms, that arise from tough underground roots called rhizomes, and which form dense colonies. Stems have prominent nodes, or places where leaves or buds may form. They are unbranched at first, but branch as they mature and form fanlike clusters of simple leaves that are thicker near the top. Young cane stems have a sheath that looks like a corn husk at each node that is shed after the first year.

River cane needs moist, well-drained, sandy soil. It often colonizes high river banks in flood plains where it filters sediments, forming natural dikes. The largest cane grows on the best soil. River cane in the Chattooga River watershed seems to grow best when interspersed with a few prominent native trees such as black walnut, black cherry and sycamore. Smilax and native pea vines are common companion plants. River cane is monocarpic—it flowers only every 10-20 years and then dies; sometimes whole colonies die at once after producing a heavy crop of seed. Periodic disturbance such as flooding or wildfire seems to play a role in river cane propagation.



*Enodia creola*



*Poanes yehl*

©2009 Jeffrey Phippen



*Amblyscirtes aesculapius*

©2005 Jeffrey Phippen

*Amblyscirtes carolina*



Native canebrake habitat is home to a variety of species, including several rare butterflies.

Images 1 & 3: [butterfliesandmoths.org](http://butterfliesandmoths.org)

Images 2 & 4: Jeffrey Phippen, [jeffhippen.com](http://jeffhippen.com)



# NATIVE CANEBRAKES



*River cane stems have clusters of simple leaves that are thicker near the top.*

There is much we do not know about river cane, mainly because there is not much left of it, and many of the keystone species that evolved with it—and that most undoubtedly played a role in its ecology as symbiotic partners—are extinct. Scientists speculate that the disturbance caused by the once-huge flocks of passenger pigeons that roosted and foraged in canebrakes may have played a part in stimulating its flowering cycle. The Bachman's Warbler that is now probably extinct is thought to have developed its distinctive curved beak to help forage among the leaves of river cane.

In recent years, interest in river cane propagation has gained momentum because of its potential value for wildlife habitat, research, and stream bank restoration to filter sediment and prevent erosion, as well as its value as a source of artisan material for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and Revitalization of Traditional Artisan Resources (RTCAR). In 2011, the Chattooga Conservancy made a proposal for a partnership with the Forest Service to restore 29 acres of river cane at Chattooga Old Town, an historic Cherokee settlement at the Highway 28 bridge near the confluence with the West Fork of the Chattooga River. In November 2011, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Forest Service to partner with the Eastern Band of Cherokee and a RTCAR to restore native cane on the site. Cherokee artisan Jim Long harvested the first batch of river cane at Chattooga Old Town in 2017. The Chattooga Native Cane Restoration Project is now recognized as the largest and most successful native cane restoration project in the Southeast.

Never again will we see the inexhaustible expanses of river cane teeming with colorful exotic birds and large predators and herbivores, impenetrable except by paths trodden by Eastern wood bison. We can only imagine the beautiful sound of flute music drifting through dense cane forests of Chattooga Old Town on a crisp fall night. Yet, by restoring river cane where we still can, we will ensure habitat for the beautiful wild creatures that remain, clean water in our rivers, an increased appreciation of Native American artisanship, and a place to learn more about how to restore this fascinating and important ecosystem.



*Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians artisan Jim Long harvested the first batch of river cane from the Native Cane Restoration Project in 2017  
Photos by Dana Cochran, courtesy of Cherokee Preservation Foundation*



# FIGHTING INVASIVE KUDZU

*Emily Pomeroy*

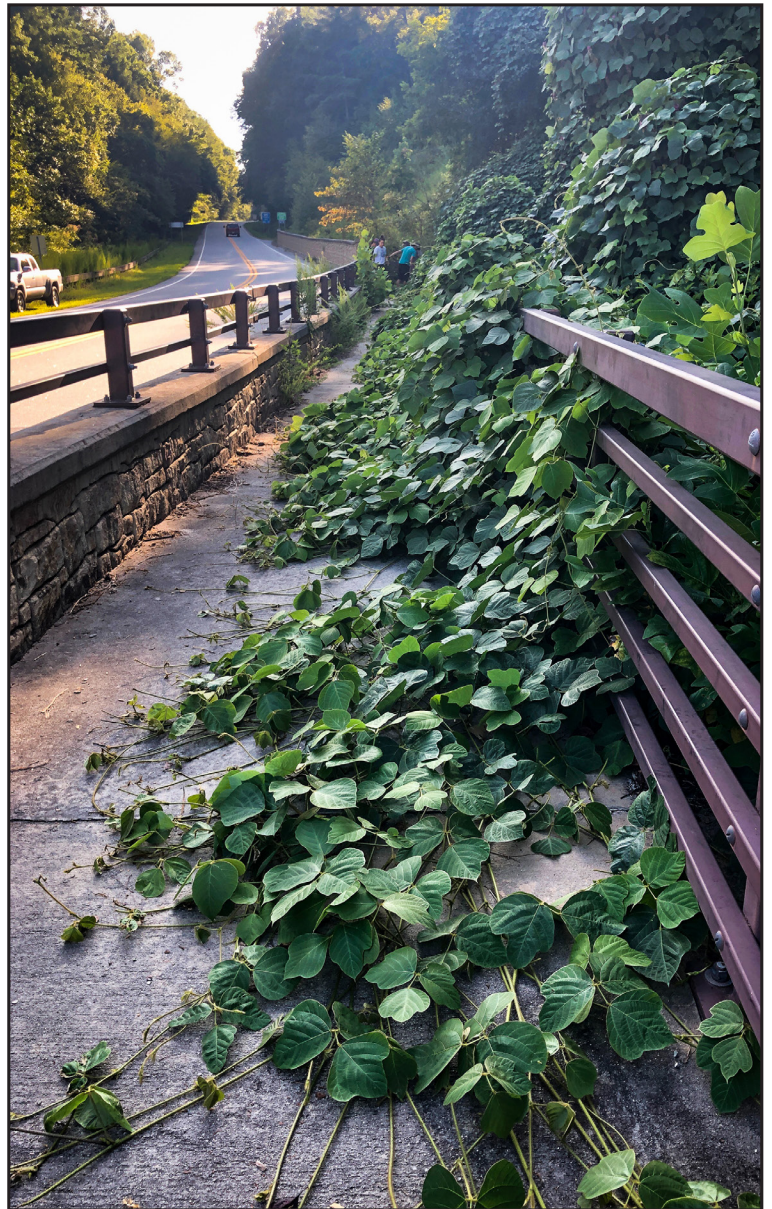
This spring, we started up a new initiative to help remove kudzu and other non-native invasive species from the Chattooga River Corridor. We organized the first group of volunteers on Earth Day and took a trip to "Cigarette Beach" in Sect. IV, where we worked to pull kudzu, privet, mimosa, and multiflora rose. We started this project as part of our volunteer agreement with the Andrew Pickens Ranger District in SC, but have since coordinated with the Chattooga River Ranger District to work on the GA side of the river as well.

With the help of a grant from River Network and USFS, we've recently been able to purchase new tools and dedicate more time to identifying and mapping kudzu growth, studying management methods, and organizing more on-the-ground work trips. With kudzu popping up in several more locations along the river during the spring and into summer, our primary target quickly became the large patch by the Highway 76 bridge, as this is likely the seed source for all that's downstream. We've spent a number of hours working on this area over the last couple of months with the help of excellent volunteers. This well-established patch of kudzu will take more work and careful monitoring, but we've made great progress! In late September, we also organized a big kudzu clean-up at Camp Creek with the help of our friends at Wander North Georgia. The participation of so many hard-working volunteers has been incredible. Thank you to all who have helped out!

Kudzu is not only a major issue on the Chattooga River, but throughout the watershed. Since starting this initiative, several people have expressed interest in learning how to remove this wild invasive from their own property. Though goats have been suggested (and we have used them in the past at Stekoa Creek Park!), they're not an option for the corridor, as they are not picky and will eat much more than just kudzu. Our methods instead are strictly manual—no herbicides, just hand tools and hard work. Kudzu vines grow from what's called a "crown root," and each vine that branches from the crown will develop nodes, which are smaller root balls. Trace vines back to the nodes, pulling or digging them up as you go, and you'll eventually reach the crown. To kill the kudzu plant, the crown and all nodes must be removed. Roots often continue deep into the ground and can be very difficult to extract. Cut these off below the crown or node and bury them under about a foot of packed dirt. This should keep them from being able to sprout, but check back in the spring to be sure. It's difficult and dirty work, but the native ecosystem will thank you for it!

Keep in mind there are also several ways to utilize the kudzu plant: woody vines can be used to weave baskets, furniture, or art; leaves can be eaten raw or cooked; roots can be dried and ground into flour; and blossoms can be used to make kudzu jelly. The vines, seeds, and seed pods are not edible. Be sure you know how to properly identify kudzu before harvesting, as it can be confused with poison ivy, and avoid collecting plants that have been sprayed with chemicals or are growing near waste or roadways.

We'll be working at several more locations through the next few months to fight the spread of kudzu and other invasives. Keep an eye on our social media and website, or reach out via phone or email for opportunities to get involved!



*Kudzu vines nearly crossed the sidewalk on the Hwy 76 bridge this summer.*



# WATERSHED UPDATE

## Chattooga Watershed Interactive Map

There is a lot happening on our public lands in the Chattooga River watershed! To see what's going on and where, check out our new interactive map at [chattoogariver.org/map/](http://chattoogariver.org/map/). Using the legend and menu, view different Forest Service projects and their basic info, along with other features of the watershed.

More information about many of the projects shown on the interactive map can be found in the Learn, News, Projects and Blog sections of our website. We encourage our members to check the website often and follow our Facebook and Instagram pages to stay more in touch with the Chattooga Conservancy's work. Please also provide us with your email address to receive periodic email updates about timely issues.

## Chattahoochee National Forest Land Sale Proposed in Chattooga Watershed

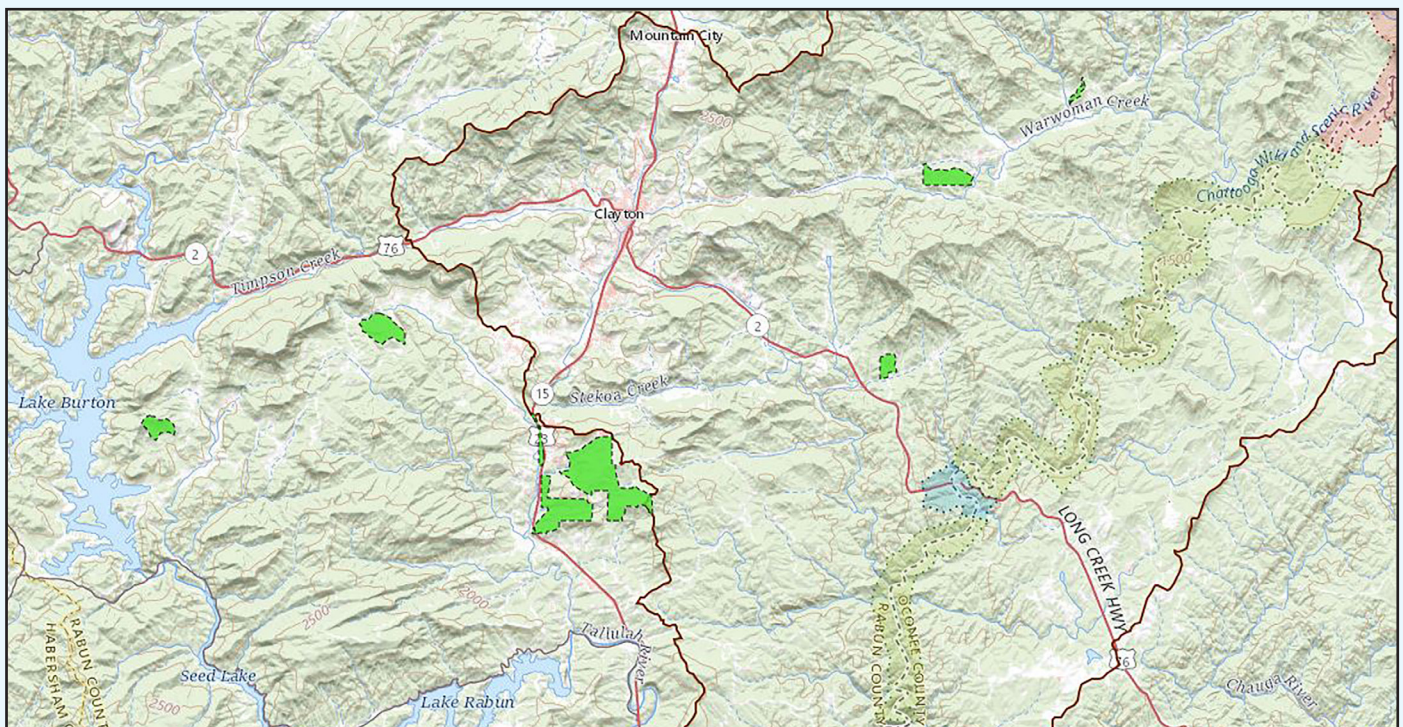
The Chattahoochee National Forest is planning to sell 3,841 acres of national forest land in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest (CONF), which includes eight tracts totaling 1,246 acres in Rabun County. The Forest Service's initiative to liquidate this public land is based on a political mandate from congress called the CONF Land Adjustment Act. This Act was tucked into the 2018 Farm Bill, and was sponsored by Rep. Doug Collins and Sen. David Perdue.

Over the years, various congressional initiatives to sell off our public lands have all been met with a massive hue and cry of opposition from citizens who cherish our national reserves of public land. This new congressional mandate for selling national forest lands in Georgia should be viewed as a "trial balloon" for selling off more public lands in other areas.

Initiated by the Weeks Act of 1911, our national forest lands were set aside for permanent protection. National forest lands are Rabun County's most valuable asset, used for recreation, tourism, and protecting natural resources including water quality, timber and wildlife habitat. Forest Service lands also boost the property values of adjacent private lands; for example, see any local real estate magazine and all of the prominent listings for tracts that border the national forest.

The Rabun County tracts involved in the CONF Land Adjustment Act vary in size from 19 acres to 538 acres. The criteria for lands to be sold are: 1) Isolated tracts that are inaccessible and/or have lost their principal value; and, 2) Disposal of national forest system lands that would be in the public interest.

Chattooga Conservancy staff have visited all of these tracts and found they have not lost their principal value; in fact, the tracts have high value in terms of protecting water quality, wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors, and in preserving scenic vistas and viewsheds. In regards to "public interest," feedback from a diverse sample of respondents shows that interests would best be served by preserving these tracts as part of our national forest system in Rabun County.



The proposed public land sale includes eight tracts in Rabun County (shaded above). Visit [chattoogariver.org/map](http://chattoogariver.org/map) for a closer look.



## WATERSHED UPDATE

The Forest Service says that “conversations” with the Rabun County Commissioners started in 2011 about the tracts in the 2018 Land Adjustment Act, and at that time the Commissioners indicated their support. Since this was nearly 10 years ago, the public has the right to ask that the current Board of Commissioners revisit this support. Citizens opposed to and/or affected by and the current national forest land sale proposal should contact the Rabun County Commissioners and request that they change/disapprove/stop the public land sales in Rabun County.

The location of these tracts can be viewed on our interactive map at [chattoogariver.org/map](http://chattoogariver.org/map) (layer “Forest Service Land Sale- GA”).



*Buzz Williams stands in an old-growth stand that is surrounded by loblolly and white pine stands proposed to be cut.*

### White Pine Scoping Notice

The Andrew Pickens Ranger District (APD) released a scoping notice in April 2019 for their proposed “White Pine Management Project” in the Sumter National Forest in SC. The project would affect 2,148 acres of “evenly spaced white pine dominated plantations” in 66 locations across the district. The APD has proposed clear-cutting “with reserves” on 1,487 acres and thinning/group selection on 661 acres in order to “produce more diverse mixed species stands.” Application of herbicides (including glyphosate—an herbicide classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as “probably carcinogenic to humans”), burning, and/or planting yellow pine seedlings would follow harvests. To view a map of the proposed project areas, visit [chattoogariver.org/map](http://chattoogariver.org/map).

We held a public meeting about this proposal on May 2nd at the Long Creek Community Center. Over 100 people attended, including representatives from the Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, Blue Ridge Fire Learning Network, wood products industry (loggers), and dozens of citizens who live, work and recreate in the project area. Interest was high, because the project calls for logging in and around popular recreation areas used for horseback riding, hiking and mountain biking, and will also impact aquatic resources on both public and private lands. Chattooga Conservancy staff moderated a lively discussion at the meeting, allowing all factions the opportunity to express their views—and dialog was heated at times.

We have since participated in meetings with The Nature Conservancy, Forest Service and Blue Ridge Fire Learning Network to discuss the White Pine proposal’s major issues. In brief, our position is:

- **Opposition to clear-cutting.** Recent Forest Service studies suggest that thinning harvests in pine plantations is the best way to facilitate the development of habitat diversity. Our initial field surveys in many stands where clear-cutting is proposed has shown that they consist of 40-50 year old even-age stands of white pine, interspersed with native hardwoods such as oak, hickory, tulip poplar and other native vegetation that has developed in the understory, and that is naturally moving the stand back to a native, uneven-aged forest. Thinning the white pine plantations could save the native trees, shrubs and wildflowers that are already growing there, significantly speeding up restoration of “more diverse mixed species stands.”
- **Restore a native mixed broadleaf (hardwood) forest.** The Forest Service has proposed planting yellow pine seedlings in the clear-cut areas, which would regenerate another pine-dominated stand.
- **Protect and restore old growth.** The APD has very little old growth, and some of the old growth areas are contiguous with or near the proposed white pine harvests.



## WATERSHED UPDATE

Clear-cutting tracts adjacent to old growth stands would continue to fragment the forest and disrupt natural wildlife corridors. Instead, the rare old growth stands should be surrounded by a connected network of intact native forests, rather than a landscape that has been clear-cut, burned and doused with herbicides.

Nearly 200 comments were submitted by the May 8th deadline. To read our more detailed comments, visit [chattoogariver.org/initiatives/white-pine-project](http://chattoogariver.org/initiatives/white-pine-project). The Forest Service will be evaluating this input, while working up an environmental assessment for the project. Stay tuned for updates as this proposal advances.

### Southside Timber Project

Thank you to many of our members who followed along and participated in commenting and objecting to the Southside Project over the last two years. This very controversial timber sale affects 317 acres of native forest located in the pristine headwaters of the Chattooga River, in the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forest. The project would cut rare old growth trees, destroy habitat for the imperiled Green Salamander, and permit repeated, excessive burning and herbicide applications. Despite hundreds of comments in opposition to the Southside Project, the Nantahala District Ranger ignored citizens' concerns and gave final approval in February of this year for the project to proceed. The Forest Service says project implementation could start in 2020.

We are disappointed to say the least, but will not give up the fight to protect these stands of rare old growth and sensitive species habitat. Depending on the outcome of the ongoing Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Plan Revision, several stands of



*This stand of white pine off Turkey Ridge Rd is one of many that would be harvested in the White Pine Project.*

timber could still be dropped from the Southside Project, in areas that are being considered for special designations and protections including the Ellicott Rock West Wilderness Area Extension and the Whitewater River. Visit our website to learn more about how you can get involved to support these designations and protect these stands! Meanwhile, we continue to explore options for stopping this ill-conceived project.

### Cashiers Lake Development Proposal

In late spring of 2018, a Texas developer applied for a permit to dredge Cashiers Lake and its surrounding wetlands, in preparation for building a high density residential subdivision. The developer's 2018 permit request was subsequently withdrawn and replaced with a new dredging permit request, which was submitted in April 2019. The reviewing agency, NC Division of Water Resources (NC DWR), held a public hearing about the proposal at the public library in Cashiers on September 5th. There was a full house at this public hearing, where the Chattooga Conservancy and others aired their concerns.

Cashiers Lake, which feeds the headwaters of the Chattooga River in NC, was built back in the 1920's as part of a development scheme that never materialized. Today, Cashiers Lake's wetlands continue to expand incrementally due to the steady accumulation of sediment from surrounding land disturbances, prompting many to say that this lake should continue naturalizing to protect water quality in the Chattooga River. Note that in the State of NC, the Chattooga River is classified as "Outstanding Resource Waters," which is exceptional because only 3 streams in the entire state are clean enough to have this designation.



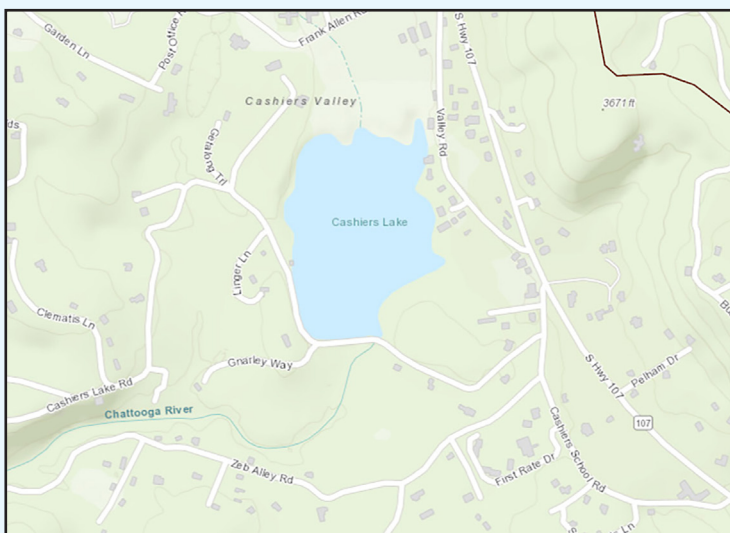
*A group camped on Brushy Mountain last winter to explore nearby old growth that is slated to be cut in the Southside Project.*

*Photo: Isabel Edwards*



## WATERSHED UPDATE

The new Cashiers Lake dredging permit request is for dredging (destroying) 6.2 acres of wetlands, filling 1 acre of wetlands, "disturbing" 3.5 acres of the lake bottom, and filling 1.5 acres of the lake. Aside from the dredging permit request, but inextricably tied to it, are the developer's plans for building a high density subdivision around Cashiers Lake of 60+ homes, and doubling the sewage load for the Cashiers Wastewater Treatment Plant, which discharges into the Chattooga's headwaters, such that the sewage plant would operate at 100% capacity.



*Cashiers Lake sits at the very top of the watershed, where it feeds the headwaters of the National Wild & Scenic Chattooga River.*

Currently, the NC DWR acknowledges that the upper Chattooga River "is at risk from...stormwater runoff from increasing residential development." Destroying wetlands, dredging, and building a high density development at Cashiers Lake would clearly add to these problems and result in further degradation of the Chattooga's Outstanding Resource Waters. The State of North Carolina has the duty to ensure that the strictest anti-degradation components of its water quality standards are being satisfied for unique Outstanding Resource Water bodies like the Chattooga River, and citizens have the right to demand that the most stringent protections be enforced to protect the Chattooga's water quality. See [chattoogariver.org/cashiers-lake](http://chattoogariver.org/cashiers-lake) for more detailed info, and stay tuned.

### Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Plan Revision

The Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Plan Revision has been in the works for over four years, spurring dozens of meetings and garnering over 20,000 public comments. Forest plans are important documents that remain in place for 15-20 years. Each individual national forest in the US has its own specific forest plan, which establishes protected areas, timber harvesting zones, and when and where a host of other uses could occur on our national forest land. We have been involved in the Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Plan Revision since it started, pushing for protection of certain areas in the Chattooga headwaters, as well as along the Blue Ridge Escarpment. This includes protections for the Overflow Wilderness Study Area; Ellicott Rock Wilderness Area West Extension; Terrapin Mountain Potential Wilderness Area; Wild & Scenic River

eligibility for Overflow Creek, Overflow's East and West Forks, and the Whitewater and Thompson Rivers; and, protecting rare stands of old growth trees.

Following the last comment period in late summer of 2017, concern has been growing regarding the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forest's lack of transparency about the plan revision. The "Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), Nantahala-Pisgah National Forest Land & Resource Management Plan" is expected to be released in late 2019, and it will be a lengthy document of probably 1,000

pages or more. There will be 90 days for public input on the draft EIS.

### Foothills Landscape Initiative

The Foothills Landscape Initiative is a large-scale project encompassing 143,000 acres of national forest in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest in north Georgia. In the Chattooga River watershed, the project area includes all national forest lands south of Warwoman Road to Highway 28, and south of Jule Field Rd. The project has lacked specific on-the-ground details thus far, but the "proposed action"



*We're pushing for the Whitewater River in North Carolina to be recognized as eligible for wild & scenic designation in the new Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Plan. Pictured is Ben Drew running the Mini Gorge of the Whitewater River. Photo by Eric Adsit*



## WATERSHED UPDATE

document released in 2017 included general plans to create more “early successional habitat” by cutting older stands of oak trees and applying herbicides to timber harvesting sites. A large environmental assessment for this project is expected in late 2019. The project area across the north Georgia landscape can be viewed at [chattoogariver.org/map](http://chattoogariver.org/map).

### Chattooga Stewardship Initiatives

The Chattooga watershed has seen an outstanding amount of community stewardship this year with events hosted by Keep Rabun Beautiful, Hatch Camp & Art Farm, and Keep Oconee County Beautiful Association; the Leave No Trace Initiative with the Andrew Pickens Ranger District; and the Chattooga River Clean-up we helped organize with the Chattooga Sounds Camp in March. Thank you so much to all who have participated!



*Stekoa Creek, beautiful as it can be, remains one of the Chattooga's most polluted tributaries.*



*Thank you to all who volunteered for the 6th Annual Chattooga River Clean-up with the Chattooga Sounds Camp!*

### Chattulah Fest

We were presented with an unexpected opportunity this past spring with the inaugural Chattulah Fest! The two-day festival was largely organized by the KLCG crew, a group of local kayakers, and held at the Chattooga River Resort in Long Creek, SC, in early April. It was a great event with live music, photo and video competitions, games, and a raffle with some outstanding prizes, including a raft from Rocky Mountain Rafts and a SUP board from Hala Atcha. We sold tons of raffle tickets at our booth, and all proceeds from ticket sales were donated to the Chattooga Conservancy and Team River Runner. We also had the opportunity to speak with attendees about our work. We are so grateful to KLCG and the others involved in the Chattulah Fest for generously including the Chattooga Conservancy in this event!

### Water Quality in the Watershed

As you may remember, we completed the Stekoa Creek Watershed Management Plan (WMP) in 2015, and the Warwoman Creek WMP last year. In each of these plans, we identified potential nonpoint sources of fecal coliform and sediment pollution and presented ways to address issues. We're now in the process of implementing some of these measures in the Stekoa Creek watershed with a GA EPD Section 319(h) grant. Using this funding, we've been able to provide vouchers to help several Rabun County residents with the cost of septic tank pump-outs, and we're currently helping complete an agricultural “best management practice” project on a local farm, as well as a green infrastructure project with rain gardens and permeable pavement in the Food Bank of NE Georgia parking lot. Keep an eye out for the first stages of the Food Bank project soon!

There is still much work to be done to restore our creeks and streams. We were recently awarded a Wild & Scenic Rivers Partnership Grant from River Network and USFS that is enabling us to conduct water quality monitoring throughout the Chattooga River watershed through the end of the year. We're gathering data to determine current baseline levels of fecal coliform and sediment in the Chattooga and its tributaries, so that we can continue to identify sources of pollution and work to find solutions and resources to help clean them up. We hope to be able to continue this work into the new year. To view our up-to-date water sampling results, visit [chattoogariver.org/waterquality](http://chattoogariver.org/waterquality).



## WATERSHED UPDATE

### Stay Wild 2019

Our annual Stay Wild fundraiser was held on Friday, July 26th at the Chattooga Belle Farm in Long Creek. We're honored and extremely grateful to say this was our most successful fundraiser yet!

**Thank you to all of our amazing sponsors, donors, volunteers, and friends who made this possible!**

#### Music

Dawn Jackson  
Thermonuclear Rodeo  
Fall Creek String Band

#### Food & Drinks

Belle's Bistro  
Brasstown Creek Gathering Place BBQ  
Chattooga Belle Farm Catering,  
Brandy Gill  
Chef David Sweeney  
Chef Eric Pitts  
Clarks' on Main  
Fortify Pi  
Fromage  
Ingles Clayton  
Mama G's  
New Moon Kettle  
Osage Farms  
Oskar Blues  
Universal Joint  
Wildwater

#### Volunteers

Liz Barrow  
Patrick Canary  
Tracy Chapple  
Amanda Cook  
Leah Culkar  
Cat Doolittle  
Molly Dougherty  
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Hannah Frame  
Sarah Gillespie  
Amanda Gladys  
Matt Hentschel  
John Hicks  
Taylor Howard  
Tim Litz  
Lee & Sharon McAbee  
Johnny & Freda McFarlane  
Chanda Morrison  
Cheryl & Jim Murphy  
Jan Nash  
Ruth Oktavec  
Renee & Ryan Padgett  
Kris Petti  
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**THANK YOU VERY MUCH** to everyone who recently contributed!\*

Your generous support will help us continue to work on the important conservation issues facing the Chattooga River watershed.

*\*donations listed through 11/20/19.*

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**THANK YOU VERY MUCH** to everyone who recently contributed!\*

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Membership donations make it possible  
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# Chattooga Conservancy

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Clayton, Georgia 30525

tel. (706) 782-6097 [info@chattoogariver.org](mailto:info@chattoogariver.org) [www.chattoogariver.org](http://www.chattoogariver.org)

## 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

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