



Chattooga Quarterly

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THE UPPER NARROWS IN THE CHATTOOGA CLIFFS REACH OF THE CHATTOOGA HEADWATERS

I n s i d e

Director's Page.....	2	Monarch Watch.....	14
The Last Wild River.....	3	Watershed Update.....	15
Junior Crowe Interview.....	9	Members' Pages.....	16

Director's Page

Buzz Williams

It is completely understandable that, in the eyes of the public, the degradation of the once wild character of the Chattooga River below Highway 28 can be attributed to the main user group, namely, whitewater enthusiasts. Total use by commercial and private boaters can exceed 80,000 people on the lower Chattooga in some years. So, when American Whitewater proposed to lift the ban on boating above the Highway 28 bridge, where the last vestige of wildness still survives in two small remote sections of the Chattooga River in the Rock Gorge and the Chattooga Cliffs reaches, it touched off a powder keg of debate.

The ensuing fight over the headwaters pitted American Whitewater (AW), a whitewater advocacy group with national clout that is demanding unrestricted access, against local chapters of Trout Unlimited (TU), a group with a long, storied history of partnership with the Forest Service to prioritize management of the river above the Highway 28 bridge to Burrells Ford for a high quality fishing experience. While the titans battled over what remains of the wild Chattooga, the rest of us, it seems, were ignored.

Finally, after years of haggling and millions of dollars spent, the Forest Service came out with a "preferred alternative" for managing visitor use in the headwaters. Not surprisingly, the Forest Service's proposal favors their old ally TU. No boating would be allowed in the sacred fishing grounds from Burrells Ford to Highway 28, but—with a nod to the agency's Washington Office, who told local managers to throw AW a bone—the Forest Service has proposed creating new access for whitewater boating in the Chattooga Cliffs reach, and allowing limited boating just down to Burrells Ford.

This proposal marks a sad day for the Chattooga River. First, it underscores our greatest fear that the agency charged with protecting the outstandingly remarkable values of the river will bow to the demands of special interests, shunning their responsibility to protect and enhance the unique qualities of wildness that caused the Chattooga to be included in the national wild and scenic rivers system.

Why is this a bad deal? First, whitewater boating should not be allowed in the Chattooga Cliffs reach for three very important reasons: 1) it would require new access; 2) it would damage a very delicate biological treasure; and, 3) this section is choked with logs and strainers that will only get worse as thousands of hemlocks succumb to the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid. Secondly, it is unfair to whitewater boaters to not allow some restricted boating from Burrells Ford to Highway 28 at water levels when it is too high to fish.

Creating a new access point for whitewater boating at the County Line Road in the Chattooga Cliffs reach is a bad deal

because new access here will attract not only boaters, but a whole host of new users. The Forest Service should know better than anyone that it is always too much access that kills wildness. The primary value of this small, still-wild section of the Chattooga River will be damaged irreparably if a new access point is created at Chattooga Cliffs.

Then there are the other reasons for not allowing boating in the Chattooga Cliffs reach. Much of this section is clogged with logs and woody debris from an old logging operation. At several places in this section, the river is narrowly restricted between near vertical rock walls, and in other places the river flows between huge boulders where logs will inevitably become lodged, making the river almost impassable as literally thousands of hemlock trees die due to the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid. Boaters in this section will be forced to portage around these hazards, causing much damage to the unique biological habitat of the Chattooga Cliffs.

On the other hand, the preferred alternative does not allow boating from Burrells Ford to the Highway 28 bridge, where the more desirable whitewater exists through the Rock Gorge, with the justification of protecting a "high quality fishing experience." The flawed logic here is evident when looking at the recommendation to allow whitewater boating through the Ellicott Rock Wilderness (the section above the Burrells Ford reach). The Forest Service claims that the wilderness experience can be maintained in the wilderness area through limiting the number of encounters by restricting boating permits. The proposal also sets a water level cut off to separate boaters from fishermen by allowing boating above levels when it is too high to fish. If restrictions would work to protect the wild character of the river and the fishing experience in the Ellicott Rock Wilderness, why wouldn't these restrictions work to achieve the same goal from Burrells Ford to the Highway 28 bridge?

The deadlock over the management of visitor use in the upper Chattooga has occurred because both powerful special interest groups maintain extreme positions, hoping the other side will blink first. We had high hopes that the Forest Service would take the high road, and come out with an obvious fair solution as offered in the Chattooga Conservancy's comments, but to no avail. In this round TU was the winner, hands down. With no justification, the Forest Service sacrificed the Chattooga Cliffs reach to AW's boating demands, while preserving TU's fishing grounds. Along the way, many in the public bought into the ruse thinking it was a good compromise.

So, now we enter into another round of appeal and litigation that is sure to follow. On a positive note, it isn't too late for the Forest Service to do the right thing. Forget about the fact that the official comment period is over. Contact the Forest Service and appeal to their conscience. Reason and fairness may yet win the day.

The Last Wild River

The daughter of James Dickey revisits the river her father made famous (or infamous, depending on your point of view).

Bronwen Dickey

***One need not weep romantic tears for them,
But when the last moonshiner buys his radio,
And the last, lost wild-rabbit of a girl
Is civilized with a mail-order dress,
Something will pass that was American,
And all the movies will not bring it back.***

—Stephen Vincent Benet, *John Brown's Body*

Thick strokes of early-evening crimson smeared across the rolling mountains of Rabun County as I drove up Highway 23 from Atlanta toward Clayton. The whole world looked like it was burning up right behind the horizon line. It was the nine-degree, molar-rattling middle of January in North Georgia, and I was on my way to visit the Chattooga River, fifty-seven miles of fierce backcountry water and etched stone where the film of my father's first novel, *Deliverance*, was shot in the summer of 1971.

When I read some months back that a lawsuit brought by a boating organization called American Whitewater had prompted the Forest Service to consider opening the river's headwaters to boaters, an unexpected sadness came over me. It was a variant of what I felt years ago when I learned that my childhood home had been torn down and rebuilt into something I couldn't recognize. The Chattooga River is generally recognized to be the wildest, most unforgiving in Southern Appalachia; its headwaters flow through some of the toughest terrain in the region. It's a twenty-one-mile stretch of swirling water where the battalions of rafters, kayakers, and canoeists who float the rest of the river every year can't go, or at least not legally. According to American Whitewater, it's the only piece of river in the entire National Forest system, in fact, where boaters aren't allowed. For reasons that differ according to who you ask, the Forest Service banned boating on the upper third of the river in 1976, two years after the Chattooga was designated a Wild and Scenic River by Congress, in order to prevent boaters and fishermen from getting in one another's way. That laws and lawsuits and controversy could extend even into the North Georgia backcountry was a reminder for me that the outside world was always pressing in on the Chattooga and on the people who lived around it.

Really, though, the outside world has been pressing in for over a century—the devastating logging period after the Civil War, the TVA dams following the Great Depression, the ever-increasing

numbers of vacation homes going up—but it started pressing a lot harder when *Deliverance* hit theaters in 1972, and with that fact comes, for me, a twinge of guilt.

I wasn't born until ten years after *Deliverance* was filmed. What I knew of the river—and by extension, what I knew of Southern Appalachia—I knew only from the film and from memories of my father: the stories he told me and the bluegrass ballads he picked out on his guitar every morning before he worked on his writing. Both of my parents' families had at one point come down from the hills, from North Georgia on my father's side and East Tennessee on my mother's. They used to say that the mountains are something you carry in your blood. If that was true for me I couldn't feel it.

But the Chattooga I did carry with me. Ever since I was old enough to watch *Deliverance*, the river—called the Cahulawassee in the story—thundered through my imagination and, perhaps more importantly, pooled in a certain corner of my heart. It was where my father's work came alive for millions of people and lodged itself permanently in the American brain, for better and for worse. Every time I watch the film and I see the Aintry sheriff, my father at a healthy forty-eight years old, standing on the banks of the river, I want to reach right through the screen. And when I hear some version of the old spiritual “Shall We Gather at the River,” I remember him playing it on his twelve-string, and I imagine the river in the song is the Chattooga. The two are forever fused in my mind. That I can't help.

I wanted to see the river while it remained, as it was called in the movie, “the last wild...river in the South.” I wanted the place that lived for me only in film and photographs and secondhand stories to live for me in a real way, in the winter, after the tourists had gone.

The free-flowing waters of the Chattooga are the color of faded denim, so wide and flat in places that it looks like you could walk right out on them and so boulder-strewn in others that it looks like a bruise-colored sculpture garden, half-submerged. The river begins near Cashiers, North Carolina, then stretches along to form a good bit of the Georgia–South Carolina border before it turns back into Georgia, joins with the Tallulah River and surrenders to Lake Tugaloo about seven miles south of Clayton. Its boiling rapids say as much about the people who named them as they do about the treacherous topography of the river itself: Warwoman, Bull Sluice, Sock 'Em Dog, Rock Jumble, Raven Chute, Jawbone, Dead Man's Pool.

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The Last Wild River

“It is,” Buzz Williams, one of the principal founders of the Chattooga Conservancy, kept reminding me when he took me up into the headwaters, “a killer river.” He meant that thirty-nine people have drowned in it since the Forest Service started keeping records on river fatalities in the '70s. Several rapids are considered “certain death” if you are unlucky enough to fall into them. Some of the people who fell out of their boats or fell in trying to cross the river were sucked into hydraulics or “strainers” (a piece of wood jammed into a rapid) so dangerous that their bodies couldn’t be recovered.

Before *Deliverance* was released only a few hundred people traveled down the river every year; after, that number jumped into the thousands and then the tens of thousands, and when a drowning occurred, it was attributed to “*Deliverance*-fever.” Despite the river’s dangers—or maybe because of them—the lower Chattooga quickly became one of the most popular whitewater destinations in the country; in the past two decades, over a million people have floated it. The fever may be gone, but there’s no question that the mystique of the *Deliverance* river endures.

Many of the locals were none too pleased with the flood of outsiders that arrived during the making of the film and for years following its release, especially when they began to see that the rest of America viewed them as violent, inbred rednecks. In much the same way as *Jaws* tapped into a primal fear of what lies under water, *Deliverance* tapped into a collective unconscious fear of the watcher in the woods that is as old as American literature itself. A person is most afraid when he is the most vulnerable, and never is he more vulnerable than when he is at the mercy of the wild.

The sadistic mountain men in *Deliverance* were, of course, fictional, as were the town of Ainty and the Cahulawassee River, but the residents of Rabun County were left to contend with the peculiar legacy of the film long after the cameras stopped rolling. The theme from the movie, “Dueling Banjos,” is used in commercials to sell everything from dish detergent to SUVs. PADDLE FASTER, I HEAR BANJO MUSIC is printed on T-shirts and bumper stickers all over the South. The character actor Bill McKinney, who uttered the improvised line “squeal like a pig” (the line does not appear in either the novel or original screenplay), now maintains his official website at www.squealikeapig.com. It’s hard to get away from.

When Congress designated the Chattooga a Wild and Scenic River—the only one in Georgia—that brought its own tensions. The designation protected the river watershed from industrial and commercial development, but also placed it under the control of the Forest Service, making some of the locals feel that the river had been taken from them and given to the federal government. New regulations on how the river could be used chafed against old mountain traditions. No cars were allowed within a quarter mile of the water, for example, which discouraged large family gatherings like baptisms. “With that government corridor they’ve created a desert,” one local resident told John Lane when he was working on his book, *Chattooga: Descending into the Myth of Deliverance River*, “and nobody can make a living out there but a bunch of rich kids with colorful boats.”

Most of the paddlers who flocked to the river were from elsewhere, and they soon became the lightning rod for local resentment. People told me stories of boaters who left their cars in parking areas near river put-ins and came back to smashed windows and slashed tires. Even as late as the mid-'80s,



“The Narrows,” Chattooga River, section III

photo by Peter McIntosh

The Last Wild River

they said, arson was a problem. So was theft. Backwoods roughnecks trying to scare off paddlers sometimes fired warning shots from the bank, strung barbed wire across the river to slash up rafts, or even hauled boats right out of the water.

Buzz drove me up to where the headwaters ended and the rest of the river began, at the Highway 28 bridge, the dividing line between where boaters are allowed and where they aren't. The bridge isn't far from Chattooga Old Town, the site of the former Cherokee village for which the river was named. No one is completely certain, but most believe that the word *Chattooga* is related to a Cherokee word for crossing, *tsatugi*, meaning either "we have crossed here" or "he has crossed the river and come out upon the other side." European disease and forced displacement wiped out the Old Town's ninety or so inhabitants by 1775. All that is left is a flattened patch of grass, hardly bigger than a high-school football field, a place where something used to be.

Originally from nearby Pendleton, Buzz has been coming to the river "since he could stick his thumb out," and worked on it as both a raft guide and a Forest Service employee before he focused on conservation. There's a saying down on Cumberland Island that the devil has his tail wrapped around the place, and that's sort of how Buzz feels about the Chattooga. "There's always something threatening it," he said. He has a deep respect for the people who live near the river and a stronger understanding than most of the circumstances affecting their lives: Skyrocketing property taxes, for example, force many to pick up and move from the land their families farmed before the mountains represented the luxury of weekend getaways. When rich folks build million-dollar vacation homes on similarly expensive lots, land values and property taxes for everyone go up, and that happens with more frequency every year. "If you're a farmer and your land is worth two million dollars," Buzz said, "how are you gonna grow enough to compete with that?"

As we drove from place to place in his pickup, Buzz pointed out who lived where and how long they'd been there, whose barn he helped build, who spent a third of his life in the pen, who had a still out back, whose moonshine was better than whose. One woman kept a deer in her fenced yard.

We talked some about a story I'd read about a Forest Service employee who claimed to have been chased into the Chattooga by a cougar last fall. I'd heard several people in Clayton joking around about the sighting, playfully warning each other to "watch out for the cougar." The Eastern cougar is believed to be extinct in the South; no one has seen any proof of one for decades. Buzz didn't think there was any chance that a big cat was prowling around the backcountry of North Georgia. "Probably just a bobcat," he said.

Small ranch-style and A-frame houses with dusty pickups out front intermittently dotted the snow-dusted hillsides, smoke curling from their brick chimneys. Barns with rusted tin roofs listed at precarious angles. A power line near the road sagged under the weight of two hefty red-tailed hawks.

You can feel it when you leave the pavement in North Georgia. Even in the dead of winter, the air wraps around you with the smell of mountain laurel, hemlock, and rhododendron, a smell just a notch sweeter than that of fresh-cut grass. The world unfolds in sheaves of green and gray and blue and brown, then folds back up in layers of shadow. The dirt road drops off steeply to either side, without the added security of guardrails. Radio stations come in infrequently, if at all. Walk half an hour into the woods, and you're away from ninety percent of the population. Walk an hour into it, and you leave behind ninety-nine percent. It's just you and the limitless indifference of a vast, tangled country.

I was in the South, certainly, but it was not the suburban South I grew up in or even a South I recognized. It was a place where people accepted the dictates of the land they were living on and understood its character, a place free—at least for now—of the gated communities and department stores, happy hours and hustle that make so many cities interchangeable. There is a sense in the hills that things are built to last.

We stopped for lunch in the town of Highlands, about ten miles from where the river actually begins, and I saw for a moment what could be on the horizon for Rabun County. Heavy gates and thick walls began appearing around large, lavish houses, some with FOR SALE signs from "Country Club Properties" staked into their yards. The shops downtown boasted faux-Tudor storefronts. At Buck's Café, I ate a mozzarella and basil sandwich while the lilting horns of loungey jazz played on the stereo. In the corner, heavily accessorized blonde women with glossy polished nails picked at scones and nursed cappuccinos. The mounted deer head on the wall looked, if anything, like an ironic touch. There was no doubt that we were in high-dollar country.

On the way back to Clayton, we passed an old sign, so faded that I struggled to read it: AMUSEMENTS, PICNICS, COLD BEER, USED CARS. Buzz told me it was the sign for Burrell's Place, a small bar where everyone used to sit out on the front porch and drink beer while a guy named Junior Crowe played the banjo. Before it closed years ago, all kinds of people gathered at Burrell's: rich kids from Highlands, hippie river guides, old-timers and farmers from the mountains. It was the sort of place that doesn't exist in Chattooga country anymore.

The Last Wild River

“It’s magic out there,” Dave Perrin said of the headwaters when I met up with him at his office one afternoon, speaking of it with the tenderness one usually reserves for a first love. Perrin is the Chattooga Outpost Manager of the Nantahala Outdoor Center, one of three commercial rafting companies that are allowed to run trips on the river. Just like Buzz and most of the other people I met who have dedicated their lives to the Chattooga, Dave started out decades back as a longhaired raft guide, and like them, the river got under his skin.

Even though there had been no talk of allowing commercial outfitters to run trips on the headwaters, Dave felt that private boaters (whose interests American Whitewater represents) should be allowed access to it. “How can anyone want to protect what they can’t even see?” he asked. Moreover, in his view, floating a river in a boat was the most low-impact vantage point from which to explore it. “Boating,” he remarked, “is not evil. You take people out on the Chattooga, and you can see the river affect them. You can see the light bulbs go on. Most people come from a computer-driven world, and this is something that isn’t virtual. It’s not a computer game. If I’m taking kids out of their urban environment and they go home and they appreciate [nature] differently, that’s a win.”

I remembered how exhilarating and edifying my own whitewater trips had been, on rivers in North Carolina and Oregon, and how much they informed my feelings about the outdoors and I couldn’t disagree with him. Could I really blame anyone in techno-heavy 2008 who longed to “get back to nature?” I’d do it more if I could. But I also thought about the Nantahala and Ocoee Rivers near the Chattooga, two once-wild rivers that are now essentially water parks, clogged with tourists looking for “wilderness adventures.”

It was true: No one was trying to dam up the Chattooga or build a shopping mall on it. And it was also true that the Forest Service restricted how many people could or could not travel down it in a given year. But the headwaters controversy struck me as an issue of supply and demand that goes on in all the unkempt corners of America: The demand is getting stronger while the supply is getting smaller. Once the land is fought over like it’s private property, like it’s just another view lot, who draws the lines and where do they draw them?

Sometimes the only way to keep something wild, I thought, is to keep as many people out of it as you can. There was no doubt that everyone I talked to loved the Chattooga. But I began to worry that some of them, in a phrase I heard many times that week, would love it to death.

Driving through the backcountry reminded me of the first scene in the novel of *Deliverance*, where the four main characters, Atlanta suburbanites, are sitting in a bar planning a canoe trip in the mountains. Lewis, the hard-edged survivalist of the group who lacks the pure instinct for actual survival, points to the Cahulawassee on his map, set to be dammed up and turned into a lake for hydroelectric power (as so many rivers were back then) and explains to the others that, “Right now it’s wild. And I mean wild. It looks like something up in Alaska. We really ought to go up there before the real estate people get hold of it and make it over into one of their heavens.” Famously, this is a trip that throws the men into a horrifying struggle for their lives: One is raped, another shatters his leg, another is killed on the river.

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My father didn’t talk much about wilderness, it was “wildness” he was interested in. Wilderness, to him, was just an idea, a romantic falsification of nature rather than the untamed, untamable thing itself. Wildness was a place where man risked everything; it wasn’t a theme park or a toy you played around with or a place you ventured into for thrills. It could kill you. The characters in *Deliverance*

were prepared only for wilderness, and they found wildness. Wildness bites back.

“I think a river is the most beautiful thing in nature,” my father wrote in one of his journals, right before the novel was published in 1970. “Any river is more beautiful than anything else I know.” He was drawn to writers who felt similarly inspired by water, like Melville and Conrad. Heraclitus’s philosophy of universal flux and his famous dictum, “you cannot step into the same river twice,” particularly moved him. But there were few things that terrified my father as much as man’s ever-growing intrusion into the natural world. “We’re never going to be able to get out of the ‘man world,’” he said in a documentary back in the ’70s, “if we don’t have any place to go to from the man world. That’s why we need these rivers and streams and creeks and woods and mountains. You need to be in contact with nature as it was made by something else than men.” As much as *Deliverance* was a story of survival, or, as so many define it, a story of “man against nature,” it was a story about the commercial destruction of a rugged, primordial landscape and a part of the South that was slipping away, even back then.

Right across the river from Clayton, the Long Creek Bar is a plain, white box of a building that looks like it might have been converted from something else, like a warehouse for three-

The Last Wild River

wheelers. Inside, the place has concrete floors and the ratty shine of exposed ductwork on the ceiling. The weak lamps above the two pool tables give off the only light in the room, and, on the night I stopped in with Buzz to grab a beer, leftover Christmas garland sagged off tables in the back, waves of cigarette smoke stung my eyes, and two guys in trucker caps shot pool while AC/DC's "Shoot to Thrill" played feebly on the jukebox.

Buzz ordered a Budweiser and sat down at the bar next to a sixty-something-year-old man with a bushy beard and camo cap whom he knew from the old days at Burrell's Place. The man had clearly had a few, and when the subject turned to the fight over the upper Chattooga (which he pronounced Chatt-ooga), he took a long drag from his Winston and became agitated, like he couldn't stand to hear another word about it. "All I wanna know is," he said, "if they open up that upper river, who's gonna pay to get the bodies out?"

Buzz asked him what some of the old-timers from Burrell's might have thought about all the controversy, and the guy shook his head and rested his hands on his pack of cigarettes. "I don't know about that, but I do know that the worst thing that ever happened to this area was that—" I knew what was coming. "—that *Deliverance*."

I was silently grateful that he didn't know who I was. Half of me wanted to apologize to him for something, and half of me didn't feel there was anything to apologize for. That was a feeling that I walked around with my entire time in Chattooga country: a shadow of guilt about the lasting legacy of *Deliverance* doing battle with the pride of my father's work. I've often wondered what it must be like to have grown up in North Georgia and to see your life, your town, your way of living flattened out for someone else's purposes and eventually turned into a national punch line. Hollywood has not been kind to Southern Appalachia in this sense. Even before *Deliverance*, there were the Kettle clan from the '40s and the Clampetts, but the shocking violence of *Deliverance*, in the imagination of so many, ratcheted up the stereotype.

It's hard for me to read much of what is written about Appalachia in popular media, because it tends to be written in a cartoonish "them-thar-hills" vernacular, always something about a "feisty, clannish" people who sit around a-drinkin' and a-stompin' and a-pickin' on the banjo. Some of that's true, sure, but some of it isn't. It's as though Southern Appalachia is the corner of America that America forgot, and the virtues that are generally lauded as defining the American frontier identity—self-reliance, resourcefulness, hard work—are now ripe material for ridicule. If the people around the Chattooga River had no

particular love for the rest of the world, I couldn't really blame them.

More than the guilt/pride, though, I had to contend with the sharp pangs of loneliness that were setting in. As enraptured as I was by the Chattooga, I couldn't know it the way the locals, the paddlers, the fishermen, and the activists knew it, because they knew it like they knew a person: its moods, its temper. This is a part of the world that I always thought would feel familiar to me, but it didn't. That stuff my parents told me about the mountains being in the blood didn't feel true. I realized, slowly, that everything I did—from the clothing I wore to how I put my hair up to the way I spoke—marked me as a person who wasn't from here, and I was in a place where being "from here" mattered.

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On my last day in North Georgia, I drove over to Mountain Rest, South Carolina, to meet up with Butch Clay, who wrote a guidebook on the river and possesses an intimate knowledge of the headwaters area. He was fighting off strep throat, but felt so strongly talking with me about preserving the wildness up there that he filled a thermos with lime juice, honey, and a bit of Jack Daniels and insisted we hike down into a place

called the Rock Gorge. "You're lucky," he said, "that I have to save my voice."

He and I drove to a small parking area near the Chattooga River Trailhead, packed up two sets of hip waders and some lunch, and started our hike to the gorge, some of the most intractable wilderness on the entire river. It was not far from the Rock Gorge, incidentally, where the Forest Service employee claimed he had seen the cougar. "If there is one around, it'd be up here," Butch said, the naturalist in him sounding hopeful. "Lots of overhanging cliffs for it to drag food into."

The hike was a sweaty, slippery, merciless hour-long climb down, with all the potential to be twice that coming back up. "There are no roads in it, and no roads to it," Butch kept saying of the gorge, speaking more philosophically than to me. "If you want to see it then you have to earn it." In the words of Dwight Yoakam, we were a thousand miles from nowhere, a fact that sank in when Butch told me that if I broke an ankle, he'd build me a fire and leave me his gun.

The gorge looked like a hulking rock coliseum, with the pine-covered mountains forming a steep V on either side that the noonday sun blanketed with light. The wind galloped straight through with as much purpose as the river did, chilling my skin

The Last Wild River

under all the layers of sweat-soaked clothes. Once we picked our way down to the water, we saw that there were thin sheets of ice all over it, looking like someone had encased the scene in glass. “Rime ice,” Butch said, as he broke off some of it with his boot. Ever so often a huge sheet of ice would break off of a ledge somewhere in the gorge and crash into the water, and I would wheel around, thinking it was a bear or a wild hog. The water was about two-and-a-half to three-feet deep and, from the bank, didn’t seem to be moving too fast. Butch and I pulled on our hip waders and slowly stepped out into the river. The carpet of rounded rocks on the riverbed was too slick for the traction on my waders to grip, and the current so strong it felt like someone had a rope around my waist and was pulling at it, hard. I tilted and stumbled. My arms reached out, though there was nothing to grab onto. The water spilled over the tops of my waders and was so cold that my body didn’t register it as cold but as scorching heat; it burned the tops of my legs and painted my skin bright red. If the river wanted to take me, it could have.

I wanted to lock the wildness of the river into the sandstone somehow so that it couldn’t be touched...and climb back out—straight up—through the mud and undergrowth, crawling over decayed logs, tripping over vines, my lungs burning from the effort because there weren’t any roads.

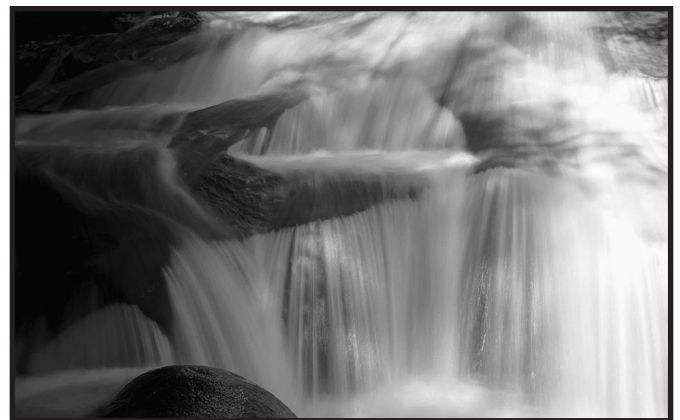
Eventually, we made the crossing, climbed onto an imposing boulder, and talked while we ate lunch about the people who wanted to bring boats to the upper river. The tide of tourism seemed inevitable: The three major cities nearby—Atlanta, Asheville, Chattanooga—are growing all the time, as are the popularity of whitewater sports and the technology with which those sports can be enjoyed. Rapids that were unrunnable thirty years ago are easy to navigate in today’s smaller boats. Really, there was no empirical evidence to make a convincing case against boaters using the headwaters. Aside from the possibility for the sort of pollution that comes with every outdoor activity, I didn’t feel that boaters represented more of a threat to the landscape than, say, the hunters and campers in the headwaters did. It all came down to gut feeling, not reasoning: Either you wanted people up there or you wanted people to stay away; either you wanted things to change or you wanted things to stay the same.

“Everyone is asking, ‘What’s in it for me?’” Butch said. “No one is saying ‘What can I give up?’” Perhaps thinking of his young son, he continued, “Where else are we gonna teach our children about this kind of wilderness? There is nowhere else.” I asked him if he thought there was anything that could be done about it. He paused for a second, looking out onto the water.

“I believe someone with deep pockets and a stout heart could hold ’em off for a while, and I’ll stick right there with ’em.” He sliced off a piece of cheese and some sausage. “But I ain’t got the deep pockets.”

The last time my father saw the river was in 1988, when he visited it on a snowy winter weekend to participate in a short film about his career. Buzz Williams showed him around, and some months later, after the documentary aired in Columbia, Buzz told me that my father shook his hand at the screening and said, “Say goodbye to the river for me.” In a dark twist on that line from Heraclitus, he knew that he could never step into the same river twice, and the Chattooga that existed as a site for *Deliverance* tourism wasn’t the same river he stepped into back in 1971.

Sitting in the Rock Gorge, I looked around at the ice-sheathed cliffs and fallen trees spanning the water and wanted everything I could see to stay right like it was, as my father had once seen it. I wanted to lock the wildness of the river into the sandstone somehow so that it couldn’t be touched by men, and climb back out—straight up—through the mud and undergrowth, crawling over decayed logs, tripping over vines, my lungs burning from the effort because there weren’t any roads. In my heart, if not my head, I wanted the glittering, jade eyes of the last cougar in the South to study me from under a ledge. I wanted to feel that cold fear that sluices through your veins when you realize you’re truly alone out in the wild—or that you aren’t. Emerging from the woods at dark-thirty (the Appalachian term for half past sunset), looking rougher, as my dad used to say, than a night in jail, I wanted to drive back down out of the mountains knowing that the people who had been living there for generations weren’t in any danger of being forced out, because I didn’t want to walk around in fifty years and see flattened patches of grass where the farmers and moonshiners and hellraisers used to live. And, before I arrived home, I wanted to stop at Burrell’s Place and drink a beer out on the porch while Junior Crowe played songs that sounded familiar to me. “Shall We Gather at the River,” maybe. That’s one I know.



Overflow Creek waterfall, Chattooga headwaters

photo by Reis Birdwhistell

Junior Crowe Interview

Junior Crowe is the embodiment of the self-reliant man of the Blue Ridge Mountains. He was raised in the remote foothills of Oconee County, South Carolina, as the son of a share-cropper trying to make a living during the hardscrabble times of the post World War II 1940's. Junior learned to play the banjo from his parents, no doubt to find respite from hard times. He also learned the fine art of making good liquor from a hearty, native corn. When the law got too hot on the trail to his still, Junior moved across the Chattooga River into the deep hollers beneath Rabun Bald where he could apply his craft, raise his family and play his music. I sat with Junior one summer morning in his home off of Warwoman Road, not far from the West Fork of the Chattooga River, as his life story flowed from his memory like a mountain spring. His stories of making his way in the mountains were laced with humor and wisdom. Junior is a little bent with age, but his spirit comes through with a wry smile and a twinkle in his eye. Here is what he told me on June 4th, 2008.

—Buzz Williams

BW: Weren't you raised over there near Morgan Burrell's place?

Junior: Oconee County is where I was born. Morgan was older than me. He was a first cousin to me. I was raised over there in what they call Cheohee Valley above the Tamassee School.

BW: I have noticed that there are a lot of Crowes buried at Cherry Hill Church—are these your kinfolks?

Junior: Yeah. That's where all my kinfolks are buried.

BW: I also noticed that there were Burrells—and was it Ridleys—buried there too?

Junior: The Ridleys are buried over here at Bethel Church, right over here going across Highway 28.

BW: When did you move over to Rabun County, Georgia?

Junior: We moved here in '46.

BW: How old were you then?

Junior: I'm 72 now. I come over here, just turned 13 year old.

BW: Did your interest in music come from your parents?

Junior: Yeah. My mom and dad played. He played the banjo,

and she beat the straws.

BW: What is "beating straws"?

Junior: She just kept time right across below his fingers where she was hit'n the banjo. He played the old claw-hammer style, and she beat the straws down below his hand. When I was a kid, people would come want'n dad and mom to play 'em a tune, and that's the way they played. I was just like this (Junior held his hand out at about 3 feet off the floor).

BW: Do you remember what kind of songs they played?

Junior: "Cripple Creek," "John Henry," stuff like that. That's all he knowed. He didn't know many tunes, Dad didn't. He played for dances before I was born, I guess.

BW: But, you picked up the banjo from him?

Junior: Yeah, and my mama, she played the banjo too, but she played with her fingers. She didn't play claw-hammer. She showed me how to wiggle my fingers. I really wasn't interested in playing the banjo, you know, that way. It didn't interest me none. And me and Morgan and us was a-workin', I worked for my Uncle Jess and Morgan and them when I was a-growin' up, on that side. That's about the first work I done beside farmin' and workin' in the fields. We got out of that after my daddy got older. We come over here, and I went to work with them. We were up there a-loadin' locust logs on a big truck Morgan and them had above Moody Springs, over there, and had a radio in the truck. Dan Reno and his bunch had come to Greenville, and they had a radio program about 9-10 o'clock in the morning. We was a-set'n there listen'n to them, load'n them logs. We stopped everything, list'n at 'em. And they was a-goin' to be at Salem High School that Saturday night. Me and Morgan and us decided to go over there. I wanted to see what he was a-doin' to a banjer. I didn't know about those picks, so I went over there. I see'd him a-usin' these picks, and I got interested in the banjer then. I was about 16 year old then.

BW: When did you form the band called "The Turnpike Ramblers"?

Junior: Morgan formed that band. We had a hearst we rode in.

BW: I remember that hearst. It's probably still parked over there somewhere at Burrell's Place.

Junior: Ah. He sold it to somebody, I think.

BW: Well, did you play with him when he first started?

Junior: Yeah, there was a Webb boy. He was a-playin' around and we let him play some with us. He wasn't a member of the

Junior Crowe Interview

band, but he played some with us when we was over there and about.

BW: Now, was that before Morgan opened up Burrell's Place?

Junior: No, he was a-runnin' it then. His wife and his girl, Aletha, run the place when he was gone.

BW: There were three of you in the band, sometimes four, as I recall. I remember, y'all played on Tuesday night and people would come from all over to hear you play.

Junior: Yeah. We had a house full over there a-pickin'.

BW: Did you teach your sons how to play?

Junior: Yeah. They sorta got the idea from me. You know they played with me when they first started. Then as they got bigger, I told 'em they needed to get with a band. Git with somebody that played all the time. I got 'em into Oliver Rice's band that played gospel music all the time. I got 'em playin' with him, and I guess you know, me and Morgan drunk a little beer and stuff.

BW: No! (We both have a laugh.) That didn't mix to good with gospel music, did it?

Junior: No, I didn't want to do that and play gospel music too. So, I got them boys off with Oliver, and then I met Raymond Fairchild from Marietta, Georgia. I was over there at that festival playin', me and Morgan and us, and I met him, and me and him got to be good buddies.

And I got an idea. Raymond was a recovering alcoholic, but he had quit when I met him. He hadn't drunk none in four year then. And I just said to myself, "This 'ud be a good time."

Raymond was goin' to carry on. He told me, he said, "I'm goin' to pick serious from now on, I ain't a-goin' to do like I been doin', just playin' around here and yonder for nothing." He said, "I'm goin' to see if I can make some money with these fingers."

I got the idea that if he could ever hear them boys play, and their older sister was a-singin' with 'em too, then.... So, we invited Raymond Fairchild over to Morgan's. Let him come over there and play, stay all night with Morgan. And I took the boys and my girl over there. And me and Raymond and him, we was

a-standin' over there under the barn a-pickin' one night while a hog was a-cookin' over there on the fire. And just as soon as he heard Wallace a-playin' the guitar with me and some more there, he asked me who that boy wuz playin' the guitar.

I told him he was my youngest son.

He said "Well, I want to hire him. Yeah," he said, "he's the best 'un I've heard for many a day. I wanna hire him."

I said, "Well." He didn't know Wallace was married. He thought he was my boy here at the house.

I said, "Well, there's one thing you'll have to do. When you talk to him about it, he's got a brother, plays and sings with 'im, and I don't know what you'uns'll do about that."

He said, "Well, I'll just have to hire him too!" (Laughs.)

BW: So, they went pretty high up, did they?

Junior: They went 17 years, nonstop, when they went with Raymond. And, done good. The oldest one is still pick'n with Raymond, yet, of the night, in that little barn up there. He works, of the day, and goes up there and picks at night, Dwayne does....

“Raymond [Fairchild] was goin' to carry on. He told me, he said, ‘I’m goin’ to pick serious from now on, I ain’t a-goin’ to do like I been doin’, just playin’ around here and yonder for nothing.’ He said, ‘I’m goin’ to see if I can make some money with these fingers.’”

BW: That's great that they are carrying on the tradition.

Junior: Yeah, they're carrying on, that's what they've got. Wallace has a record contract with these people up in Nashville. And, they just finished a new CD, and they're gonna put it out fer him. And when they do play a show, they make some money now. They ort to have quit Raymond about 6 years before they did. But, I told 'em, to make shore to go on and learn everything they could about it, you know. And that way, going to all these festivals, with all these musicians, and see how things was going.

BW: Well you certainly gave them some good advice.

Junior: I give 'em advice that I should have done.

BW: Well, you had a lot of fun, I know that.

Junior: The reason I couldn't go out there like they was, was when they was little, right here, at home, I had to stay in here and make a livin'. And I thought that the best thing to do was to

Junior Crowe Interview

get them with somebody that already knowed the business, and they could play with them.

BW: How did you make a living?

Junior: By makin' liquor and selling it.

BW: Did you do that since you moved here?

Junior: Yeah. That's what I come over here fer. (Laughs.)

BW: Why? Just because it's more remote and further from the law?

Junior: The law knowed us too well over there. Knowed my Daddy. My Daddy never did drink none in his life, but he made a little and sold it. But it was such an old tradition. He quit makin' it hisself and the boys tried to make some, but they couldn't do no good at it. And I got big enough and I tried it. My dad sort of left it up to me, when I got old enough, to do what I needed to do 'cause he wasn't able to do nothin' anymore, then. He had Typhoid fever in his time, and it left him sick. He left it up to me to do whatever I needed to do. And I told him we was going to move. We'll have to move.

BW: I know you must have had some good crop land over there in Cheohee Valley.

Junior: Oh yeah, had some of the finest.

BW: Did y'all sell the property over there?

Junior: No, we never did own it. My daddy was a share cropper. He'd standing-rent the property, you know. He'd pay 'em money for the land, to farm it.

BW: Where did the Crowe family come from?

Junior: They originated from over in Cherokee. My Dad was born around Cherokee.

BW: That's fascinating. I know that Cheohee Valley was the site of an old Cherokee Indian village.

Junior: Where we lived was an old Indian reservation. We tended a big bottom in there, about 15 acres, as flat as it could be, at the foot of that mountain.

BW: Was that on Cheohee Creek?

Junior: Yeah, on the head of Cheohee Creek.

BW: Was that next to the Piedmont Seed Tree Nursery?

Junior: Well, they've got lakes up there now.

BW: Did you find any arrowheads out in those fields?

Junior: Yeah, I found a lot of 'em. I found a pipe. It was in good shape.

BW: Did you keep any of that stuff?

Junior: Well, my daddy give my grandma that pipe, and I think she dropped it and busted it on the hearth rock. I was just a kid and I had to do what he said, you know. She was stayin' with us and she wanted that Indian pipe. It'd git so hot she couldn't hold it.

BW: Now, when you left that land and came over here, did you find the land good over here?

Junior: Well, I didn't depend on the land, here. There wasn't enough of it to do no good. We just growed some corn where this water's standin' down here, and on where it's growed up on the other side down there. Now, where this trailer's a-settin' down here, there was a tater patch in there, and I sorta truck farmed that stuff, and then I got into the booze business. And that's where my money had to come from.



*Junior Crowe and friends making music
left picture - Junior in center; right picture - Junior on right*

Junior Crowe Interview

BW: Did ol' Morgan throw in with you and bring you some corn, now and then?

Junior: No. I sold him a lot of it. (Laughs.)

BW: You told me one time that Holcomb Prolific was the best corn for making liquor.

Junior: Yeah. That's what we used. The big Holcomb Prolific.

BW: But, you didn't grow all you used, did you?

Junior: No, we grew it. We saved our seed.

BW: You still got any of that seed?

Junior: No. I ain't got none of it now. I could get some big corn like that. John Houlk kept the seed of it over here. I guess the boys has still got it yet.

BW: Where did you keep your still?

Junior: I just kept it in one holler 'til they cut it down, and I'd move to another'n.

BW: Did you ever get caught?

Junior: No. That's what people couldn't understand, why I didn't get caught.

BW: What was the secret?

Junior: First thing I done, I got in with the sheriff; got them to like it. That was the best thing. Over there, my other brothers—I learnt that from them. They'd dodge the law and they'd both drink a little. When I was foolin' with that stuff, I didn't drink back then. I done all my drinkin' after I quit farmin' and stuff. I didn't drink at all. I didn't drink on up 'til I was thirty-two year old. Them boys tried to make it and drink it too, and I couldn't see that wouldn't work.

BW: When you made friends with the law enforcement people, I guess they....

Junior: They took care of me. Chester York was the last one, I quit on him.

BW: I know you made some good whiskey, because I've had some of it.

Junior: That's some I took over there to Morgan's.

BW: How much liquor did you make, Junior?

Junior: Well, it's according to how much you put in. When I was makin' by myself, I'd just put in about four barrels. That would run over four cases of liquor.

BW: Did you ever run it twice?

Junior: Yeah, I stayed in one place for over a year at a time, and never got cut down. I'd always have some stuff fixed and another still that was ready and everything to put in it, somewhere else, when they got to that one.

BW: Did you use copper?

Junior: Yeah.

BW: Did you tin lock it or soulder it?

Junior: Tin locked it, and put brads in it.

BW: Did you do it yourself?

Junior: I had a boy to help me that knowed how to do it, and you had to have the right

“My Daddy never did drink none in his life, but he made a little and sold it. But it was such an old tradition. He quit makin' it hisself and the boys tried to make some, but they couldn't do no good at it. And I got big enough and I tried it.”

tools to brad with.

CQ: That's the best way, I guess.

Junior: You got to run that first still full, run it back, 'cause if you have a heater box, a dry barrel, a thumper and all that stuff, and caps, and don't keep it awful clean, washin' it.... If you put a big heater box up, you couldn't take all that stuff, and pipes, down, when it run 'cause it would take you half a day to put it back together. So, we just left that part of it. Just used the cap and front post, the rest of it stayed together. But that first still-full that run through there, comes a little bit green, off of that poison that had to clean that heater and stuff, that ran out. So, we just set it back and put about a gallon, according to how much there was of it, or a gallon and a half, back into the next still-full we put back in there, and it purified it and cleaned it up. And I run it through fire coals and a wool rag. Let it filter through that. If there was anything in it, them fire coals would get it. I'd wash 'em good and put them on top of that wool rag and it would filter everything out of it. It'd come just as clear as crystal—you couldn't even see it in the jar, hardly.

BW: I know it was good clear whiskey.

Junior: That's the reason I got by so good. The sheriff bought

Junior Crowe Interview

it, he got his liquor from me too.

BW: That helps, doesn't it?

Junior: Yeah.

BW: I want to ask you a little bit about the Chattooga River. Cheohee Valley wasn't far from the Chattooga.

Junior: In a straight line it's not far over there, if you go straight, but the way you have to go, it's about 25 miles over there.

BW: When you migrated over here, where did you cross the river?

Junior: We came right up the highway [Highway 28]. There was a big house that sat over there, at the entrance to this road [Warwoman Road], and below the road there, a big two-story house that was vacant. My Daddy rented it, and we tended them big bottoms when we first moved over here. There were some Brysons that lived over there, and we got in with them. They was good neighbors. We went in halvers, and tended them big bottoms. We growed beans in one of 'em, beans and corn. We took 'em up there to Dillard and sold 'em up there, at the market.

BW: Then, you bought this place?

Junior: Yeah, I bought this place here. I just got two acres.

BW: Where were you when they made the Chattooga a National Wild and Scenic River?

Junior: Well, I remember 'em a-talkin' about it.

BW: How did people feel about it?

Junior: We had bumper stickers and everything else, tryin' to keep it out.

BW: What do you think about it know?

Junior: It's bad news for somebody like us that wants to go over on the river camping or something. They got restrictions that

are hard to go by. The way it was before, you could just pick ye' out a place and go anywhere you wanted to. And over on the South Carolina side now, at Burrells Ford, they won't even let 'em build a fire over there. We can build a fire over on this side yet. You can't get by. What they've done is stop the roads up, where I want to go, where you can't get anything down 'em. Can't even go a-squirrel huntin' or nothin'.

BW: I guess one argument is that if they hadn't protected it, it would have been developed.

Junior: Yeah, well see, Georgia Power owned all this river rights back then. They finally sold all their river rights to the gov'ment, and that messed up, when they done that. All them big bottoms you see over on the South Carolina [side] over yonder, except that Russell farm down there, across to the right when you cross the bridge, it was private land, but all them other big bottoms that was there, and plumb up the river in what was called the Jule Nicholson place, and the next place down the river—a big farm on it—they people raised their families and stuff, on Georgia Power land down in there, and up there too.

BW: Well, I know that when they studied it to see if it was eligible, they found out that there were plans for 8 dams on the Chattooga River. And if they had built those dams, it would have destroyed the river.

Junior: Oh yeah!

BW: So, don't you think that protecting the river was best in the long run?

Junior: Yeah. I'd hate to see it all dammed up.

BW: One more question, Junior. If they opened up Burrells Place again, would you come over and pick a few tunes?

Junior: No. I've changed my way of livin', you see.

BW: Junior, I sure have enjoyed talking to you.

Junior: You come back anytime.

**“I just kept it in one holler
'til they cut it down,
and I'd move to another'n.”**

-Did you ever get caught?

**“No. That's what people
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-What was the secret?

**“First thing I done, I got in with
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Monarch Watch

This article is based on personal communication with Dr. Chip Taylor, director of Monarch Watch at the University of Kansas, and information posted on the Monarch Watch website.

The changing seasons of summertime to autumn in the Chattooga River watershed mark the appearance of Monarch butterflies traveling through this area en route to their winter home in south-central Mexico's Sierra Madre. The fall migration period for Monarch butterflies through our tri-state area is mid-September through mid-October. Less noticeable is the return migration of over-wintering monarchs in April. Useful indicators of the fall migration through the Chattooga watershed is the onset of bloom by the wild asters, goldenrod and Joe Pye weed.

In all the world, no butterflies migrate like the Monarchs of North America. They travel much farther than all other butterflies—distances up to 3,000 miles—and they are the only butterflies to make such a long, two-way migration every year. Their migration is more the type we expect from birds or whales; however, unlike birds and whales, individuals only make the trip once.

The Monarch's lives are brief. In the summer months, breeding Monarchs only live 2-6 weeks; however, the fall migrants often live up to 9 months. The migrants, some from as far north as Canada, reach the over-wintering sites in Mexico in November. There, they over-winter in dense clusters on fir trees high in the mountains. The over-wintering butterflies mate and begin moving north in late February and March. On the way north, females will lay eggs on milkweed plants until they die, with most dying before they reach Midwest latitudes. New adults, born of the eggs laid by the returning females, continue the journey to the northern breeding areas in May and June.

After considerable study, largely under the leadership of Canadian zoologist Dr. Fred Urquhart, it has been concluded that most of the fall migrating Monarchs are those that hatch in late summer, as daylight hours wane. Even though these butterflies look like summer adults, they are biologically and behaviorally different from those emerging in the summer (the shorter days and cooler air of late summer trigger these changes). Of these, the females do not develop productive

ovaries, and they won't mate or lay eggs until the following spring. Instead, their small bodies prepare for a strenuous flight.

Fat, stored in the abdomen, is a critical element of their survival. This fat not only fuels their flight of 1,000 to 3,000 miles, but must last until the next spring, when they begin the journey back north. As they migrate south, Monarchs stop to feed on nectar and they actually gain weight during the trip. Otherwise solitary animals, they often cluster at night, while moving ever southward. If they linger too long, they won't be able to make the journey, because they are cold-blooded and unable to fly in cold weather. If you watch Monarchs on the migration, you can see them gliding and soaring and using thermals, much like hawks and vultures. These flight tactics, in contrast to powered flight (constant flapping), are believed to be save energy, preserve muscle function, and minimize wing wear during the migration.

An unsolved mystery is how Monarchs find their over-wintering sites each year. Somehow they know their way, even though the butterflies returning to Mexico (or California, for areas in western North America) each fall are 3 to 5 generations removed from the group that migrated the previous year. Amazingly, once they reach Mexico, they often cluster in the same winter roosts, often to the exact same trees each year. Then, as daylight hours lengthen in the wintering area, the Monarchs—now mature—feel the urge to mate and fly north, breeding new generations along the way. No one knows exactly how their homing system works. This is an area of great interest for researchers, and there is much to learn about how these small and fragile organisms are able to travel so far.

Monarch butterfly numbers appear to be declining due to development (at least 6,000 acres per day in the United States,

as per Forest Service research), the wide use of pesticides, and agricultural practices. For the last three years, Monarch Watch, an organization based at the University of Kansas, has urged gardeners and landowners to create, conserve, and protect Monarch habitats and to register these habitats as "Monarch Waystations." This effort has resulted in the creation of more than 2,500 waystations to date. For more information about Monarch Watch's program, please visit:

www.monarchwatch.org



*"Monarch Waystation" habitats can help declining populations of Monarchs; this one is planted with Sullivant's Milkweed (*Asclepius sullivantii*).*

photo by Wade Lawrence

Watershed Update

CHATTOOGA HEADWATERS CONTROVERSY MILESTONE

August 18th was the deadline for submitting comments on the Forest Service's pre-decisional Environmental Assessment (draft EA) for the Management of Recreation Use on the Upper Chattooga River. Unfortunately—after 4 years of study and spending over \$2 million of taxpayer's money—the Forest Service's lengthy EA is based on inconsistent logic and, in places, contradictory statements, and ultimately sacrifices the "Outstandingly Remarkable Values" of the Chattooga Cliffs reach of the Upper Chattooga River.

Here are the facts: the Forest Service selected Alternative 4 as the "preferred alternative," which would designate a new access point into one of the last remote sections in the entire Chattooga River corridor to allow boating from the County Line Road in North Carolina down to Burrells Ford. Boaters would then have take out at Burrells Ford (above the most desirable whitewater stretch in the upper Chattooga). Boating would be allowed only from December 1st to March 1st, and boater numbers would be limited to 4 groups of 6 boaters per day.

Ironically, this preferred alternative proposes to limit encounters to preserve the "wilderness experience" and to limit resource damage by not designating new trails in the Chattooga Cliffs reach of the river, yet goes on to propose designating the County Line Road as a new trail to a put-in for boating. This runs counter to Alternative 4's objectives, as it would lead to more encounters and inevitably result in increased use and greater potential for resource damage in the most biologically sensitive area in the Chattooga River headwaters. Alternative 4 would also direct boaters to a river stretch where perilous "strainers" abound, a dangerous situation that is predicted to worsen.

The Chattooga Conservancy continues to support an alternative that would protect the outstandingly remarkable values of the Chattooga River headwaters and allow whitewater boating, with sufficient limitations (and strict enforcement), from the Bull Pen Bridge all the way to the Highway 28 Bridge. It's not too late to call for a fair and reasonable plan to allow paddling in the Chattooga headwaters. A new alternative can be developed that will protect the outstandingly remarkable values of the headwaters and allow whitewater boating with adequate limitations. For more information, please visit our website and read the "Director's Page" in this issue of the *Quarterly*.

PROGRESS ON THE HORIZON FOR STEKOA CREEK

Clayton City Council passed a resolution by unanimous vote on August 12, 2008, to issue a Request For Proposals (RFP) addressing the dire need to fix the city's sewage collection system (the main source of pollution into Stekoa Creek, and the Chattooga River downstream of the Stekoa confluence). City officials agreed to work with the Stekoa Watershed Task Force to draft this RFP, with the objectives of: a) soliciting proposals for engaging qualified engineering firm(s) to assimilate and



Alternative 4 directs boaters to put in shortly above a river-wide log jam.

evaluate all of the existing information about Clayton's sewage system; and, b) complete a comprehensive study of the state of the entire sewer system, to also include a projected cost for formulating short and long term plans (*i.e.*, a prioritized schedule) for fixing the sewage system's leaks.

The Chattooga Conservancy made the presentation to the Clayton City Council requesting the resolution to move forward with this RFP on behalf of the "Fix Sewer System" group of the "Stekoa Watershed Task Force." This task force came about as a result of the Chattooga Conservancy initiating a meeting in November 2007 to convene the Environmental Protection Agency, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, Rabun County and City of Clayton officials, and local stakeholders to strategize about improving water quality in Stekoa Creek. Council and the mayor approved the resolution to go forward with a RFP largely due to assurances that help would be forthcoming from the Stekoa Watershed Task Force to execute the next steps, which are: 1) producing a draft RFP; and, 2) assembling the funding mechanisms to pay for the work components and deliverables of the RFP. This has great potential for advancing work to clean up Stekoa Creek, because a comprehensive prioritized engineering plan for upgrading Clayton's sewage collection system will provide the essential foundation from which to secure and earmark funding to accomplish this formidable task.

GEORGIA WATER PLAN

After a disappointing 2008 legislative session for water issues in the Georgia Statehouse, the Chattooga Conservancy now urges citizens to continue lobbying their statehouse representatives to protect water quality, rivers, and future water supply. The statehouse session ended with approval for a statewide water plan that has no mandatory requirements for water conservation and efficiency; regional water planning districts that are drawn up along political jurisdictions instead of watershed

Watershed Update

boundaries; and, no protection for downstream communities against interbasin water transfers. This summer's exceptional drought only underscores the urgent need for pressuring Georgia legislators to apply statutory fixes to the outstanding problems in the state's water plan. Add to this mix the recent state budget shortfalls that have caused the suspension of \$40 million for water supply projects—all the more need to focus on water conservation and efficiency!

Meanwhile, the state water plan is moving forward as follows: The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) issued a call for nominations of members to the regional water planning districts. Each district group will create their region's "water development and conservation plan," beginning in the spring of 2009.

The EPD will also develop a "water conservation and implementation plan," but the agency's board only has to consider this plan—adherence is not mandatory. Citizens can provide input on this plan during two comment periods from Sept. 8 to Oct. 8, and Nov. 14 to Dec. 15, 2008. In addition, the EPD has started evaluating the state's flood control dams (350 altogether) for their potential conversion to water supply reservoirs. To date, 20 of these structures have been identified as having a "relatively high potential for yield," which includes the option of pumping from a nearby water body to fill the reservoir. Interestingly, just about all 20 of the potential new reservoir sites are north/northeast (uphill) of Atlanta.

I-3 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS EXPECTED SOON

The Request for Proposals (RFP) for the study of the proposed Interstate 3 may be issued as soon as October 2008. It is crucial that legislators near and in the Chattooga River watershed be urged to oppose construction of this unnecessary, fiscally irresponsible, and environmentally devastating interstate highway. **Please act now to contact your county councils and Members of Congress by way of calls, faxes and email, and ask them to oppose construction of I-3, whose route would most likely cut through or near the Chattooga watershed.** Our tax dollars are needed for so many other worthy uses! Ask your representatives to write a letter stating their opposition to the Third Infantry Division Highway (I-3) that is proposed to run through/near their district. Correspondence should go to Mary Peters, Secretary of Transportation, with another copy to Thomas Madison, Director of the Federal Highway Administration. Ask all legislators to also write their letter of opposition to be attached to the RFP. Citizens represented by Sen. Lindsey Graham and Rep. Gresham Barrett are especially

in need of contacting these legislators (see Spring 2008 *Chattooga Quarterly*, "I-3 Now Targeting South Carolina") to urge their opposition to I-3. To send an e-mail and get more contact information, go to www.congress.org.

PUBLIC LAND WOES: YET ANOTHER ROUND

Roadless Rule, On Again Off Again In mid-August, Wyoming District Court Judge Brimmer re-issued his 2003 injunction against the 2001 "Roadless Area Conservation Rule," which was promulgated in the last days of the Clinton Administration. However, Brimmer's ruling contradicts California Magistrate Court Judge LaPorte's 2006 injunction against the Bush Administration's "State Petition Rule," that had sought to supercede the 2001 Roadless Rule.

Now, Bush Administration attorneys have filed motions in both California and Wyoming requesting that the two judges lift their conflicting injunctions, saying that they have put the Forest Service in an "untenable position" of having to follow one injunction to comply with the Roadless Rule, while also following another setting aside the rule. Judge Brimmer's recent decision is expected to be appealed in the 10th Circuit Court, while an appeal of Judge LaPorte's 2006 decision is ready for argument in the 9th Circuit Court. If the two circuit courts reach different conclusions, the issue will be headed to the Supreme Court to resolve the

conflicting injunctions that are directed at the management of 58.5 million acres of roadless public land in the United States.

Fire Costs All Regional Foresters recently received a letter from Forest Service Chief Gail Kimbell outlining specific measures for the agency to implement to deal with the financial shortfall caused by this year's intense fire season. For FY 2008, total wildfire suppression costs are projected to reach \$1.6 billion, exceeding budgeted amounts by \$400 million. The cost-saving measures cited include deferring: non-emergency contracts, non-critical projects and travel, no funding for land acquisition, forest legacy projects, or other agreements that would use FY08 funds; and, using "prudent cost-saving judgment" when managing staffing. It's likely that the Forest Service will have to make even further cuts to all their programs to offset fire costs, in which case they may only be able to cover basic payroll expenses.

Nearly every national forest and Forest Service program will see significant impacts from this latest round of budget shortfalls. In the Chattooga River watershed, signs of this continuing lack of resources for basic services is easily visible and includes the unsanitary build up of trash at many popular destination sites.



Persistent lack of funds for basic services on our public land is seen here at the Bull Sluice parking lot.

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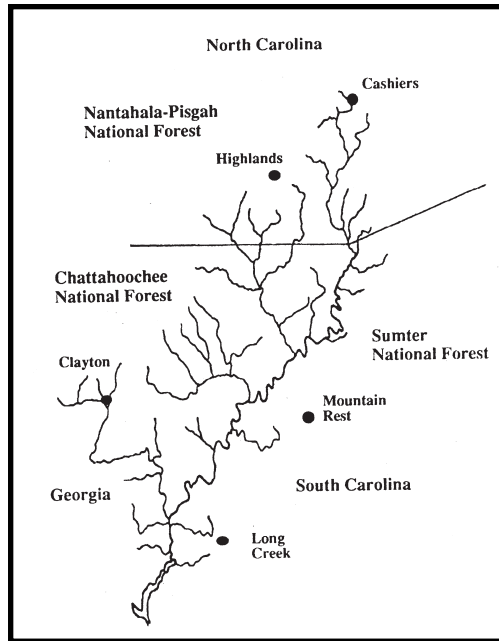
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Purpose: To protect, promote and restore the natural ecological integrity of the Chattooga River watershed ecosystems; to ensure the viability of native species in harmony with the need for a healthy human environment; and to educate and empower communities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

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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
- Educate the public
- Promote public choice based on credible scientific information
- Promote public land acquisition by the Forest Service within the watershed
- Protect remaining old growth and roadless areas
- Promote sustainable communities
- Promote conservation by honoring cultural heritage

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