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The Weeks Act of 1911 appropriated money for purchasing lands cut-over by “timber barons” to create our national forests.□

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Director's Page *The "Cognitive Niche"*

Buzz Williams

A question occurred to me as I was writing the article on river mussels that appears in this issue of the *Chattooga Quarterly*. This question is: What niche does the human race occupy in the natural world?

Freshwater mussels occupy an important niche in river ecology. They literally anchor the river bed, which in turn helps prevent erosion. They supply food for raccoons, otters, and even humans. As harmless parasites, immature mussels require a host species of fish during their development stage. Mussels also siphon nutrients and detritus from our river waters, which cleans the water while returning waste to the river substrate, to provide food for other aquatic creatures such as mayflies, caddis flies and midges. In the case of river mussels, we now know that they occupy a specific place in nature's food chain, and are associated with other specific aquatic species in a complex web of interdependent life functions.

Ecology, of course, is the study of the interconnected relationships between organisms and their environments. All species of plants and animals have evolved over millions of years to "fit" into a delicate web of life in the environment where they live. This place, where a species lives in the natural order of things, is called a niche. Scientists have discovered many fascinating physical and behavioral traits that plants and animals have developed that allow them to live in harmony with their environment. These adaptations have evolved over time by the process of natural selection.

The human niche is fascinating, and in some ways even more so than other species. Scientists who have attempted to define the human ecological niche believe that humans are singularly unique in the ways we relate to our environment. One such scientist, Alfred Russel Wallace, who was a contemporary of Charles Darwin, postulated that humans are different than other creatures in that we have developed large brains, which allow us to consciously change our environment to suit our immediate needs without having to depend on the evolutionary process of natural selection. Other scientists have advanced this theory, and coined the term "cognitive niche" to describe this phenomenon. Humans use both thought and social cooperation to manipulate the environment. The process by which humans build a suite of knowledge, by building on preceding thought and discovery, gives humans a great advantage over other creatures. Humans use their knowledge to meet environmental challenges quickly, without having to wait on genetic evolution.

In other words, humans are by design creatures who survive by actively changing our environment. However, humans have become so successful in changing the environment, and some

of these environmental alterations have become so excessive, going far beyond simply meeting our "needs," that the results are causing environmental damage. A prime example of this is climate change caused by the excessive use of fossil fuels, which is contributing to global warming. Other examples are human caused habitat destruction, water and air pollution, and soil erosion. Many scientists now believe that humanity's excesses are reaching a tipping point, and may cause irreparable harm to our planet.

The fact that humans are beginning to understand the harm that we are causing to the environment from the excessive use of our enhanced ability to change the environment marks a new era of human development. Indeed, the health of our planet—and our very existence—depends on a new understanding of humanity's obligation to curtail the excessive use of our unique abilities to shape our environment.

Scientists have coined the term "cognitive niche" to describe the singularly unique way that humans relate to our environment.

To that end, here are some goals we should set for living in harmony with our environment:

Yield to the intuitive knowledge that we must voluntarily honor and protect the natural forces of creation and sustainability

Strive to protect all species of life and their habitats, based on the premise that by preserving the richness of life on Earth, we will also enrich the quality of our lives

Reduce our impact on our environment by reducing both consumption and population

Eliminate our dependence on fossil fuels, and develop alternative energy sources to curtail global warming, the primary cause of climate change

Break the grip of unconscionable corporate control of our government

Strive to reach global consensus for environmental protection

Humans have powers that other species do not possess; we have evolved the unique ability to change our environment. However, we are becoming aware that this ability also comes with an obligation to protect our fragile planet by not abusing our powers. We must come to grips with the simple fact that the debt from over-consumption is now coming due, and our future well being depends on conservation. We should voluntarily strive to live in harmony with natural cycles. If we possess the power to change our environment to the extent that we cause harm, we also have the ability to change lifestyles to achieve a harmonious relationship with our environment.

Strengthening Our Mussels in the Chattooga River

Buzz Williams

It has become a near ritual on hot summer days for local families to take our kids to the river to cool off and swim. This past summer produced a record number of spontaneous gatherings at various favorite swimming holes to float in the Chattooga's cool, gently flowing waters in a shaded eddy and watch the children play. They know where all the safe jumping rocks are, and which small rapids they can safely swim through, and where all the potholes and beaches are full of river treasures. My daughter, Jasmine, has taken an interest in finding mussel shells during these outings. As the collection grew over the summer, we began to notice differences between the shells. Some were small, elongated ovals and nearly black in color, while others were bigger, rounder shells with dark streaks radiating out toward the edges. This prompted further investigation after realizing that I really couldn't answer the questions I was being asked about these interesting creatures. Here is what we have discovered.

River mussels are first cousins to salt water mussels, both of which are bivalve mollusks. They are invertebrate animals that have soft bodies protected by a hard shell consisting of two halves connected by a hinge. The two shell halves, called valves, lock together at the hinge with interlocking teeth and tough cartilage. Strong muscles called adductor muscles allow the animal to open its shell to feed, or to close tightly for protection. They live in colonies embedded in gravel or sediment on the bottom of the river, and feed on bits of dead plant and animal material floating in the water. They do this by siphoning the water in through their gills to strain out the nourishing detritus. They don't move much unless disturbed by flood waters or predators, but they can move by using their "foot," which is extended out of their shell and used as an anchor to drag themselves to a new location. River mussels are long-lived, with some individuals living up to 100 years.

River mussels are found worldwide, but they have reached their evolutionary pinnacle in North America. There are about 300 species of river mussels in the United States, a large number of which live in the rivers of the Southeast. Scientists estimate that river mussels at one time comprised almost 90% of all bottom-dwelling biota in our rivers. Unfortunately, due to human-caused effects such as dam building, agricultural pollution from pesticides and fertilizers, sedimentation, and mussel collection, two-thirds of our native fresh water river mussels are extinct, imperiled, or are of special concern.

The precipitous decline in mussel populations began in the late 1800's. One big factor in this decline had to do with buttons! In 1889, Johann Bopple, a German button-maker invented a machine that could manufacture buttons from mussel shells.

Mussel populations in the upper Mississippi River were dealt a heavy blow by mussel shell harvesting for the button-making industry until the 1940s, when plastic buttons displaced shell buttons. Another factor that instigated excessive harvesting of mussels was the discovery in the 1950s that river mussels are good hosts for implanting nuclei material that will produce a cultured pearl.

The industrial revolution also brought about a dramatic increase in natural resource extraction and agriculture. Timber harvesting to fuel the needs of a growing manufacturing economy, and increased demands for agricultural products to feed a growing nation resulted in the clearcutting of native bottom lands near rivers, and vast amounts of soil disturbance for agriculture. These activities introduced massive amounts of sediment into our rivers and streams, in turn contributing to the demise of mussel populations. Later, in the 1940s, the chemical industry began producing pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers on a large scale, that dramatically boosted crop production, but which also caused serious environmental side effects including polluting river waters. As a result, pollution-sensitive mussel populations have been severely impacted.

The fact that the rare Brook Floater mussel population in the Chattooga River is the best in the Southeast makes it extremely urgent for us to protect these important creatures.

Then in 1988, during a routine ship ballast water exchange in the Great Lakes area, the exotic Zebra mussel was released into the waters of Lake St. Clair, which connects Lake Erie to Lake Huron. This small mussel, that originated from the Black and Caspian Sea region, has since grown in population at the expense of native mussels, which cannot compete with the voracious and effective feeding habits of the Zebra mussel. The Zebra mussel has the ability to attach itself to the bottom of boat hulls and can live for several days with cool, moist conditions. Consequently, it is transported unwittingly from one watershed to another on boat trailers, boat hulls, and other gear associated with water use. The Zebra mussel has now spread from the Great Lakes region to all major navigable rivers in the eastern U. S. The prognosis, given the current rate of spread, is that the



The Brook Floater is the rarest of the mussel species found in the Chattooga River.

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negative effects of the Zebra mussel invasion will be significant for our native mussels.

The scientific community is just now discovering how important mussels are to our native ecosystems. A close look at the life cycle of the river mussel reveals an incredibly interesting and complex association with other plants and animals, anchoring a vital link in our native ecological food chain. The life cycle of a river mussel begins with the release of sperm by a male mussel into the water within a mussel bed. The sperm is siphoned in by feeding female mussels, through their gills. Eggs within the female are fertilized by the sperm, which hatch internally into small larvae called glochidia, that resemble little "Pac Men."

Here is where it gets interesting. Scientists have discovered that river mussels need a host animal for the next step in the development of the immature glochidia. Although it varies with the species of mussel, the host is usually a fish such as small mouth bass, a bluegill sunfish, or other smaller river daces, darters or chubs. In order to transfer their immature young to this host fish, river mussels have appendages that have evolved to resemble a small minnow or worm, which attracts the predatory fish. When the host fish approaches to investigate the potential meal, the female mussel literally sprays the host fish in the face with a burst of water containing thousands of immature larvae. The immature mussels then attach themselves to the host fish much like a tick on a dog. They sometimes attach themselves to a gill, fin, or even an eye, where they are parasitic resident for a period of time, varying from a few days to several months, until they mature. The young mussels then fall off of the host fish and bury themselves in the river bottom. If the substrate where they land is sufficient, they survive and become adults.

River mussels are a key component of our native ecosystem throughout their whole fascinating life cycle. Their excrement enriches the river bottoms with nutrients, which in turn support the larvae of many important macroinvertebrates such as mayflies and caddis flies that are an important food for native fish populations. They also anchor the river bottom substrate against scouring from floods. They are eaten by predators including river otters, raccoons and muskrats. Mussels are also good water filters. One scientist estimates that during low flow conditions, a healthy mussel bed will filter 12% of the water in the river channel. Mussel beds with all the associated activity generated around them during their life cycle have been compared to corral beds in the ocean.



A river mussel displays a fleshy appendage appearing to be a minnow, to attract host fish for its larvae.

The Chattooga River is known to harbor at least three species of mussels, and surveys indicate that maybe a fourth is present. The Brook Floater (*Alasmidonta varicose*) is the rarest of the mussel species found in the Chattooga River. Populations of the Brook Floater have been found from Highway 28 to Tugaloo Lake. The Chattooga River population of Brook Floaters is considered the best in the Southeast. A study of Chattooga River mussels conducted in 2004 by Alderman found the Brook Floater, the Carolina Lance (*Elliptio angustata*), and the Atlantic Spike (*Elliptio producta*). Another river mussel study of the Chattooga River the following year (Roghair, 2005) discovered a relic species, the Eastern Elliptio (*Elliptio complanata*).

Clearly, the Chattooga River watershed is a haven for some of the most interesting and important mussels in the Southeast. The fact that the rare Brook Floater population in the Chattooga River is the best in the Southeast makes it extremely urgent to protect these important creatures. A press release on September 26, 2011, issued by the Center for Biological Diversity underscores this fact. The press release announced a settlement agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, consenting to consider 374 species in 12 Southeastern states for protection under the Endangered Species Act; among these species was the Brook Floater.

Unfortunately, these important populations of river mussels in the Chattooga River watershed will be hard to protect. At least six tributaries to the Chattooga River are classified as impaired from excessive pollution and sedimentation. Thousands of Forest Service system roads are in need of maintenance, and a study by Dr. David van Lear of Clemson University determined that unmaintained Forest Service roads were the greatest source of sedimentation in the Chattooga River watershed.

Harmful pollution also comes from private lands. The sewage collection systems located on Stekoa Creek, Norton Mill Creek, and in the Chattooga's headwaters near Cashiers, North Carolina, contribute harmful pollution to the river. Uncontrolled ground disturbing activities from development also adds sediment, which harms mussels and other aquatic life. Correcting these problems on both public and private lands will be essential if we want to protect and strengthen our mussel population in the Chattooga River watershed.

Mussels are fascinating creatures, and the Chattooga River harbors some of the best existing populations of rare fresh water mussels. Our ability to appreciate the important role that mussels play in the health of the river should spur us to take actions to protect these beautiful animals.

The Weeks Act Remembered *A Century of National Forests*

Donald E. Davis

2011 marks the one-hundred year anniversary of the passage of the Weeks Act, the historic federal law that helped to create the first national forests in the eastern United States. Although the passage of this important legislation has been discussed in newspaper op-eds around the country, and is the featured topic on numerous conservation blogs and websites, most commentaries have failed to mention the important role that both the State of Georgia and Georgia residents played in the formation of our eastern national forests.

What follows is an attempt to remedy that shortcoming as well as summarize the events that preceded and immediately followed the passage of the 1911 Weeks Act.

In 1900 the timber boom was in full swing. Armed with teams of sawyers, locomotives, railroad lines, and steam-powered sawmills, industrial logging operations were now able to remove the biggest and oldest trees from mountain forests with unparalleled speed and efficiency. Virtually no stand of timber was off-limits, including trees old enough to have witnessed the passing of Hernando De Soto in 1540. Soon the effects of timbering on such a large scale would be felt across the Appalachians. Within a few short years the high-grading of old-growth timber—from eastern Kentucky to Alabama, from West Virginia to North Georgia—would have a noticeable impact on nearly all mountain environs. Erosion, fires, and flooding also increased significantly across the region during this period, damaging prime cropland along major water courses and destroying important wildlife habitat.

The increasing environmental destruction was not only due to the mere cutting of large trees but also as the result of new and more technologically efficient logging methods. With the coming of railroads to the remoter sections of the Appalachians, it was no longer necessary for logging operations to be confined to lower elevations or the vicinity of large navigable streams. Narrow-gauge railroads called “dummy lines” could now be laid along the contours of steep hillsides in places once thought inaccessible by lumbermen. From there, logs of all sizes could be “skidded” by cable across steep slopes to awaiting railroad cars for loading and transport. The result was ostensibly a clear-cut since the heavy logs destroyed nearly everything in their path and created such severe erosion that the landscape took many decades to heal. A U.S. Geological Survey employee asked to investigate the effects of these logging practices in the Watauga Valley of North Carolina, found conditions so severe there he described the area “as torn to pieces.”

Accompanying the soil erosion were also widespread forest fires, which further denuded mountain slopes and hillsides. Many of the fires were the direct result of careless lumbermen, who routinely left behind large piles of brush and downed treetops at logging sites. During summer months, those materials became a virtual tinder box, ignitable by campfires, lightning, or carelessly tossed matches. Noted forester William Ashe estimated in that in 1891, 800,000 to 1,200,000 acres of woodlands were burned in North Carolina due to unchecked forest fires. Although seldom admitted by industry spokesmen, many fires were caused by sparks from coal or wood-fired locomotives used to haul out harvested timber. John H. Finney, the secretary and treasurer of the Appalachian Forest Association during the early 1900s, estimated that the annual amount of timber destroyed by forest fires started by railroad locomotives at more than \$50 million dollars. At a convention speech reported in the trade journal *The Southern Lumberman*, Finney advised timber companies to “clear up almost immediately all the downed timber on their land” in order that destructive fires “may be at least to some extent prevented.”

By far the most controversial and widely debated topics surrounding industrial logging and its effect on the mountain environment was flooding and soil erosion. By the early 1890s, there was already consensus among observers that standing timber played an important role in preventing, after torrential downpours, excessive water runoff and the loss of topsoil. In fact, supporters of the Organic Administration Act, formally passed by the U.S. Congress in 1897, argued that a large amount of forest lands should be set aside not only to secure “a continuous supply of timber,” but to create the “most favorable conditions” for water and stream flow.

By 1900 there could be little doubt that “injudicious lumbering and forest fires” resulted in widespread loss of forest topsoil that had once served as a natural sponge for water run-off during



Narrow-gauge railroads were laid along the contours of steep hillsides, getting all trees and destroying nearly everything in their path.

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heavy rains. According to Forest Service Chief Gifford Pinchot and others, large stands of native trees served as a natural barrier to heavy rainfall, providing thick mats of leaves to hold large amounts of water in the ground. The loss of topsoil due to timber cutting prohibited appreciable amounts of rain from soaking into the ground and water table, causing stream courses to run dry during summer months and flood during winter and spring months. "The destruction of the earth cover," noted Horace Ayres and William Ashe in their widely publicized 1905 U.S. Geological Survey report, "prevented water from fully penetrating the earth. The roots of trees penetrate deeply into the subsoil, and as they decay leave a network of underground water channel [and] the mosses and humus of a well-conditioned forest form wet blankets, often a foot thick, the function of which is apparent."

The detrimental effects of timbering on soil and water quality were not immediately apparent to the timber industry or its political supporters who challenged these notions as "a subterfuge and a pretext, not to say a sham." However, growing evidence supported the fact that current lumbering practices were, in fact, the principal cause of increased flooding in the Appalachians, placing additional pressure on the federal government to permanently correct the situation. As early as 1899, the federal government had heard enough evidence to order a four-agency investigation of the mountains in order to determine the true cause and extent of soil erosion and flooding in the region. The final results of the study challenged the wastefulness of industrial logging practices and advocated the use of conservation measures, among them creation of a permanent Appalachian forest reserve.

James Wilson, one of the authors of the government report and the secretary of agriculture under Theodore Roosevelt, placed the destruction squarely on the shoulders of the logging industry, stating that the preservation of the mountain forests should not be left "to the caprice of private capital." In the final draft of the report sent to the president in 1901, Wilson wrote: "The soil, once denuded of its forests and swept by torrential rains rapidly

loses its humus, is washed away in enormous volume into the streams, to bury such of the fertile lowlands as are not eroded by the floods, to obstruct the rivers, and to fill up the harbors on the coast."

Attaching his own response to the document, President Roosevelt thought that the evidence was clearly on the side of those who believed that uncontrolled lumbering practices were the primary cause of increased flooding in the region. "[T]he regulation of the flow of these rivers," wrote the president, "can be accomplished only by the conservation of the forests." Despite overwhelming evidence that conservation measures should be legally mandated in the mountains, the debate concerning the role of standing timber in protecting Appalachian

watersheds would continue for another decade. In the interim, annual timber production in the region steadily increased, peaking in 1909 at four billion board feet of sawtimber. In western North Carolina alone, fifty-nine million cubic feet of lumber, pulpwood, tanbark, cross-ties, firewood, rails, and fence posts were consumed by the forest industry that same year.

As could be expected, the increased timber outputs also accelerated the damage to mountain ecosystems, leaving many to question the extent the hardwood forest would, if ever, recover. Writing in 1907, Forest Service

employee Royal S. Kellogg pointed out that there had already been a 15% decline in hardwood lumber production in the Appalachians, adding that "when the utmost has been done that it is possible to do to insure a future supply of hardwoods, there still must remain a considerable gap between the time when the present supply of large timber is exhausted and that when new timber is available for use, since it takes many years to grow a tree to merchantable size." Kellogg believed that even the most optimistic calculations would place the region's future hardwood supply at not more than sixteen years. To remedy the situation, he recommended that the federal government begin purchasing "the backbone of the various Appalachian ranges" so that they might be managed for the preservation of hardwoods as well as for flood control and the prevention of erosion.



In the 1900s the timber boom was in full swing, with industrial logging operations able to remove the biggest and oldest trees from mountain forests. Pictured here is the Gennett Lumber Co. during the 1900s, in Rabun County.

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Tragic floods in West Virginia, Maryland, and Kentucky in 1907 insured that Kellogg's wish for government involvement in the acquisition of mountain forests would become a reality. With the growing evidence that healthy forests served as the principal protector of our nation's watersheds, added pressure was placed on legislators to finally stop the destruction by setting aside large tracts of mountain timberlands in permanent forest preserves. After hearing considerable and heated testimony from engineers, industry spokesmen and conservationists, the senate passed the Weeks Act on February 15, 1911, by a vote of 58 to 9. Signed into law by President William Taft on March 1, 1911, the bill was named after Massachusetts Congressman John W. Weeks, who introduced and promoted the legislation.

The Weeks Act authorized the purchase of "forested, cut-over, or denuded lands within the watersheds of navigable streams" for the intended purpose of "conserving the forests and water supply of the states entering such an agreement or compact."

Among the first proposed land acquisitions in the Appalachians under the Weeks Act included timberlands in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Georgia, western North Carolina, and east Tennessee. In fact, the first parcel to receive preliminary approval for acquisition by the government was a 31,000 acre tract formally offered for purchase on April 14, 1911.

The owners were the Gennett brothers of the Gennett Land and Lumber Company, which was then headquartered in Blue Ridge, Georgia. The Gennetts also had sawmill operations in Rabun County, Georgia, as well as numerous lumber yards in western North Carolina. The mountain lands were located in Fannin, Union, Lumpkin, and Gilmer Counties, in an area Andrew Gennett later claimed was "so long abandoned and neglected, and so thinly occupied, that people had drifted in from other counties in Georgia."

By law, all land acquisitions under the Weeks Act had to first be approved by the newly created National Forest Reserve Commission, a government body comprised of James Wilson, the Secretary of Agriculture, Walter Fisher, the Secretary of the Interior, Henry Stimson, the Secretary of War, Senator John W. Smith of Maryland, Senator Jacob H. Gallinger of New Hampshire, Congressman Willis Hawley of Oregon, and

Congressman Gordon Lee of Georgia. According to Section 6 of the act, all parcels under consideration would also have to be "examined by the [U.S.] Geological Survey" in order to determine whether or not they fully "promote or protect the navigation of streams on whose watersheds they lie."

When the commission met on June 19, 1911, only two tracts received preliminary approval by both the National Forest Reserve Commission and the U.S. Geological Survey: "Tract A in Georgia, of some thirty thousand acres, and Tract B in Tennessee, of some sixty thousand acres." Tract A was, of course, the Gennett lands, which appeared to meet all qualifications for purchase under the new Weeks law. However, because mineral rights claims from previous land owners

remained largely unresolved in the Gennett property, a ruling by the U.S. Attorney General was deemed necessary before final action could be taken. Tract B, located in the area of the Great Smoky Mountains, was later rejected as a national forest preserve, but did eventually qualify for inclusion in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

To expedite matters, Congressman Gordon Lee of Georgia, along with William Ashe of the Forest Service, made a trip to the mountains of North Georgia to specifically investigate the deeds and titles involved in the Gennett tract. They hoped to resolve the issue before the end of the

fiscal year on June 30, 1911, as federal monies had already been earmarked for the purchase. Andrew Gennett made subsequent trips to Washington DC, meeting with both the attorney general and Forest Reserve Commission to plead his case. Despite those efforts to satisfy the many outstanding legal issues regarding the Gennett tract, final commission approval for its purchase did not take place until December 9, 1911. Approved along with the Gennett parcel was an 8,100 acre tract owned by the Burke-McDowell Lumber Company in McDowell County, near Marion, North Carolina.

The McDowell tract was, in fact, the first property in the eastern United States to become part of a national forest preserve, as the legal transfer of the deed was completed on August 29, 1912. The Gennett purchase was finalized nearly four months later—on December 23, 1912—after Attorney General George W. Wickersham ruled that the federal government could claim



The Gennett Lumber Company logged all around the Chattooga, floating logs down the river to their sawmill at Madison, GA.

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clear title using condemnation proceedings as outlined in the Act of August 1, 1888, the so-called Condemnation Act. Although the Gennett brothers received \$6.66 per acre for the 31,000 acre holding, forty-four cents less than their \$7.00 asking price, and the process “took more than two years of hard work and much anxiety,” the outcome did not deter them from offering additional lands to the government. In 1913, the commission approved the purchase of another 7,000 acres in Rabun County, Georgia, private lands belonging to the Oaky Mountain Lumber Company of which Andrew Gennett was President. Two additional Gennett properties became part of the national forest system in Georgia, including a 10,000 acre tract approved by the commission in 1917 and a 2,000 acre parcel approved in 1919.

By 1920, nearly 2 million acres had been added to the national forest system, public lands located mostly in the Appalachians. Although the passage of the Weeks Act was directly responsible for the creation of the first national forests in the eastern United States, the unbridled destruction of Appalachian forests continued for at least another decade. World War I brought additional demands on mountain timberlands, forcing logging companies to seek trees atop even the highest mountain slopes.

By 1930, more than 4 million acres of timberlands had been purchased by the Forest Service Reservation Commission in the southern Appalachians alone.

As the various properties were legally transferred to government holdings as the result of Weeks Act, boundaries became formalized and individual national forests were officially declared. In 1916, the Pisgah National Forest of North Carolina, the first in the Appalachians, was officially proclaimed. In 1920, four additional national forests were created, including the Boone in North Carolina; the Nantahala in North Carolina, North Georgia, and South Carolina; the Cherokee in east Tennessee; and the Unaka in upper east Tennessee, western North Carolina and southwest Virginia. When the Chattahoochee National Forest in North Georgia was officially declared in 1936, it incorporated all the former Gennett holdings within its boundaries. Today those public lands comprise significant portions of the Blue Ridge and Chattooga River

Ranger Districts, and are enjoyed by tens of thousands of citizens annually.

On January 13, 1911, just six weeks before the Weeks Act was signed into law, the noted southern author Thomas Nelson Page delivered the keynote address at the American Forestry Association’s annual dinner in Washington, DC. Mr. Page, who titled his speech “The People’s Possessions in the Appalachian Forests,” spoke at length about the future of forest conservation in the Appalachians, if not the entire United States. “The abiding work of the forestry department will be the awakening in the public mind of the necessity of preserving forests,” remarked Page during the opening minutes of his oratory. To

focus only on the “material return” of forests, he added, would be to measure them using the “lumber standard” and thus ignore their impact on both the human spirit and the quality of our lives. For Page and the others in the audience who supported the passage of the Weeks Act, “the influence of forest and the grove on the human mind, and thus on human progress, is one which may not be directly measured, for it is immeasurable.”



This crew of foresters was dispatched to evaluate the Gennett Lumber Company’s 31,000-acre Rabun County tract, for purchase under the new 1911 Weeks Act.

The Weeks Act Centennial, like Page’s

remarks, challenges us to become better stewards of our public lands and honor their many “immeasurable” qualities. Without them, our lives would certainly be diminished. As we reflect on the beginning of our national forests in North Georgia and across the Appalachians, we also might consider their immediate and distant future. At a time when “big government” is often seen as an impediment to human progress, national forests offer the greatest good for the many, not just for the elite few. Viewed in this way, the protection of national forests for future generations may be the ultimate patriotic act.

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Please visit www.chattoogariver.org to read this article complete with its footnotes and additional references.

Oconostota, The Great Warrior of Chota

Buzz Williams

There were two ways for a man to become a leader in 18th century Cherokee society: either by offering wise counsel, or by demonstrating courage and cunning in warfare. One notable Cherokee chief was Oconostota, also known as the Great Warrior of Chota. Oconostota reigned as the most powerful war chief in the Cherokee Nation during the period from 1760 until about 1782. This was a time of great change in the lives of the Cherokee people, who were being pressed on all sides by the French, the British, and the burgeoning influence of the Carolinas frontier expansion into Cherokee territory. The resulting pressure from encroachment on traditional hunting grounds and on Cherokee culture soon triggered a war between the Cherokee Nation and the British colonists, that forever changed the North American landscape. During this epic struggle known as the Cherokee War, the Cherokees placed their hope in the hands of Oconostota, the only leader they believed could deliver victory.

Oconostota was probably born around 1712, in the Overhill Towns on the Little Tennessee River. As a young boy, he undoubtedly learned how to shoot a bow and blowgun, and how to hunt and live off of the land. He was also reported to be an excellent marksman with a rifle. Oconostota soon became known for his tactical skills and physical courage during warfare. We know from several eyewitnesses, and from the examination of his remains, that he was a very large, powerful man. His face was scarred from smallpox, which he contracted in his youth.

The young warrior lived during a time of great upheaval in his country. His tribe had been weakened by repeated smallpox epidemics, which greatly reduced their population. Traders, missionaries and adventurers were now living in their towns. The Cherokees soon became very dependent on European trade goods including guns, powder and ball, rum, iron pots and axes. Cherokee men had to hunt a dwindling game population for the fur trade, in order to buy the goods upon which they had become so dependent.

The neighboring Creek Indians, the traditional enemies of the Cherokees, soon also became a great threat, and for a while the lower Cherokee towns were abandoned. The Cherokees sought help from the British, who built Fort Prince George in South Carolina in 1753, and Fort Loudoun in east Tennessee in 1757, to protect the Cherokees. This was during the French and Indian War, and the British recruited the Cherokees to help fight the French and their northern Indian allies.

During this period, many older Cherokee chiefs died, and a new generation of leaders took charge. The Overhill Towns were now dominant as a result of the diminished role of the weakened, Lower Towns. Consequently, Oconostota of Chota, an emerging man of influence, became a very important chief.

Oconostota was destined for leadership. He was first mentioned in historical records written by the French, who visited the Overhill Towns in 1736. While many Cherokee leaders were loyal to the British, there is evidence that Oconostota was inclined to treat with the French on occasion. It is said that after the French visit in 1736, "Oconostota and some other young men flew French banners from their house tops." By 1753, the town of Chota had become the most influential town in the whole Cherokee nation. That year, Oconostota led a war party of 400 warriors in a campaign to aid the pro-British Chickasaw Indians in a battle against the pro-French Choctaw Indians in Alabama.

Near present-day Otto, North Carolina, Oconostota and his warriors executed one of the most devastating ambush attacks in military history, and sent Colonel Archibald Montgomery packing back to Charleston.

During this era, British traders were licensed by Carolina colonial governors. There was very little oversight of these sometimes unscrupulous characters, who often cheated the Cherokee people by over-pricing trade goods. Consequently, in an attempt to break the Carolinas trade monopoly, Oconostota made a trip to visit Virginia Governor Robert Dinwiddie, to establish a trade network with Virginia traders. However, the meeting was not productive.

Oconostota was not known for his great negotiating skills; he was principally a warrior. It was about this time that another Cherokee leader ascended to the forefront. This great leader was called Atakullakulla, often called the Little Carpenter because of his crafty powers of oratory and negotiation skills. So, while Atakullakulla negotiated with the British, Oconostota went to war. In 1755, Oconostota led an expedition to the Illinois-Wabash region, and he came back with 5 French scalps. Upon his return, he led 500 warriors and defeated the Creeks in a decisive battle called the Battle of Taliwa, which caused the Creeks to abandon northeast Georgia.

In the year 1758, Cherokee warriors were recruited by the British for a Virginia campaign against the French. It was during this expedition that an unruly group of young Cherokee warriors stole some horses from Virginia settlers. The settlers retaliated by killing a number of the Cherokee party. The following spring, warriors from the lower Cherokee town of Settico killed 15 men, women and children in revenge for the Virginia killings.

Oconostota, who had not been involved in the incident, tried

Oconostota, The Great Warrior of Chota

to make peace. Nonetheless, South Carolina's new governor, William Henry Lyttelton, imposed a trade embargo, and cut off the supply of ammunition to the Cherokees. Oconostota and an entourage of 55 Cherokee men and women then made a trip to Charleston, to meet with the governor. Nineteen Cherokee chiefs were among this group. Lyttelton, an ambitious aristocrat, had already made up his mind to make a name for himself by standing up to the Cherokees. He demanded that the Cherokees hand over the young warriors who had murdered the settlers, and took the whole group of Cherokees hostage. He then put together an expedition to Fort Prince George to personally demand reparations, and to punish the Cherokee people.

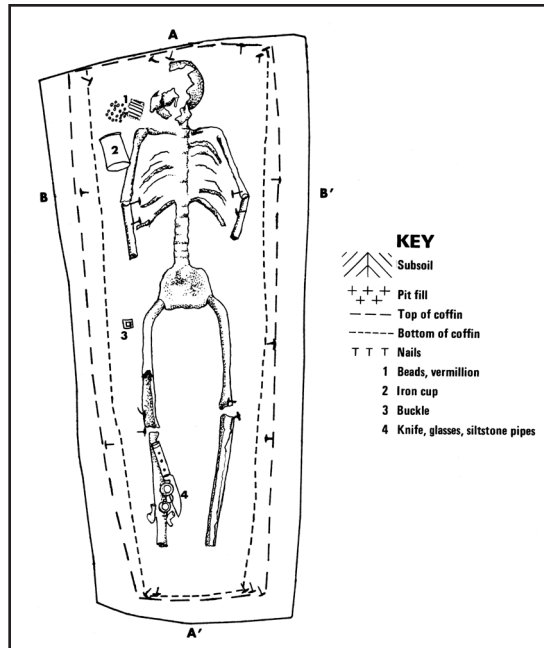
The Lyttelton militia arrived at Fort Prince George on December 9, 1759. Attakullakulla, who came to negotiate with the governor, convinced him to release many of the hostages as a show of good faith, so that he might be able to convince the Cherokee leadership to turn over the offending warriors. The cold winter, a smallpox outbreak, and increased desertion caused Lyttelton to return to Charleston after forcing Cherokee leaders to agree to his demands. Oconostota, who was outraged by his treatment, had no intentions of meeting these demands and immediately planned retaliation. The enraged warriors launched attacks on settlers across the Carolina frontier.

The next year, in February 1760, Oconostota appeared on the banks of the Keowee River, across from Fort Prince George. He lured the fort commander, Lieutenant Coytmore, outside the gates to negotiate the terms of a settlement. When Coytmore and his attending officers came within range, Oconostota waved a bridge over his head three times as a signal to warriors hidden beneath the banks of the river, who then opened fire, killing Coytmore and several of his men. Soldiers within the fort panicked and slaughtered all the remaining Cherokee hostages, all of whom were prominent chiefs.

In June, Oconostota laid siege to Fort Loudoun, and left his men in place there while he traveled to head off a force under Colonel Archibald Montgomery, that had been dispatched by the British to put down the Cherokee uprising. On June 27th, Montgomery entered a narrow pass along the Little Tennessee River, near present-day Otto, North Carolina. There Oconostota and his warriors executed one of the most devastating ambush attacks in military history, and sent Montgomery packing back to Charleston. Oconostota then returned to the siege of Fort

Loudoun, which surrendered on August 7th. Oconostota agreed to allow the fort's company to evacuate the fort unharmed, but his warriors attacked and killed two dozen of the garrison occupants as they left the area.

The Great Warrior then laid siege to Fort Prince George, but the glow of victory soon cooled his ire, and he met with a council of Cherokee chiefs and two thousand Cherokees at Nequasse, who decided to sue for peace. The British, however, having recently learned of the massacre at Fort Loudoun, refused Oconostota's offer of peace.



Drawing of a burial believed to be Oconostota's, showing details of burial accompaniments.

In the spring of 1761, British General Amherst sent Colonel James Grant to punish the Cherokees. In June, Oconostota tried the same ambush tactics as he had successfully used to humiliate Montgomery, but this time it failed due to the more battle-ready colonel, who posted advance scouts to find out the position of the enemy. The result was the annihilation of 15 Cherokee towns, that destroyed 1,500 acres of corn and drove 5,000 Cherokees in the woods to starve.

Although the Cherokees lost the war, Oconostota's personal esteem was never in question. He remained the most influential chief among the Cherokees. He had demonstrated that the Cherokees were great warriors to be feared. But the force of the European conquest of the traditional Cherokee domain could not be held

back, even by the Great Warrior. The powerful Cherokees gradually lost ground to the relentless advance of land speculators and unhonored treaties. The American Revolution provided an opportunity for the Cherokees to take advantage of a divided nation, but to no avail. By this time Oconostota was an old man, and young warriors like the fierce Dragging Canoe led the fight. Unfortunately for the Cherokees, they chose to side with the British, and the victorious Americans continued to invade Cherokee lands with both soldiers and settlers until the great Cherokee Nation was driven from their homeland.

Oconostota lived to the age of about 70. He was buried with great honor at the entrance of the old town of Chota. According to his wishes, he was interred in an old canoe, facing the north. The Cherokees still visit the site, to honor their ancestors. There is no doubt that they often speak of the Great Warrior of Chota, in whom they once placed their trust for a fight they could never win. Yet, in defeat, no one can deny that the brave war chief put up a hell of a fight.

Watershed Update

A Great Success

Chattooga Conservancy Benefits from Rhapsody

An outstanding team of volunteers worked to make Rhapsody in Rabun 2011 a resounding success! This year, Rabun County's premier charity event raised \$61,000 for the Chattooga Conservancy—the first time in the event's 20-year history that the recipient was a conservation organization. The funds will be used to help complete the Stekoa Creek Park, a joint venture between our organization and the City of Clayton. Now, after nearly two years of steadily working on this ambitious project, we aim to complete it more quickly, during 2012.

It was a big time at our Rhapsody event on September 12th, with a sold-out capacity crowd in attendance at the Rabun County Civic Center. During the evening, folks were up and rocking to the music of The Tams, only pausing to enjoy the fine food and spirits provided by local vineyards and restaurants, as well as the event's live and silent auctions. Local businesses and individuals generously donated over 400 items for the silent auction, and the select group of 10 or so items in the live auction included an incredible "break front" cabinet made by master craftsman Dwayne Thompson of Timpson Creek Millworks that sold for a whopping \$6,500!

A new and timely element for this year's gala was the Chattooga Conservancy's "green" theme. The civic center was elegantly and masterfully decorated under the supervision of Holli Watts to convey the "great outdoors," and featured wildflowers and plants, flying bird mobiles, sky and stars of fabric and lights, origami bird napkins, floral arches and chandeliers, and a three-dimensional mountain and forest scene for the stage backdrop. Gracing the beautifully decorated tables were plates and utensils made from bamboo, and cups made from corn. Extra effort went into recycling and composting nearly all of the event's trash, and Wilbros LLC, an organic compost company based in Toccoa, Georgia, took the "green" debris to their plant to be transformed into an organic compost sold at Lowes stores nationwide. Wilbros will also deliver a load of compost for use at the Stekoa Creek Park site! The Chattooga Conservancy offers our deep gratitude to all the volunteers and businesses that contributed to the Rhapsody in Rabun 2011 event.



The civic center was decorated as a park, shown here just minutes before guests entered for Rhapsody in Rabun 2011.

Dam on the Chattooga River

The Chattooga Conservancy has discovered an illegal dam on the headwaters of the Chattooga River, constructed within the Wild & Scenic River Corridor. The dam has been built by a private property owner, and is located about 1 mile below Cashiers Lake on Nantahala National Forest lands, just below Silver Slip Falls. Upon further investigation, we found that the Forest Service and the Army Corps of Engineers were contacted by the property owner, who was seeking a permit to rebuild an old, low-head dam that had once existed on the property before the Forest Service acquired it in the 1980s. Both agencies accepted the landowner's argument that he had prescriptive rights to rebuild the dam on national forest land. The Chattooga Conservancy has now pointed out to both agencies that the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act was passed by congress to preserve certain rivers "free of impoundments." The dam is about 25 feet long and 3.5 feet high, and it is a small dam that sets a very big precedent. The Chattooga Conservancy anticipates legal action will be needed to resolve the issue.

Chattooga Conservancy Designs Nature Trail at the Rabun County Recreation Complex

The Chattooga Conservancy has been working with the Rabun County Recreation Department to build a new 1.25-mile nature trail, called the Lake Loop Trail, for the use and enjoyment of residents and visitors to Rabun County, GA. The trail is at the county's relatively new recreation complex, which is located on State Highway 441, just south of the Rabun County High School. The Chattooga Conservancy designed and flagged the trail, identified forest types and individual plants for interpretive signs, and assisted in the design and placement of benches and an informational kiosk. We also designed a constructed wetland to help cleanse a small perennial stream near the trail. The Lake Loop Trail and constructed wetland project should be completed and open for visitors by the spring.

Native River Cane Restoration Project Moves Forward

In cooperation with the Chattooga Conservancy and Revitalization of Traditional Cherokee Artisan Resources

Watershed Update

(RTCAR), the US Forest Service recently approved a project to restore and manage native river cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*) along the Chattooga River. Giant river cane is a native grass found in floodplains and bottomlands, and it once formed extensive canebrake ecosystems throughout the Southeast. Today, canebrake habitat has been reduced to less than 2% of its historic range, resulting in negative impacts to several wildlife species, water quality, and other ecosystem services. The Chattooga Conservancy requested that the Forest Service start restoring native river cane to fulfill the mandates of the Sumter National Forest Land Management Plan, and now we finally have a project in the works.

The river cane project will take place on 29 acres at the Russell and Ridley Fields near the Chattooga's Highway 28 bridge. The designated cane restoration zones include portions of areas currently managed as wildlife openings, where existing colonies of river cane won't be mowed down anymore, thus allowing it to spread. River cane will also be transplanted into the spot where once stood the renown old growth bamboo patch (that was cut and burned by the Forest Service last year). More cane restoration is also to occur upstream of the Highway 28 bridge, where some trees and bushes may be removed to allow patches of existing river cane to spread.

As the river cane restoration takes off, Cherokee artisans may be allowed to sustainably harvest cane from the area, for traditional cultural uses such as mats and baskets. A restoration project of this magnitude will also provide researchers with one of the largest canebrakes in the Southeast, providing a venue for research at both the species and ecosystem levels.

Congress Weighs In on the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule

President Clinton instated the Roadless Area Conservation Rule during the last days of his presidency in 2001, after the rule underwent extensive review and a public comment period. The 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule was aimed at protecting 58 million acres of wildlands on our public lands from most forms of logging and roadbuilding, to maintain their eligibility for permanent protection and potential wilderness designation. But the Bush Administration struck down the Roadless Rule, and it has been the subject of ongoing legal battles ever since. On October 21st, the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals rendered a decision after more than 18 months of deliberation and upheld the 2001 Roadless Rule, in what some claim is one of the most significant conservation victories in several decades. Now, the fight moves to congress, where competing forces have introduced polar opposite bills to address the controversy. Pro-protection is the "Roadless Area Conservation Act," which would make the rule to protect roadless areas into the law of the land. Opposing legislators have introduced the "Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act" that would open up many roadless areas for exploitation including logging, and oil and gas extraction. Please contact your senators and representatives

today, to request protection of roadless areas that are our last remaining undeveloped forest lands, to safeguard clean water resources and as a home for wildlife, a haven for recreation, and a heritage for future generations.

More Water Under the Bridge Upper Chattooga Controversy

Readers, at this writing there is still no resolution of the upper Chattooga controversy. The most recent development occurred in mid-July of this year, when the Forest Service released yet another (new) Environmental Assessment containing their "preferred alternative" for managing recreational uses in the Chattooga headwaters. Now, the preferred alternative would allow the construction of a brand new access point into the river below Grimshawes Bridge, just below private land near Green Creek, to accomodate whitewater boating from Green Creek to the Burrells Ford Bridge from December 1st to March 1st. Then, from January 1st to April 1st, boating would be allowed from Burrells Ford down to Lick Log Creek. Where boating would be allowed, there are no restrictions on boater numbers or water levels; however, the proposal would place restrictions on other recreational users in the headwaters "to protect the backcountry experience and to minimize natural resource damage."

The Chattooga Conservancy believes this proposal is unfair to boaters, and will also result in irreparable harm to the outstandingly remarkable resources in the headwaters. First, there is simply no reason not to allow boating all the way to Hwy. 28 Bridge. The Forest Service steadfastly refuses to allow boating from Lick Log Creek to Hwy. 28 because they claim it will interfere with the high quality fishing experience. Yet, their own statistics show that it's not practical to fish the headwaters at higher water levels, that are optimum boating water levels. Therefore, we suggest a water level cut-off, where boating would only be allowed above 450 cubic feet per second, to provide both boating and fishing use of the river—year round—at their respective optimal use levels. We also suggest that boating should be restricted to 4 groups per day, with a maximum of 6 boaters per group, to prevent resource damage and to protect the primitive experience and as prescribed by the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act. Further, we are adamantly opposed to building a new access point in the headwaters, which could destroy the last remote section there. Lastly, we believe that boating in the Chattooga Cliffs reach should not be allowed because it would require building a new access trail, which would promote increased use of this remote section, year-round.

The Forest Service has stated that a final decision will be made by the end of 2011. The public will be allowed another round of comments on this decision. If the Forest Service does not present a more fair and unbiased proposal, we will need all the help we can get to persuade them to change their minds. Stay posted.

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH to everyone who recently contributed to the Chattooga Conservancy. Your generous donations will help us continue to work on important conservation issues facing the Chattooga River watershed area.

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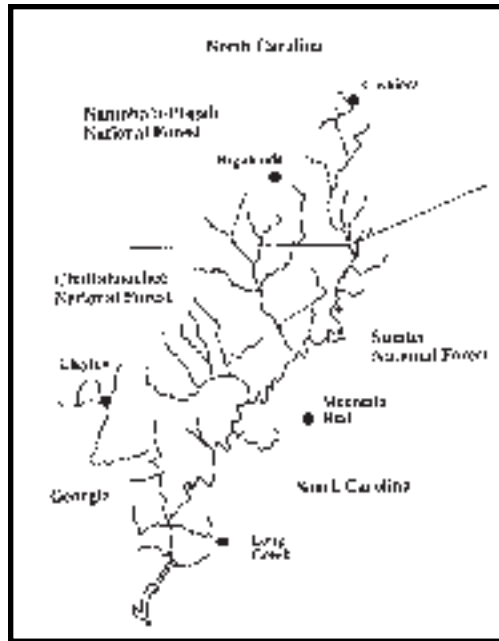
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Mission:

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



Goals:

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

Promote public choice based on credible scientific information

Protect remaining old growth and roadless areas

Promote public land acquisition by the Forest Service in the watershed

Educate the public

Promote sustainable communities

Promote conservation by honoring cultural heritage

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