

Across Our Mountains

fall/winter 2009



Working Together to Protect and Restore Southern Appalachian Forests

SAFC Partners in Effort to Save Hemlock

Imagine our mountain streams without Eastern Hemlocks. Imagine high rocky bluffs in the heart of the Southern Blue Ridge without Carolina Hemlocks. These emblematic trees are an integral part of our region, and their loss would fundamentally change our forests. Their presence would be missed by species and ecosystems dependent on these keystone trees, as well as the people who love them for their beauty and inviting shade. Yet their absence is not just an imagined nightmare but a likely outcome unless a heroic and sustained effort is conducted to save this species from extinction.

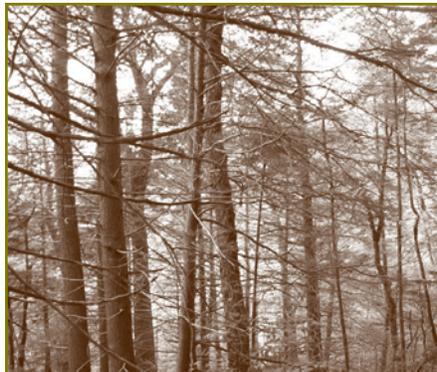
SAFC is part of an effort to address the threat to hemlocks and to lay the groundwork for their eventual recovery. We are partnering with the US Forest Service in North Carolina, Wildlaw, and others interested in hemlock conservation, to reassess the condition and viability of existing Hemlock Conservation Areas and find additional replacement areas. This fall, working under a contract from Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere (SAMAB), and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, SAFC sent three field teams to over thirty existing treatment sites and potential replacement sites to help determine where future treatment efforts should be focused.

Both species of hemlock, Eastern and Carolina, are subject to a non-native exotic insect introduced from Asia. This insect, the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, has been in Eastern North America for some time, however, the harsh cold winters in the areas where it was introduced slowed and limited its impact. As the adelgid spread southward, its impact has increased. The tiny insect sucks the sap from healthy hemlocks, eventually defoliating and killing them.



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A healthy hemlock forest in Great Smoky Mountain NP.



Lauren Recker

A hemlock forest infected with HWA.

No native controls exist in our mountains for this pest, and our hemlock trees appear to have little resistance to combat the attacks. The decline of both Eastern and Carolina hemlock species in our mountains has been devastating and swift, and you've probably noticed dead or dying trees in your travels. Old growth Eastern Hemlock trees, in some cases over 500 years old, have been killed in just a few years, and the rarer Carolina Hemlock could be close to extirpation if trends continue.

As damage from the adelgid infestation has progressed, it has become clear that the long range strategy needs updating. Predator beetles, a natural control for the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, were originally heavily relied on for control of the adelgid. This solution still provides hope for a long range solution if the right combination of beetles and conditions are found. Predator beetles have so far not proved as effective as originally hoped in controlling the infestations. Meanwhile, land managers have been working to keep wild populations of hemlock alive using chemical controls until the best long term solutions can be worked out.

SAFC is confident that our work will provide the necessary information to focus hemlock treatment resources on populations that are still viable and help keep these populations healthy until a permanent solution is found.

Connections: USFS, USFWS, SAMAB, Wildlaw

From the Director...



I am a member of a slightly exclusive trail club. The trail is not far from my home and it has a small core group of people who I have run into on a regular basis through many seasons. Each of us goes there to get away from the hustle and bustle of our lives and to renew our outlook. We look out for each other and for the visitors that we run into. We pay no fees to belong to the club, but nevertheless, we serve as the eyes and ears for this section of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail that runs through the Pisgah National Forest.

Trudging this trail through the red, oranges, yellows, greens and browns of a Southern Appalachian autumn, I think of all of the people that make up this close knit community, the small network of hikers that have tromped up this well-beaten path to catch a glimpse at the panoramic views that people from all over the world come to see. Unbeknownst to many who travel this heavily-used trail, it is very well taken care of by the Carolina Mountain Club. Behind every trail is a dedicated group of folks that work hard to maintain and rehabilitate the condition of the footpath for all who come after them.

The exercise of putting this newsletter together is always a revelation that great work is being done by a community of organizations whose mission it is to protect, connect and restore our Southern Appalachian forests. As Benton MacKaye, the founder of the Appalachian Trail, said, "A trail is as serviceable as its poorest link." It reminds me that the work we do will only be successful if we continue to strengthen and expand our connections.

Our connections to the land. These public lands that provide so much – clean air, fresh water, recreation and renewal.

Our connections between conservation efforts. The groups doing great work protecting, connecting and restoring the great eastern forest.

SAFC's role is to raise the public's awareness of the value of natural and healthy forests and to remind citizens of the important responsibility for taking care of these treasured landscapes --- the people's forests. Every day, this becomes more and more important in a world that seems to have lost its way – the vital connection with the all-too important natural world seems to be fraying at both ends of the rope.

Calling attention to November as nonprofit awareness month – you can rest assured that there is a nonprofit organization working diligently to ensure the health of the green spaces on your southeastern map. I encourage you to seek them out, finding out more about them and connecting to the great works going on throughout the region. We highlight a number of these great works in this newsletter, and you can go to our website (www.safc.org) to find out more.

The economic storm hanging over our nation has been extremely difficult for those that serve others. We understand that times are tough – we ask you to think about those who are doing good work for all of us. We want to make sure that you are aware that the groups that make up the Forest Coalition are working diligently to raise the awareness of the connection between the quality of the natural world that surrounds us and our own quality of life – connecting people to and building the army of support for these unique and beautiful areas that are in our backyards - ensuring that the public keeps a voice in how their national treasures are managed.

We must strive to leave our forests and waters better than we found them and we must dedicate ourselves to inspiring others to do the same. Each generation of Americans has to rediscover and renew the priority for safeguarding the country's natural places -- ensuring that what is passed on to future generations can meet their needs.

Please consider supporting the organization that connects those accomplishing great feats of conservation and puts forth a collective regional voice and effort. Think of how important National Forests are to you. Think of those groups that make up the Forest Coalition who, connected and collectively, maintain, rehabilitate and watch over YOUR public lands.

Think of the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition -- join us as we work together to return the Great Forest, a connected network of natural areas. It is all about the connections and fulfilling your stewardship responsibilities are the strongest link of the south's forest conservation trail. Do you know who is watching your forests? Do you know where the closest forest is and how it contributes to your quality of life? Contact us and we'll be happy to connect you with your forest and those that are working together to protect and restore YOUR Southern Appalachian Forests.

*For the Great Forest,
Mark Shelley*

Forests, An Important Factor in the Climate Equation

SAFC is partnering with the Open Space Institute (OSI) on a comprehensive GIS-based assessment of State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAP) throughout the southern Appalachian region. By identifying priority wildlife and habitat targets, SWAPs, which state fish and wildlife agencies develop to qualify for federal funding, are used as a tool to conserve wildlife before they become endangered and too costly to protect. Specifically, the project will address potential corridors or escape routes that wildlife can use for adaptation due to climate change. SAFC will work with OSI to incorporate climate adaptation modeling for identification of these wildlife corridors.

Scientific research has amply documented the greater health and resiliency of intact forest ecosystems versus heavily disturbed ecosystems. These healthier ecosystems are able to act as a refuge for sensitive wildlife and plant species. Intact forests can serve as vital reservoirs and safety nets, as surrounding landscapes become developed and fragmented.



A lush Southern Appalachian forest.

The OSI project will develop consistent data across the Southern Appalachian states and will evaluate wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors throughout the project region. It will facilitate future planning efforts by providing a consistent framework for SWAP habitat analysis and create a planning tool for wildlife in a regional context.

The varied landscape of the Southern Appalachians, the higher peaks and the north-south orientation of the mountains, can provide microclimates with varying elevations, aspects, slopes and soils for species migration. This makes adaptation possible by allowing species to move from the bottoms of mountains to the tops and to different microclimates. To assure that these corridors are in place when they are needed it is essential to identify and prioritize them within the region.

While possessing some of the nation's most significant wildlife habitat, the Southern Appalachians have not enjoyed anywhere near the level of attention or funding of other regions. This project will build on significant prior planning, lay the foundation for more comprehensive future efforts and has the potential to deliver more strategic conservation action.

The project will increase communication of SWAP objectives between state agencies, NGOs, regional governments and state-level Wildlife Federations, as well as traditional hunting and fishing groups, as they advance their own work and advocate for state and federal project funding.

The goal is to foster greater collaboration and coordination among conservation organizations and state and federal agencies through project coordination and standardized data and tools and will result in improved and better integrated planning across the region.

Connections: Open Space Institute, Wildlife Federation



Business as Usual Stands in the Way of Ecological Restoration

Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition, along with our member groups, recently won two appeals of timber projects that concentrated too much on traditional cutting goals while passing up opportunities for ecological restoration.

SAFC and WildSouth, represented by WildLaw, filed and won an appeal of the Harmon Den project on the Appalachian District of Pisgah National Forest. This area forms a key wildlife linkage between Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the adjacent Bald Mountains landscape conservation area identified in SAFC's Conservation Vision.



Hugh Irwin

The Southern Environmental Law Center, on behalf of SAFC, Western North Carolina Alliance and WildSouth, filed the other appeal of the Thunderstruck Project on the Tusquitee District of Nantahala National Forest. This sale would have impacted mature rich forest and built roads with inadequate consideration of the impacts.

These appeal wins give us additional tools to push for ecological restoration, particularly in recognizing the impacts of roads and the necessity in considering these impacts in project planning.

As much as ecological restoration makes sense as the best way to optimize our national forest's role in providing the public with ecosystem services, there are forces that continue to oppose the transition of management toward true ecological restoration. SAFC and its member groups are working hard on project and policy work to stop bad projects and help move the Forest Service toward the implementation of ecologically based projects.

Unfortunately, many of the projects we see are business as usual where the primary purpose is the generation of funds from traditional timber sales, too often in recovering forest that is starting to deliver the ecosystem services we would expect from our native forests. Often restoration goals are presented as the rationale for projects even when roads are increased, stands are regenerated creating new even-aged forest, and wildlife corridors are degraded. While some marginal restoration progress is made in the course of such projects, it does not increase the overall health of the forest or the ecosystem services in the long run. Rather than true ecological restoration, an altered landscape is taken as a given and is maintained

Most of our native forests once were and would once again become, with restoration, all-age forest with rich species diversity and multilayered structure. Natural events including wind, ice, disease, and natural mortality create gaps of varying sizes in the forest and maintain a natural structural diversity that creates innumerable niches for different plants and animals. Clearings the size of clearcuts or 2-age regeneration cuts are a rarity. But because of past logging dating back to the turn of the 20th century, most of our forests are an artificially created even-aged forest.

This unnatural condition cries out for ecological restoration to return the structural diversity and species diversity of the native forest. However, most project proposals that SAFC and our member groups review focus instead on maintaining the forest in uneven-aged blocks through regeneration cuts and the creation of early succession. These projects also typically involve building new roads or rebuilding old roads, increasing the road density that can cause sedimentation problems in streams.

The focus on traditional timber sales at the expense of ecological restoration has its roots in the incentives and budget structure of the US Forest Service. These budgets and incentives provide the funds to pay staff and accomplish some agency goals, but they do not encourage ecological restoration. Revising this system to provide budgets for ecological restoration while placing the incentive on accomplishment of restoration goals will be essential to achieve a real focus on ecological restoration.

Connections: State Forest Watch Groups, SELC, WildLaw, the American people

The Future of National Forest Management is Restoration

There is increasing interest from conservation groups like SAFC as well as within the Forest Service in managing national forests with ecological restoration principals in the forefront. The management of our forests should be directed towards maximizing the ecosystem services which we all depend on, and restoring their health and complexity.

Optimizing clean water, clean air, healthy and vibrant wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration should become the guiding principle for future national forest management.

Our national forests in the East were rescued from exploited lands at the turn of the 20th century to stop the flooding, wildfires, and loss of resources that were occurring due to unrestrained logging. With some fairly rare exceptions of old growth forests that survived this period of abuse relatively unscathed, most of our current day forests have remaining impacts from this period of exploitation. Some of these forests, logged only once a century or more ago, are now well on their way to recovery, having largely regained the species and structural diversity characteristic of native Southern Appalachian forests. Other stands have never completely recovered or have been clear-cut over the years, and are in poor condition, having neither the species nor the all-age multilayered structure of native forests.

It has become increasingly apparent that ecosystem services are some of the most important values coming from our public forests. Besides the obvious services of maintenance of clean water and clean air and provision of habitat for a long list on native animals and plants, additional important services are becoming apparent.

Carbon storage as a means of mitigating fossil fuel emissions is an extremely important function of forests. Carbon stored in forests ties up a large portion of the carbon that otherwise would contribute to global warming. Healthy forests sequester carbon dioxide from large point sources such as fossil fuel power plants, and store it. In fact forests are one of the major stable stores of carbon that has always acted as a buffer against carbon driven climate change.

As mitigation for climate change, the storage of carbon appears to be optimized in older forests as they mature and increase in complexity, particularly in large carbon reserves stored in soil and below ground biomass. Studies are showing that it takes centuries for a regenerated forest to regain the carbon already sequestered in old growth and mature forest.



A volunteer pulls invasive species.

Restoring forest health and complexity, removing invasive species that threaten native species, and removing old roads that contribute to water quality degradation should be the focus of Forest Service projects. From the national office of the Forest Service to the regional office in Atlanta to the Forest and District level there is an increased interest in and discussion of ecological restoration. Ultimately it will take a restructuring of priorities and budgets (see companion piece on national forest projects) but the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition calls for ecological restoration to become the highest priority for national forest management.

**Connections:
United States Forest Service, SAFC Member Groups,
WildLands CPR, The Nature Conservancy**

Working Together to Connect, Protect & Restore Our Appalachian Forests

The Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition is dedicated to protecting and restoring the wildlands, waters, native forests and ecosystems of the Southern Appalachian landscape.

The Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition (SAFC) unites national, regional, state and local conservation organizations from Alabama to Virginia, to protect and restore the public lands and natural heritage of the Southern Appalachian region. SAFC formed in 1994 recognizing that the Southern Appalachian legacy – high mountains and forests, rivers and rural countryside – is at risk from mismanagement, excessive road building and irresponsible land development.

Together, we have created a regional conservation vision and campaign to protect and restore lands, native species, and ecological processes of natural landscapes. The SAFC provides GIS mapping, scientific analysis, fundraising support and campaign assistance to our members and dozens of conservation initiatives throughout the region.

SAFC envisions a future where the landscape serves and sustains all communities. Such a landscape would sustain healthy populations of native species, generate clean water and clean air, and satisfy the increasing demand for fulfilling backcountry recreation and renewal.

SAFC calls on every citizen to engage in the “Great Work” that can lead us in the direction of health for our forests, our lands and our people. We hope that you will join SAFC in our efforts to protect and restore our national forests and the values they provide us. Working together, we can move the conservation vision closer to reality.

"In the Southern Appalachian mountains occur that marvelous variety and richness of plant growth which have led our ablest business men and scientist to ask for its preservation by the Government for the advancement of science and for the instruction and pleasure of the people of our own and of future generations..."

-Theodore Roosevelt, 1902

To strengthen your partnership with SAFC, contact us at: www.safc.org , or connect with one of our member groups working diligently on YOUR forest.

Appalachian Voices
Cherokee Forest Voices
Clinch Coalition
Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics
Georgia ForestWatch
Sierra Club

Southern Environmental Law Center
Virginia Forest Watch
Western North Carolina Alliance
The Wilderness Society
WildLaw
Wild South

Tennessee Wilderness Campaign

The Blue Ridge Mountains of Tennessee are some of the most biologically rich temperate forests on earth. Tennessee Wild, A SAFC Campaign, is seeking to expand the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness, Big Frog Wilderness, Little Frog Wilderness, Bald River Gorge Wilderness and to establish a brand new Upper Bald River Wilderness.

To connect to TN WILD, go to www.tnwild.org.

Campaign Partners:

Cherokee Forest Voices, Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning, The Wilderness Society, The Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, Sierra Club – Tennessee Chapter, Southern Environmental Law Center, Campaign for America’s Wilderness and the Conservation Alliance.

Roadless Update -- What would Teddy Do?

Protecting roadless areas is an important step towards preserving the invaluable ecological benefits that intact forests provide. As the realities of global climate change become more apparent, the critical need to preserve these last remaining natural areas of the national forests could not be more urgent. The importance of maintaining large terrestrial carbon stores, particularly in forests, is swiftly being recognized as a critical element in addressing climate change.

On October 1st, a politically and geographically diverse coalition of congressional members introduced legislation to permanently safeguard the nation's roadless areas from harmful development. 150 House Representatives (15 from the southeast) and 25 Senators (3 from the southeast) joined nearly 200 co-sponsors to support the Roadless Area Protection Act of 2009. This legislation would bring an end to eight years of efforts to undermine the 2001 Roadless Rule by codifying it into law and providing a national standard for protecting pristine places in America's National Forests.

"After eight years of attacks by the Bush administration it is clear that Congress needs to step in and permanently protect what is left of our roadless forests," said Ben Prater, Wild South Associate Director. "These special places provide too much in the way of clean water, recreation, and wildlife habitat for Congress not to act."

In May, the administration issued a directive requiring extra scrutiny of roadless projects. In August, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals effectively reinstated the 2001 Rule and dealt yet another rebuke to the prior presidential administration's efforts to undermine it. The ruling reinforced protections for 50 million acres in the National Forest system (over 728,000 acres in our region) banning logging, harmful road building, and destructive development.

Despite being wildly popular, the Roadless Rule has been caught up in the federal courts and the politics of changing Presidents for almost a decade. "Teddy Roosevelt created our National Forests to be special places that belong to all Americans for all time," added Mark Shelley, SAFC Executive Director. "The legislation introduced follows that spirit and could end years of conflict and uncertainty over these last remaining wild places – especially here in the east." "Roadless area protection has enjoyed tremendous public support over the years. These lands provide some of the best fish and wildlife habitat left in the nation as well as clean, safe sources of drinking water to millions of Americans."

"The southeast's elected leaders and outdoor businesses across the country understand that roadless protections are synonymous with quality of life," concluded Brent Martin, the Southeast Regional Program Director for The Wilderness Society. "We have a responsibility to pass on the things that make this part of the world great to future generations." Our forests represent America's legacy for future generations. A century after they were established by President Roosevelt, those forests still stand because Americans enthusiastically embraced them and pushed back when special interests threatened them. It's time to renew that commitment by upholding the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. What would Teddy do?



Connections:

Heritage Forests Campaign, SAFC Member Groups, Town Creek Foundation, Mr. Fred Stanback, the American people



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Thanks to our Business Partners

As you probably know, SAFC is a nonprofit organization that relies on income from a variety of sources. Concerned citizens like you, foundations large and small, and businesses all contribute the funds to make our work possible. In addition to monetary support, many businesses also provide SAFC with crucial expertise, gear, influence and advocacy help as well. We rely on all of these sources every day, and don't stop to say thank you enough.

Whether it's Rudd Montgomery of Push Hard Lumber and Carl Absher of ABC Tree Service giving radio interviews endorsing wilderness expansion in Tennessee, Rock Creek Outfitters providing funds to raise wilderness awareness, Promotive.com providing great deals to SAFC members on outdoor gear or REI donating goods and volunteers for any number of projects, these partners are a key to our success.

There is another partner who has gone to extraordinary lengths to assist us. Tennessee Field Organizer Jeff Hunter recently attended the Patagonia Tools for Activists training in Reno, NV. Jeff spent five days at Fallen Leaf Lake near Lake Tahoe attending some of the best training sessions of his nearly 30 year career. It became clear almost immediately that Patagonia is invested in the success of SAFC's Tennessee Wild campaign. They believe in our work and are willing to make a significant investment- in both cash and training- to see us succeed.

Please consider shopping with these committed businesses as your way of thanking them for their support of SAFC!



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