



Georgia ForestWatch ATV Documentation Project: Introduction & Purpose

Georgia ForestWatch has a vision: *the members of Georgia ForestWatch share as their vision the enduring restoration, protection, and appreciation of the unique mountain and piedmont landscapes of north and central Georgia, and the biological communities and diversity located therein.* Georgia Forest Watch also has a mission: *our mission is to protect and restore the native ecosystems of Georgia's mountain and piedmont public lands, and to inform the citizens of Georgia about the values of these landscapes.* Considering the above statements it is clear that our goal and purpose is to protect and restore environmental degradation on the Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forests, however and wherever they may occur.

For at least a decade the use of ATV's, (all terrain vehicles such as 3 wheelers, 4wheelers, dune buggies and snow mobiles) has been increasing on private and public landscapes nationally, along with the negative environmental impacts associated with their use. Georgia Forest Watch (GFW) members have observed with increasing alarm the illegal use of these machines as illegal trail systems sprout hydra-headed from USFS systems roads, closed roads, private lands adjacent to USFS lands, and from legal Off Road Vehicle Use Areas. Illegal ATV trails exist in USFS Wilderness Areas, on scenic hiking trails such as the Appalachian and Benton McKaye trails, on GFW's Georgia's Mountain Treasures, on USFS inventoried roadless areas, and they run through headwater streams and larger trout streams managed by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Despite the 15 legal ORV use areas managed by the USFS with 131 miles of designated trails on the Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forest, environmental damage from ATV use is occurring and increasing forest-wide. Presently the USFS estimates 550 miles of illegal trails on the Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forest with an estimated repair cost of \$990,000.00 to the American taxpayers. Some of the environmental impacts associated with ATV use are extensive soil erosion and damage to wildlife habitat and water quality. Certainly air quality should be considered along with the social impacts of noise and safety concerns to forest users. As this problem has continued to grow, GFW has sought ways to address and hopefully in time to resolve the issue of illegal ATV use on the public lands of Georgia. We see four avenues for progress. 1.**Educate** the citizens of Georgia concerning threats to the health of their National Forest lands. 2.**Political**; inform and impress upon our political leaders the importance of specific forest issues to their constituency and how they can help. 3.**Enforcement**; assist the USFS with field observations and in securing funding to increase their legal presence on the forest. 4.**Documentation**; an ongoing program to gather pertinent information in the field and sharing it with land managers, enforcement officers and citizens. This project addresses avenue 4.

The GFW ATV Documentation Project was made possible by a grant from the Natural Trails and Waters Coalition. The purpose of the project was to gather field observational data using a survey protocol supplied by Wildlands CPR to define the scope and particulars of illegal ATV use on the Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forests. Areas of concern were accessed by truck, mountain bike and by foot. Information was gathered for mapping purposes using a handheld Garmin 12 GPS unit and corresponding software, USGS 7 1/2 minute quad maps, and the Chattahoochee National Forest travel map. The survey protocol also required photos and written descriptions of significant observations which were duly recorded on the proper survey forms. Initial locations of illegal ATV activity were provided by GFW District Leaders and later by the USFS and concerned citizens. This assistance was invaluable in pinpointing areas of concern allowing a more efficient use of time. The forest was surveyed by district, scouting most illegal routes from their point of origin on FS roads, county or state roads and FS hiking trails. Illegal routes originating from private lands and entering FS lands

were not usually scouted from their source due to legal concerns. Between 1 and 1-1/2 weeks was spent in the field on each district gathering information. Districts where significant impacts were identified were returned to in order to better define the situation. Unfortunately the Oconee National Forest was not covered due to time constraints. Also many routes discovered during the implementation of this study and many other areas remain to be documented. See 'List of Routes that Need Scouting' at the end of this report.

Thank You!

Many folks contributed to this effort in various ways, from original idea and vision to route location to housing and spiritual support. I would like to Thank the following:

Brent Martin and the staff of Georgia ForestWatch

The Board and membership of GFW

District Leaders of GFW:

Howard & Yvonne Markel; Brasstown District

Angela Martin; Armuchee District

Mort & Helen Meadors; Tallulah District

James & Sue Sullivan; Chattooga District

Tom & Rita Thrasher; Toccoa District

USFS Folks

Larry Thomas; Cohutta District

Don Vaughters; Toccoa District

Gary Lawson; Cohutta District

Alan Smith; Tallulah District

Michael Gryton; Chattooga District

David Govus

Tom Govus

Shirl & Keith Parsons

Joe Gatins

Judd German

Jerry Seabolt

Tom Keene

Walter Cook

Rick Hayden

Ridgerunner

Key to Abbreviations

AT: Appalachian Trail

ATV: All Terrain Vehicle

BMT: Benton McKaye Trail

FS: Forest Service

GFW: Georgia ForestWatch

GMT: Georgia Mountain Treasure

ORV: Off Road Vehicle

Map Key

Green route indicates route surveyed, by truck, bike or by foot

Black hatch marks indicate illegal ATV route