



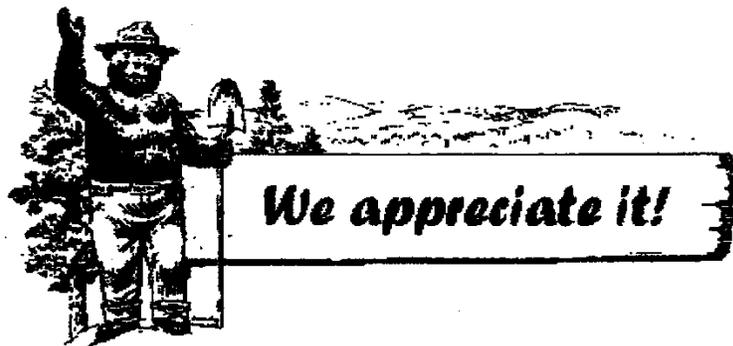
Trail Talk

March & April

2014

As the weather warmed up in March and April, the Conasauga Ranger District Volunteer program started to get full of activity: we had a Team Conasauga workday and work weekend; the Backcountry Horsemen of Northwest Georgia (BCHNWG) led by Larry Wheat had two workdays at Dry Creek; an Alternative Spring Break group from Northern Illinois University worked on the District; a Volunteer event was held at the Houston Valley OHV trail system with Tammy Kirk of Kirk Cycle; Jim Holland and friends cleared some wilderness trails; a volunteer helped me to finish a critical project. And a partridge in a pear tree...!

With this flurry of volunteer activity on the District, I would like to first and foremost thank everyone for their contributions. I hope we can keep this momentum going for the rest of the year. Please enjoy the read, and hope to see everyone at the upcoming events.



> > > > **March** < < < <

So much happened in March, let's jump right into it. Volunteerism on the District started on the first of the month with a very important project. A group of folks associated with Leadership Murray and Keep Chatsworth-Murray Beautiful donated their time to clean up Muskrat Road. **Russell Witherow, Mike Witherow, Caleb Martin, Steve Chastain, Gary Pierce, and Jeremey Peden**, with help from our District Ranger **Jeff Gardner** pulled out dozens of tires and collected 40 bags of garbage. Thank you all so much for doing this inglorious but extremely important service for the Forest. Here is an account of the day written by **Russell Witherow**.

"When we first entered the leadership Murray program we were tasked to develop a design for an advertisement that identified things that bring people to Murray County. We all agreed that our mountains are a major draw and they bring people in from all over the region for a variety of recreational activities. When deciding on a project to benefit our community it only made sense to include our mountains in some capacity. We contacted Jeff Gardner with the US Forest Service for guidance on areas in need of some sort of attention. He identified Muskrat Road (better known as the road to Windy Gap Cycle Trail) as being in great need. I rode over this area and it didn't take long to see he was right and we didn't want a road used by so many out of town folks as access to our mountains to resemble a landfill. There was a significant amount of tires, furniture, and every other type of waste you can imagine...some that you might not want to imagine! It was obvious we needed to do this cleanup, but we would need assistance disposing of it all. One phone call to Sandi Adams at Keep Chatsworth-



Murray beautiful and we had the help we needed. A majority of the tires were at the bottom of steep drop offs and required equipment and ingenuity to retrieve. Luckily we called on friends and coworkers who loaned us a variety of ropes, hooks, & a heavy duty pulley. We stopped counting, but when all was said and done we estimate 60 - 75 tires were removed, several pieces of furniture and more diapers and beer bottles than I care to remember! While we made a huge improvement in the area, there is still a ton of work to do out there, even on this same road. We would like to challenge anyone that enjoys our mountains to "pick up" where we've left off. Contact the USFS and/or Keep Chatsworth-Murray beautiful, and they can help you take it from an idea to a day of making a difference."



The volunteer projects continued in March with BCHNWG led by **Larry Wheat** on the Dry Creek Trail system. They had a beautiful day on the first Saturday of the month. Helping Larry was **Kathy Hansen, Susan van Apeldoorn, and Louis Bondurant** who picked up litter, cleared trees, and re-worked some trail tread on several of the trails in the Dry Creek Trail System. For the full write up and/or information on upcoming events with the BCHNWG, contact Larry Wheat at L.Wheat@mindspring.com.



The Conasauga Ranger District was honored to have an Alternative Spring Break group from the Northern Illinois University. These eight college students gave up a week of relaxation at the beach to volunteer and give back to their public lands. I would like to personally thank **Benjamin Mommer, Leslie Paramo, Michael Payne, Ben Stone, Stephanie Norman, Katie McBride, Naveen Komal, and Sai Subhashs** for all their hard work on the Pocket Boardwalk project. We could not have done it without them. This project was on the Pocket Loop Trail outside of the Pocket Campground. The boardwalk is over two hundred feet long and has been in need of repairs for some time. We kept the crew busy pulling boards, setting posts and sloshing around in the mud. In the end, we installed a whole new substructure to the boardwalk in the week that they were here. The crew also had time to paint some railing at the Houston Valley OHV trailhead. Thanks again for all your help, and we will talk about how we finished the boardwalk in a few more paragraphs.





On March 21 and 22 Team Conasauga had their 71st Working Weekend. The location for this event was the East Cowpen Trail starting at the Three Forks Trailhead. We

had two beautiful days of working in the Cohutta Wilderness. Our goal was to complete all 77 waterbars from the trailhead to the Panther Creek junction and we got them all done plus some. On Friday **Jim Bishop, Amos Burrell, Wanda Brown, Tom Blackwell, Tannis Blackwell, Jim Leatherwood and Larry Thomas**, as well as a new volunteer **Joe Connell**, tackled the big waterbars from the trailhead on past the Rough Ridge intersection, most of which were all but gone. A few of us spent that night just down the FS road from the trailhead on top of the ridge which provided good conversation and excellent star gazing. Saturday was another amazing day to be on the trail. **Gail Milner, Charlie Crider, Wanda Brown, Jim Leatherwood, Joe Connell, Robert Edmondson, Deede Edmondson, and Larry Thomas**; plus two more new volunteers, **Nicole Keating and Chris Muthig** came out to help complete the waterbars. With superman helping us, we finished the work with enough time to spare to hike to the top of Cowpen Mountain, which is the highest point in the Cohutta Wilderness. Thank you all for making this a successful Working Weekend and we hope to see all the new volunteers back real soon.



Another project that happened on Saturday, March 22nd was **Jim Holland**, the BMTA Maintainer, **Steve Davis, Zoe and John Zardis** worked the Hemp Top Trail. They cleared Hemp Top Trail from the old fire tower north. They cleared many trees and had a great time doing it. Thanks for all your work!



Wrapping up this busy weekend on March the 22nd and 23rd was a volunteer project at Houston Valley OHV Trail System lead by Tammy Kirk of Kirk Cycle. **Tom Steele, Bud Blue, Bernie Blue, Judy Blue, Keaton Blue, Tammy Kirk, JoAnn Swartz, Nadia Swartz, Mikhail Swartz, Grigs Swartz, Brandon Brown, Ethan Chance, Daniel Ratcliff, Amber Stephens, Lonnie Teffeteller, Charles Teffeteller, Marty Burt, Gary Parker, Cassie Ledford, Canaan Stepp, and Jonah Coppock** did a great job at the trail system. They did an array of tasks that included picking up litter, clearing vegetation, painting the fence, and sweeping all the stones off the parking

lot. This was some much needed spring cleaning and has made the trail system look great. Also if you are a user of the Houston Valley Trail system let me take a moment to remind folks that we have implemented a **Weather Closure Program** for the Houston Valley Trail system after significant rain events. Always check the Forest Service website <http://www.fs.usda.gov/conf> for up to date information before you go ride.

To conclude March's events I would like to thank **Jim Leatherwood** for coming out and helping Ed Land and me finish the Pocket Boardwalk project. Even with all the help that the Northern Illinois University Alternative Spring Break group provided, we were unable to complete the 200+ foot boardwalk that week. We completed the substructure but still had the decking to do. I was talking about this around the campfire during the Team Conasauga overnighter and Jim offered his assistance. Not only can he dig a mean waterbar but he is a great carpenter too. Jim assisted us on the 25th and 26th of March and his help was paramount. With Jim's expertise on decking corners we finished what was a lengthy project on the Pocket Loop Trail.



> > > > **April** < < < <



Kicking off April's volunteer efforts was a collaborative NWGA, SORBA, and BCHNWG workday at the Dry Creek Trail system lead by **Larry Wheat**. In attendance were: **Kathy and Eddie Henson, Kathy Hansen, David Wheaton, Bill Hester, Louis Bondurant, John West, Steve Harrell, Ray Blevins, Chris Zimmerman, Bill Semsrott, Marcus Moore, Larry Wheat, and Karen Larsen (USFS-CRD)**. On April 5th they did many different projects on the system including vegetation clearing, sign installation, spreading gravel, and litter clean up. Great job everyone.

The next collaborative workday at the Dry Creek Trail system is May 3rd. If you are interested in reading the entire write up of the April workday or want more information on May's workday, contact Larry Wheat at L.Wheat@mindspring.com.

For Team Conasauga's April workday on the 12th, we headed over to the west side to work on the Chickamauga Creek Trail. This trail is a 6 mile loop and was in desperate need of maintenance. Fifteen volunteers, **Gennie Dasinger, Steve Harrell, Jim Bishop, Jim Leatherwood, Amos Burrell, Tom Blackwell, Tannis Blackwell, Gail Milner, Charlie Crider, Chuck Brock, Bill Hester, Wanda Brown, Conrad Fernandez, and Marcus Moore** donated their time to improve this trail. Most of the group worked on the many waterbars on the east side of the trail and supported me in clearing blow downs. We worked all the waterbars but I ran out of gas before we met up with Bill's group. A special thanks to **Bill Hester** who lead a small group that focused on mostly cutting blow downs, but cleared some waterbars too on the north and west sides of



the trail. After a lengthy hike out, most of us met up back at the trailhead for some refreshing Coca-Colas supplied by Amos Burrell. When we had concluded talking about the wonderful day and all the work we had completed we called it a day. Thanks for all your help and I hope you are like me and are looking forward to hiking the Chickamauga Creek Trail again very soon.



Jim Holland, Zoe Zardis, and Kathleen Corcoran were very busy this month with two trips into the wilderness. They completed the blow down clearing on Hemp Top Trail all the way to Big Frog Mountain on the 11th of April. They were back at it again on the 18th of April, working on the Penitentiary Branch Trail, nearly making it to the river before very windy weather turned them around. I just hiked Penitentiary Branch and the work looks great! Thanks so much for your contributions.

The last but not least volunteer that I would like to highlight is **Tim Woody**. Tim has been spending a lot of time helping Alan Orth, Developed Recreation, over the last few months getting the developed recreation sites up and ready for the summer crowds. They have been working on the water systems at Cottonwood Patch Horse Camp and Lake Conasauga Campground. They have retrofitted the Mill Creek Overlook with new safety railing, which is great for the kids, as well as doing all the preparation work at Lake Conasauga Campground to get it opened and ready for business. Thank you for all your help, Tim, and we are all looking forward to seeing you at Lake Conasauga this summer as the campground Host.



Georgia Pinhoti Trail New Section

Grand Opening



The **Georgia Pinhoti Trail Association** is having a grand opening of a brand new section of the Pinhoti Trail on **Saturday afternoon, May 3rd at 3 p.m.** It will be held at the new parking lot on Dennis Mill Road on land that was purchased by the Conservation Fund so the trail could be built.

The Georgia section of the Pinhoti is the longest blazed trail in Georgia running from the Alabama line in Polk County Georgia to the Benton MacKaye Trail near the Cohutta Wilderness.

The Pinhoti is a multi-use trail open to hikers, mountain bicycles, and equestrians along most of its route. This new section of trail is the result of many years of work by several groups. Many of these groups will be present at the grand opening.

Please join us for the opening and meet many of the people who have made this a reality. If you ever wondered about the Pinhoti signs and blazes you may have seen in the area, this is your chance to talk to the people who are working on it.

Dates for the Rest of the Year:

May 2-3, 2014 – Rough Ridge *north end waterbars*
(Working Weekend #72)

June 7, 2014 – Lower Emery Creek trail *trimming*
and tree removal
(National Trails Day®)

July 19, 2014 – Rice Camp trail *trimming (tornado),*
waterbars, and campsites

August 16-17, 2014 – Jacks River trail *weed*
whipping between Horseshoe Bend and Rice Camp
(Working Weekend #73)

September 20, 2014 – Chestnut Lead trail *weed*
whipping and campsites
(National Public Lands Day,
Wilderness 50th Celebration)

October 4, 2014 – East Cowpen trail *water bars in*
from Rice Camp trail

October 25, 2014 – Volunteer Appreciation Picnic
@ Pocket Campground Pavilion

November 14-15, 2014 – Beech Bottom Campsite
Maintenance
(Working Weekend #74)

December 2, 2014 – Annual Board Meeting *6p.m.*
@ Conasauga District Office

December 13, 2014 – TBA *open for now*





For more information on activities and events happening on the Conasauga Ranger District, please check out the following links to the various associations who are committed to helping us provide a safe, enjoyable trail experiences for our forest users...

Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA): www.bmta.org

Backcountry Horsemen of Northwest Georgia (BCHNWG): www.bchnwg.org

Backcountry Horsemen of North Georgia (BCHNG): www.bchng.org

Northwest Georgia Southern Off-Road Bike Association (NWGA SORBA): www.nwgasorba.org

Georgia Pinhoti Trail Association: www.pinhoti.info

Appalachian Trail Association (GATC): www.georgia-atclub.org

Ellijay Mountain Biking Association (EMBA): www.ellijaymountainbike.org

Southern Off-Road Bike Association (SORBA): www.sorba.org or www.ngwasorba.org

Co-Trails: www.cotrails.org



Any interested people, please contact me at kvasalinda@fs.fed.us. Thanks and see you next time.

~Kevin~