Trail Talk

July, August, September and October

2014

It has been a few very busy months and Volunteers have been diligently working across the Conasauga Ranger District. During this period we seen the dog days of summer come and go, we celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act, and concluded with the end of fiscal year Volunteer Appreciation Picnic. We also hosted a Student Conservation Association High School trail crew that I can't wait to tell you all about. I am sincerely sorry that this turned into a double issue of Trail Talk--I had the opportunity to travel out west to help with the wildfires in Washington State. I am grateful that I got the opportunity to help those in need but it did get me behind on my formal documentation and acknowledgment of all the great work that you do on the Conasauga Ranger District. In saying that, we have a lot to talk about and I do hope you enjoy this issue of the newsletter.

> > > > July < < < <

I should have made the color of this header blue because July was a very wet month. A heavy rain storm on July 19 cancelled both the Team Conasauga workday and the workday scheduled at Dry Creek. That is just the way it goes sometimes! The following weekend a small group did band together to tackle some sling blading and blowdowns on the Rice Camp Trail. **Jim Leatherwood, Amos Burrell,** and **Larry Thomas** did a great job and got rattled by a rattlesnake. Thanks guys.

At the end of July, we welcomed a Student Conservation Association (SCA) high school trail crew onto the district. I personally was very excited to get to work with them because I was on two crews just like this when I was that age. The crew was headed by two crew leaders **Zack Podmore** and **Amanda Penny Nichols** and had eight crew members, who were from all over the country; **Morgan McFall-Johnsen** (Chicago, IL), **Michelle Fonda** (York, PA), **Julia Kaback** (New York, NY), **Rebecca Composto** (Philadelphia, PA), **Brett Mayville** (Newtown, MA), **Brandon Keogh** (Rochester, NY), **Jeremy Nicholson** (Boulder, CO), and **Lyle Winkler-Prins** (Arlington, VA). This was a great crew: they all had at least one season of trail crew already under their belts and you could definitely tell by the work they put out. They spent two weeks camping and working in the Cohutta Wilderness on a reroute of the Upper Jacks River trail caused by a thirty foot wash out of the trail. The work site was about 2.5 miles in, between the first and second river crossings, and the reroute was

about a quarter mile long. They worked very hard to complete this large project doing what it took including bucking downfall, clearing rhododendron, building tread, installing rolling grade dips, and a set of seven steps. Upon completion of the reroute, the crew did a 15-mile backpacking work trip to Jack's River Falls and back to the trailhead on the Penitentiary Branch Trail. Along the way the crew bucked approximately 20 trees of varying diameters and brushed 5 miles of trail including the Jacks River Canyon. The backpacking trip was challenging but rewarding work for everyone. Thank you so much for all the hard work and best of luck on all your future endeavors.

> > > > August < < < <

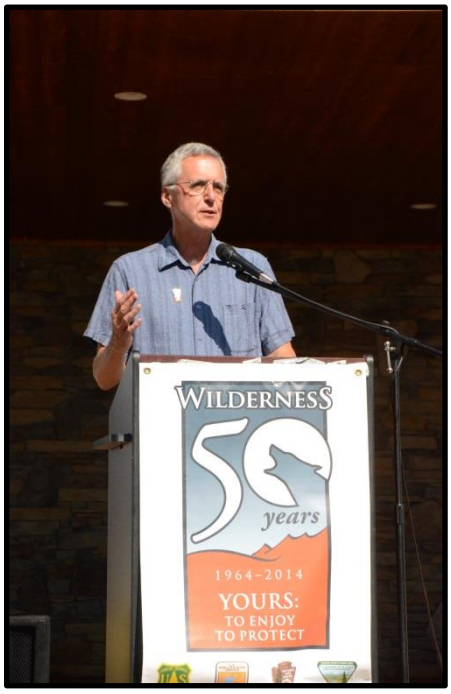
The volunteer groups kicked off August with a great work day at Dry Creek, led by Larry Wheat on August 2nd. They had nine participants: **Bill Semsrott, Steve Harrell, Patricia and Pic Petelle, Carole Pinion, Kathy and Eddie Henson, Bill Hester, and Larry Wheat** donated their time representing Back Country Horsemen of Northwest Georgia and the Northwest Georgia chapter of the Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association. They did a lot of great work both on trail and at the trailhead. Thank you so much. For full write up on the workday and/or more information on upcoming workday at Dry Creek Trail System you can contact Larry Wheat at l.wheat@mindspring.com or follow them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/groups/DryCreek/.

On August 16, Team Conasauga had its 73rd Working Weekend. With the cancellation of July's Workday, the tornado spot on top of Rice Camp became this group's top priority. **Wanda and Troy Brown, Amos Burrell, Deede and Robert Edmondson, Gail Milner, and Charlie Crider** took on the task of pruning this very thick section of trail. After the work was done a small group filled the rest of the day by hiking down to the Jacks River. Thank you all for the hard work and I have heard much appreciation from hikers for you taking care of this brushy section of trail.

> > > > September < < < <

What a great month this was. We had two volunteer events and the National Forests of Georgia's celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act.

September 6th was a busy day. First, Friends of Dry Creek had a very productive workday headed by **Kathy Henson**. She was joined by four others; **Eddie Henson, John West, Marcus Moore, and Kathy Hanson**. Despite their small numbers they were able to get a lot of work done in and around the Dry Creek Trailhead. Thank you so much and as always if you want more information on upcoming events at Dry Creek you can contact Larry Wheat at l.wheat@mindspring.com and/or follow them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/groups/DryCreek/.



Also on the 6th of September the National Forests of Georgia celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. The event, titled "Inspiring Stewardship", was held at Hancock Park in Dahlonega, GA. Forest Service employees, Volunteers, and members of the Public all came together to celebrate Wilderness. During the event there was great live music and several amazing speakers which included **Nathan Mynatt**, a SAWS ranger working in Georgia's Wildernesses; **Betty Jewett**, Forest Supervisor for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest; **Liz Agpaoa**, Regional Forester; the key note speaker was **Dale Bosworth**, former Chief of the Forest Service; and the event was emceed by **John Campbell**, Recreation Program Manager with the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. They all had exciting things to say about the past and future of wilderness both in Georgia and across America. In conjunction with the speakers, the event also had several interactive stations for guests. Many wilderness stewardship partners set up booths to educate the public and gain new support. Team Conasauga had a great setup and was staffed by; **Troy and Wanda Brown, Robert Edmonson, Tom Owens, Larry Thomas, Charlie Crider, Gail Milner, and Jim Bishop**.

Next to the stewardship partners was an excellent cross-cut demonstration manned by **Jim Holland** and **Steve Davis.** Just beyond them **Alex Winsch**, seasonal wilderness ranger, and **Taylor Hamilton**, wilderness and trails technician for the Blue Ridge R.D., presented Leave No Trace activities for the younger attendees. This was an amazing event that really showed the high level of appreciation Georgia has for its Wilderness areas. Thank you to everyone who attended and participated at this truly inspirational event.

During the 50th Anniversary Event, one of the objectives for the Team Conasauga booth was to advertise our September workday. The workday was held on one of the more accessible trails in the Cohutta Wilderness, Chestnut Lead, and also celebrated National Public Lands Day. The Team Conasauga members did a great job and we had three new volunteers join us on September 20th. That Saturday was a beautiful day to work in the Wilderness. Ten volunteers attended: **Amos Burrell, Dan Newman, David Tanner, Jim Leatherwood, Troy Brown, Travis Sanchez and Justin Sanchez** with three new volunteers **Deb Chavez, Greg Chavez, and Kim Westcott**. We accomplished our goal to sling blade down to the Conasauga River and Troy and David worked the waterbars on the first third of the trail. After we ate a late lunch down at the river we started the long climb back to the top to the mountain. This was a great day to be in the wilderness, and thanks to everyone who attended.

> > > > October << < <

October 4th brought us a cool start to the Team Conasauga Workday on the East Cowpen Trail. My truck said 41° at the trailhead but most say that's good working weather. We had 14 volunteers donate their time for the Cohutta Wilderness and they were: **Gail Milner, Jim Bishop, Charlie Crider, Kim Westcott, Jim Leatherwood, Troy and Wanda Brown, Robert Edmonson, Larry Thomas, Travis and Justin Sanchez, Helen Chamberlain, David Tanner** and a new volunteer **Derek Kozlowski**. Our charge was to repair all the waterbars on the north end of the East Cowpen Trail. We easily completed the task despite the amount of work some of them needed. We took lunch just shy of the gap at the trail junction below Buckeye Mountain. We finished the rolling grade dips and took a small break at the gap while Robert and Derek hiked to the top of Buckeye Mountain. We hiked down the mountain to the trailhead together, shared food and fellowship, and concluded a great day of wilderness stewardship. Thank you for all the hard work.

Also on Saturday, October 4th the Dry Creek Volunteers had a great work day. They had twelve Volunteers equally representing both the Back Country Horsemen of Northwest Georgia and the Northwest Georgia chapter of the

Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association. **Rick Manis, Bill Semsrott, David Wheaton, Larry Vanden Bosch, Steve Harrell, Kathy Hansen, Kathy and Eddie Henson, Larry Wheat, Louis and Melody Bondurant, and Scott Ross** donated their time to help maintain the Dry Creek Trail System. They took full advantage of this beautiful day and accomplished many projects both on trail and at the trailhead. Thank you so much. For full write up on the workday and/or more information on upcoming workday at Dry Creek Trail System you can contact Larry Wheat at l.wheat@mindspring.com or follow them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/groups/DryCreek/.

AND finally, we conclude the fiscal year and this newsletter with the 24th annual **Volunteer Appreciation Picnic** held on October 25. The picnic was held again this year at the Pocket Campground pavilion. It was a beautiful day with a very nice turnout to celebrate the accomplishments of our great volunteer community this year. So what were we celebrating? This year on the Conasauga Ranger District we had 140 Volunteers contributing a total of 3,577 hours of service. In addition, the two camp hosts, **Tim Woody** at Lake Conasauga and **Bobby Hatfield** at the Pocket campgrounds, accorded 1,243 hours. We had 4 Boy Scout Eagle Scout projects that included 67 participants and totaled 650 hours of work. The motor trail volunteers were busy in the spring, recording over 325 hours of work for nearly $5,000 worth of the matching funding that allows us to continue to utilize State funds for maintaining the OHV trails. We also had two youth crews on the district

this year, an 8 person Alternative Spring Break crew from Northern Illinois University, and an 8 person YCC/SCA combination crew. Together they contributed another 960 hours to our trails program for a grand total on the district of 6,755 hours which is an increase of over 1,000 hours over last year's grand total. This mountain of work touched over 75% of our trail system on the District. It also helped complete many major projects across the District like the completion of the Dennis Mill section of the Pinhoti, a reroute around a small landslide on the Jacks River trail, the reconstruction of the 200 foot long boardwalk on the Pocket loop trail, a new kiosk at the Chickamauga Creek trail, the blazing of the Bear Creek trail, the development of a 5 year trail plan, and the planning and performance of multiple Wilderness 50th celebration events.

So, **Yes** there was plenty to celebrate this year.

All these accomplishments would not be achievable without a strong and vibrant volunteer community. Inside this community we have some outstanding individuals that we like to give a special thanks to each year by recognizing them as Top Guns. Each one of these five volunteers gave at least 150 hours of service this year and together have thousands of hours over their tenure. First is **Larry Thomas**, who gave 150.5 hours this year with a lifetime total of 370.5 hours. Second is **Jim Holland** with 157 hours this year and 1,377 lifetime hours. Third is **Larry Wheat** with 173.25 hours this year with 1,569 lifetime hours. Fourth is **Troy Brown** with 216.5 hours this year with a lifetime total of 9,102.5 hours. Our fifth and top contributor this year is **Wanda Brown** with 279 hours this year and a lifetime total of 8,709 hours. Thank you all so much for your contributions this year. For all those who were not mentioned, please do not let it diminish your importance. You make up the rest of our large Volunteer Community and are just too numerous to list in this format. It is because of you that we get all these great projects completed and achieve more and more stewardship each and every year.

Thank You

Dates for the Rest of the Year:

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

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

December 6, 2014 – Dry Creek Volunteer Workday, contact Larry Wheat at l.wheat@mindspring.com

December 13, 2014 – TBA *open for now*

2015 Volunteer Training Opportunities:

January 31, 2015 – CPR/First Aid Certification

March 7, 2015 – Chainsaw Certification

May 9, 2015 – Crosscut Certification

For more information contact Karen Larsen at 706-695-6736 or kalarsen@fs.fed.us

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

Team Conasauga: **www.teamconasauga.org** or **www.facebook.com/teamconasauga**

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~