



# Trail Talk

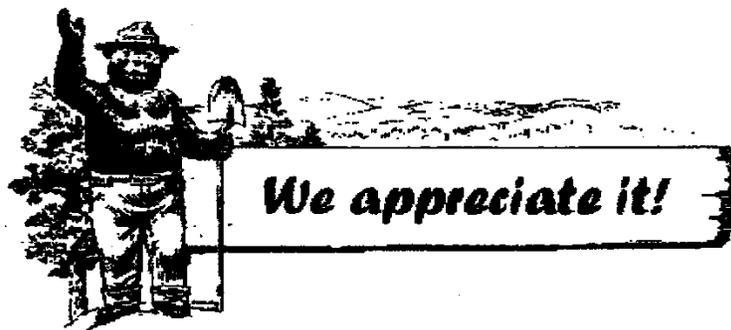
March & April

2015

Spring is in full swing, the days are heating up and so is the volunteer work throughout the Conasauga Ranger District. During the last two months we have gotten a lot of work done across the district. The Friends of Dry Creek had two great workdays and Larry Wheat has written two wonderful articles to tell us all about it. Team Conasauga also had two great workdays inside the wilderness, one of which they partnered with the Southern Area Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) to tackle Penitentiary Branch.

Once again the Conasauga Ranger District was pleased to host students from Northern Illinois University (NIU) for an Alternative Spring Break trip and they got all kinds of work done during a very soggy week. Also, we had a very successful volunteer chainsaw class taught by Jim Holland. Things have been busy but we are just ramping up for what I am sure will be another excellent summer season in the Southern Appalachian of northwest Georgia.

Lately I have been meeting some interested folks who want to volunteer but for whatever reason they can't make the organized workdays. Don't worry; there are a lot of volunteer opportunities out there that only need one person or a small group. If this pertains to you, please contact me at [kvasalinda@fs.fed.us](mailto:kvasalinda@fs.fed.us) and based on your knowledge and experience, I'm sure we can pair you up with stewardship actions that will be a benefit to our public lands.



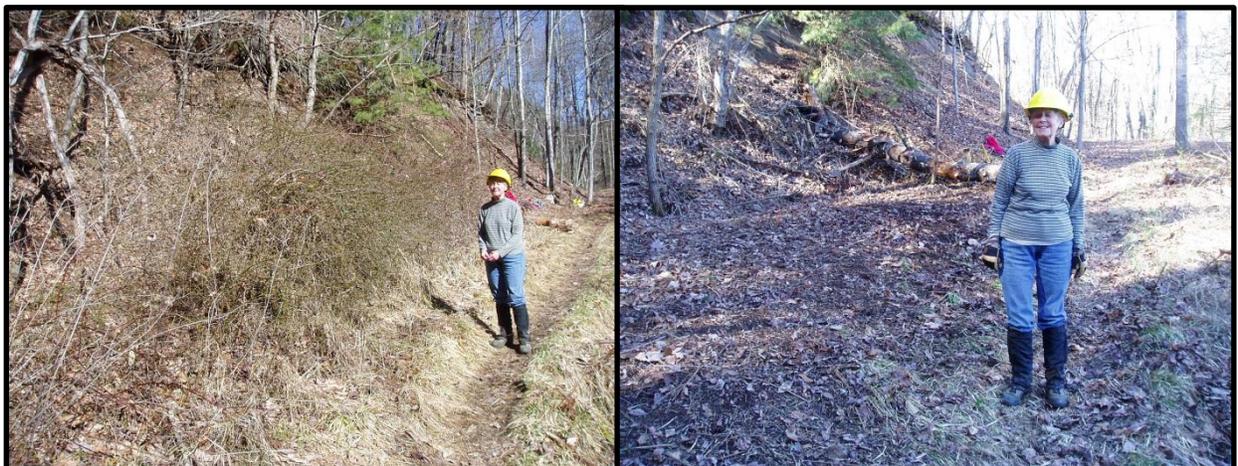
> > > > **March** < < < <

## Team Conasauga and SAWS Tackle Penitentiary Branch



Early this winter when the Southern Area Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) contacted me about partnering on a volunteer day in the Cohutta Wilderness, I knew exactly what trail to suggest. Penitentiary Branch Trail lives up to its name. It's remote, it's rugged, it has a lot of waterbars, almost 200, as the trail makes its way down to Jacks River, and it was up on rotation for maintenance. The date was set for March 7<sup>th</sup> and Team Conasauga needed a big crowd to get all of the waterbars done in a single day, especially when you take into consideration that it is a 2.5 mile uphill

hike just to get the beginning of Penitentiary Branch trail. The volunteers heard the call and we had a great group come out to work on the trail. **Twenty-one in total** including members of several groups not already mentioned, such as the Benton MacKaye Trail Association and the Backcountry Horsemen of North Georgia. **Bill Hodge, Tom and Tannis Blackwell, Troy and Wanda Brown, Johnathan Corrier, Robert Edmondson, John Franant, Jim Leatherwood, Stephanie Campbell, Eric Giebelstein, Allison Williams, Bob and Melinda Wagner, Kelly and Brandon Arp, Barry Allen, Joe and Debbie Connell, Kathleen Corcoran, and Tim Goudie** marched their way up Hemp Top trail to begin the trail work. Everyone worked very hard that day completing all but a handful of waterbars on Penitentiary Branch Trail. What a huge accomplishment! I would also like to highlight that Tom and Tannis Blackwell stayed back on Hemp Top trail to beat back some multi-flora rose that was choking the trail and pushing users off the side of the mountain. This was an amazing project to get done and I think the pictures do more than speak for themselves. Thanks to all for your hard work and dedication.



## Volunteer Chainsaw Class

Even with the large crowd working in the wilderness on March 7<sup>th</sup>, we still had a full volunteer chainsaw class at the base of the mountains in Chatsworth. I would first like to thank **Jim Holland** for leading and instructing the class; he does a wonderful job. I would also like to congratulate the Volunteers who took the class, most of which are new sawyers. **Derek Kozlowski, Ryan Byers, Louis Bondurant, Richard Sullivan, Jim McGarvey, Ken Krick, Eric Eades, Patricia Patelle, Michael Patelle, Larry Wheat, Zoe Zardis, Noel Durant, and Ken Jones.** Thank you so much and I hope you use your new skills soon.



## “Best Spring Break Ever!”

By: Karen Larsen



An amazing group of students from Northern Illinois University once again graced the trails on the Conasauga Ranger District during their Alternative Spring Break sponsored by the University’s recreation program “Outdoor Adventures”. Twelve enthusiastic young men and women: **Mike Brien, Mikey Pappas, Hayley Sprow, Len LiPetri, Nathan Tripp, Tyler Pelligrini, Sarah Stendebach, Bailey Wolters, Stefani Krautstrunk, Michael Payne, Jessica Wind, and Mateusz Kruk** joined USFS recreation staff to complete several much-needed projects over the course of the week. Work included construction of railing and size-limiting gates at the Houston Valley OHV trail system, making and installing routed signs for several developed recreation sites, finishing work on a major step construction project at the Pocket Day Use Area, and major trail rehabilitation work on the popular Keown Falls Trail. The weather was anything but cooperative, with rain every single day, but this awesome group didn’t let

that dampen their spirits one bit. In fact, we think they kind of liked it, and we dubbed our adventure with them “Mudfest”! With their can-do attitude, they kept the Forest Service folks scrambling to keep ahead of them with the needed tools and materials, getting more projects done than we had anticipated. In the evenings, the crew enjoyed their free-time at the rustic John’s Mountain check-station cooking family-style meals, hiking around the nearby Girl Scout Camp and playing intriguing



games of “Mafia”. At the end of their week, they rounded out their trip with a much-deserved recreational trek into the Cohutta Wilderness before heading back to the icy North. The Conasauga RD can’t thank these young Volunteers enough. They donated close to 500 hours of service, completed more work than we could have accomplished in a month’s time, and we had a blast working with them. As one NIU crew member summed it up “Best Spring Break Ever!”

## Thank You Dry Creek/Pinhoti Trail Volunteers

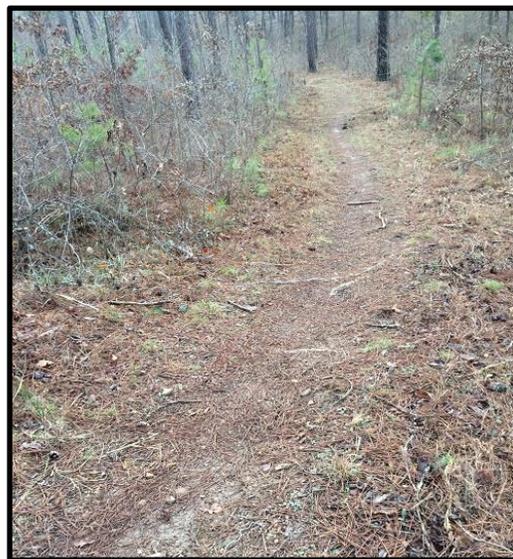
By Larry Wheat, CONF Trail Crew Leader



On March 21<sup>st</sup> we had six Volunteers come out and work to improve the popular Dry Creek Trail System. Each one of them made personal sacrifices in order to perform this trail maintenance. The Volunteers were **Gennie Dasinger and Marcus Moore from the NWGA SORBA bicycle group and Joe Schoech, Carole Pinion, Kathy Hansen, and Larry Wheat from the BCHNWG equestrian organization.** While the numbers were small, the volunteer contributions were great.

With specific U.S. Forest Service approval on a case by case basis, we used two UTVs to transport workers with chainsaws to clear deadfall or to haul crushed rock to harden wet spots. We have water seeping out on about 150 yards of the Purple trail during the wet season. We added underlying fabric and then placed crushed rock on top of the fabric. Marcus and Joe did most of the rock hauling and spreading. Kathy and Gennie spent most of their time chain sawing deadfall on parts of the Red trail, and they wrapped up the day by hauling one load of rock.

Carole and Larry used a brush and field mower to cut back weeds and brush along a few hundred yards of the Orange trail. Due to special vegetation control guidance we are allowed to mow portions of this trail only in the winter months.



The next photograph [previous page right] shows the finished trail. We also trimmed brush on a portion of the Green trail. A special thanks goes to Kathy Hansen for bringing both the brush mower and her UTV. And likewise, thanks to Joe Schoech for bringing his UTV.



And a sincere 'Thank You' is extended to the U.S. Forest Service, Conasauga Ranger District, for providing ample crushed rock and for permission to use UTVs on this workday. The progress made would not have possible without the Forest Service support.

During the wet season one may enjoy the peaceful view of our own "Dry Creek Swamp" that is located between FS 226A and the East Armuchee Creek.

There are also one or more 'sink holes' located within the trail system. One may be spotted from the lower Red trail, just south of the intersection with FS 226A.



## Thank You Dry Creek Volunteers-Collaborative Effort Success

By Larry Wheat, CONF Trail Crew Leader



This photograph tells the story of our success in one frame - cooperation between our hikers, bikers, and equestrians. On a gorgeous weather day 14 Volunteers contributed their time and resources to keep the Dry Creek Trail System in excellent condition. This team provided 111.5 hours of service including on-site work, travel and administration. Nine people drove 3 or more hours round trip to help on Saturday, April 4<sup>th</sup>.

The Volunteers and their primary trail use follow:

***Hikers were Tom and Tannis Blackwell and Pic Petelle; bicyclists were Bill Hester, Ray Blevins, and Charles Brogden; equestrians were Patricia Petelle, Kathy Hansen, Kathy and Eddie Henson, Joe Schoech, Ellen and Bill Stara, and Larry Wheat. A sincere THANK YOU to each one of these volunteers.***



The Dry Creek National Forest trails were opened by the U.S. Forest Service in June 2011, nearly four years ago. As expected they are popular trails with primary use by equestrians and mountain bicyclists. Trail system maintenance is provided primarily by Volunteers from the Back Country Horsemen of Northwest Georgia (BCHNWG) and the Northwest Georgia Chapter of the Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association (NWGA SORBA), strongly supported by the Conasauga Ranger District of the U.S. Forest Service.

Five planned tasks were completed plus some additional trail brush trimming.

The tasks were:

- Mow and trim the short grass at the trailhead (picnic table, toilet and kiosk, and handicap mounting areas)
- Haul crushed rock and harden a few trail wet areas on upper Purple trail #239
- Clean out and de berm water diversions on part of upper Red trail #240
- Trim brush and clean water drainages on 200 yards of lower Purple trail #239
- Repair erosion turnouts on double track portion of the regional Pinhoti Trail on the hill just south of the Pinhoti junction with the Pink trail #235. This required a trail machine.

In addition, brush was trimmed on the Loblolly Spur Trail #241 and empty beverage cans were

picked up on part of the upper Red trail and at one of the primitive campsites.



Our next general trail workday is planned for Saturday, May 9<sup>th</sup>. This is one week later than normal, to accommodate equestrians who hopefully are participating in the unique BCH of Georgia Chickamauga Battlefield ride with a historian. Our June workday will be June 6<sup>th</sup>, National Trails Day®. Several pictures were taken at the April 4<sup>th</sup> workday. Photographers were Kathy Henson, Kathy Hansen, Joe Schoech, and Larry Wheat. A photo album has been placed in Facebook, in the Friends of Dry Creek Trail System group, with the label "[April 5, 2015](#)".

## Divide and Conquer

For whatever reason Team Conasauga didn't get a big crowd for the April 11<sup>th</sup> workday. The trail to be worked was Tearbritches and we all know Tearbritches is a lot like Penitentiary Branch, you need quite a few folks to get all the waterbars done in one day. As I was getting tools around that morning I had an idea to break the small group up and work on two different projects. I thought this would be great because the



sign at Bray Field on the Conasauga River needed replacing and I only needed a few people to help tow the locust post down the trail with me. At the trailhead I met **Larry Thomas, Wanda Brown, Amos Burrell, and Robert, Deede, and Robby Edmondson**. Together we discussed my plan and it was decided that Larry, Wanda, and Amos would work on waterbars on Tearbritches trail and the Edmondsons would help me replace the sign at Bray Field. Not that anyone will be surprised but the dream team of Larry, Wanda, and Amos completed 43 waterbars. Great Job!! Meanwhile Robert helped me carry the 100+ pound locust post to Bray Field, Deede carried the signs, and Robby carried the posthole diggers. The log got heavy as we made our way around the beaver pond but it was worth it since the old sign had broken off at the base and was leaning against a near-by tree. Thank you so much for your help, Edmondsons, on this abnormal but important project.



## Dates for the 2015 Workdays:

**May 1-2, 2015** – Hickory Ridge / Horseshoe Bend Trail (waterbars)  
(Working Weekend # 75)

**May 2, 2015** – Dry Creek Work Day,  
contact Larry Wheat  
at [l.wheat@mindspring.com](mailto:l.wheat@mindspring.com)

**June 6, 2015** – East Cowpen Trail, Three Forks TH (slingblade)  
(National Trails Day®)

**June 6, 2015** - Dry Creek Work Day,  
contact Larry Wheat at  
[l.wheat@mindspring.com](mailto:l.wheat@mindspring.com)  
(National Trails Day®)

**July 10-11, 2015** – Rough Ridge Trail (sling blade)  
(Working Weekend # 76)

**July 18, 2015** - Dry Creek Work Day,  
contact Larry Wheat  
at [l.wheat@mindspring.com](mailto:l.wheat@mindspring.com)

**August 1, 2015** - Dry Creek Work Day,  
contact Larry Wheat  
at [l.wheat@mindspring.com](mailto:l.wheat@mindspring.com)

**August 8, 2015** – Lower Jacks River Trail  
(campsite maintenance)

**September 5, 2015** - Dry Creek Work Day,  
contact Larry Wheat  
at [l.wheat@mindspring.com](mailto:l.wheat@mindspring.com)

**September 12, 2015** – Lower Jacks River Trail  
(sling blade)

**October 3, 2015** - Dry Creek Work Day,  
contact Larry Wheat  
at [l.wheat@mindspring.com](mailto:l.wheat@mindspring.com)

**October 3, 2015** – Team Conasauga (TBA)





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 safe, enjoyable trail experiences for our forest users...

Team Conasauga: [www.teamconasauga.org](http://www.teamconasauga.org) or [www.facebook.com/teamconasauga](https://www.facebook.com/teamconasauga)

Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA): [www.bmta.org](http://www.bmta.org)

Backcountry Horsemen of Northwest Georgia (BCHNWG): [www.bchnwg.org](http://www.bchnwg.org)

Backcountry Horsemen of North Georgia (BCHNG): [www.bchng.org](http://www.bchng.org)

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

Georgia Pinhoti Trail Association: [www.pinhoti.info](http://www.pinhoti.info)

Appalachian Trail Association (GATC): [www.georgia-atclub.org](http://www.georgia-atclub.org)

Ellijay Mountain Biking Association (EMBA): [www.ellijaymountainbike.org](http://www.ellijaymountainbike.org)

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

Co-Trails: [www.cotrails.org](http://www.cotrails.org)

If you would like to be added to the mailing list or have any other questions, please contact me at [kvasalinda@fs.fed.us](mailto:kvasalinda@fs.fed.us).

Thanks and see you on the trail.

*~Kevin~*

