

WHY WILDERNESS?

WHAT THE LAST REMAINING WILD LANDS OF THE SOUTHERN
APPALACHIANS MEAN TO THE PEOPLE OF THE SOUTHEAST



THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

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EDITOR/DESIGNER/ART DIRECTOR

Jamie Douglas
Daylight Communications

PHOTOGRAPHY

Kathryn Kolb
www.kathrynkolb.com

MAPS

GreenInfo Network
www.greeninfo.org

Mark Wilbert
The Wilderness Society



CONTRIBUTORS

Michelle Ackermann
Victoria Aronoff
Butch Clay
George Gay
Jerry Greenberg
Peter Kirby
Darrell Knuffke
Jennifer McCabe
Shirl Parsons
Bob Perschel
Frank Peterman
Pamela Sery
Ann Strohm
Sally Wells



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THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

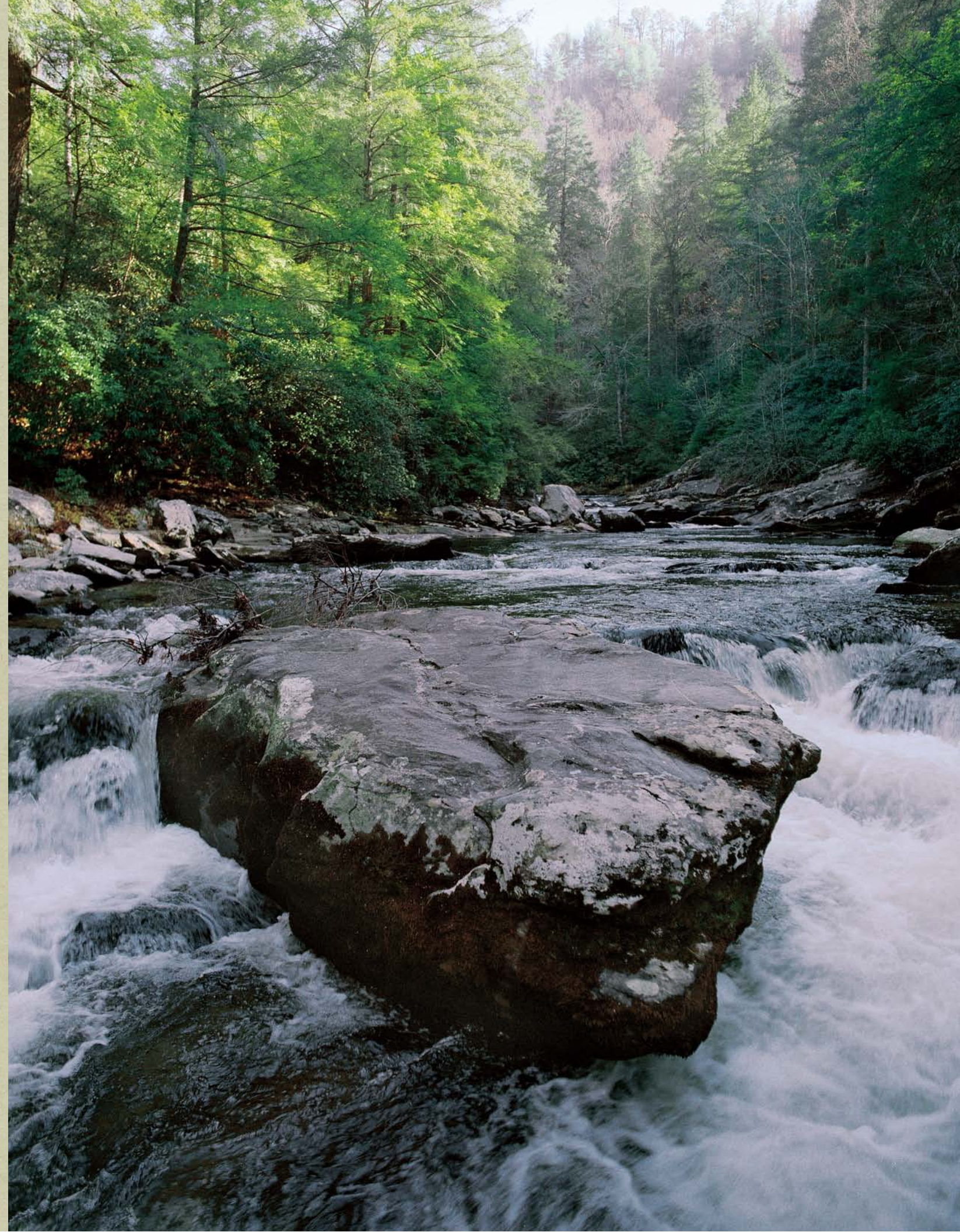
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FRONT COVER: Lewis Fork/Little Wilson Creek roadless area from the Mount Rogers summit trail, Jefferson National Forest, Virginia.

BACK COVER: Old-growth tulip poplar, Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest, Nantahala National Forest, North Carolina.

FACING PAGE: Chattooga River at Rock Gorge, on the border of the Sumter National Forest, South Carolina, and the Chattahoochee National Forest, Georgia.





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SIPSEY WILDERNESS, BANKHEAD NATIONAL FOREST, ALABAMA

*“The people of the South have a special connection to the land:
for so many of us, for so long, the land is all we had.”*

PREFACE: “THE WILDERNESS LIVES IN ALL OF US”



I was born and grew up in rural Alabama. I return there as often as I can — to the outdoors I love and that has taught me so much.

Walking through fields, smelling the wildflowers, touching the ancient oaks, poplars and pines, I learned wonder. Drinking from a fresh water spring, I learned purity. Fishing with a simple cane pole, I learned contemplation and patience. Feeling the dirt and pine straw between my toes, I learned the wilderness is a part of me — I cannot and never will separate myself from its beauty and peacefulness.

The people of the South have a special connection to the land: for so many of us, for so long, the land is all we had. It is our home — what we are in tune with. For those of us who know the Southern wilderness, we will forever long to be reconnected with this part of our lives.

For those who haven’t experienced our wilderness, it will welcome without judgement. Take young people away

from the concrete and asphalt jungle of the city and give them the chance to spend time in the woods, and they will be transformed forever by the fresh air, the clean rivers, the openness, and the peace they find there.

The wilderness lives in all of us, and we shouldn’t try to separate ourselves from it. To experience its gifts makes us better people. We live healthier and more wholesome lives when we spend more time in communion with our natural environment.

Part of the problem we have in our society, particularly in urban centers, is that we don’t lose ourselves to what is natural. In our rush to progress technologically and to grow economically, we sometimes forget about the things that give people a sense of fulfillment and happiness. People have busy lives and difficult priorities — raising families, educating their children, trying to get ahead. But it shouldn’t be an either-or-choice when it comes to protecting wilderness. We must be willing to move beyond our own selves and our own problems and consider the larger impact of our actions and the legacy we leave for our children. If we don’t, we will lose a part of our humanity we can’t replace.

I believe that in the coming days and years, the cause of civil rights will become more and more about protecting green spaces and open land, about clean air, clean water, and clean land. It is about our fundamental right to pursue a healthy life — physically, mentally, and psychologically.

The incredible beauty and pristine quality of the Southern Appalachians wilderness is a rare and very special gift that we must never take for granted. It is not right for any of us to abuse it, misuse it, or claim it for our own reason. I don’t believe there is a limit to the amount we should protect. We must demand that policymakers at all levels set aside more wilderness, and find a way to bring green spaces to the urban centers as well.

We all can play a role.

Use your vote.

Lobby your county, state, and federal elected officials.

Read this book, and find out more about the natural treasures in our own back yard.

Ask your neighbors and fellow citizens to join you in protecting the wilderness areas we have left.

And, like the people you will meet in this book, share your experience of wilderness with others.

Together, we can fulfill this mission: to leave our planet a little greener and a little more peaceful.

U.S. Representative John Lewis
Fifth Congressional District
Georgia

INTRODUCTION: “THIS BOOK CONNECTS PEOPLE AND PLACE”



WILLIAM MEADOWS, PRESIDENT

Initially, we intended this book to be simply the Southern conservation community’s immediate and long-term recommendations to the U.S. Forest Service of land to be permanently protected as “Wilderness” [see sidebar on page 9] in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Yet, as we asked our fellow Southerners “Why Wilderness?” we found a deeper connection to the Southern Appalachian wild lands than we ever expected.

The South has a historic land ethic. Traditionally a rural and agrarian culture, the Southern connection of family roots to the land cannot be overstated. In making this book, we found that generations of hunters, anglers, farmers, teachers, developers, hikers, mothers, urban ministers, grandfathers, and Wilderness activists alike have shared that ethic. Each person may have a different access point to it; each person may give it a different name — be it “land conservation,” “stewardship,” or “just keeping the land the way it is.” But all who experience

Wilderness understand its essential role in Southern culture.

As we asked “Why Wilderness?” we found a widely shared respect for nature’s spiritual and humanizing values. Many talked to us about the healing powers experienced in wilderness. Nearly all spoke of their connection to a larger community of life — greater than oneself and yet vital to one’s individual well being. Many said they met their true selves in wilderness and were made whole by the experience.

As a native Tennessean, I share this passion for the Southern Appalachians. As a Wilderness advocate, I’m excited about the way this book connects people and place: Kathryn Kolb’s photography not only reflects the region’s extraordinary beauty and unique visual identity, it captures the mystery, surprise, and untamed charm of this world just beyond our back yards. The maps amplify how little of our remaining wild lands are protected, and how much of it is so close to our fastest-growing urban centers. The Southern voices recorded here confirm how much these wild lands mean to us, whether we are urban ministers, suburban homeowners, or rural farmers.

This book reminds me of how far we’ve come since I became an environmental activist more than 30 years ago. We’ve passed the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act. We’ve set aside 106 million acres of designated Wilderness. We’ve seen an infusion of ecological values in American life — from environmental studies in

classrooms, to recycling, to the slow but sure growth of renewable technologies.

Still, time is running out for the last remaining wild lands of the Southern Appalachians. A decade of unprecedented growth has dramatically accelerated the inevitable collision between land conservation and urbanized sprawl. Today, only eight percent of our Southern Appalachian National Forests is permanently protected as designated Wilderness. Amazingly, this is only about one percent of the entire Southern Appalachian region. With each new round of forest planning, fewer opportunities exist to preserve more of our wild lands.

Wilderness areas are the heart and soul of these wild lands. They represent the ideal, the wellspring of all that wild lands — and even parks, open spaces, and urban green areas — have to offer. As we allow potential Wilderness to be developed, mined, logged, or roaded, it loses that ideal character forever.

Moreover, as more generations grow up without the experience of wilderness, its intrinsic spiritual, cultural, and personal values cease to imprint the fabric of our society, values whose loss undeniably impoverishes our way of life.

Wilderness molded American history and nurtured our most cherished values: freedom, independence, ingenuity, perseverance, and optimism.

Wilderness saves our Twenty-First Century souls. It provides our last refuge from the relentless pressures, noise, and pollution of urban and suburban life.

Wilderness rewards us with life-altering experiences of awe, humility, wonder, solitude, self-reflection, and reverence found nowhere else in our lives.

Underlying all these values is interdependence — what wilderness teaches us about being a part of something greater than ourselves. People tell me that even the idea of Wilderness gives them a special comfort and confidence — knowing that in a world of constant change and shifting values, society has made a decision: we want to protect these places forever. At the same time, I cannot underestimate the importance of experiencing Wilderness firsthand. That is a primary reason why The Wilderness Society wants to create more opportunities for that experience. That means, simply, we need to preserve more of it.

This book is an excellent tool for bringing wilderness into people’s lives — physically and philosophically. Use it to examine the role of Wilderness in your own life. Be confident in putting the question “Why Wilderness?” to your family, friends, and colleagues — I know you will be inspired by what you find.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "William Meadows".

William Meadows
President
The Wilderness Society
July 2004



BLACK MOUNTAIN RIDGES, PISGAH NATIONAL FOREST, NORTH CAROLINA

Big “W” Wilderness or little “w” wilderness?

The term “wilderness” has played a powerful role in the shaping of American culture and history. For many Americans, it evokes philosophical, spiritual, and poetic meanings. For some, it is interchangeable with “the woods,” “wild lands,” or “nature.” For others, it more specifically refers to “where no one else is” or “untrammelled” and “untouched” land. Still others describe it more personally as “original Creation” or “part of the American soul.” For clarity in this book, we use uppercase “W” Wilderness for land protected as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. For the generic or personal sense, we use lowercase “w” wilderness.

WHY WILDERNESS?

WHAT THE LAST REMAINING WILD LANDS OF THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIANS MEAN TO THE PEOPLE OF THE SOUTHEAST

Stretching more than 1,000 miles, the Southern Appalachians host one of the richest ecosystems on our planet. These mountains have supported life for more than 300 million years, since flowering plants first appeared on Earth. Rivers overflow with more aquatic species than anywhere in the world, and supply clean water to more than 10 million people. Neo-tropical songbirds summer in giant old-growth trees. Healthy black bear and river otter populations still thrive. Spectacular gorges, soaring peaks, and mysterious coves host world-class backcountry recreation.

But this rich vision of Southern Appalachian forests is a mere fraction of what existed before three centuries of European settlement dramatically changed the region. Untold numbers of wildlife species went extinct. Millions of acres of dense woodland and pristine watersheds succumbed to unregulated logging. Rivers were scoured and clogged with silt — parts of some rivers erased from the map altogether. Native American cultures became diminished and some disappeared entirely. Modern development claimed the landscape.

In the early Twentieth Century, conservationists proposed a system of public forest reserves allowing for various uses and limited extraction of resources, and several eastern National Forests and National Parks were established.

*The Southern
Appalachian National
Forests have become
islands amidst
a sea of highways
and encroaching
developments.*

The Southern Appalachian National Forests — the George Washington, Jefferson, Pisgah, Nantahala, Cherokee,

Chattahoochee, Sumter, Talladega and Bankhead — now total 4.7 million acres. The Great Smoky Mountains and Shenandoah National Parks protect an additional 840,000 acres. Together, these Parks and Forests comprise the greatest concentration of federally owned land in the eastern United States.

While the National Park Service mandate is resource protection and visitor enjoyment, the U.S. Forest Service is charged with managing its land for multiple uses, including watershed protection, limited logging, fish and wildlife habitat, and recreation. But by the 1960s, the Forest Service's main activities were building roads and preparing timber sales for private industry. By the mid-1980s, clear-cutting had become widespread in the Southern Appalachians.

Today, Southern Appalachian National Forests have become islands amidst a sea of highways and encroaching developments. Increased pressure to build roads, dam rivers, log forests, and mine mountains still threatens our remaining wild lands, as do widespread urban sprawl and air pollution.

Most Southern Appalachian Wilderness areas on our National Forests are small, averaging less than 10,000 acres; nationwide the National Forest average is almost 87,000 acres. Moreover, because of their popularity, many eastern Wilderness areas are overused, as for instance the Ellicott Rock Wilderness in South Carolina, the Cheaha in Alabama, Citico Creek in Tennessee, Lewis Fork in Virginia, Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock in North Carolina, and the Cohutta in Georgia. In the Cohutta, visitor use more than doubles that of any other Wilderness in the southern National Forests.

As more areas are logged, as wildlife habitats and watersheds shrink, as recreational demand increases, permanently protecting more land as Wilderness is crucial.

WILDERNESS: THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF PROTECTION

Enacted in 1964, the Wilderness Act created the National Wilderness Preservation System, and defined protected Wilderness as follows:

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate

TOP RIGHT: OAK LEAVES,
CONASAUGA RIVER,
CHATTAHOOCHEE NATIONAL
FOREST, GEORGIA

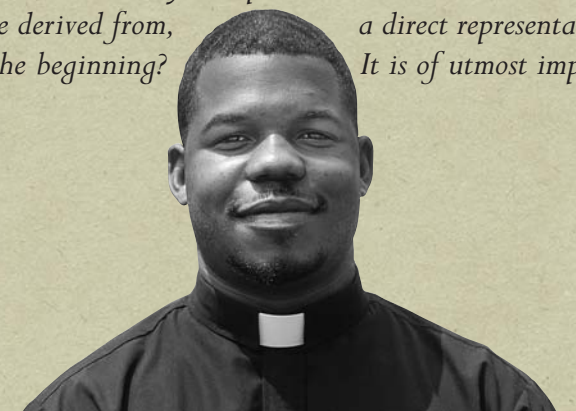


A transforming power

Reverend Eugene Boger, Poplar Spring United Methodist Church,
Atlanta, Georgia

Reverend Boger grew up in the ganglands of South Central Los Angeles. At age 15, he traveled to California's Sierra Mountains and developed an immediate interest in wildlife and the peace he found there, and a belief that wilderness has a transforming power — for youth in particular.

“Being in nature, removed from the gangs and violence, I learned not to take certain things for granted. I developed a renewed outlook on life. The preservation of wilderness, in that sense, is about preserving ourselves. We take great steps to preserve the homes of famous and influential people and historical areas in cities. Why not preserve wilderness — the environment that we all have derived from, a direct representation of God’s creation from the beginning? It is of utmost importance.”





The great neutralizer

Mike Wechter and Lorilei Swanson, parents of Elliott,
Mountain Rest, South Carolina

Lorilei is a family therapist. Mike is a physician's assistant. Both are former Chattooga River guides. We sat with Mike, Lorilei, and Elliott on the porch of their home and talked about the Chattooga River and what can be learned from wilderness.

“Wilderness is the great neutralizer. No one person is better or worse than another when you go into the woods. You get down to core values: food, shelter, water. People who don't get that are not bad people — it's just not in their experience. We can easily get caught up fighting each other, but that's destructive. We need to find a common ground, just as nature does. It's a whole lot easier said than done, but it comes down to respect.”



the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.

The Act enabled Congress to designate “Wilderness” areas in National Forests, National Parks, and other federal lands to be kept permanently undeveloped. Wilderness areas are protected from timber-cutting, roads, dams, and since 1984, from new mining claims and mineral leasing. In short, Wilderness designation allows the forest to follow its own natural processes. Other protected lands — such as “backcountry recreation” areas — restrict logging and road-building on a limited basis, but only designated Wilderness protects the forest forever.

The Wilderness Act — which established 9.1 million acres of Wilderness in 1964 — directed the Forest Service, the Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service to survey lands for possible additional Wilderness designation. (The Bureau of Land Management subsequently was directed to survey its lands in 1976). It is Congress' responsibility to decide which areas to protect. Since passage of the Act in 1964, Congress has

protected a total of 106 million acres across the country. The Southern Appalachians contain forty-three Wilderness areas totaling 473,000 acres. All of these are National Forest areas, except for the 81,000-acre Wilderness within Shenandoah National Park. Wilderness areas comprise eight percent of the total National Forest land and about one percent of all the land in the region.

In 1975, the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act allowed “regenerating” lands — lands growing back to a wild state — to be candidates for Wilderness designation. The Act designated 15 Wilderness areas in thirteen eastern states and required Wilderness studies for 17 additional areas. Today, hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, canoeing, kayaking, and climbing are popular activities in these beautiful protected places.

THE HUMAN VALUE OF WILDERNESS

Southern Appalachian Wilderness areas improve our quality of life. They grant us solitude and spiritual renewal, and escape from the noise, pollution, and frantic pace of urban life. They protect watersheds and improve air quality by acting as a filter for pollutants. They grow plants that contain the essential ingredients for many modern medicines. They offer spectacular beauty and world-class recreation; in fact, the Southern Appalachian National Forests host more than 50 million visitors each

year — a number expected to increase dramatically in the next decades.

WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE SURVIVAL

Wilderness areas are key components in efforts to protect large blocks of undisturbed forest habitat critical to the survival of many species. Wilderness can

Southern Appalachian

National Forests host

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in the next decades.

act as a refuge for species that are primary indicators of the overall health of the ecosystem.

For example, even though Wilderness areas in the Southern Appalachians are mostly small and isolated from each other and cannot by themselves

sustain viable populations of black bear, they are nevertheless a critical source of habitat for this important indicator species in many areas in the Southern Appalachians. Although black bear often inhabit non-Wilderness habitats, Wilderness affords the greatest protection from the primary contributors to black bear mortality and population decline. In short, Wilderness areas permanently provide core interior habitat unavailable elsewhere.

THESE ARE YOUR WILD LANDS — PLEASE HELP TO PROTECT THEM

Currently, there remain a significant number of high-quality candidates for Wilderness designation that should be protected for their core habitat values. These areas include pristine watersheds, critical wildlife habitats, and old growth forests that can provide a Wilderness-based foundation for ecosystem health and restoration across the Southern Appalachian landscape.

Bottom line: these wild lands are yours to protect — and their fate may be decided in the very near future.

Your voice and your actions can make a huge difference — and there are several easy ways for anyone to get involved. Please consider joining The Wilderness Society or a similar organization in your area dedicated to wild lands conservation.

For more information about how you can help protect wild lands in your area, please call The Wilderness Society's Atlanta office at: (404) 872-9453. Or visit our website: www.wilderness.org

TOP LEFT: VARIEGATED
MAIANTHEMUM RACEMOSA,
SAMPSON MOUNTAIN
WILDERNESS, CHEROKEE
NATIONAL FOREST,
TENNESSEE



THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY



SIPSEY WILDERNESS, BANKHEAD NATIONAL FOREST, ALABAMA

*Only about six percent of National Forest land in Alabama
is currently protected as designated Wilderness.*

WHY WILDERNESS?

Alabama

The Appalachians slowly lose elevation through western Georgia and finally come to an end on Alabama's Cumberland Plateau. Simply put, the features of the earth are written differently here. Unlike North Carolina, where the relief is stark and visible from afar, Alabama's wild lands constantly surprise, with jungle-like forests unlike any other in the eastern United States. Much of this area is truly primeval.

Only about six percent of the 660,000 acres of National Forest land in Alabama is currently protected as designated Wilderness, all of it in the Talladega and Bankhead National Forests. The Talladega hosts the long ridges characteristic of the end of the Ridge and Valley province. To the west, the Bankhead features a maze of lush canyons, cascading waterfalls, rich forests, gorges, pine-clad promontories, and dry oak uplands. Both the Bankhead and Talladega contain culturally historic sites; the Muskogee Creek were the most recent American Indian

inhabitants here, though archeological evidence indicates that these canyons have supported humans continuously for 10,000 years.

Logging has decimated Alabama's privately owned forests. Native mixed-hardwood forests are cut and often re-planted with monoculture loblolly pine "plantations" — the ecological equivalent of clearing the forest to plant corn. The National Biological Service reports that high-quality oak-hickory forests on the Cumberland Plateau are in 85-98% decline and considered endangered.

SIPSEY, THE CROWN JEWEL

Forty square miles of the Bankhead's geological and ecological wonders are preserved forever in the Sipsey Wilderness. Designated in 1975 and expanded in 1988, the 25,000-acre Sipsey is the largest and most frequently visited Wilderness area in Alabama. Here one finds the headwaters of Alabama's only Wild and Scenic River,

the Sipsey, highly favored for canoeing and swimming. Also, several rare species of neotropical migratory birds make their homes in this mature forest habitat.

CHEAHA AND DUGGER MOUNTAIN WILDERNESSES

Alabama's premier scenic vistas are found along this stretch of the Talladega Mountains. The 7,300-acre Cheaha Wilderness, designated in 1983 and expanded in 1988, lies next to Cheaha State Park, near Birmingham. The 100-mile long Pinhoti Trail, which one day will connect with the Appalachian Trail in Georgia, passes through both the Cheaha and Dugger Mountain Wilderness areas.

Designated in April 1999, the 9,200-acre Dugger Mountain Wilderness is Alabama's newest Wilderness area. More than 650 species of plants have been identified here, making Dugger a favorite with wildflower enthusiasts. Dugger Mountain is the second highest peak in Alabama and a popular hiking and hunting destination.

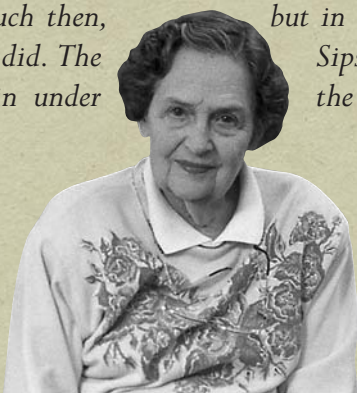


He said, "I don't need to go to Alabama"

Mary Burks, grandmother, Birmingham, Alabama

At 82 years old, Mary Burke still exudes the energy and passion for life of someone one-third her age — qualities that helped her fight successfully to protect the Sipsey Wilderness in the Bankhead National Forest more than 30 years ago.

"It was 1970. The choice was to save the land or have it clear cut — the government didn't make any bones about it. Six of us went to Washington, all Alabamans, all with low boiling points. We invited the Forest Service official to Alabama to view the Sipsey area. He said, 'I don't need to go to Alabama to know that there's nothing there that would qualify!' We were too polite to say much then, but in our hearts we said, 'We'll show him.' And we did. The Wildernesses went in under the Act of 1975."



OUTSTANDING CANDIDATE FOR WILDERNESS DESIGNATION IN THE BANKHEAD NATIONAL FOREST

The 5,850-acre Brushy Fork area is one of the wildest places left in Alabama, though not even officially listed as "roadless" by the Forest Service. It features steep slopes, sculptured rocks, cave-like overhangs, twenty miles of canyons, and 52 canyon-heads and waterfalls. Dry oak-hickory ridges criss-cross primeval canyons of old, diverse forest, rich in mosses, lichens, plunging 100-foot waterfalls, and ancient trees. Opportunities for solitude can be even greater here than in the neighboring, heavily visited Sipsey Wilderness.

OUTSTANDING CANDIDATES FOR WILDERNESS DESIGNATION IN THE TALLADEGA NATIONAL FOREST

The 6,000-acre Oakey Mountain roadless area contains a high mountain ridge covered in a variety of forest types, and also includes rich bottomland hardwood wetlands. This area — along with nearby Dugger Mountain Wilderness — comprises the South Fork watershed of Terrapin Creek and is considered a critical aquatic refuge for some fish and mussel species. Dry

TOP LEFT: BORDEN CREEK TRAIL,
SIPSEY WILDERNESS, BANKHEAD
NATIONAL FOREST, ALABAMA

oak-hickory-pine forest abounds here, with lower slopes and coves cloaked in white oak, beech, and basswood. The lower portion of the area, bordering the Chief Ladiga Trail, hosts river birch wetlands.

The Blue Mountain area comprises 4,800 acres lying between Horseblock Mountain and Blue Mountain, and includes an outstanding 3,900-acre inventoried roadless area. The topography here includes a series of narrow ridges, steep slopes, and small draws in the southern portion of the area. Second growth oak, hickory, and pine found on the ridges and slopes contrast with the rich oak-beech forest of the stream valleys, including the large and scenic Hillabee Creek. The Hillabee Creek municipal watershed within the Blue Mountain roadless area serves as a public water supply for the Anniston-Oxford area.

The 9,000-acre Rebecca Mountain area lies southwest of Cheaha Wilderness. Rock outcrops, such as Sherman Cliffs, offer spectacular views of farm valleys and forested hills of the Piedmont and the Ridge and Valley province. The higher ridges are forested with dry oak-hickory forests, while mixed hardwood-pine forests cloak middle and lower slopes. 🌲

TOP RIGHT: REBECCA MOUNTAIN,
TALLADEGA NATIONAL FOREST,
ALABAMA

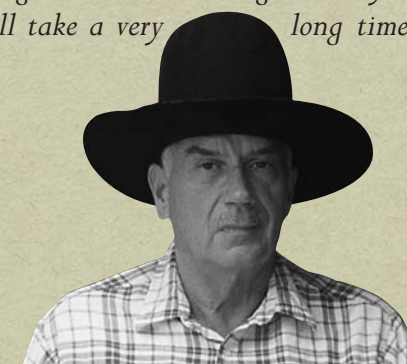


We'll be gone by then

Sam Curren, McCalla, Alabama

Of Cherokee ancestry, Sam is a virtual walking history book of Southeast Native American history. He grew up in the last big stand of long-leaf and hardwood trees in Alabama. His wilderness ethic comes not from textbooks or politics, but from his belief that the natural world is our salvation.

"We need to convince people that what they need to survive — drinking water, air, medicine — and what the land needs to survive are linked together. We have to think twice before we destroy something forever — before we dump pollution into the rivers, pour motor oil down drains, clear cut whole forests. My ancestors believed that Earth was created for man to live on but not take anything away permanently. Wilderness has a way to heal itself. But with huge cities encroaching in many areas, it will never come back — or it will take a very long time, and we'll all be gone by then."





CONASAUGA RIVER, CHATTAHOOCHEE NATIONAL FOREST, GEORGIA

*Ten million people visit the Chattahoochee National Forest
each year — more than the Great Smoky Mountains,
America's most heavily visited National Park.*

WHY WILDERNESS?

Georgia

In the 1990s, Georgia grew faster than any other state — a 26-percent explosion — making it the tenth most populous state in the nation. Yet, incredibly rugged and unprotected wild lands and pristine rivers await only a two-hour drive from Atlanta's sprawling metropolis.

The Forest Service recognizes the 750,000-acre Chattahoochee National Forest as one of the few urban National Forests in the country. Ten million people visit each year — more than the Great Smoky Mountains, America's most heavily visited National Park. Recreational demand, high-quality fisheries, mature forests, intact watersheds, and some of the most beautiful scenery in the Southeast are all compelling reasons to protect more Wilderness areas here.

POPULAR EXISTING WILDERNESS

There are 10 Wilderness areas in the Chattahoochee National Forest. The 35,000-acre Cohutta, designated in 1975 and expanded in 1986, is the largest, most heavily used National Forest Wilderness in the Southern Appalachians. More than 60,000 visitors each year — hunters, hikers, and fishermen — enjoy the area's spectacular gorges and rushing rivers. Cohutta's Conasauga and Jacks Rivers are renowned for their clear water and abundant fish. Elsewhere, 11 miles of Appalachian Trail snake through rugged terrain in the popular Blood Mountain Wilderness. Brasstown Wilderness — characterized by steep ridges, remote coves, and narrow valleys, and home to white-tail deer, wild turkey, and black bear —

encircles Georgia's highest mountain, the 4,800-foot Brasstown Bald.

OUTSTANDING CANDIDATES FOR WILDERNESS DESIGNATION

Kelly Ridge is a high, wild, and rugged 8,500-acre roadless area adjacent to Moccasin Creek and the 9,700-acre Tray Mountain Wilderness. Swallow Creek, an important trout stream, flows out of Kelly Ridge; its tributaries flow through the richest assemblage of north-facing hardwood coves in Georgia. Wilderness designation for Kelly Ridge, together with Tray Mountain, would permanently protect an 18,000-acre island in the sky, rich both in ecological treasures and scenery.

The 10,000-acre Mountaintown area lies just southeast of the Cohutta Wilderness.

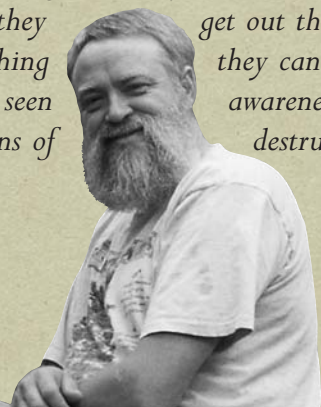


Get people out to the woods

**Jim Sullivan, canoe builder, botanist,
Toccoa, Georgia**

Jim grew up in Wisconsin and moved to Georgia more than 20 years ago. Today, he is based in the Chattahoochee National Forest. "So many of my best experiences have occurred in National Forests," says Jim, "so I spend much of my time advocating for their protection."

"How can we make the public more aware? First, I don't think people can make the connection with the natural world unless they get out in it. People with busy lives, commuting to work an hour each way, taking care of their families, who have no clue about it, don't get the connection from watching PBS nature specials. They might develop an interest, but they don't make a connection — until they get out there. People who do care deeply need to do everything they can. Get people out in the woods. Educate them. I've seen the awareness grow, but it's a very slow process and the means of destruction are very fast."



Here, the five-mile-long Mountaintown Creek Trail crisscrosses its namesake, a cascading stream with dramatic falls and gorges. The Benton MacKaye Trail runs along the high ridge in the eastern portion of the area and connects Alabama's Pinhoti Trail to the Appalachian Trail. Mountaintown features high-elevation terrain with steep slopes, waterfalls, and clear, broad streams popular with fishermen. It shelters rare and threatened plants, including purple-fringed orchid, mountain camellia, yellow lady's slipper, and stands of mixed oak and hickory old growth.

Rabun County includes three important areas that should be protected as Wilderness: Patterson Gap, Rabun Bald, and Three Forks.

The 5,500-acre Patterson Gap roadless area (also known as Joe Gap) features a high mountain bog on Keener Creek. This unusual ecosystem hosts the rare painted trillium and the bog turtle. Its diverse terrain includes rich north-facing coves, steep slopes, rock outcroppings, the 4,000-foot Wolf Knob, and excellent trout fishing in Persimmon Creek, Howard Branch, and their tributaries.

Named after the second highest peak in Georgia, the 5,000-acre Rabun Bald Roadless Area is believed to be the southern limit for many rare and endangered species, including a number of

**TOP LEFT: JACKS RIVER,
COHUTTA WILDERNESS AREA,
CHATTAHOOCHEE NATIONAL
FOREST, GEORGIA**

salamanders. One of Georgia's richest botanical sites, Rabun Bald dazzles visitors with orchids, trillium, azaleas, mountain laurel, and rhododendrons. It also harbors unique stands of dwarf oak and heath near the summit. Excellent opportunities for hiking abound along the Bartram National Recreation Trail, and native brook trout make this area a popular fishing destination. Incredibly, this rare wild land is open to logging.

Steep gorges with spectacular rock formations characterize the 3,000-acre Three Forks area. Here, Overflow, Holcomb and Big Creeks converge to form the West Fork of the Chattooga River, currently Georgia's only Wild and Scenic River. Accessed by Three Forks Trail, the area features some of the best native trout habitat remaining in Georgia, as well as pocket-sized stands of old growth along some streams.

Just north of Rich Mountain Wilderness is the 4,150-acre Cold Mountain area, which should be designated Wilderness; together these two areas constitute one large block of wild country — a vanishing resource in the Southern Appalachians. Cold Mountain contains rich coves covered with a deep, black potter's loam resulting in spectacular wildflower displays. Thick forests of basswood, ash, and black cherry support one of the region's best black bear populations. 🌲

**TOP RIGHT: CHANTERELLE
MUSHROOM CONASAUGA RIVER,
CHATTAHOOCHEE NATIONAL
FOREST, GEORGIA**



Intricate, complex, mysterious

**Manni Akbar (and student), Director,
Masjid Al-Muminun's Nur Academy, Atlanta, Georgia**

Manni's students started a garden in a vacant lot to learn how living things grow. "Rather than just taking them out in the wilderness where they can 'ooh' and 'ah,' we make nature a daily experience," says Manni. We talked with her at her school in Atlanta.

"I had my first experience with wilderness in college. I was a city person, and I had no idea what to expect. Soon I began to appreciate the unexpected and to seek out nature's places of beauty. It made me realize that if you ever doubt that you were created by something greater than yourself, the wilderness will erase it. No human being could create the intricate, complex, mysterious artistry of God that you find in the wilderness. Protecting wild spaces is a way of respecting God."





LOOKING TOWARD CRAGGY MOUNTAINS, PISGAH NATIONAL FOREST, FROM MT. MITCHELL, NORTH CAROLINA

*North Carolina wild lands are home to some of the
greatest biodiversity in North America.*

WHY WILDERNESS?

North Carolina

The core of the Southern Appalachians lies in the heart of western North Carolina. Here, the mountains reach their highest elevation and dramatic peaks loom against the sky. With habitats ranging from high, windy boreal forests, to lush moisture-loving groundcover, North Carolina wild lands are home to some of the greatest biodiversity in North America. Rare endangered plants thrive — such as mountain golden heather and Heller’s blazing star — and more old growth stands survive here than in any other Southern Appalachian state. In fact, the exceptional character of these North Carolina mountains inspired discussions by early conservationists that led to the formation of the National Forest system.

POPULAR EXISTING WILDERNESS AREAS

The Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests cover more than a million acres and are home to many of the state’s

existing and potential Wilderness areas. They also host millions of visitors each year. Shining Rock and Linville Gorge are among only three areas east of the Mississippi River that received protection under the Wilderness Act of 1964. Ellicott Rock and Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock were designated under the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act of 1975. Southern Nantahala and Middle Prong were designated in Wilderness legislation in 1984.

Cherokee tradition holds that the first woman, Selu, and the first man, Kanati, came from lands now within the boundaries of Shining Rock Wilderness. The Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness is famous for its large tract of virgin forest, and it is among the most beloved Wilderness areas in the United States.

SELECTED OUTSTANDING WILDERNESS AREAS

Also in 1984, Congress created five Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) —

a special category of lands that the Forest Service must consider for future Wilderness designation. These WSAs are Craggy Mountain (2,380 acres), Snowbird (8,500 acres), Overflow (4,000 acres), Lost Cove (5,900 acres), and Harper Creek (7,350 acres). Unfortunately, no Wilderness has been designated in North Carolina since 1984.

Other excellent potential Wilderness areas are in the Black Mountains, northeast of Asheville. This stunning mountain range features six of the highest peaks in the eastern United States and is one of the last remaining large-scale wild lands in North Carolina. The topography is dramatic — it is among the only areas in the region with avalanche chutes. The dark spruce-fir forests that give the Black Mountains their name cloak the high ridges, and cove hardwoods thrive along many creeks and streams at lower elevations.

Adjacent to Mt. Mitchell State Park, the 16,600-acre Black Mountain area



I don't feel shut out

Faye Orr, research chemist, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Faye owns land on the Haw River in the Piedmont area of North Carolina. She grew up on a farm north of Macon, Georgia, which was “cut right through when the interstate went in.” Work-related disabilities have forced her into unexpected mid-career changes but haven’t quieted her passion for the forest.

“Plants have evolved to protect us from viruses, and this is not just by chance — we need each other to survive, and there are so many plants that still have not been tested for medicinal qualities. Unfortunately, the richest areas are often the most exploited wilderness areas . . . I feel grateful that I can get to the areas where I can get to. I don’t think feeling ‘shut out’ by my disabilities is a good way to look at it. If people would pay attention to what’s around them and allow themselves to feel part of it, they could appreciate it and not look at what they can’t have.”



(including the 11,000-acre Balsam Cone roadless area) is one of the premier wild areas in North Carolina. It shelters a rare array of plants and animals, including a genetically unique population of saw-whet owls. Black Mountain is the second largest roadless area in the Pisgah and it forms the eastern flank of 6,700-foot Mt. Mitchell, the highest mountain east of the Mississippi. The 1,300-acre Middle Creek Research Area, a beautiful example of an uncut watershed supporting several native forest types, is located here.

A grouping of nearby wild lands, commonly referred to as the Black Mountain cluster, are also prime candidates for Wilderness protection.

The 14,700-acre Mackey Mountain area includes 6,000 acres of roadless forest, which have been called a national treasure. The Burke-McDowell Tract was the first land purchase made to create National Forest land in the eastern United States. High summits and steep slopes pitch down to cold, rushing creeks, accented by huge fallen hemlocks, moss-covered boulders, and ancient oaks more than 250 years old. Mackey Creek and Clear Creek provide clean drinking water for the town of Marion. Not surprisingly, this is also top quality black bear habitat.

TOP LEFT: OLD GROWTH FOREST, JOYCE KILMER MEMORIAL FOREST, NANTAHALA NATIONAL FOREST, NORTH CAROLINA

The 23,000-acre Bald Mountains area straddles the North Carolina-Tennessee border (11,000 acres in North Carolina). This is the largest site along the Appalachian Trail between the Great Smoky Mountains and Shenandoah National Parks that is eligible for Wilderness protection. Maintaining the wild character of this large area — home to black bear and brook trout — is critical to the integrity of the entire Southern Appalachian ecosystem.

The 5,600-acre Wesser Bald area (which includes 4,100 acres of roadless lands) in the Nantahala National Forest sits in the northern section of a group of wild lands along the Appalachian Trail. Its steep slopes support ecologically significant forest communities, including high-elevation northern red oak, dry oak forests, and over 1,200 acres of old growth.

The 27,000-acre Tusquitee Bald area contains the largest roadless area (13,800 acres) in the Nantahala National Forest, as well as a striking 5,200-foot horseshoe-shaped rim of mountains. Here, the popular Rim Trail skirts high points and balds along the ridges, which afford numerous overlooks with commanding views of the countryside. 🌿

TOP RIGHT: FULL MOON, MT. MITCHELL, PISGAH NATIONAL FOREST, NORTH CAROLINA



So much, so fast

Kelly Merrill Dozier, mother, holistic healing practitioner, Brevard, North Carolina

Kelly’s love of the woods and its restorative powers for the mind and body was instilled in her as a youth. Having seen first-hand the scale of wilderness loss, she fears her own children might never have the chance to appreciate and learn from the wilderness as she did.

“I don’t think words can say what my heart feels about the need to protect every little bit of wilderness left — I’ve seen so much disappear so fast through development since I was young. On the mountain behind where I live my uncle had a farm; now there are 20 houses. It’s tough, I feel I have to look at both sides; it’s a beautiful place and I can’t blame people for wanting to live here. But every time I drive through the National Forest I notice something different, something gone, and I remember that it’s constantly going away.”





PERSIMMON MOUNTAIN ROADLESS AREA, SUMTER NATIONAL FOREST, SOUTH CAROLINA

*Less than one percent of the Sumter National Forest
is protected as Wilderness.*

WHY WILDERNESS?

South Carolina

Two factors distinguish South Carolina's Southern Appalachian wild areas: their surprisingly rugged beauty and their inadequate protection.

South Carolina's mountain wild lands are all found on the Blue Ridge Escarpment — the dramatic edge of the Appalachian chain along the North Carolina-South Carolina border, where the mountains fall abruptly to the Piedmont. The rushing waters of several small but torrential escarpment rivers — including the Chattooga and Chauga — have been carving through the mountainsides here for eons, falling precipitously through steep gorges and eventually leveling out onto the rich plateaus below.

The 365,000-acre Sumter National Forest includes a little more than half of South Carolina's total National Forest land, but of the Sumter's three ranger districts, only one — the 80,000-acre Andrew Pickens Ranger District — contains Southern Appalachian terrain. It is the only Sumter district with existing Wilderness, though about 75 percent of the district is open to logging. The two other Sumter districts, both on the Piedmont, are heavily roaded and have suffered from years of industrial timber production. Thus, the Sumter has less than one percent of its area protected as Wilderness.

The one existing Wilderness area in the Andrew Pickens, Ellicott Rock, was designated in 1975. This beautiful area

spans the junction of South Carolina, Georgia, and North Carolina and totals 8,300 acres. South Carolina's portion of this Wilderness totals 2,850 acres. At present, there are only 6,100 acres of official roadless area in the Sumter, all located in the northern reaches of the Andrew Pickens. If all of these roadless lands were designated as Wilderness, the total Wilderness in the Sumter would still represent less than three percent of the Forest.

LOGICAL EXPANSION TO EXISTING WILDERNESS

Ellicott Rock Wilderness, with the Chattooga at its heart, and containing nearly 20 miles of hiking trails, is a popular recreation spot. Graced by

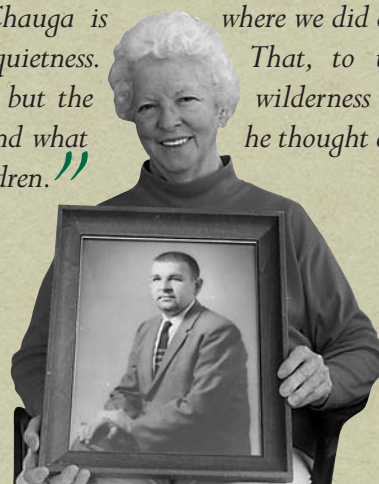


That was romance

**Willette Butts (with a photo of her late husband, Fletcher),
Westminster, South Carolina**

Willette Butts was raised in the country, in a time when few thought about the need to set aside wilderness but many respected the land. Fletcher, who passed away in 1966, grew up near Rocky Fork. Their favorite area was always the Chauga River, which is now eligible for Wild and Scenic River status.

“My husband knew everything about the mountains, and he spent much of his time teaching me and our children about the land. He felt the way to grow the idea of protecting the land was to hand it down through the generations. The Chauga is where we did our hiking, always into great peacefulness and quietness. That, to us, was romance. So much has changed — but the wilderness will always give me memories of Fletcher, and what he thought of wilderness, and what that meant for our children.”



more than 80 inches of rain most years, this area boasts a sensory feast of wildflowers such as bloodroot, jack-in-the-pulpit, sweet white violets, and rare painted trillium. Two endangered plants are found here: rock gnome lichen and small whorled pogonia. The 2,100-acre Ellicott Rock Extension borders the existing Wilderness area on the south and east, and contains critical headwaters for the East Fork of the Chattooga River. Protection of this readily accessible and easily managed area would extend the present Ellicott Rock Wilderness out to the logical boundaries of Highway 107 to the east and Burrell's Ford Road to the south.

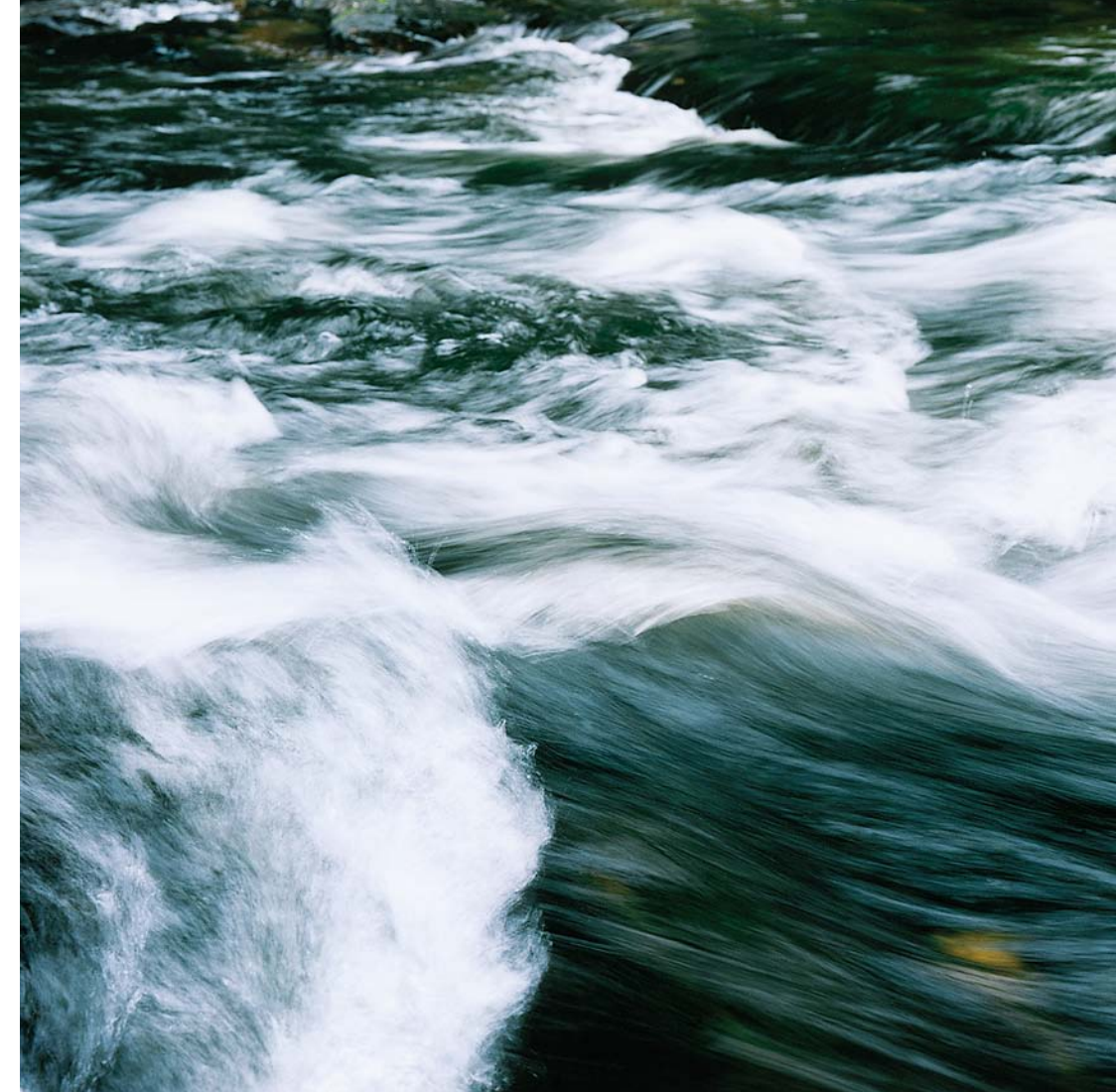
Just downstream from the Ellicott Rock Extension lies the 5,000-acre Rock Gorge area, which South Carolina shares in roughly equal halves with Georgia's Chattahoochee National Forest across the river. In this roadless wild land, dubbed “Big Mountain” by the Forest Service, the Chattooga River plunges into the steep and pathless Rock Gorge canyon in the most wild and rugged part of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River corridor. This area provides important habitat for black bear and native brook trout, and features old growth hemlock, the rare mountain camellia, and a stunning 80-foot waterfall on King Creek.

**TOP LEFT: GALAX BLOOMS
ALONG CHATTOOGA RIVER TRAIL,
SUMTER NATIONAL FOREST,
SOUTH CAROLINA**

The 7,000-acre Persimmon Mountain area in the northeast corner of the Andrew Pickens Ranger District falls in the transition zone between the mountains and the Piedmont. At the heart of this area lies the 3,000-acre Bee Cove roadless area. The dramatic topography results in spectacular cascades on many creeks, including Moody Branch, which falls off the Blue Ridge Escarpment and plunges more than 1,000 feet in less than a mile. Botanists agree that this area is particularly important, with rare plants that include mountain camellia, enchanter's nightshade, and faded trillium. The Pickerel frog can also be found here, and native brook trout flit through several small streams. Highway 107, a designated scenic byway, offers outstanding views into this area. The northern portion of the tract would provide additional watershed protection to the East Fork of the Chattooga, as well as a wild corridor direct to the Nantahala National Forest in North Carolina.

Wilderness designation for Persimmon Mountain would protect wild, natural values that are quickly vanishing as surrounding mountain land is developed, and it would also provide a critical link with nearby wild areas to the northeast along the dramatically scenic and richly forested Blue Ridge Escarpment. 🌲

**TOP RIGHT: CHATTOOGA RIVER
ABOVE ROCK GORGE,
SUMTER NATIONAL FOREST, SOUTH
CAROLINA**

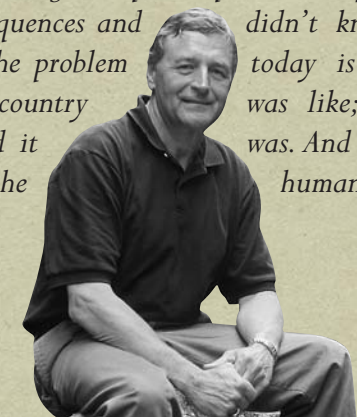


Nobody has any memory

**Richard McAdams, building contractor,
Easley, South Carolina**

Some might think being a builder disqualifies Richard from being a wilderness advocate. Of course, that's not true. From hunting as a child on the Chattooga River, to modeling his father's strong conservation ethic, to participating in the Sierra Club, Richard has come to understand this about wilderness: out of sight, out of mind.

“I saw what happened back when they cut down and destroyed vast hardwood forests and then flooded the area to build the nuclear power plant. This country was absolutely run over with dirt bikes and four-wheelers during the construction of the power plant. But people back then didn't understand the consequences and anything about it. The problem today is that nobody has any memory of what this country was like; they just don't know how remote and wild it was. And they don't act on it — they're caught up in the human grid.”





ELK RIVER, SLIDE HOLLOW ROADLESS AREA, CHEROKEE NATIONAL FOREST, TENNESSEE

*Here one passes through some of the biggest, most scenic
blocks of wild Appalachian backcountry left.*

WHY WILDERNESS?

Tennessee

Long, spiny, heavily wooded ridges characterize Tennessee's share of the Southern Appalachians — including the sharp western ridges of the mighty Unakas. Marked by rugged cliffs, rich forests, and deeply incised, steep-sided streams, the Unakas still harbor brook trout and remote pockets where black bear thrive. Over 200 miles of the Appalachian Trail wind northwestward to the Virginia border, passing through some of the biggest, most scenic blocks of wild Appalachian backcountry left. Unfortunately, the heavy, rutted signature of unauthorized off-road ATV use is prevalent in some areas, testimony to the immediate need for strong, far-sighted conservation measures.

CRITICAL WILDLIFE CORRIDORS

Tennessee's only National Forest, the Cherokee, covers more than 630,000

acres divided into a northern and southern portion by the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The Cherokee hosts a rich diversity of plants and animals, and it offers many opportunities for recreation. Currently, just over 10 percent of the Cherokee — 66,500 acres — is Wilderness. The three oldest Wilderness areas — the Cohutta (1,700 acres), Gee Creek (2,500 acres), and Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock (3,850 acres) — were all designated in 1975. Although an additional 50,000 acres are protected in scenic areas and trail corridors, fully half the Cherokee is open to logging and road construction.

APPALACHIAN TRAIL WILDERNESS POTENTIAL

The Forest Service now recognizes about 86,800 roadless acres in the Cherokee, spread out over 18 areas. The 23,000-acre Bald Mountain area is one

of the best Wilderness candidates. This unit straddles the Tennessee-North Carolina border and includes acreage in both the Cherokee and in North Carolina's Pisgah National Forest. Bald Mountain is the largest potential Wilderness area along the Appalachian Trail between the Great Smoky Mountains and Shenandoah National Parks. Outstanding terrain, dramatic cliffs, and numerous waterfalls characterize the entire area.

The greater Bald Mountain wild lands, including the nearby 8,000-acre Sampson Mountain Wilderness, harbor one of the healthiest populations of black bear in the Southern Appalachians. It hosts many species of rare plants, including piratebush, turkey beard, John's cabbage, and marsh marigold. The Appalachian Trail winds through the Bald Mountain roadless area for more than six miles.



A much greater value

**Todd Eastin and family, farmers,
Shady Valley, Tennessee**

Todd and his wife Lynn moved to rural Tennessee in the 1970s to raise their family in a small community and practice self-sufficiency. Today, they enjoy strong ties to the community and great appreciation for the “marvelous wisdom” of nature. Their farm is nearly surrounded by the Cherokee National Forest.

“As much as our society consumes and exploits natural resources, we’ve lost sight of our interdependence with nature. The place to regain that is in understanding nature’s marvelous wisdom and balance firsthand. That’s where protecting wilderness fits in. We gain sustenance from our understanding of wilderness and its beauty, complexity, and diversity. It’s not something you buy — it has a much greater value. Wilderness deserves our utmost respect, especially here in the Southeast, where we have so little left.”



CRITICAL WATERSHEDS

The 14,950-acre Upper Bald River area is the most significant area still unprotected in the Bald River watershed. This area includes the 9,100-acre Upper Bald River roadless area and adjoins a 3,400-acre old growth restoration area in North Carolina’s Unicoi Mountains. Protection for this area is crucial — it is some of the wildest land remaining in the Cherokee National Forest without Wilderness designation.

Upper Bald River is known for its numerous clear, cold streams, which provide prime brook trout habitat. It also supports a wide variety of wildlife, including bear, wild turkey, and deer. Upper Bald River is a key component of the entire Bald River system — a critical watershed that benefits a significantly larger ecosystem in both Tennessee and North Carolina.

OTHER OUTSTANDING CANDIDATES FOR WILDERNESS DESIGNATION

One of the most significant of the Iron Mountains cluster of potential Wilderness sites is Flint Mill — the last remaining unfragmented area on Holston Mountain. At 14,450 acres, Flint Mill contains the

**TOP LEFT: CANOPY ABOVE SQUIBB
CREEK, SAMPSON MOUNTAIN
WILDERNESS AREA, CHEROKEE
NATIONAL FOREST, TENNESSEE**

second largest roadless area (9,500 acres) in the Cherokee National Forest, and includes many miles of the Appalachian Trail. This spectacular area hosts an abundance of plant species, including the rare kidney-leafed twayblade, large purple-fringed orchids, and round-leafed orchids.

East of White Rocks Mountain, Slide Hollow’s old-growth hardwood stands provide critical habitat for wildlife dependent on mature, interior forest habitat. The Appalachian Trail weaves through old growth along the pristine Sugar Hollow Creek in the southern portion of this 4,350-acre wild land (including 4,200 roadless acres). Although Slide Hollow has not been extensively logged since the 1920s, it remains unprotected.

Roger’s Ridge, a favorite of the late Wilderness champion Arthur Smith, is a 5,550-acre roadless area in the extreme northeast corner of Tennessee. This wild land boasts high grassy ridges and trails with spectacular views, mountain bogs, rare riparian wildflowers, remnant old growth, and waterfalls. With its sister ridges — Holston and Iron Mountains — Roger’s Ridge is an important albeit tenuous link between wild lands in Tennessee and Virginia. 🌿

**TOP RIGHT: DANDELION,
BALD MOUNTAINS, CHEROKEE
NATIONAL FOREST, TENNESSEE**



Measure of our culture

Dana Eglington and family, Bluff City, Tennessee

A New England native, Dana has lived in Tennessee for 17 years. His favorite wild area is a stand of old growth forest — 200-300 years old with trees four feet in diameter — in the Flint Mill roadless area, at the headwaters of the Big Oak Branch of the Cherokee River. Dana is currently pursuing a Master of Divinity.

“When I was little, I loved to wander around the woods and ponds near our home, and I read books about nature that inspired my imagination. I have a theological affinity for nature, too. When you are in an old growth area, you can see Creation still functioning the way God set it up. And in that sense, it can serve as a measure of our culture. In the natural system, there is no waste — all is recycled. It shows us that, given the wastefulness of our culture, we are very far from where we need to go.”





WILBURN RIDGE, LEWIS FORK/LITTLE WILSON CREEK ROADLESS AREA, JEFFERSON NATIONAL FOREST, VIRGINIA

The George Washington National Forest Wilderness sits within a day's drive of major cities such as Washington, D.C., Atlanta, and Pittsburgh.

WHY WILDERNESS?



A feeling of ancient wisdom and gentility characterizes Virginia's 350-mile stretch of the Southern Appalachians. Shenandoah Mountain, Mount Rogers, Clinch Mountain, and their sisters are relatively understated, compared with the sharp and dramatic peaks to the south in North Carolina. Still, a certain majesty is unmistakable in the mix of high, wild, and windy peaks and rich, golden valleys. Rocks here are from the Cambrian Period, and the New River, running eastward off Mount Rogers, is one of the oldest on the continent.

In 1975, James River Face in the Jefferson National Forest was designated the first Wilderness area in Virginia. Today, Virginia's best candidates for Wilderness designation are contained within the Jefferson and George Washington National Forests. Eleven existing Wilderness areas within the Jefferson are among the smallest in the country, averaging less than 5,700

acres. Out of 723,000 acres comprising the Jefferson, only eight percent are designated as Wilderness. Of the one million acres comprising the George Washington, only 42,570 acres — or four percent — are Wilderness.

POPULAR EXISTING WILDERNESS AREAS

Lying within a day's drive of major cities such as Washington, D.C., Atlanta, and Pittsburgh, the George Washington National Forest Wilderness areas are very popular with visitors, and demand for outdoor recreation is growing. The 6,500-acre Ramsey's Draft Wilderness contains a large amount of old-growth forest, and parts of it become a snow-white sea of mountain laurel in the spring. The 9,850-acre Saint Mary's Wilderness is also very popular, with a beautiful trail that follows Saint Mary's River as it cascades through a steep canyon at Saint Mary's Falls. The Jefferson National Forest also has many popular Wilderness destinations.

Mount Rogers, the highest peak in Virginia, lies within the 5,600-acre Lewis Fork Wilderness in the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. One mile away, the 3,600-acre Little Wilson Creek Wilderness features several peaks with views of Mount Rogers, as well as swags and rocky outcrops. Existing Wilderness in both areas abounds with wildlife, stunning trees, and wildflowers.

OUTSTANDING WILDERNESS CANDIDATES IN THE JEFFERSON NATIONAL FOREST

The Jefferson National Forest hosts 280 miles of the Appalachian Trail — more than 10 percent of its entire length. The forest here ranges from high-elevation spruce-fir forests to lower-elevation beaver-pond wetlands, including 60,000 acres of old-growth forest. Currently, the Forest Service recognizes some 21 percent of the Jefferson as roadless areas qualifying for Wilderness protection.



Nancy Ward and her husband Otis, a retired coal miner, settled near the High Knob region of the Jefferson National Forest in 1974, where they camped, hunted, and hiked with their children. Now, the Forest Service has proposed cutting 700 acres of mature timber there and the Wards are part of the effort to stop it.


“My husband hunted in the High Knob area since 1952, but clear-cutting ran all the game out of there, and more deer run in town now than up on the mountain. We used to take the children up on the mountain, and they all enjoyed it; sometimes we would stay a whole week, fishing and hiking. The river was clear before the clear-cutting started. In 25 years, half of the forest is gone. Strip mines. Big cutting. I’ve seen it with my own eyes. Pretty soon, there will be nothing left for our children. Is that what we really want?”



Garden Mountain boasts spectacular cliffs and rock formations, including 400-million-year-old fossils. Brush Mountain, less than 30 minutes from Blacksburg, still retains its unspoiled scenic beauty. Hunting Camp-Little Wolf Creek roadless area, totaling 8,600 acres, is a unique remnant of Appalachian wildness; it would provide superb Wilderness backdrops and important buffers for the Appalachian Trail. The Forest Service rates the scenery of these areas as 98-percent unimpaired. Also containing a high Forest Service rating for unspoiled scenic beauty (95 percent) is Raccoon Branch, an isolated area that affords excellent opportunities for solitude and backcountry recreation and also harbors over 300 acres of old growth.

Today, there are some 250,000 acres of roadless area in the George Washington National

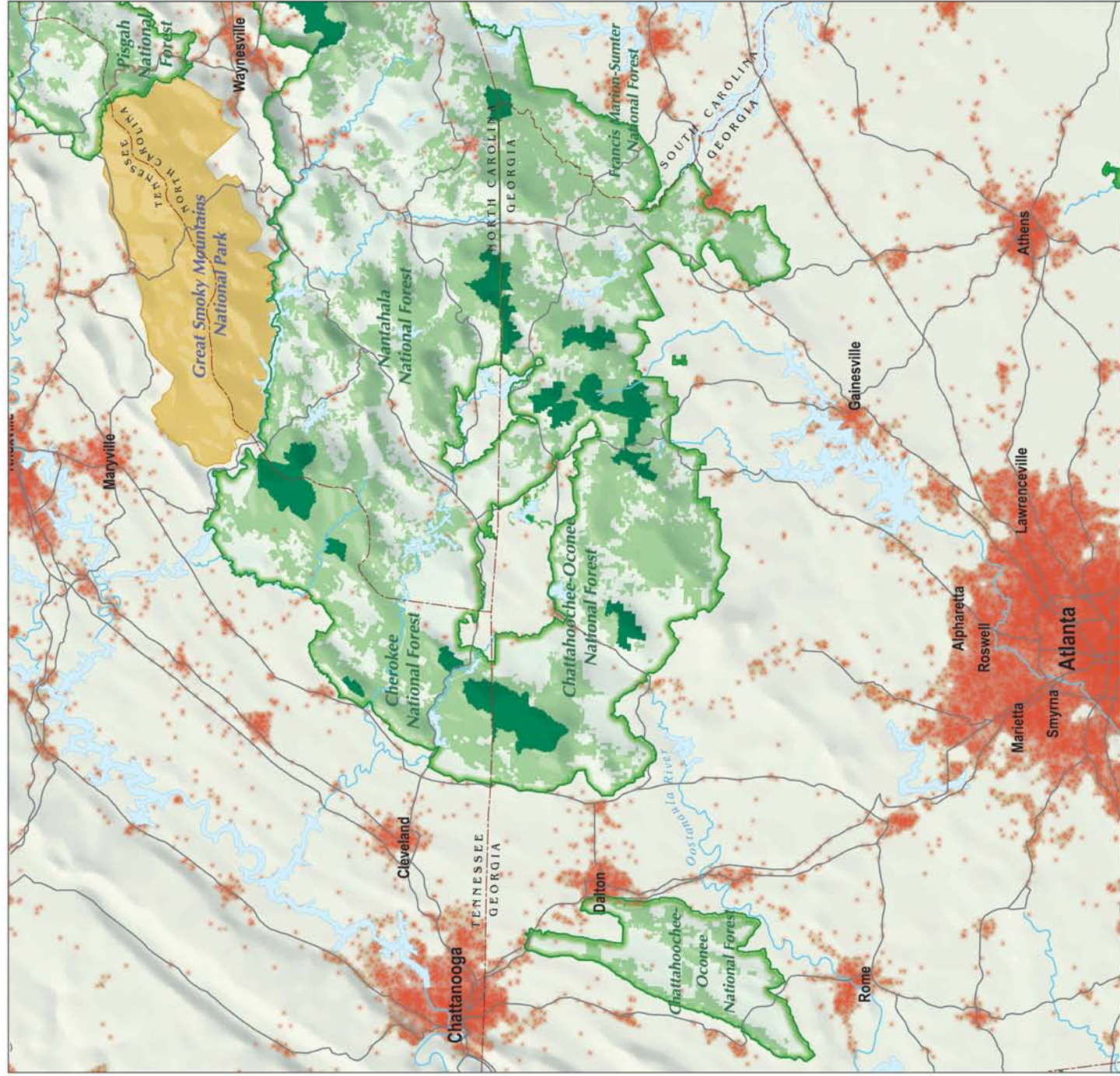
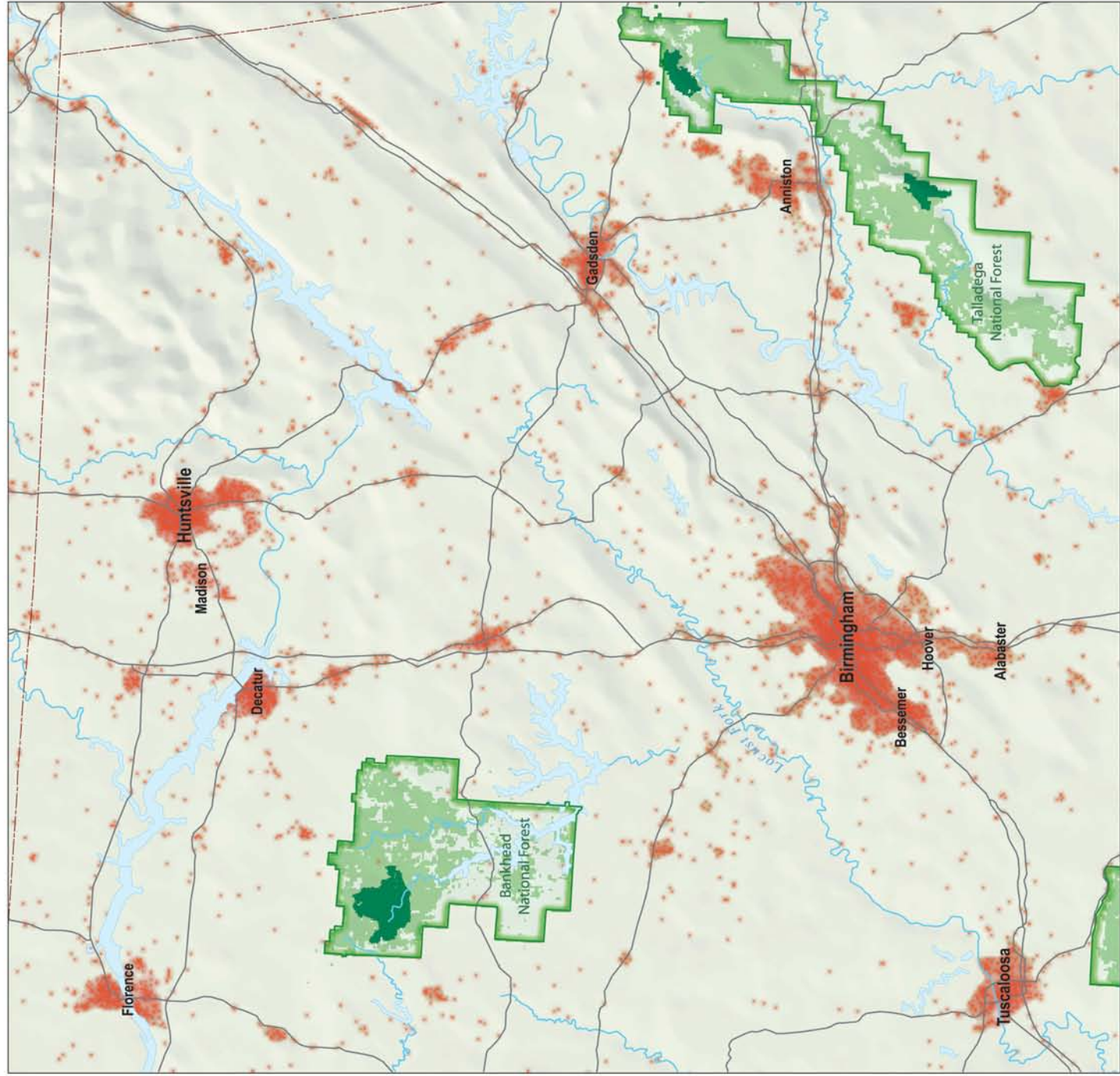
Forest, including some of the best potential old growth forest sites in the Southern Appalachians. One crucial candidate for Wilderness designation is the Ramsey's Draft addition, which encircles the Ramsey's Draft Wilderness and is nearly twice its size at 12,800 acres. Dozens of trails make this beautiful area an ideal hiking and backpacking location. Hunting and native trout fishing are popular here, too. An 1,800-acre stand of old-growth forest — one of the largest remaining in the northern tier of the Southern Appalachians — includes sugar maple, beech, basswood, and eastern hemlocks aged 300 years and older.

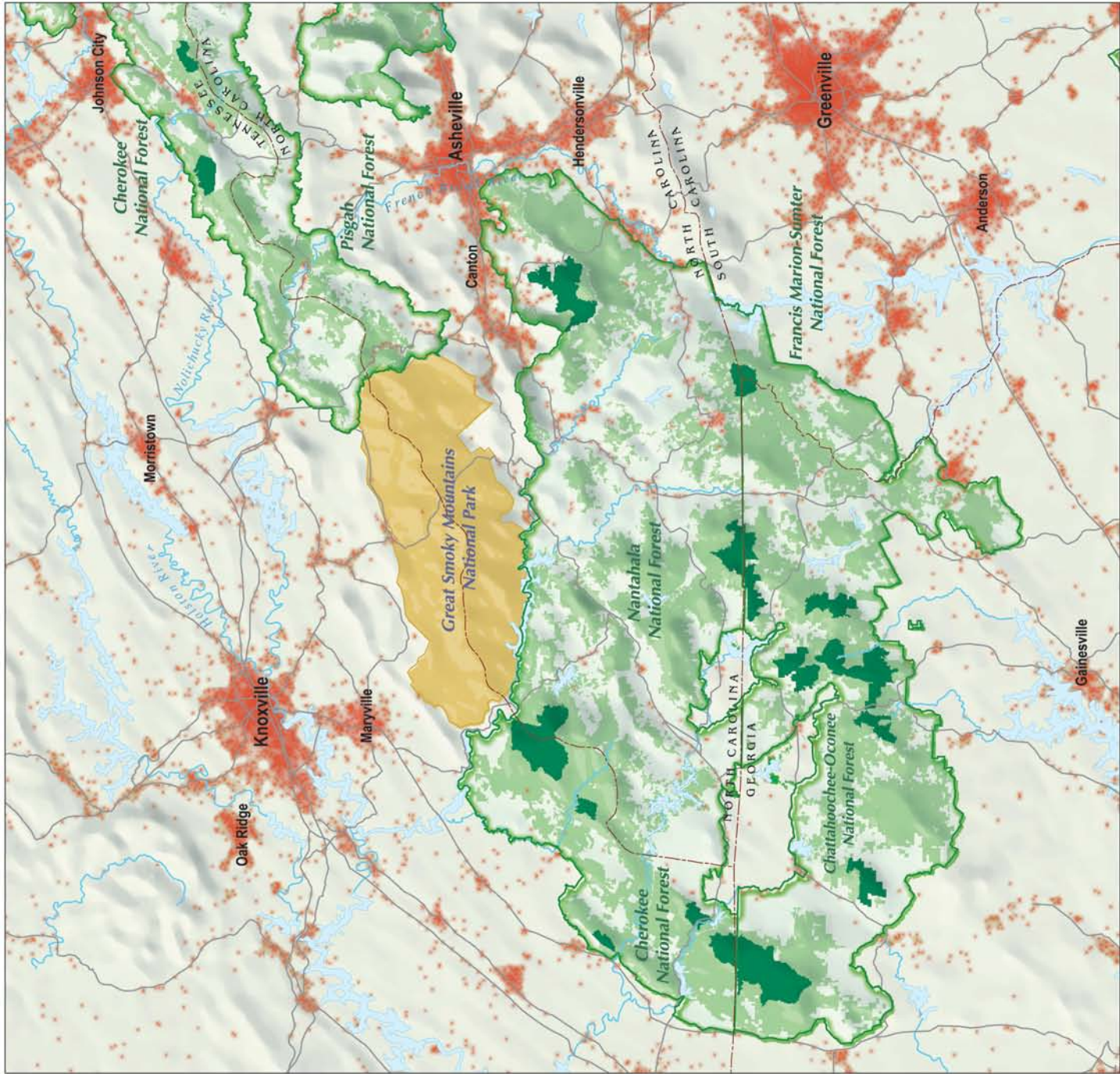
Another outstanding candidate is the 27,300-acre Little River area, the largest roadless area in the Southern Appalachians. Accessible by several trails including the Wild Oak Trail, its knobs and high ridges provide striking vistas of the Shenandoah Valley. Little River's high elevation on Shenandoah Mountain provides habitat for a large number of rare species. Laurel Fork is a large, nearly 9,950-acre roadless area bisected by its namesake, Laurel Fork, a branch of the Potomac River. This area is home to 25 rare species, and it also supports a rainbow- and brook-trout fishery. 

I didn't realize what they could do

Kim grew up at the foot of the High Knob region in the Jefferson National Forest. She traveled widely and then returned to raise her daughter there.

“I didn’t even realize the government could legally cut down trees in our National Forests. They justify it by saying that the government is losing money. But somebody is getting a lot of money for what I’m seeing cut down here — they are very desirable hardwoods for builders. I don’t know if it’s that people don’t feel that they have any power, or they’re not aware of what’s going on, but that’s why the government gets away with it. When you see what’s there, up close and personal, you can’t deny its value. I have enough faith in human nature that once they’re aware of it, they’ll see that it’s not right for this to continue.”





NORTH CAROLINA - TENNESSEE

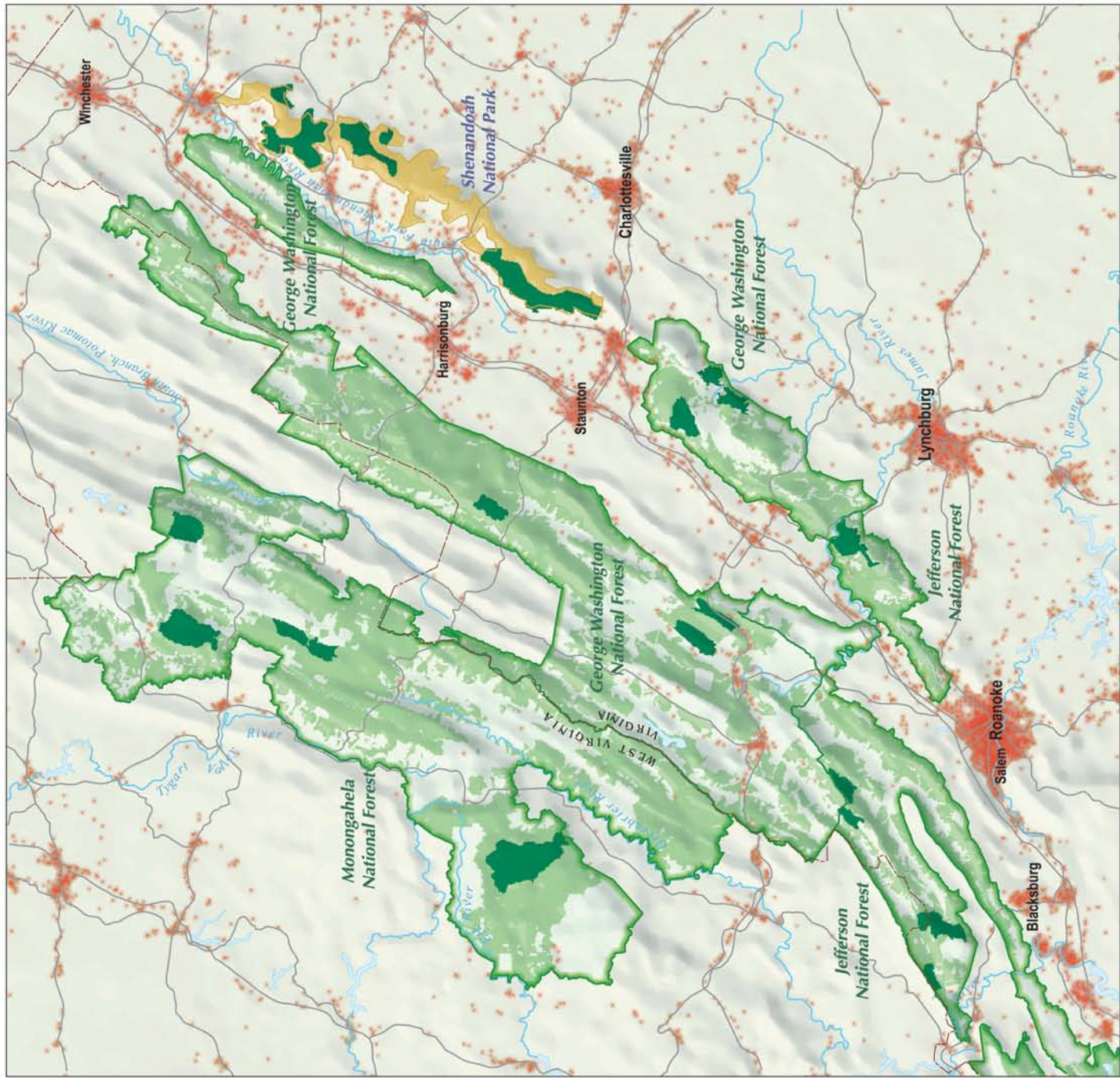
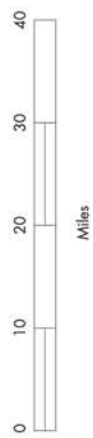
Wilderness islands in a sea of development

- Protected Wilderness Areas
- National Forest Land (contains remaining unprotected wilderness areas)
- State and Private Land within National Forest Boundary
- Cities, Towns and other Developed Areas

locator map



data sources: U.S. Forest Service 2002,
The Wilderness Society 2001, U.S.
Geological Survey 2000, ESRI 1998

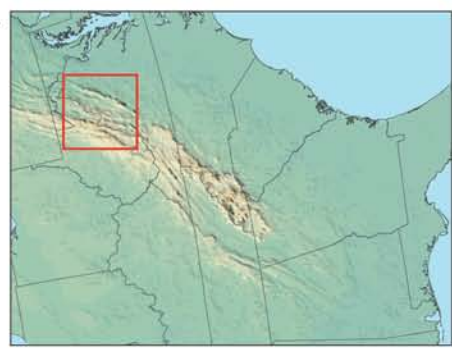


NORTHERN VIRGINIA

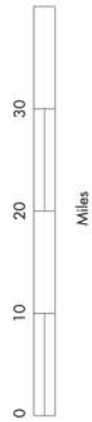
Wilderness islands in a sea of development

- Protected Wilderness Areas
- National Forest Land (contains remaining unprotected wilderness areas)
- State and Private Land within National Forest Boundary
- Cities, Towns and other Developed Areas

locator map



data sources: U.S. Forest Service 2002,
The Wilderness Society 2001, U.S.
Geological Survey 2000, ESRI 1998



SOUTHERN VIRGINIA

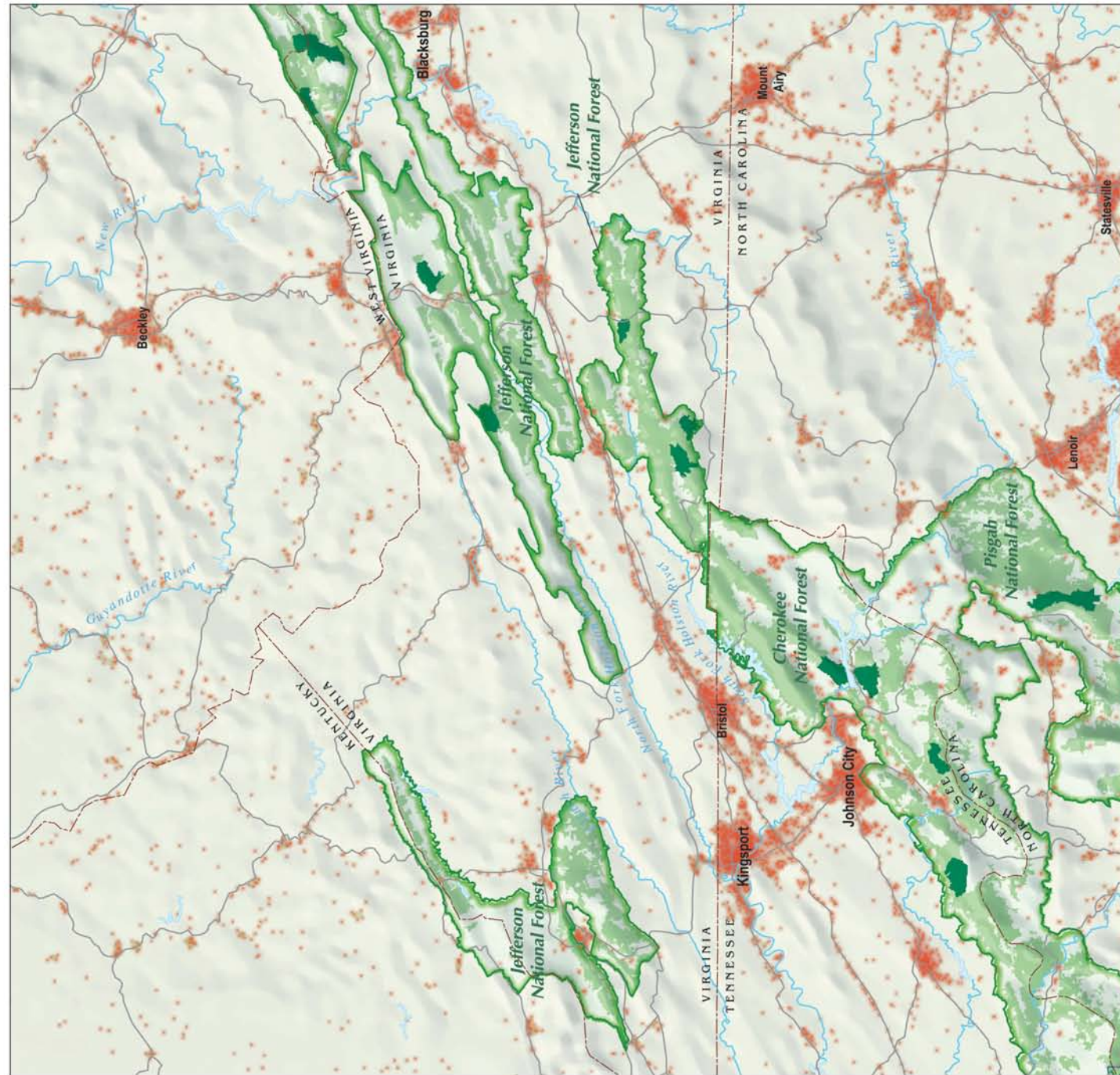
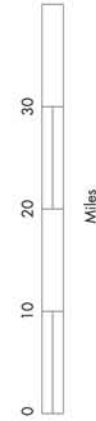
Wilderness islands in a sea of development

- Protected Wilderness Areas
- National Forest Land (contains remaining unprotected wilderness areas)
- State and Private Land within National Forest Boundary
- Cities, Towns and other Developed Areas

locator map



data sources: U.S. Forest Service 2002, The Wilderness Society 2001, U.S. Geological Survey 2000, ESRI 1998



SUPPORTERS

THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS WORK HAND-IN-HAND WITH THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY TO PROTECT WILDERNESS IN THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIANS

- | | |
|--|---|
| Appalachian Voices (NC) | Sierra Club Joseph LeConte Conservation Group (GA) |
| Audubon Naturalist Society of the Central Atlantic States (MD) | Sierra Club North Georgia Conservation Group |
| Audubon North Carolina | Sierra Club Ocmulgee Conservation Group (GA) |
| Cherokee Forest Voices (TN) | Sierra Club Savannah River Group (GA) |
| Clean Water Action (Washington, D.C.) | Sierra Club Southeast Georgia Conservation Group |
| Coalition for Jobs and the Environment (VA) | Smith Lake Environmental Preservation Committee (AL) |
| Earthkeepers (GA) | Smoky Mountain Hiking Club (TN) |
| Geared To Go (GA) | South Carolina Forest Watch |
| Georgia Forestwatch | Southern Appalachian Biodiversity Project (NC) |
| Georgia River Network | Southern Environmental Law Center, Deep South (GA) |
| League of Conservation Voters Education Fund (GA) | Tennessee Chapter Sierra Club |
| League of Women Voters of Tennessee | The Clinch Coalition (VA) |
| Living Education Center for Ecology and the Arts (VA) | The Wildlife Center (AL) |
| Patagonia Atlanta | Trinity Presbyterian Restoring Creation House Church (VA) |
| Peachtree/Nancy Creek Technical Advisory Council (GA) | Upstate Forever (SC) |
| Potomac Appalachian Trail Club – Southern Shenandoah Valley Chapter (VA) | Virginia Forest Watch |
| Reynolds Nature Preserve (GA) | Virginians for Wilderness |
| Sierra Club Metro Atlanta Group | Western North Carolina Alliance |
| Sierra Club Centennial Group (GA) | Wild South (AL) |
| Sierra Club Coastal Group (GA) | Wild Virginia |
| Sierra Club Forsyth Conservation Group (GA) | Wilderness Watch - National |
| Sierra Club Greater Gwinnett Group (GA) | |



*T*he wilderness lives in all of us, and we
shouldn't try to separate ourselves from it.
To experience its gifts makes us better people.

—*from the preface by Congressman John Lewis*