

Georgia WILD Newsletter: July–August 2008

Table of Contents

Teachers turn conservation students at forestry/wildlife workshop.....	1
Registration and anticipation	1
First stop: Plum Creek timberlands	2
Trees as products, from seedlings to lumber	2
Behind the scenes at a sawmill and a tree farm.....	4
'I have learned so much this week'	5
Maybe good things rub off.....	7
Zahnd blends bizarre, wonderful.....	7
The first TERN board.....	8

Teachers turn conservation students at forestry/wildlife workshop

Kristina Summers, a senior public relations and information specialist with the Georgia Wildlife Resources Division, attended much of the fourth annual Teacher Conservation Workshop held June 23-27 at Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center in Mansfield. Here is her in-the-field glimpse of the workshop and participants adventures around the state.

Registration and anticipation

Workshop participants begin arriving Monday to check in and pick up the required safety equipment for the field trips to several timber companies, including Plum Creek Timber Co., one of the workshop sponsors. Each person receives a hard hat, safety glasses and earplugs. The light-hearted chatter around the room grows louder as teachers start swapping classroom stories and decorating the bright orange hard hats with stickers.

This years workshop, called Exploring Forestry and Wildlife in Georgia, has drawn 30 educators from as far away as Valdosta, Hapeville and the Georgia coast.

Walter Lane, workshop co-organizer and Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center program manager, describes the purpose as helping teachers learn about "the science of forestry and wildlife management and how they can apply conservation to education in the classroom."

All participants will be certified in and receive updated curriculum for Project WILD, Project WET and Project Learning Tree, award-winning environmental and conservation education programs designed for teachers and other educators working with students across the country. The goal of these programs is to increase awareness, knowledge, skills, commitment to conserving natural resources, and the ability to make informed decisions and take constructive action concerning wildlife and the environment.

The teacher workshop, held each year during the last week of June, is open to Georgia educators in grades 5-12. This year's deadline to register was April 15. The class limit is 30. Co-organizer Carla Rapp of the Georgia Forestry Association works to secure sponsors for each participant. Major sponsors for 2008 included the Georgia Forestry Association, the Georgia Forestry Commission, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Rayonier, the U.S. Forest Service, Plum Creek, Georgia-Pacific and the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources at the University of Georgia. Participants pay only a \$25 registration fee. (A complete list of sponsors follows below.)

Staff members from a variety of backgrounds and occupations help with the workshop. One thing they have in common is a desire to spread a conservation ethic to as many young people as possible through education.

"Everyone just raves about the conference," said Donna Gallaher of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative program housed at the University of Georgia. "Word of mouth is really incredible." Charlie Elliott, a 6,400-acre wildlife management area, public fishing area and wildlife education center, is an hour-and-a-half from 60 percent of the state's population, making it easily accessible for most Georgia residents.

The teachers are scheduled for a series of field trips including tours of the Flint River paper mill, Gully Branch and Big K tree farms, Jordan Forest Products sawmill, and the Georgia Forestry Commission's Flint River nursery. Each location has been picked to ensure the teachers get a comprehensive look at conservation through sustainable forestry management, the juncture where forestry and conservation meet in Georgia.

The agenda also includes demonstrations of Project WILD, Project WET and Project Learning Tree activities teachers can take back to their classrooms.

[First stop: Plum Creek timberlands](#)

At 7:15 a.m. Tuesday everyone loads onto the bus to see a harvest and a reforestation site on Plum Creek timberlands. Talk is muted. Many of the people are still half-asleep, tired from a root beer float social the night before. The hour-and-a-half ride is quiet.

"Our reason for being here," explains Plum Creek forester Darrell Kauffman, "is to educate teachers about forest management practices and how forestry fits in with conservation."

The tour of Plum Creek's timber operations in Jones County is followed by a trip to Brender/Hitchiti Forest, a U.S. Forest Service research forest and facility near Juliette. During activity time, the group learns about tree cookies, dried slices of tree trunk that reveal a tree's growth rings. All of the activities are part of the new curriculum that participants will take home at the end of the week.

After learning about research and management at the Brender/Hitchiti Forest, the educators spend the afternoon focusing on forest and wildlife management on private land at Big K Farm near Gray. The group is thrilled when former Atlanta Braves player Ryan Klesko, one of Big K's owners, drops by at dinner to say hello.

[Trees as products, from seedlings to lumber](#)

Wednesday is another early day. Teachers board the bus for the Flint River mill. Owned by Weyerhaeuser, the mill is used primarily to create absorbent fluff, which is used in diapers and other absorbent products.

After an eye-opening activity led by Neil Moore, a chemical engineer, the group dons their safety equipment and goes into the mill to see the operations first hand. It is soon clear why earplugs and safety glasses are required. The noise is deafening. Sawdust is everywhere. The guide leads the teachers through carefully monitored rooms, each dedicated to a different crucial function of the pulp process, from temperature levels to conveyor speed. The mill runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week, so even a few lost moments can be costly to the company. In one room, samples of pulp are put through a series of tests to determine the quality of the product. Each of the mills customers has specific requirements regarding thickness, size and even color. Everyone in the workshop is allowed to take a small sample as a souvenir. The samples resemble thin white cardboard. It is hard to imagine this becoming the inside of a diaper.

When the tour ends, the group takes a short ride to Yoders Dietsch Haus, a Mennonite restaurant in Montezuma that serves down-home country cooking buffet style. There are tough decisions to make: meatloaf or fried chicken, homemade biscuits or corn bread, and which desert will be the tastiest?

The next stop is the Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) seedling nursery. Black clouds are gathering overhead but they don't dampen the teachers enthusiasm as they gather around to learn how GFC grafts trees together, a technique dubbed Frankenstein-like by one teacher that will help develop genetically superior trees.

Grafted trees are referred to as clones. The process involves attaching a superior treetop to rootstock from another tree. Out of the approximately 1,500 trees in the loblolly pine area of the nursery, there are only 20 actual genotypes, or separate tree individuals. These improved trees grow faster, produce more seed, rate more drought resistant and can more successfully withstand damage from pine beetles.

The 120-acre nursery is home to a variety of species including loblolly, slash and longleaf pine, as well as a number of hardwoods such as sweet gum and several types of oak.

Rain is falling as everyone loads on the bus, bound for Georgia Forestry Association headquarters in Forsyth. Lightning flashes through the bus windows, but the storm quickly passes, leaving the afternoon air muggy and hot.

Upon arriving at the Georgia Forestry Association building, the group is greeted warmly by association Director Steve McWilliams. He talks about the work the organization is doing involving conservation and policy.

"Every teacher in this workshop has the opportunity to impact the lives of many students who one day will be making decisions about our forests natural resources," McWilliams said. "We want to spark their interest, give them some of the tools that will make it possible for them to convey the right information to Georgia's next generation."

While he is talking, staff members set up a series of Project Wet, Wild and Learning Tree activities. Laughter echoes throughout the room as each person briefly gets to be a kid again, cutting, coloring and gluing their projects.

Johnson County Extension agent and 4-H teacher Sandra Fortner enjoys the time, saying she has "a better understanding of forestry management in Georgia now, including fun new hands-on activities to help teach it."

The day ends with dinner from the Forestry Association and a long, sleepy ride back to Charlie Elliott.

Behind the scenes at a sawmill and a tree farm

The last day of field trips brings the group to a sawmill operated by Jordan Forest Products in Barnesville. The atmosphere at the mill is friendly; everyone seems excited that the teachers are here. Employees are obviously very proud of the mill's safety record and a large sign in the main conference room states that OSHA certifies the mill as a premier safety partner. This recognition from the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration is given only to organizations that go above and beyond the standard safety measures required.

Everyone pulls out his or her hard hat, safety glasses and earplugs for a tour of the noisy mill. Following the production line, the group starts in the tree yard where millions of board feet (unprocessed trees) are stacked in piles waiting for a massive crane to ferry them to conveyor belts.

Each tree has already been de-limbed. One by one the trees are laid on the fast-moving conveyor and carried into the mill. Where once a person stood feeding logs by hand, there is only a large machine. Everything is computerized now. An operator sits a safe distance away within an insulated room and watches monitors as the boards zip by. The computer is programmed to cut the logs into customer-specified units. From this room, the operator can ensure that everything runs smoothly. Automation has increased safety and productivity. After the logs are cut into rough boards, they drop onto a belt that will take them to be inspected and then dried. When a tree comes into the mill, it is approximately 60 percent water. If the wood is not dried properly, there is a chance that the lumber will shrink, which can create quality control issues if the boards are sold to consumers expecting lumber of a certain size and width.

The lumber is briefly stacked outside before making the journey to the kiln, which is powered with sawdust to decrease waste and emissions. The wood takes approximately 24 hours to dry to the acceptable level of 19 percent water.

Once dried, the lumber is loaded onto another conveyor to be inspected. Four employees withstand temperatures of up to 110 degrees while inspecting the incoming wood. Each person is responsible for marking every fourth board that passes by. The wood is marked according to a grading scale that determines the quality of the board. If there are damaged areas, the wood is funneled to the side where another worker will cut off the bad areas, creating shorter sections. All the wood receives a final inspection before being loaded onto a truck or rail car for transport to the customer.

When the tour is complete, everyone is given a rain gauge courtesy of Jordan Forest Products, plus all the M&Ms they can eat. The bus leaves for lunch at Whistle Stop Caf   in Juliette. Everyone is greeted with smiles and Mason jars of sweet tea at the site of the 1991 film "Fried Green Tomatoes." Memorabilia from the movie and the town covers the walls and sparks comments among the diners as dishes of barbecue and, yes, fried green tomatoes are served. C.J. Pinson of Callaway High School in Hogansville and Taylor Ginn, who teaches ninth-grade science classes at East Jackson Comprehensive High School in Commerce, exchange teaching stories with DNR wildlife biologist Mary Terry over strawberry shortcake .

After a bus ride to Gully Branch Tree Farm in Cochran and some catnaps en route, everyone is rested and ready for the tour. The 1,500-acre farm owned by Earl and Wanda Barrs includes a new pavilion and a 42-acre lake stocked with carp, catfish, and bass.

A long wagon pulled by a large tractor pulls up, the transportation for a tour of the farm. During the tour, Michael OShield, educational outreach coordinator for the DNR's Environmental Protection Division, gives the group a lesson on water quality and the EPD's Adopt-A-Stream program before pulling on waders and jumping into the creek to demonstrate the diversity of aquatic life found there. The teachers take turns examining macro-invertebrates such as clams, midge fly larvae, leeches and aquatic snails.

"If these teachers take anything away from their time here I hope it is that (they) can determine the water quality by methods other than using chemicals," OShield said. "You can examine what lives there and use what you find to determine biological quality of the water and the habitat."

Back on the wagon, a bumpy ride leads down into what Earl and Wanda refer to as the bottoms to visit an old cypress tree. The tree is more than 5 feet in diameter and is estimated to be 100 years old.

Before dinner, the group participates in a Project WILD activity that resembles freeze tag and teaches participants about predator-prey relationships. Tyshon Reed of the Lowndes Forestry Institute is picked as the "predator" whose job it is to catch the "rabbits" as they try to cross the field. When the whistle blows the teachers scramble madly to reach the far side without being caught. By the time the activity is over, everyone is red-faced and laughing, with most sprawled on the ground.

While they are recuperating, Wanda Barrs, chair of the state Board of Education, gives a quick talk on the importance of renewable resources and responsible forestry. She tells them that 66 percent of Georgia is forested and that 75 percent of those forests are held by private landowners, explaining why education and cooperation between state agencies and private businesses like Gully Branch are so important.

Dinner is served in the pavilion. The sun is setting as everyone gathers outside later for photos. Following what seems like an endless stream of flashbulbs, the group is done with the paparazzi experience. The educators board the bus for the last time.

A two-hour drive brings them back to where they started. Everyone makes a point to thank the bus driver. Then new friends retire for some rest before packing for home.

['I have learned so much this week'](#)

On the workshop's last morning, the participants are moving at a slower pace, as if they are a little sad to be going home. After they turn in their evaluations, they receive a certificate of completion and a generous teacher kit, which includes even more activities for them to use in their classrooms.

There are many promises to stay in touch. Telephone numbers and e-mail addresses are swapped.

After five busy days, these tired but happy Georgia educators are going home, taking with them the knowledge they need to spread the word about the importance of forestry in wildlife conservation.

Abbie Whitaker, a 22-year-old student at the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, is excited about using what she has learned at the workshop in her future career. "I wasn't aware of the magnitude of the aspects of the forestry industry but feel like I have learned so much this week," Whitaker said. "I can't wait to use some of this stuff in my own job."

Maybe good things rub off

By John Fuchs

Today was fishing day at the summer camp my 8-year-old granddaughter, Carolyn, attends at Charles Elliot Wildlife Center. Carolyn likes for me to go with her on this particular day, mainly because it is another chance for us to fish together. Of course I am always glad to oblige, after all, I am a volunteer at the center, and the fishing events are some of my favorite interest. A lot of parents and grandparents also come on fishing day to help the kids.

The lake used for this event is a catch-and-release lake. Not long after the fishing started, we caught a bluegill and after taking a photo, Carolyn removed the hook and released it.

A few minutes later another child caught a fish, but she and her mother did not know how to remove the hook or how to handle and release the fish. So the mother called for help.

Carolyn yelled, "I'll help! I'll release it!"

She handed me her pole and ran over to release the fish. It was no big deal to Carolyn; she had released many from our lake.

We caught five more fish and released all of them without injury to them or ourselves. Between catches, Carolyn would run over to help others in releasing their fish.

I was real proud of her this day, not because she caught five fish, but because she volunteered to help others with her time and talent. Maybe volunteering does rub off?

John Fuchs is a volunteer at Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center in Mansfield.

Zahnd blends bizarre, wonderful

By Matt Elliott

The Zahnd Natural Area in Walker County covers some 1,380 acres of the Cumberland Plateau physiographic region. Zahnd sits on the eastern edge of Lookout Mountain and across McLemore Cove from Pigeon Mountain.

The Zahnd family donated the original 163 acres to the state in 1940. Another 1,208 acres were bought in 2003 from the Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia using money from the state's Nongame Wildlife Conservation Fund and the State Wildlife Grants Program.

The original tract contains a number of spectacular sandstone rock formations similar to those found in the better-known Rock Town at Pigeon Mountain. The newer tract has large sandstone bluffs on the brow of Lookout Mountain, several waterfalls (except during dry periods) and three caves.

Zahnd is dominated by the oak-hickory forests typical of the Cumberland Plateau, but it also has drier pine stands and more moist hardwoods. Rare species known from Zahnd include the Ozark bunchflower and green salamander, both state-listed as rare; the mountain witch-alder, which is state-listed as threatened; and granite gooseberry.

Popular activities at the natural area include hiking, hunting, rock climbing, bird watching and nature study. Camping, horseback riding and use of ATVs or mountain bikes is not permitted.

Although there are no designated hiking trails, there is a path leading into the woods at the Ga. 157 kiosk that winds around through the sometimes-bizarre sandstone formations. Side trails lead through narrow crevices, under overhangs and into cave-lake openings that resemble small rooms.

To access the newer part of Zahnd, follow the old road leading away from the lower kiosk. It goes across Cedar Grove Creek and into a moist, cove-like hardwood stand with a lush herbaceous layer. Other old logging roads intersect with this one, affording numerous opportunities for extended exploration.

In late June, the state Board of Natural Resources approved plans for an \$8.3 million acquisition of 1,564 acres at Crockford-Pigeon Wildlife Management Area near Lookout Mountain. The property will connect Zahnd and the WMA.

Getting to Zahnd's kiosks

** Upper kiosk: On Ga. 157 4.4 miles north of Dougherty Gap Road. The pull-off is on the east or northbound side of highway.

** Lower kiosk: Take Cove Road north from Dougherty Gap Road, or south from Ga. 193. Turn onto South Cedar Lane either six miles south of Ga. 193 or 3.5 miles north of Dougherty Gap Road. South Cedar Lane will wind around to the left, pass over Cedar Grove Creek, and dead-end at the parking area inside the natural area.

The first TERN board

Eva Persons

Emmy Minor

Jaydee Atkins Ager

Herb Cawthorne

Jackson Daniel

Pat Edwards

Moses McCall

Lenetta Root

Kaye Wansley

Peter Abt

Tricia Allen

Gary Breece

Maurice Crenshaw

Terry Johnson

Larry Hodges

Suzanne Rogers

Jerry Payne

*1992