

Public Land
Management and
Cherokee Forest
Voices, a Non-Profit
Forest Watch
Coalition: One
Student's
Experience

Public Land Management and Cherokee Forest Voices, a Non-Profit Forest Watch Coalition: One Student's Experience

About the Author

I am a student attending East Tennessee State University located in Johnson City, Tennessee. My major field of study is Biology with a minor in Environmental Studies. I am very interested in conservation issues such as protecting the land and managing natural resources in the best possible way. I feel it is important to help educate people about environmental issues and hope to one day have a career that helps to do this.

Essay Summary

This essay focuses on my work for the class ENVS 4950, which is an Integrative Seminar in Environmental Studies, over the spring 2014 semester at East Tennessee State University. My volunteer hours were completed with Cherokee Forest Voices (CFV), a non-profit coalition under the leadership of Catherine Murray, who is the Director of CFV, in Johnson City, TN. Their mission is to increase the preservation of the Cherokee National Forest.

Cherokee Forest Voices influences the management of the Cherokee National Forest (CNF). The CNF consists of 650,000 acres of mountain land in the state of Tennessee, along the eastern border with North Carolina. CFV successfully helps to control the management of that land, working to promote ecological and recreational interests, to balance the interests of the timber industry in USDA Forest Service decisions. CFV works within the public participation

frameworks for National Forests, which were mandated by Federal Laws, including National Forest Management act of 1976 and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970.

My placement with CFV helped educate me about important concerns within the Cherokee National Forest and how this small group is able to make a big difference. When beginning this project, I will admit, I was not very knowledgeable about the subject of our National Forests, Wilderness Areas, and the laws that protect them. I feel that my understanding has grown exponentially over the past semester, however it is important to mention that I am still no expert on this broad subject. This essay examines the history and creation of the National Forests, important legislation that allows CFV to do their intended work, and why the work of CFV is important.

What is a National Forest?

A National Forest is defined as a specific portion of land owned and controlled by the government.¹ This includes a variety of types of land such as grasslands, rangelands, watersheds, deserts, wilderness areas, and recreation areas.² The National Forest System is presided over by the United States Forest Service, which is an agency of the Department of Agriculture.³

There are different levels of authority involved with the National Forests, beginning with the Chief. This is the head of the United States Forest Service who reports directly to the Undersecretary of the United States Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C. Following the Chief is the Regional Forester who is the Director for all the National Forests in one geographic region. The last two levels in the hierarchy are the Forest Supervisor and the District Ranger. The Forest Supervisor is a manager for one or several National Forests and the District

Ranger is a manager for one or two Ranger Districts which is 100,000 to 200,000 acres of a National Forest. The Regional Forester for the Cherokee National Forest is Elizabeth Agpaoa located in Atlanta, Georgia⁴ and the Forest Supervisor is JaSal Morris, located in Cleveland, Tennessee.⁵

Why were national forests created in the Appalachian Mountains of the Southeastern United States?

The Forest Reserve Act of 1891 was managed by the Department of the Interior.⁶ This act was mostly concerned with the Western United States. However, I feel it is important to mention it because it was the first instance in which the President was allowed to set aside forest reserves from public lands, marking the beginning of a system of National Forests.

In 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt transmitted “A Report of the Secretary of Agriculture in relation to the Forests, Rivers, and Mountains of the Appalachian Region” to Congress. In it, the state of the land is discussed and the problems that were occurring because of overuse. For instance, cattle grazing, clearing land for farming, and, most importantly, unauthorized timbering. Of utmost concern was watershed protection, erosion prevention, and sustainable forest products production as private timber companies had absolutely devastated the forests of the Southeastern United States by thoughtlessly clearing every large tree they found. What they left behind caught fire, and the soil then eroded. As the document states on page 4,

The soil, once denuded of its forests and swept by torrential rains, rapidly loses first its humus, then its rich upper strata, and finally is washed in enormous volume into the streams, to bury such as the fertile lowlands as are not eroded by the floods, to obstruct the rivers, and to fill up the harbors on the coast. More good soil is now washed from these cleared mountain-side fields during a single heavy rain than during centuries under forest cover.

The soil specifically being discussed is the Southern Appalachian hillsides, which were being carelessly farmed by private interests. It is determined that the protection of important rivers and other bodies of water can only be accomplished with the conservation of the forests which, in turn, can only be accomplished by the creation of a National Forest Reserve.⁷ [SEE APPENDIX I, FIGURES 1-5]

Widespread anxiety over the mishandling of affairs in the General Land Offices of the Department of Interior provoked President Theodore Roosevelt to encourage the transfer of administration of the forest reserves to the US Department of Agriculture in 1905.⁸

John Weeks, a Massachusetts Republican, became an unlikely leader for the issue of enacting a federal law authorizing the purchase of private land to protect watersheds. Weeks was a business man who had close ties to Joseph Cannon, who was Speaker of the House at the time, and had once proclaimed, “Not one cent for scenery!” However, Weeks became concerned with about the damage logging was doing to the White Mountains which was around the area where he had been raised. Weeks drafted the bill and was able to use his business background to gain the support of Cannon.⁹ Under his direction, The Weeks Act was proposed and enacted by Congress March 1, 1911. This act made it possible for lands deemed valuable to be acquired by the government and preserved as National Forests. At the time, most land was deemed valuable for the protection of headwaters of rivers and watersheds in the eastern part of the country, as the main focus was on rivers and streams crucial to navigation.¹⁰

The Forest Service was established in 1905 because of the public’s ever expanding list of what they want from national forests such as water and wildlife protection, wood, and recreation.¹¹ The federal government acquired some of the land located in the Cherokee National Forest under the Weeks Act of 1911. It did not officially become a national forest until

1920 when certain sections of land in the Southeastern United States were declared National Forests by President Woodrow Wilson. The present day boundaries of the Cherokee National Forests were drawn by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1936.¹²

Important Legislation:

In summary, these laws give the public a chance to voice their thoughts on certain proposed measures and challenge them if they deem necessary. Cherokee Forest Voices uses provisions in these laws in order to participate in the management of the forest.

National Forest Management Act of 1976

Congress passed the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) in 1976 to reform the Forest Service and ensure that the agency give due consideration to wildlife, water quality, and recreation as well as their traditional role of conducting logging, road building, grazing, and other activities associated with resource extraction. The legislation required each National Forest and Grassland to develop management plans and periodically revise them and also provides for public involvement in preparing and revising forest plans. These reforms heightened the Forest Service's duty to defend threatened species¹³ and prohibited clear cutting unless it could be shown to be the optimum method for timber cutting on the land involved.

Section 4 of the act states,

All forested lands in the National Forest System shall be maintained in appropriate forest cover with species of trees, degree of stocking, rate of growth, and conditions of stand designed to secure the maximum benefits of multiple use sustained yield management in accordance with land management plans.¹⁴

Mentioned above, the term multiple use is very important. The Forest Service defines multiple use as "managing resources under the best combination of uses to benefit the American

people while ensuring the productivity of the land and protecting the quality of the environment.”¹⁵ This basically means that the National Forest must consider recreation and environmental impact as well as providing timber products. A Land and Resource Management Plan is defined as a strategic resource plan which takes into account all resource values and resource sustainability.¹⁶ This section is important because if a proposed Forest Service project is not optimum for all things involved it can be challenged by the public.

National Environmental Policy Act of 1970

The National Environmental Policy Act, enacted in January of 1970, requires that the consequences to any federal action be studied before it is carried out. Section 101 states that the act “requires the federal government to use all practicable means to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony.”¹⁷ Section 102 requires an integrated method of decision making be used concerning any proposed federal action. This includes taking into account the environmental effects of any said action. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must be provided, any environmental impacts which cannot be avoided must be clearly stated, and various alternatives to the proposed action must be provided.¹⁸ NEPA provides for public notification and participation in agency project planning, however, it only requires agencies to consider the environmental impacts of their decisions, it does not mandate that the agency execute the most environmentally correct decision.

Cherokee Forest Voices History:

Cherokee Forest Voices is a coalition that has over 200 individuals and 6 member organizations. These include:

- The Wilderness Society

- Tennessee Audubon Council
- Smokey Mountains Hiking Club
- Wild South
- TN Chapter Sierra Club
- Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning.

CFV is also partnered with the Clinch Coalition and Virginia Forest Watch in Virginia.

However, this description makes one envision the group as being larger than it actually is. There are not 200 actively participating members and not everyone involved in each of the groups listed contributes to Cherokee Forest Voices. I only mention this fact because knowing that the organization is very small only makes the amount of work they do even more impressive and inspiring to other individuals who want to make a difference.

Their mission is to encourage increased emphasis on the ecological values of the Cherokee National Forest including:

- Restoration and preservation of biodiversity
- Improved protection of fish, wildlife, plants, soil, and water resources
- Promoting an increase in the size of existing Wilderness Areas
- Designation of additional Wilderness Areas
- Increased availability of nature oriented recreation and protection of scenic values

CFV is concerned with the Forest Service's strong emphasis on timber cutting rather than the preservation of the forests. The Forest Service considers 350,000 acres of the 650,000 acre Cherokee National Forest to be suitable for commercial timber harvesting.¹⁹ Cherokee Forest Voices looks to reduce this portion to 100,000 acres because financial analysis indicates this is

the largest portion capable of cost effective timber production.²⁰ [SEE APPENDIX II, FIGURE 1]

¾ of the funding for CFV comes from individuals and member organizations and ¼ is acquired from foundations. They send 2 fundraising letters per year, which include updates of activities and current threats to the forest. The budget for CFV is \$20-25,000 per year and Director Catherine Murray makes \$12,000 per year. They have pro bono, which means free or almost free, legal service from Southern Environmental Law Center and many of their resources, such as forest mapping, are provided by member groups.²¹

Timber Sales, Procedures, and the Role of Cherokee Forest Voices

The National Forests were created for the protection of the quality of the land which was quickly deteriorating. CFV promotes this protection with an emphasis on preservation rather than timber harvesting. When the Forest Service conducts a timber sale, private companies bid on sections of the National Forest in the Forest Service plans to harvest.

The Forest Service states that they conduct timber sales to achieve certain objectives, such as ecological restoration and protection, research and product development, fire hazard reduction, and the maintenance of healthy forests.²² However, CFV points out that the federal government, therefore the taxpayers, is losing money by doing this. According to Cherokee Forest Voices, over a 5 year period the Cherokee National Forest generated average annual timber sales of \$1.62 million and the Forest Service spent an average of \$3.2 million on these timber sales, which is an average loss of \$1.6 million per year.²³ CFV believes the public would benefit from the land if it were used in a different manner such as for recreational use which,

according to Cherokee Forest Voices, provides 27 times more revenue to local economies than income from timber does.²⁴

The NFMA allows public involvement in preparing and revising forest plans and NEPA provides for public notification and participation in project planning. This legislation supplies CFV with the information they need to get involved with the actions proposed by the Forest Service. The Forest Service is required to provide a SOPA (Schedule of Proposed Actions) to the public and also an EA (Environmental Assessment) for each project they intend to complete. If CFV determines a project will harm a sensitive area, for example, habitat to an endangered species or old growth, they will file an appeal/objection. If a compromise is not met with the forest service a lawsuit will then be filed. The Forest Service listens to the group because they have been sued by them in the past and know it is not an empty threat. As of 2014, CFV is 26 years old and during that time they have filed 70 appeals.²⁵

Spending Time with Catherine Murray of Cherokee Forest Voices



This is the way Catherine Murray takes a conference call, which is perhaps not exactly how one would expect the director of an important organization to conduct business. However, she is anything but conventional. Her office is located in her home and this photo shows her kitchen table which sometimes doubles as her work desk. She became an environmentalist because she was selected to be a juror in the trial of Champion International Paper Company. Because of this, she saw firsthand how the company was contributing to water pollution with no regard for the public. Her first concern was water. She soon learned that to protect the water, the mountains must be protected which led to her involvement with Cherokee Forest Voices. She was able to train under the previous leader of CFV for many years before taking the job herself which gave her the experience she needed.

During my time with her organization, she has told me more than once that someone with her background probably would never be hired to do the type of job she has with Cherokee Forest Voices, but I cannot imagine anyone being more passionate about her work than she is.

Over the course of completing my service hours, I was able to see detailed maps of the Cherokee National Forest. She pointed out areas which they were initially trying to get protected and then the area which officially ended up getting protected, which was always a lot smaller. One thing she emphasized was the patience it takes to be involved in work such as this. It takes a lot of time and commitment to make even the smallest difference. However, when talking with her it is apparent that she views her work as very rewarding and her enthusiasm is contagious.

We went over two current projects of CFV, the Offset Project and the Paint Creek Project. **[SEE APPENDIX III, FIGURES 1 AND 2]** As much as I would like to elaborate on these, they are still unfinished and it would take many pages just to describe each project. Being

able to work with this organization and learn more about their accomplishments and goals was a great opportunity and will hopefully help me with my career in the future.

Recent Developments Concerning Wilderness

On April 7, I was able to sit in on a conference call with TN Wild and Wild South, which are member organizations of Cherokee Forest Voices. During this conference call an update was given about the current Wilderness Act which included 7 proposals for Wilderness Area. This means that there are 7 areas within the Cherokee National Forest that are proposed for Wilderness designation by the United States Congress.

A wilderness area is defined as an underdeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence without permanent improvements or human habitation. It is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions which (1) generally appear to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of man's activity substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; and (3) may contain feature of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value as ecological and geological interest.²⁶ At the moment, only 66,000 acres of the Cherokee National Forest are designated Wilderness and permanently protected from timber harvesting.²⁷ This act, which has been in the making for roughly four years, was passed by the senate committee which was considered a huge accomplishment for Cherokee Forest Voices. Being declared a Wilderness area is so important because an area can only be designated wilderness by the United States Congress so once the area is chosen it is under a high level of protection.

APPENDIX I. Photos of Mistreated Southern Appalachian Forest from the 1902 Report of the Secretary of Agriculture.

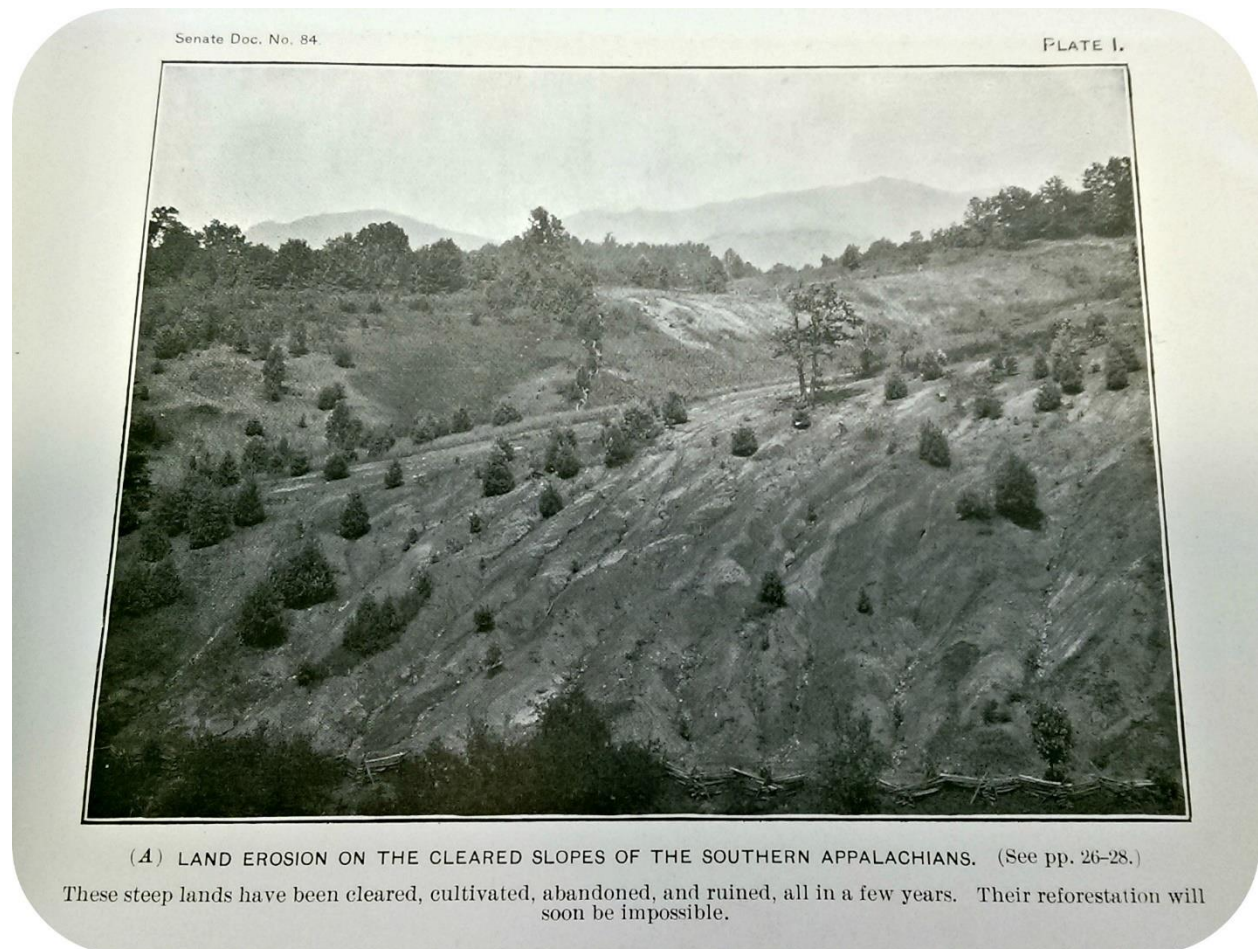


FIGURE 1. LAND EROSION ON THE CLEARED SLOPES OF THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIANS

These steep lands have been cleared, cultivated, abandoned, and ruined, all in a few years. Their reforestation will soon be impossible



STONE MOUNTAIN, NEAR ATLANTA, GA. (See p. 26.)

The ax and fire have removed the forest; and the heavy rains have removed the soil which once covered the larger part of this rocky knob.

FIGURE 2. STONE MOUNTAIN, NEAR ATLANTA, GA

The ax and fire have removed the forest; and the heavy rains have removed the soil which once covered the larger part of this rocky knob.



(A) VALLEY OF VIRGINIA. (See p. 16.)

This is a part of the great Appalachian Valley lying west of the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

FIGURE 3. VALLEY OF VIRGINIA

This is a part of the great Appalachian Valley lying west of the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

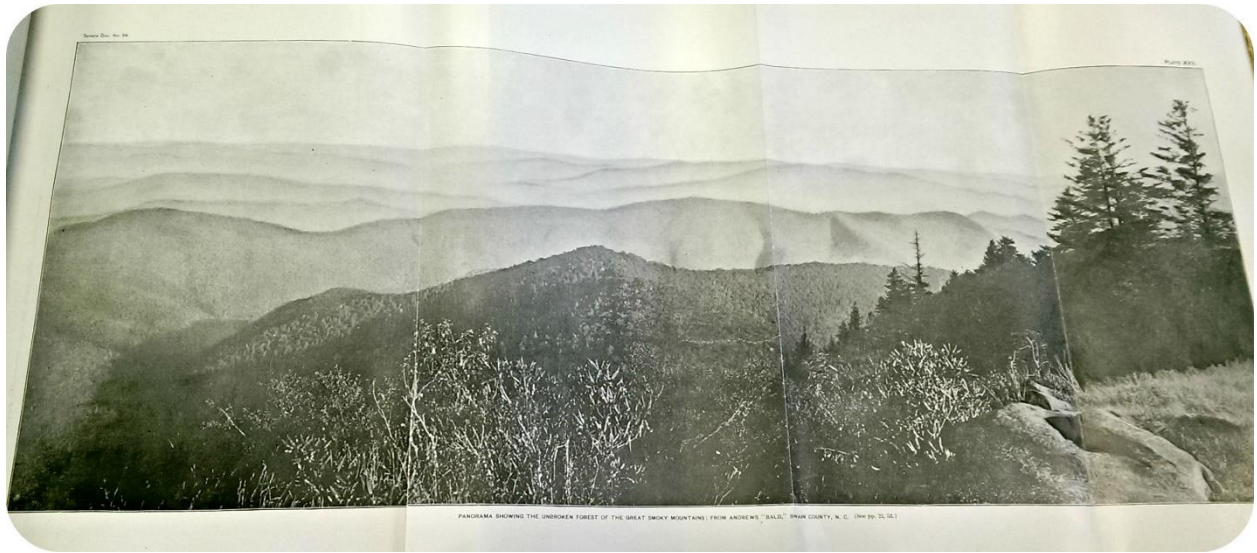


FIGURE 4. Panoramic showing the unbroken forest of the Great Smoky Mountains, from Andrews Bald, Swain County, NC.

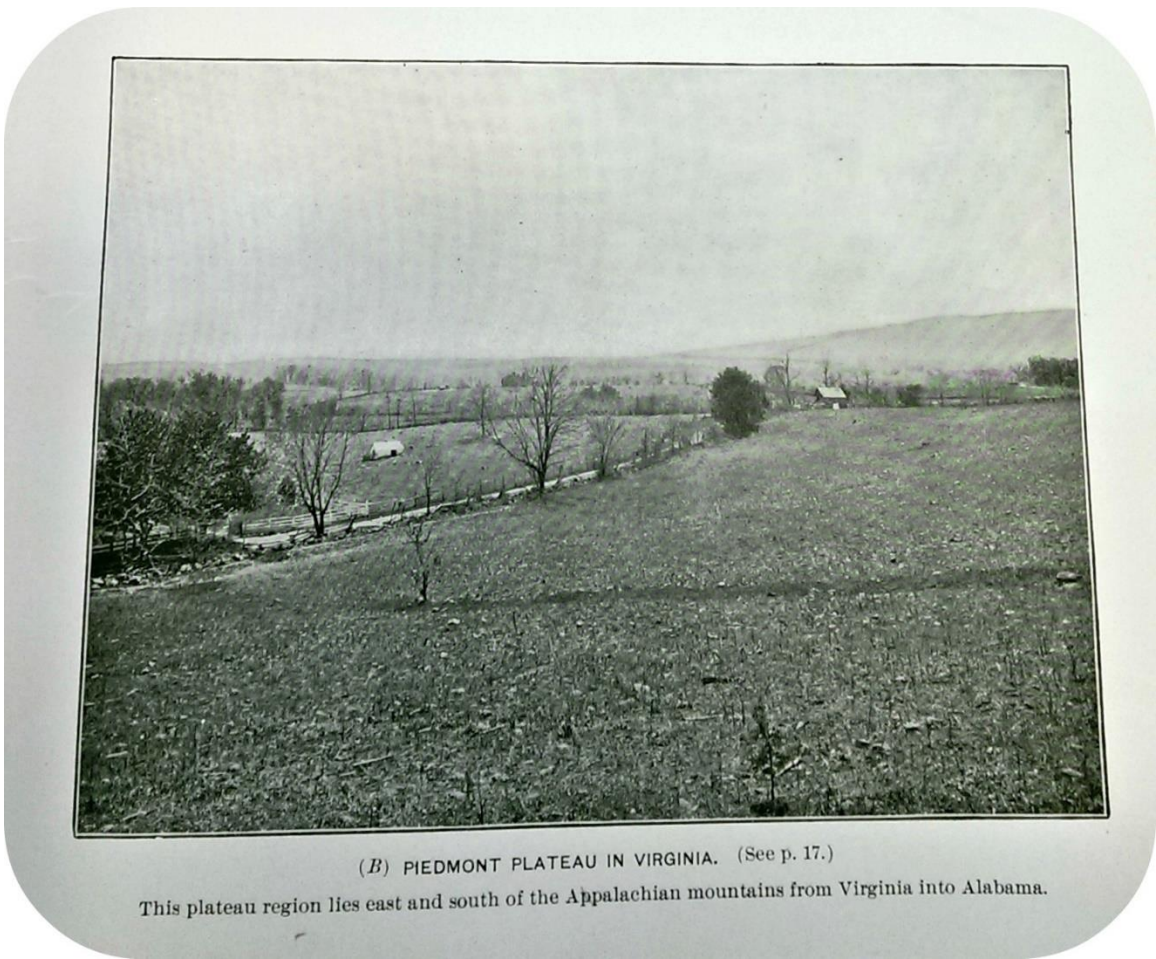


FIGURE 5. PIEDMONT PLATEAU IN VIRGINIA

This plateau region lies east and south of the Appalachian Mountains from Virginia to Alabama

APPENDIX II. Cherokee National Forest Map



FIGURE 1. Map of the Cherokee National Forest

Appendix III. Photographs of CFV Project Maps

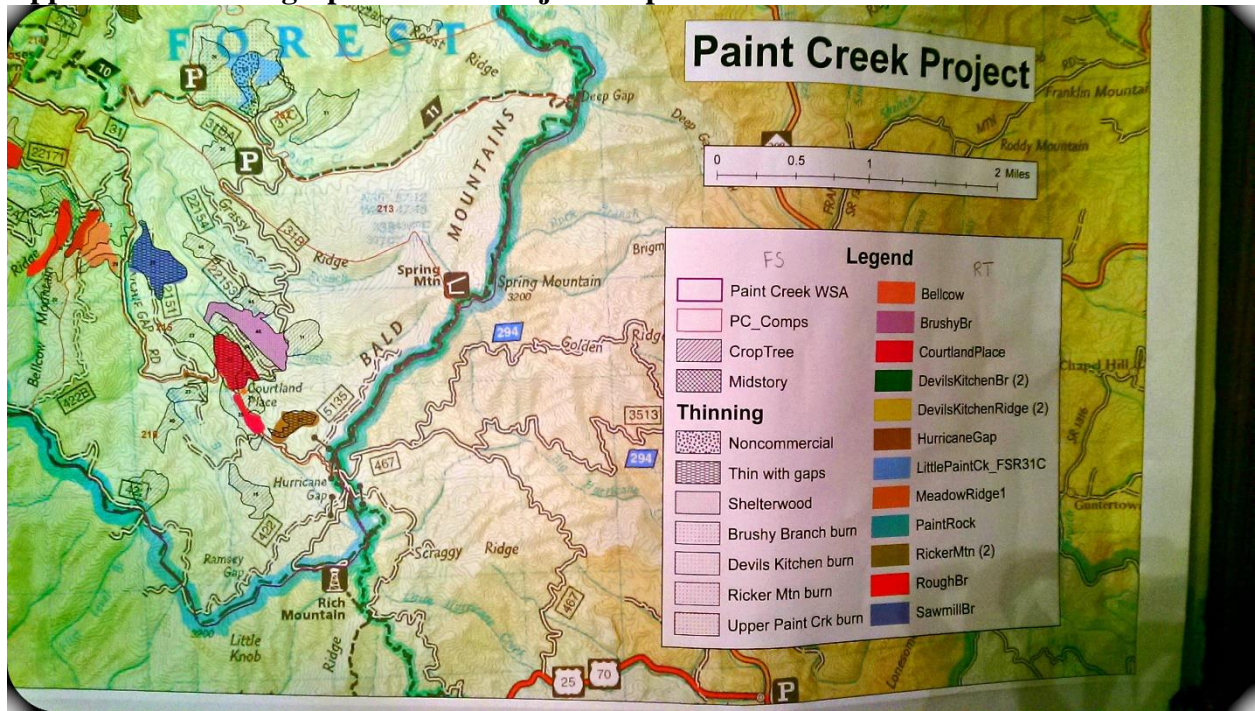


FIGURE 1. Paint Creek Project

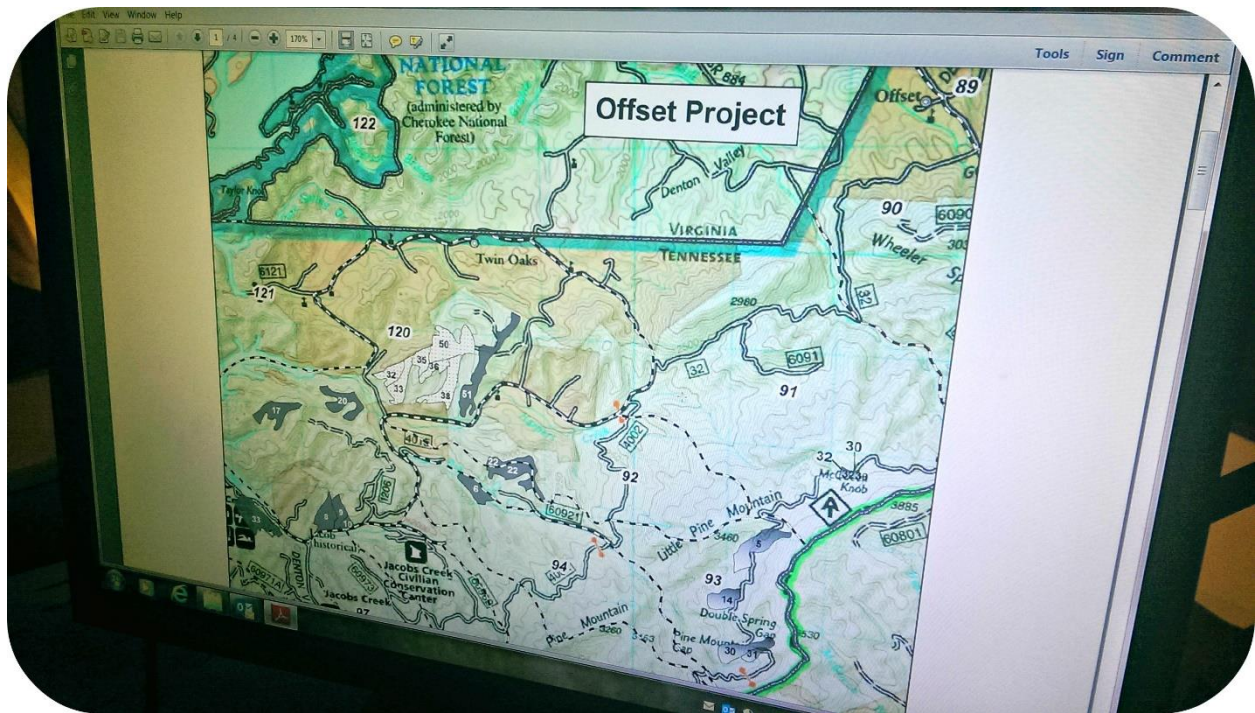


FIGURE 2. Offset Project

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- ¹ Rutkow, Eric, 5. Located in the Introduction, title *The Death of Prometheus*.
- ² http://www.fs.fed.us/global/employee_resources/marketing/pubs/51_ip_faq_100611.pdf. Accessed April 25, 2014. PDF file provided by the USFS (<http://www.fs.fed.us/>)
- ³ <http://www.fs.fed.us/aboutus/history/>. US Forest Service website. Accessed April 25, 2014. Last modified March 23, 2013.
- ⁴ <http://www.fs.fed.us/news/2008/releases/08/southern.shtml>, Found on the United States Forest Service website, Last updated March 29, 2013. Accessed April 25, 2014. Surprisingly difficult to find a web source for this information, this is from a press release that announced her promotion to Southern Regional Forester in August of 2008, this information has been confirmed by CFV documents. Contact Catherine Murray for more information: mtncat7@earthlink.net
- ⁵ <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/conf/news-events/?cid=STELPRDB5390058>. "Morris Named Supervisor of Cherokee National Forest". September 7, 2012. Accessed April 25, 2014.
- ⁶ Rutkow, 158. Located in Chapter 5, *A Changing Consciousness*.
- ⁷ <http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/misc/presidentmsg.pdf>. This document is provided in PDF file by the USDA Forest Service Southern Research Station, website is <http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/>. Accessed April 25, 2014.
- ⁸ http://www.fs.fed.us/global/employee_resources/marketing/pubs/51_ip_faq_100611.pdf. Accessed April 25, 2014. PDF file provided by the USFS (<http://www.fs.fed.us/>)
- ⁹ <http://www.foresthistory.org/ASPNET/Policy/WeeksAct/PassingAct.aspx>. The Forest History Society website, recommended on the USFS website for further research on the history of National Forests and the Forest Service. Accessed April 25, 2014. Updated March 2011.
- ¹⁰ <http://www.foresthistory.org/ASPNET/Policy/WeeksAct/index.aspx>. From The Forest History Society website. Accessed April 25, 2014. Last updated March 2011. This website is recommended on the USFS website for further research on the history of National Forests and the Forest Service.
- ¹¹ <http://www.fs.fed.us/aboutus/meetfs.shtml>. U.S. Forest Service Website, About Us section. Updated March 23, 2013. Accessed April 29, 2014.
- ¹² *Cherokee National Forest Hiking Guide: Second Edition*. By the Harvey Broome Group of the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club. Located in Section A: The Cherokee National Forest. University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville TN. 2005.
- ¹³ Rutkow, 319. Located in chapter 10, *The Environmental Era*.
- ¹⁴ National Forest Management Act of 1976, provided in PDF form by the US Forest Service, <http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/nfma/includes/NFMA1976.pdf>. Under Section 4, titled Reforestation.
- ¹⁵ <http://www.fs.fed.us/aboutus/meetfs.shtml>. US Forest Service Website, About US section.
- ¹⁶ <http://www.bcwatersheds.org/wiki/index.php?title=Glossary>. BC Watersheds Glossary, provided by West Coast Environmental Law. Updated June 21, 2011. Accessed April 25, 2014.
- ¹⁷ <http://www.fws.gov/r9esnepa/RelatedLegislativeAuthorities/nepa1969.PDF>. PDF file of NEPA, page 1. Found on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service website (<http://www.fws.gov/>)
- ¹⁸ <http://www.fws.gov/r9esnepa/RelatedLegislativeAuthorities/nepa1969.PDF>. PDF file of NEPA, page 3. Found on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service website (<http://www.fws.gov/>)
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- ²¹ Information provided by Director Catherine Murray. email: mtncat7@earthlink.net
- ²² <http://www.fs.fed.us/forestmanagement/aboutus/index.shtml>. US Forest Service, Forest Management section. Accessed April 25, 2014.
- ²³ Cherokee Forest Voices Factsheet provided by Director Catherine Murray, email: mtncat7@earthlink.net
- ²⁴ Cherokee Forest Voices Factsheet provided by Director Catherine Murray, email: mtncat7@earthlink.net
- ²⁵ All information about Cherokee Forest Voices provided by Director Catherine Murray, mtncat7@earthlink.net
- ²⁶ <http://www.cherokeeforestvoices.org/Default.aspx?tabid=58>. Cherokee Forest Voices official website. Accessed April 25, 2014.

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