Recovering Destroyed Land:
AN HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE DESTRUCTIVE EXPLOITATION AND MANAGED
RE-CREATION OF THE NORTHEAST GEORGIA MOUNTAIN ENVIRONMENT FROM
THE LATE NINETEENTH THROUGH THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH
CENTURY

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the thesis of LAWRENCE EUGENE MACINTYRE find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

________________________________________
Chair
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The natural resources of the northeast Georgia mountain area underwent significant transformation from 1850 to 1950. The introduction of railroads to the area in the 1880s brought a combination of scenery seeking tourists and industrial resource-extractors looking to turn the rivers and forests into profit. As a result, conflicts developed over how these resources should be managed in the twentieth century. These conflicts were short-lived, however, as the resource extractors successfully denuded the previously forested hills and dammed the Tallulah River, destroying the tourism-based economy that was slowly developing.

The Progressive conservation movement in the first decade of the twentieth century successfully influenced the federal government to intervene in the management of the area’s forests by purchasing over half the land in the northeast Georgia mountain area and placing it in the national forest system for protection and restoration.
Meanwhile, they refused to interfere with private enterprises damming the Tallulah river. This curious conflict of policies created a confusing situation for the government institutions and private industries with investments in the area. This confusion was further exacerbated in the 1940s when the Tennessee Valley Authority received federal government permission to build hydro-electricity generation developments on the primary rivers of the three counties within the Tennessee river basin.

The conflicting goals emanating from the federal government and the resource-extraction industries operating in the northeast Georgia mountain area resulted in conflicting natural resource management strategies being practiced on the ground. While the Forest Service worked for environmental restoration in the forests, the Interior Department supported both federal and free enterprise resource-extraction along the area’s primary rivers. The result of competing goals for the natural resources of the northeast Georgia mountain area was that a single management strategy was never developed and implemented during the period under review. Instead, several competing strategies created by different outside institutions were forced to co-exist with the hope that together they could create foundations that would ultimately result in an improved quality of life for the communities and restored conditions for the surrounding environment.
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and father for their tremendous support and for providing me the ability to spend much of my life enjoying the lands described in this work.

I would also like to thank my amazing wife, Leah M. Christian, for her support and invaluable assistance in helping me achieve my goal of earning a Master’s Degree.
INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1992 the Georgia Power Company opened the floodgates to the Tallulah Falls dam marking the first planned water release into the Tallulah River gorge since the dam was constructed in 1913. The water release was part of the power company’s effort to re-license the five dams in their North Georgia Hydropower Group with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). In the late 1980s, the FERC issued new requirements for dam re-licensing that included a review of the impact dams have on the environmental and recreational resources of a river basin. This information is then weighed against the value created by continued operation of the dam. The FERC decides whether the values created outweigh the negative environmental and recreational impact of the dam as part of their final determination on granting or rejecting a new license.

Working as a newspaper reporter, I had the good fortune to receive one of the few press passes that allowed me to witness this momentous event. I describe the event as momentous for personal reasons because I have spent many days exploring virtually every accessible area in and around the gorge. Every time I climbed down the sheer walls to the river bottom I would close my eyes and imagine what the gorge looked like with its natural flow falling over the multiple waterfalls. It turned out that reality was more spectacular than I had imagined.

This event spurred me to learn more about the history of the Tallulah River, and its famed Tallulah Gorge. My research expanded to include the history of multiple rivers in the northeast Georgia region, and naturally to the forests of the surrounding southern Appalachian Mountains that are so vital to the conditions of these rivers. These rivers and
forests are the primary natural resources found in the four counties – Rabun, Towns, Union, and Fannin - that I have identified as the northeast Georgia mountain area and are inextricably linked to the quality of life of the residents of the small communities located in the area.

This study begins in the mid to late-nineteenth century because it was around this time that white entrepreneurs first began looking at the natural resources of the northeast Georgia mountain area for potential economic development. The few thousand white settlers of the area lived in extreme isolation at the time and relied on subsistence agriculture and localized small-scale logging for survival. But the forces of the Industrial Revolution could already be felt one hundred miles south in Atlanta and it was not long after that railroad interests, with state support, began planning lines to reach the eastern and western edges of the northeast Georgia mountain area.

The Industrial Revolution’s march to the area was slowed, however, by the Civil War and post-war Reconstruction, allowing the area to remain isolated for thirty to forty more years. When the railroads did finally reach southern Rabun County in 1882 and western Fannin County in 1886, their primary cargo was tourists venturing out to enjoy the scenic beauty and relaxing powers found in the north Georgia mountains. Tourists accounted for the first substantial investment in the area, and a small tourism-based economy developed around the Tallulah Gorge in Rabun County and around the natural mineral springs found in northwest Fannin County. The railroads also provided entrepreneurs interested in extracting the area's timber resources for profit increased access to the old-growth forests that carpeted the four counties. While the tourists came
to enjoy and appreciate the natural resources already there, the loggers came to turn those resources into money regardless of the consequences.

In the early 1900s this conflict of interest quickly developed into the first significant environmental battle in north Georgia history once the impacts of industrial logging began interfering with the scenic beauty around the growing tourist resorts. But the environmentalists’ battle was not exclusive to the timbermen denuding the hills. At the same time they also made extensive efforts to preempt a growing interest in damming the Tallulah River just above the gorge for the purpose of generating hydro-electricity. The hydroelectricity interests included both the federal government and private entrepreneurs, so the odds of success were long for those who desired to preserve the area in its natural state.

The natural resources of the northeast Georgia mountain area stood at a crossroads around the turn of the twentieth century. The future of these resources seemed more and more likely to be managed by humans in the future, as opposed to the natural forces controlling the area for millions of years. The future natural resource management strategy would also determine the future economic foundation for the residents of the area, for it was becoming apparent that the subsistence farming methods practiced by the local residents were unsustainable because of the damage they inflicted on the land. The decision between a tourism-based economy and a natural resource-extraction economy would not be left to the local residents, however. It turned out that a combination of well-financed capitalists from the northeastern United States and the federal government, with assistance from Georgia’s political leadership, would become the ultimate arbitrators. While this perceived usurpation of authority gave outside interests colonialist like power
in the northeast Georgia mountain area, this research can support an argument that the outside influence provided better care for the natural environment than did the local officials that controlled the resources previously.

In the 1900s, when many of the decisions were made that guided the northeast Georgia mountain area’s future, the philosophies of the Progressive movement had a strong influence on the federal government’s planning and management strategies. The most important philosophy influencing federal natural resource management policies was the idea of multiple-use management. This idea was based on the foundations of “wise-use”: natural resource management that would provide growing economic development to both local communities and the nation through extraction, while protecting the overall health of the natural resources using scientific conservation practices.

The growing number of private capitalists attempting to make a financial profit from extracting the natural resources of the northeast Georgia mountain area certainly agreed with the Progressives’ desire to increase economic development, but they did not subscribe to the conservation protections promoted by the federal government. They instead practiced a cut-and-run management strategy in the forests and resisted any federal interference in their efforts to dam the rivers for hydroelectricity generation. While Progressives interested in natural resource protection were not pleased with the ecologically destructive management strategies of the loggers and power generators, they essentially followed the political tradition of keeping the federal government out of the affairs of private enterprise.

Soon after the Atlanta-based, and northeast-financed, Georgia Railway and Power Company, later re-named Georgia Power, completed construction of the Tallulah Falls
dam in 1913, the burgeoning tourist industry in the town of Tallulah Falls evaporated. Without the water thundering loudly over the falls the site lost its attractiveness and the hotels stood empty until they all burned in a large fire nearly a decade later. Natural resource extractors had won the battle, and the lands of the northeast Georgia mountain area paid the price.

The immediate benefits of a natural resource extraction-based economy were limited for the residents in the local communities. Though few residents had ever held wage-paying jobs before, they could always rely on the land around them to provide for their needs. Now that the lands were being destroyed by the resource-extractors the community members had no place to turn.

Georgia Power provided some employment opportunities to local residents while building the five dams from 1911 to 1927, but that project lasted just sixteen years and needed little manpower to operate once completed. When the federal government purchased roughly half of the land in the northeast Georgia mountain area from the early 1910s to the mid 1930s, to add them to the national forest system for protection and restoration, it also provided some badly needed jobs in the United States Forest Service, but not enough to support the entire working-age population. So the small communities in the four counties were in economic limbo until just before World War II, when the federal government decided to begin using the rivers in Fannin, Towns, and Union counties for multiple-use development. Just before the United States entered the war the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) received federal authorization to impound the Hiawassee River in Towns County, dam the Nottely River in Union County, and purchase the already-constructed dam and reservoir on the Toccoa River in Fannin
County. While the TVA’s multiple-use management strategy for these rivers may have been good for the war effort, it took an already strained economic and social condition in these three Georgia counties in the Tennessee River basin and made them worse by forcing the relocation of many productive farms.

The conflicting goals emanating from the federal government and the resource-extraction industries resulted in conflicting natural resource management strategies being practiced on the ground. While the Forest Service worked for environmental restoration in the forests, the Interior Department supported free enterprise resource-extraction along the Tallulah River. The pre-World War II introduction of Tennessee Valley Authority hydro-electricity generation developments on the primary rivers of the three area counties in the Tennessee River basin further exacerbated the conflicting natural resource management strategies of the federal government. The result of competing goals for the natural resources of the northeast Georgia mountain area was that a single management strategy was never developed or implemented during the period under review. Instead, several competing strategies created by different outside institutions were forced to co-exist with the hope that together they could create foundations that would ultimately result in an improved quality of life for the communities and restored conditions for the surrounding environment.
The Industrial Revolution and Southern Appalachian Natural Resource Management

The Relationship of the Northeast Georgia Mountain Area to the Destructive Natural Resource Management Practices and Future Recovery Efforts in the Southern Appalachian Mountains from the 1850s to the 1950s

In the mid to late-nineteenth century, as the Industrial Revolution became the dominant factor influencing the direction of American society, well-financed corporations targeted the abundant natural resources found in regions just beyond the industrial northeast to obtain the fuel needed to operate their energy-hungry machines. Industrialists began logging the vast forests carpeting the North American continent east of the Mississippi River, for they appeared to be capable of providing a never-ending supply of timber for fuel and building material. With the forests of the northeast region already reduced in large scale by more than two centuries of Euro-American settlement, the Great Lakes region became the next most convenient option for locating future logging opportunities in the 1850s.

According to William Shands, in his book *The Lands Nobody Wanted*, the grandiose logging and sawmill operations in the Great Lakes depleted most of that regions valuable timber at a very rapid pace. Then corporate interests turned to the next most convenient remaining forests that could be exploited: the southeastern United States region, including the Appalachian mountain forests. “As the supply of trees in the lake states diminished, the industry turned southward,” states Shands.¹ Thomas Cox argues in

his book *This Well Wooded Land* that the first migration of the lumber industry was actually “spread over a considerable period of time.” While the industry entered both the southern Appalachians and the Great Lakes states in the early 1850s, the abundance of White Pine in the upper Midwest, the most marketable timber at that point, made this region more attractive initially for large-scale industrial investment. Cox’s sources reveal that by the 1880s a combination of White Pine exhaustion in the upper Midwest and hardwood timber exhaustion in the Northeast practically forced the timber industry of both regions into the Southeast simultaneously.\(^2\) Southern Appalachian historian Donald Davis, explaining how this migration was influenced by conditions in the north Georgia region, stated that the social and economic vacuum created in the area by Civil War and postwar Reconstruction was ripe for “a new wave of entrepreneurs, land speculators, and timber barons - northern industrialists who had an eye for transforming the mountain region into a private domain of capital and wealth.”\(^3\)

When the timber industry relocated to the southern Appalachian Mountain region, corporate leaders successfully capitalized on a long-standing federal policy to move as much public land into private ownership as possible. In a 1936 article in *American Forests* titled “Uncle Sam Buys Some Forests,” L.F. Kneipp recognized that “the second half of the nineteenth century had been an era of public land disposal, dominated by the


idea that the public interest would be best served by transferring public lands into private
ownership and placing them on the tax roll with all possible dispatch.” He continued his
analysis by stating: “The widely accepted theory was that only through private ownership
and management would such lands contribute to economic and social progress.” A 1950
bulletin by Carl C. Moxey titled *The Forest Economy of the South in Transition*
reinforced Kneipp’s assessment and further elaborated on the ability of late-nineteenth
century loggers to leverage federal land use policy for their advantage. “Liberal land
policies” of the post-reconstruction South “permitted lands and forests to come into
private ownership faster than they could be utilized. The abundance of land and timber
and their ease of acquisition were an encouragement to hasty exploitation. The results
were rapid economic development followed by soil and timber exhaustion, neglect and
abandonment of land, and economic and social demoralization,” he stated. In his
research monograph *A History of Georgia Forestry*, James Pikl implied that the isolation
of the southern Appalachian Mountains kept land prices down, which in turn “facilitated
expansion on the part of the lumber industry.”

So, as the Industrial Revolution increased its influence on life in the southeastern
states, substantial capital found in the financial institutions of the northeast was used to
acquire large amounts of cheap, mountainous forestland throughout the region. A small

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4 L.F. Kneipp, “Uncle Sam Buys Some Forests: How the Weeks Law of Twenty-Five Years Ago is

no. 6 (State College, MS: School of Business and Industry, June 1950), 17; Samuel Trask Dana and Sally
Hill Book Co., 1980), 33; Cox, 226.

Business and Economic Research, Graduate School of Business, University of Georgia, 1966), 9.
number of these entrepreneurs set up shop in the northeast Georgia mountain counties of Rabun, Towns, Union, and Fannin and proceeded to exploit the land and local communities using the destructive methods described by Moxey. The first goal, and first chapter, of this thesis is to provide a brief historical understanding of the natural resource exploitation and restoration that took place in the aforementioned counties in northeast Georgia and the surrounding southern Appalachian Mountain region. The following chapters of this study will focus on the complex mosaic of parties from outside the region that acquired an interest in the condition and utilization of the primary natural resources found in this area. They will further discuss the strategies developed and implemented by these outside interests in the first half of the twentieth century to revitalize and re-create the plundered forests, and to bring managed control over the free-flowing rivers and streams.
To provide a more thorough understanding of the northeast Georgia mountain area under review, a description of the area’s political and physical geography is helpful. Rabun is the most northeastern county in the state of Georgia. North Carolina sits to its north, with the Chattooga River making up the eastern border with South Carolina. The west side of Rabun County shares with Towns County a high ridge border that is part of the Blue Ridge eastern continental divide. Towns, Union, and Fannin counties, as political boundaries proceed west, all sit in the Tennessee River Basin with North Carolina as a northern border. The southern boundary lines for these three counties are coterminous with the Blue Ridge eastern continental divide, which begins with the ridgeline border between Towns and Rabun Counties and then turns west, and southwest.
The high ridges physically indicating the borders of each county mentioned are significant because they divide most of each county into its own distinct watershed (with the major exception of the Cohutta Wilderness Area in Northwest Fannin County). Unlike most areas in the original thirteen states, whose political boundaries were drawn with little consideration of physical geography, these four counties can be easily identified by their physiographic characteristics.\(^7\)

Found at - http://www.cviog.uga.edu/Projects/gainfo/histcountymaps.htm

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This area is geographically and topographically unique. The southern Appalachians in North Georgia are a part of the “Blue Ridge Province”\textsuperscript{8} that stretches southward from southern Pennsylvania,\textsuperscript{9} Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia,\textsuperscript{10} or Virginia,\textsuperscript{11} depending on the source, through northern Georgia. The Blue Ridge is the easternmost range of the southern Appalachians, dividing into two separate ridgelines as it moves south from Virginia into Tennessee and North Carolina. The western Blue Ridge split-off begins with the high-elevation Smoky Mountains, identified today by Great Smoky


\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{11} Ellis Merton Coulter, “Tallulah Falls, Georgia’s Natural Wonder: From Creation to Destruction,” \textit{Georgia Historical Quarterly} 47 (issue 2, 1963), 121.
Mountain National Park. As it continues southward into northern Georgia the western Blue Ridge morphs from mountain ridgeline to isolated mountain masses, such as the Cohutta Mountains in northwest Fannin County.\textsuperscript{12}

The eastern Blue Ridge split-off begins with the high-elevation Pisgah Mountains in western North Carolina. South of that, on the North Carolina side of the Georgia/South Carolina - North Carolina border, it creates the Highlands Plateau. From there it extends into northeastern Rabun County and creates Rabun Bald at 4,696 feet above sea level,\textsuperscript{13} the second highest peak in Georgia.\textsuperscript{14} According to a group of early twentieth century scientists, dynamic changes occurred in the spine of the eastern Blue Ridge sometime in the mid to late-Tertiary geologic era (Tertiary era: 65 million to 1.6 million years ago). Before these changes, the eastern Blue Ridge continued southwest from Rabun Bald until it reached the Yonah Gneiss thirty to forty miles away. However, the softer rock found in the geologic make-up of this section allowed the upper reaches of the Savannah River, named the Tugaloo River in this area, to erode the southeastern slope and eventually capture the waters of the Tallulah River away from the western side of this continental divide.\textsuperscript{15} The river capture of the Tallulah dramatically altered the course of the eastern Blue Ridge continental divide. The result of the capture is that the northeast Georgia mountain area under review now contains headwaters for three major watersheds that

\textsuperscript{12} Wharton, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{13} USFS, 2-3. USFS (Map).
\textsuperscript{14} Wharton, 13.
drain the southern Appalachians: the Savannah River watershed that flows into the
Atlantic Ocean at the Georgia/South Carolina border, the Tennessee River watershed that
flows into the Gulf of Mexico via the Mississippi River, and the
Chattahoochee/Appalachicola Rivers watershed that flows into the Gulf of Mexico via
the Appalachicola River flowing through the Florida pan-handle.16

Today, as the eastern Blue Ridge continental divide drops off Rabun Bald, it
climbs northwest into another high-altitude mountain mass referred to as the southern
Nantahala Massif in North Carolina, just north of the Rabun/Towns County border. At
the southern Nantahala Massif, the eastern Blue Ridge again turns south at Standing
Indian Mountain and “tails off down through Georgia, with Tray, Brasstown, and Blood
Mountains as the higher peaks.”17 Unlike the western Blue Ridge and its mountain
masses in Georgia, the eastern Blue Ridge forms an almost continuous ridge through
north Georgia.18

The highest mountain in Georgia, Brasstown Bald, sits at an elevation of 4,784
feet above sea level along the high ridge separating Towns and Union Counties. The next
highest elevation is Rabun Bald at 4,696 feet above sea level. This mountain is located in
Rabun County along the Blue Ridge front “proper”19 of the Appalachian Mountains that
runs northeast/southwest through Rabun. While these are the highest extremes, most of
the mountains and ridgelines in this region top out between 2,500 and 3,500 feet above

and Legend Mingle and a Vast Vacation land Awaits the Visitor,” American Forests 45 (1939), 249-50.
17 Wharton, 13.
18 Ibid., 7.
19 Ibid., 6.
sea level and the steep slopes provide poor habitat for humans. Meanwhile, the valleys of the northeast Georgia mountain region are well carved river floodplains that sit at elevations between 1,500 and 2,500 feet. These few small areas provide adequate habitat and resources to sustain small concentrated populations in towns like Clayton, Hiawassee, Blairsville, and Blue Ridge, each a county seat of the four counties under review.20

Subsistence Forestry to Industrial Logging from the 1880s to the 1920s

In 1772, the colonial leadership of Georgia asked renowned British botanist William Bartram to conduct the first survey of the forests in the colony.21 After spending significant time touring the forests throughout the southern Appalachian Mountains, including extensive investigation in what is today Rabun County, he concluded that the southern Appalachian region, including the northeast Georgia mountain area under review, was the richest land, in terms of biodiversity, that he had found on the American continent. Natural historian Charles Wharton provides a modern understanding of Bartram’s description by explaining how multiple glacial progressions and retreats over the past two million years allowed boreal and temperate forests to move up and down the Blue Ridge. “Due to the complex terrain,” Wharton explains, ”there always seemed to be niches for survival, yielding our present high species diversity.”22

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21 Pikl, 70.
22 Wharton, 15; Hursh, 11.
spread out for miles across the northeast Georgia mountain area, and according to Shands
“In the late 1800s, travelers in the southern Appalachians reported stands of mixed
hardwoods with trees more than 100 feet tall and four to seven feet in diameter.”23

Descriptions like these painted a picture as beautiful to the logging industry of the
era as Leonardo da Vinci’s Mona Lisa is to art patrons around the world. Portable
sawmills cropped up throughout the southern Appalachians, including the northeast
Georgia mountain area, to “harvest the rich crop of old-growth timber, much of the
logging being wasteful in nature,” according to Pikl. Shands describes this logging
activity in the following manner: “In the southern Appalachians, the industry cut timber
with an approach that might be termed extensive high-grading, . . . whatever trees were of
value at any given time were cut, without consideration of future species or quality.”24
This means the timber most valuable for market at the time was targeted and cut from the
coves and ridgelines, while the poor and less valuable timber was left to re-seed the cut-
over tracts. The results of this style of targeted logging reduced the available pool of seed
stock and created second growth forests devoid of the tremendous tree species diversity
that greeted Bartram on his tour through the region. On top of this, erosion destroyed soil
quality on logged land, or in clear-cut areas, completely washing the soil off ridgelines
and cove drainages and leaving the bare granite structure of the Appalachian Mountains
exposed.25 Archer Mayor describes this southern Appalachian industrial logging strategy

23 Shands, 23.
24 Ibid.
25 Pikl, 7.
this way: “America’s timber resources in those days were viewed like coal or ore - something to be mined rather than cultivated.”

Prior to the 1880s, a small amount of logging for profit occurred in the northeast Georgia mountain area, as opposed to logging for agricultural field clearing or home heating and cooking. At the time, loggers relied on stream splash dams and seasonal floods to move their timber down creeks and rivers from logging tracts to sawmills. Therefore, only timber tracts reasonably close to streams and rivers, capable of floating “log rafts” down to the sawmill, were marketable. This severely limited the industry’s ability to drive deep into many areas of the southern Appalachians.

New technologies introduced in the 1880s altered the perspectives and practice of the logging industry and provided increased access to tremendous amounts of quality lumber found deep in north Georgia’s mountain forests. Cox argues that “the geographical shifts (of the timber industry) were, of course, no more important than the technological shifts that accompanied them and to a large extent were made possible by them.” This was especially true of the industry’s combined invasion from the depleted northeast and upper Midwest forests into the southeastern United States. Technological advances enabled lower gear ratios for train locomotives allowing for the creation of the “logging locomotive” capable of carrying heavy loads along poor quality tracks running up steep slope contours called “dummy lines.” Examples of these railroads used


28 Cox, 108, 164; Williams, 238.
throughout the southern Appalachians are the Shay Standard and Narrow-Gauge and the Climax Narrow-Gauge. Thomas Clark explains that the “southern log railroad was an anomaly in American transportation history,” because “roadbeds, bridges, and tracks were temporary in nature” connecting to primary trunk lines. “By 1890, the lumber industry was no longer tied to rivers and larger streams that would float log rafts . . . and thus large sawmills . . . in the mountains of north Georgia, began to send out feeder lines into previously untouched territory,” according to Schneider.

The log railroad also inspired additional new technologies, such as the steam skidder and log-loading crane, implemented for moving felled trees across the mountain slopes and onto the rail cars. As it no longer relied on seasonal flooding for river transport, logging became a year-round operation. The advent of these new technologies allowed for a dramatic increase in timber production and widened the market for southeastern lumber. “By the turn of the century, the timber boom was in full swing in north Georgia and western North Carolina, and teams of sawyers began removing the biggest and oldest trees from the mountain forests,” according to Davis.

The impact of these new technologies and the increasing scale of logging operations created immediate detrimental consequences to the natural environment. Erosion, wildfires, and flooding increased significantly, destroying valuable cropland

31 Schneider; Hayler, xv.
32 Hayler, xiv-xv; Cox, 108; Davis, 52.
33 Davis, 52.
along streams, wildlife habitat, and devastating the land on which the forests grew. 34
Steam-powered skidders dragged large timber up and across the steep slopes of the Blue
Ridge Mountains creating tremendous soil disturbance and allowing the heavy seasonal
rains to wash virtually all the topsoil down hill into the nearest stream or river. The
tremendous erosion resulting from some of the skid trails took “decades to heal.”35

“The dry slash left by loggers,” tree tops and refuse cut from the lumber before
being loaded onto the rail cars, was left in piles along railroad tracks and throughout the
clear-cut lands. These piles frequently caught fire as “sparks from wood burning trains
and skidders ignited thousands of acres.”36 Lightning strikes and arson, a traditional
method of revenge in the south at the turn of the century, also ignited wild fires fueled by
the discarded slash. The fires spread rapidly destroying all new growth and seed bearing
trees.37

From this point forward the Industrial Revolution influenced natural resource
management in the four counties of the northeast Georgia mountain area more than any
other social element. Well-financed loggers purchased valuable farmland -- and potential
farmland -- from local landowners, reducing the limited amount of productive cropland
available in the fertile river valleys. Once the logging operations began on these lands
they “largely cut out their stands, leaving behind them millions of monumental stumps to
memorialize temporarily what had once been a noble forest,” according to Clark. “Their

34     Ibid.
35     Ibid.
36     Schneider.
      Davis, 52; Shands, 35-36.
mills stood idle and abandoned railroad trackage fell into disrepair and decay, logging equipment rusted at the spot where it loaded the last logs.”38 Habitat destruction forced many native plants and game, important to the subsistence needs of the local communities, to be eliminated from the local forests, including white tail deer, wild turkey, black bear, ginseng, goldenseal, mayapple, galax, and many more commodities that traded in local stores for money and provisions.39 Clark states “in some ways the mills acted as social and economic safety valves by drawing away from (tenancy and subsistence farmers) laborers who had no alternative source of employment.”40 However, labor specialists might argue to the contrary that these mills used their capital to manipulate the labor market in their favor, rather than serving as a safety valve providing security to the local communities.

The U.S. Forest Service account describing the tremendous wildfire damage created by modern technologies also lays some responsibility for early mismanagement of the natural resources of the northeast Georgia mountain area on the local agricultural inhabitants of the region. “Farmers lost control of fires they set to clear land, to rid the woods of insects and snakes and to improve forage for cattle and swine which roamed the woods,” stated the report.41 According to Carl C. Moxey in a business school report on the southern forest industry, in the south “forest lands are always potential farmland, and conversely, farmlands are potential forest lands.”42

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38 Clark, 24-25; Cox, 226.
39 Davis, 53.
40 Clark, 34.
41 Schneider; Davis, 52.
42 Moxey, 4.
opportunities in the southern Appalachians before the turn of the twentieth century forced continuous generations to farm sub-marginal land. This land was made sub-marginal by continuously clearing fields out of healthy forests abandoning them after a few years of production once the soil nutrients were exhausted. The abandoned fields were then left to erode under the force of the tremendous rainfall that occurs in this region annually. Farmers would subsequently find another tract of forest to clear for new fields.

The result became single-crop agriculture by unskilled farmers that returned poor yields creating high costs and increased poverty rates.\textsuperscript{43} In addition, the original white traders to enter the Georgia upcountry in the eighteenth century introduced domesticated animals - cattle, hogs, and poultry - to the mountain forests. By the late nineteenth century, farmers, allowing their herds to free-range through the forests, saw them eat virtually all the canebrakes dominating the stream and river banks in the region and trample the new forest growth in cleared and abandoned fields preventing natural succession. This resulted in a “parklike effect” throughout the forests, according to Davis.\textsuperscript{44}

The presence of moonshine stills throughout the area as described by Andrew Gennett, a logger in this region around the turn of the century, was virtually the only other avenue of generating income for residents of the northeast Georgia mountain area.\textsuperscript{45} According to Clark, “rapid depletion of southern lands by repetitive and primitive farm operations and the removal of the region’s forest cover reached their nadir of regional


\textsuperscript{44} Davis, 42-45.

\textsuperscript{45} Hayler, 38-39.
impoverishment almost simultaneously in the 1920s.”46 The cumulative effects of poor natural resource management over an extended period of time significantly damaged the natural environment of the region, thus threatening the sustainability of the communities and cultures of the northeast Georgia mountain area.

Foundations for Natural Resource Protection and Its Relationship to Future Waterway Management in the Southern Appalachians, 1880-1911

In the early 1880s, roughly the same time northern industrialists turned their saws on the southern Appalachian mountain forests with full force, federal officials took the first steps towards exploring the possible benefits of capturing and utilizing the waters falling from the high altitudes of the Blue Ridge within the state of Georgia. Water-powered industrial operations along the Savannah and Chattahoochee Rivers, in the cities of Augusta and Columbus, developed as early as 1850, with both rivers recognized as the best watershed power potential east of the Mississippi River, excluding Niagara Falls.47 The city of Augusta promoted dam and reservoir development along the entire Savannah River because of its “large potential to meet the needs of the city-owned waterworks and of the manufacturing industries it was desired to encourage.”48

Boosters and technocrats specializing in river management initially conceptualized methods to improve the navigation capabilities, and increase the volume

46 Clark, 34.
48 Ibid., 244-45.
of commerce traffic, along the Savannah River. According to Louis Hunter in his multi-volume work, *A History of Industrial Power in the United States, 1780-1930*, by the end of the decade the U.S. Department of Commerce (USDoC) created a proposal for full reservoir development of the Savannah River watershed that included dam and reservoir construction at Tallulah Falls, in Rabun County, as a vital component. The goal of this proposal was to provide a ready supply of water to maintain navigable depths for deep draft barges to move material and products up and down the Savannah River.\(^49\) This is the first identified large-scale proposal to begin managing the waterways of the northeast Georgia mountain area for economic purposes.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recognized, around the turn of the century, the favorable conditions that Tallulah Falls, and the many additional waterways draining the Blue Ridge in the northeast Georgia mountain area, presented for waterpower development. “Many shoals and cascades are to be found,” according to a report delivered by Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson to the U.S. Congress in 1902, and “notable among these is Tallulah Falls.”\(^50\) This report, commissioned by the 56th Congress in 1901, studied the conditions of the forests, rivers, and mountain lands of the


southern Appalachians. The report concluded, among many additional findings, that “no region in the United States is better watered and better drained.”

Wharton described the region more specifically by recognizing the Blue Ridge as a “semi-rainforest.” The elevation of the mountains intervenes in the water-cycle, he explains, as warm, moist air from the Gulf of Mexico is rapidly lifted, resulting in as much as one hundred (100) inches of annual precipitation along the mountaintops and ridgelines, and seventy (70) inches in the river valleys.

Secretary Wilson summed up the potential of harnessing southern Appalachia’s well-watered, free-falling rivers and streams in his report to Congress, stating that “the rivers of the southern Appalachians, because of their value for

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51 Ibid., 3, 115; Georgia Power, 1.
52 Wharton, 13; Leighton and Hall, 7.
agriculture, water power, and navigation, were ‘absolutely essential to the well being of
the nation.’”53 Private interest surpassed that of the federal government, however, and the
Tallulah Falls, the primary target for dam development in the north Georgia mountain area, was ultimately dammed by an investor-owned utility.

The importance of the 1902 report from the Secretary of Agriculture extends far
beyond the USDA’s recognition of the potential waterpower to be harnessed from the
rivers of the southern Appalachian Mountains. As early as the 1880s, scientific
consensus, which became increasingly important to future political decision-making,
argued that forests played a vital role in erosion and flood control. President Theodore
Roosevelt stood with his primary environmental advisor, Chief Forester for the USDA
and professionally trained scientist Gifford Pinchot, in their support of such consensus,
and requested the commissioning of the 1902 report after witnessing the destruction in
the southern Appalachian region in late 1900.54 Seeing the poor conditions of the heavily
logged forests, he directly blamed the industrial loggers for badly mis-managing
important natural resources. Publicly he stated “the preservation of the mountain forests
should no longer be left to the caprice of private capital,”55 and in his note presenting the
report from the Secretary of Agriculture to the 57th Congress he commented, “more good
soil is now washed from these cleared mountain side fields during a single heavy rain
than during centuries under forest cover.”56

53   U.S. Senate: 57th Congress, 39; Shands, 28.
54   Samuel P. Hays Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement,
55   Davis, 52 (Roosevelt, 1901).
56   U.S. Senate: 57th Congress, 3.
As Wharton explains, dense groundcover is necessary for natural stream-flow regulation and for preventing heavy rainfall from washing all the topsoil on steep mountain slopes into local waterways. “Perhaps the most valuable attribute of mountain forests is their management of water,” he states. Secretary Wilson, recognizing the damage already inflicted on the southern Appalachian forests and waterways, recommended in the conclusion of his 1902 report the creation of a national forest reserve in the southern Appalachian Mountains as a method for the federal government to protect the conditions of the precious natural resources so important to the region, and to the nation. His desire was federal acquisition of large tracts of forestland that had not yet been logged to protect them, and the waterways within their domain, from future exploitation and wanton destruction.

Advocacy for the protection of the southern Appalachian forests actually developed years before the USDA’s 1901 study. In 1888, George Washington Vanderbilt, of the famed family of industry, visited Asheville, North Carolina, fell in love with the southern Appalachians, and eventually purchased 125,000 acres around Mount Pisgah just south of the city. This property included a long stretch of the French Broad River, distant headwaters of the Tennessee River that spring up not far from northeast Rabun County. Along the river he built the Biltmore Estate and hired a young, European-trained, professional silviculturalist named Gifford Pinchot to manage his properties.

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57 Wharton, 13; M.O. Leighton and Horton, 6-8, 38.
58 U.S. Senate: 57th Congress, 3, 113; Leighton and Horton, 8.
59 Fisher, 48.
In 1898, Vanderbilt donated most all the forest land to the newly created U.S. Forest Service, but maintained Biltmore Estates where Pinchot organized a meeting of many different interests in 1899 concerning what to do with the forests of the southern Appalachian Mountains. It was here that the first thought of creating federal forest reserves for protection was considered. “Thus was conceived the forest land acquisition program of the United States,” as proposed in the 1902 USDA report, according to Kneipp. Soon after this meeting the Appalachian National Park Association was organized to coordinate further forest preservation efforts, including the establishment of a national park in the region. In 1900, the Appalachian National Park Association of the South Atlantic States joined the Appalachian Mountain Club and officially asked Congress to create a national park. The 56th Congress responded with the traditional stalling tactic of creating a study commission for the proposal, and Senator Pritchard of North Carolina secured $5,000 to investigate the conditions of the southern Appalachians.

The 57th Congress, which received the report and recommendations of the study commission from Secretary Wilson, refused to move forward with the proposal for a southern Appalachian forest reserve in 1902. Meanwhile, a similar movement developing in the White Mountains region of New England asked Congress to provide federal management of their forests, and was also rebuked. A few years later, in 1907, a frustrated President Roosevelt asked Congress to commission another study on the

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60 Kneipp, 443-44.


62 Shands, 27; Ise, 207-208.
conditions of the southern Appalachians and the potential for federal protection and management. This time, Roosevelt had an ally in Representative John Weeks of Massachusetts, who brought together the leadership of these three forest preservation organizations to lobby Congress. The president now enjoyed the support of interest groups up and down the entire eastern seaboard. On top of this combined political pressure, a string of natural disasters, including the 1907 flood of the Monongahela River through West Virginia and into Pittsburgh, focused increased attention on the rapid deforestation of the Appalachian Mountains because of its relationship to exacerbated flood problems.

In response, Congress commissioned a new study of the southern Appalachians and the White Mountains. An unpublished 1907 report Shands claims to have found in the files of North Carolina’s national forests in the Asheville office of the U.S. Forest Service described the condition of the southern Appalachian forests in the following manner:

Soil was degraded by years of abuse. It is very probable that the productive capacity of forest soils throughout most of this region have been greatly decreased by repeated fires, so that present forest growth is poorer in composition and quality than it once was.

As chief proponent of the Appalachian forest reserve proposal in 1908, Secretary Wilson provided the findings of the study commissioned the previous year by explaining that the

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63 Kneipp, 444; Leighton & Hall, 8; Leighton and Horton, 6-8.  
64 Shands, 29.  
southern Appalachians “are advancing toward a condition of bareness and sterility.” He adamantly repeated his six year-old charge that the federal government purchase large tracts of mountain forestland and place them in a national forest for future “protection and improvement.” According to the report, various experts in all sciences that participated in the study agreed that “the southern Appalachian and White Mountains are of vast commercial importance to the industries of the country,” and current management would lead to their ultimate destruction.  

Secretary Wilson pressured Congress by implying that its lack of action on his original request years earlier had taken vital natural resources that were once in danger and almost completely destroyed them. Wilson said that in 1900, “virgin hardwood timber lands existed in large areas” and could have been purchased for very little cost. By 1908, however, the forests had “crossed the threshold of a hardwood timber famine,” resulting in the cost of the remaining old-growth hardwood stands being greatly inflated. He now recommended acquiring cut-over lands because of their much lower cost in order to repair the unfathomable damage that Congress allowed to develop.

Advocates of Wilson’s proposal for southern Appalachian forest reserves argued the Constitution gave congress power “to regulate commerce among the several states,” and federal purchase of eastern mountain forests would result in improved and increased stream flow and navigability on inland waterways for commercial purposes. Forest historian Samuel Trask Dana states that this theory was based on a debate started by George Perkins Marsh in the revolutionary ecological book *Man and Nature* (1864),

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68 Ibid.
which argued that forests play an important role in regulating water quantity and quality in streams and rivers.\textsuperscript{69} In May 1908, however, the House Committee on the Judiciary adopted a resolution quite critical of Marsh’s theory concerning the interconnection between forests and rivers. This act essentially denied Secretary Wilson’s proposal on the grounds that this ecological argument did not provide an adequate Constitutional basis for federal purchase of private land for preservation.\textsuperscript{70}

**Federal Investment in the Southern Appalachians: 1911-1940**

“For nearly a decade, opponents of federal acquisition were able to deflect bills implementing Wilson’s recommendations,” according to Samuel Dana and Sally Fairfax in their book, *Forest and Range Policy*. “Their leader was House Speaker Joseph Cannon, who vowed ‘Not one cent for scenery.’”\textsuperscript{71} As Shands describes the circumstances, “in those states of the original thirteen colonies there was no federal public domain” at the turn of the twentieth century. Creation of a national forest reserve on a “significant scale” meant the federal government must purchase private lands, and there was no such precedent for such an action according to the opponents of Wilson’s proposal.\textsuperscript{72} However, the 1907 report commissioned by Congress clearly stated the intentions of Wilson, Roosevelt, and Pinchot. The revision to the agricultural appropriations bill requested a survey of the watersheds of the southern Appalachian and

\textsuperscript{69} Dana, 113; Fisher, 49; Hursh (Stone Forward), 3; Leighton and Hall, 8.
\textsuperscript{70} Dana, 112.
\textsuperscript{71} Dana, 111; Shands, 29.
\textsuperscript{72} Dana, 112; Shands, 26.
White Mountains. A report on the condition of these areas was requested, and most importantly it desired an appraisal of the value of the land for future purchase by the federal government in order to establish a national forest reserve to regulate rivers for agriculture, hydro-power, and navigation purposes. With the results of the 1907-1908 study in hand, Roosevelt’s staff constructed a management strategy for the southern Appalachian forests that began with the proposed purchase of enough land to establish manageable public forests. And as Wilson reprimanded Congress for its negligence in caring for such vital natural resources as those found in the southern Appalachian mountains, the battle finally yielded a law that constitutionally enabled the federal government to purchase these lands for such purposes.

While the elements establishing a constitutional basis for federal purchase of private lands in the southern Appalachians will be discussed in more detail later, it is important to note that the leaders initiating the proposed land purchases believed they had legitimate goals in protecting resources of significant value for the nation as a whole. “Secretary Wilson concluded that the rivers of the southern Appalachians, because of their value for agriculture, water power, and navigation, were absolutely essential to the well being of the nation,” according to Shands. This was just one important factor for establishing the constitutional foundation for the federal purchase of private land.

Representative Weeks, who benefited from the combined support of the three major organizations along the eastern seaboard advocating federal protection of Appalachian forests, and the National Academy of Science, became the legislative leader.
of Secretary Wilson’s proposed initiative. In 1910, he introduced a bill in Congress called the “Act to Regulate the Navigability of Navigable Rivers by Protecting the Watersheds at the Head of Said Rivers.” In this act, Weeks proposed the acquisition of approximately seventy-eight million acres of mountain forest throughout the Appalachian Mountains. The industrial lumbermen throughout the East cried foul at Representative Weeks’ bill, complaining that the federal government had no constitutional foundation for purchasing private land for future forest protection. The Weeks bill countered this charge by stipulating that acquired land must be recognized by the U.S. Geological Survey “to be of such that the maintenance on them of a forest cover would contribute to the navigability of (a) stream.” In addition, this bill appeased the sovereign rights of the states, and gained majority support in the Senate, by providing states the ultimate authority to decide what lands they allowed the federal government to purchase.

Finally, after more than ten years of struggling to convince Congress that purchasing land for eastern forest reserves was not only legal, but also morally the right thing to do, Congress passed the bill and President William Howard Taft signed it into law on March 1, 1911. As Moxey describes the scenario, “The errors of a policy of hasty lands disposal have come to be recognized, but not until after the ill effects of

75 Dana, 112.
76 Ibid, 113-15; Ise, 212.
77 Hayler, 94.
78 Kneipp, 444.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.; Holliday, 59-60; Davis, 52; Shands, 19.
private exploitation have been felt.”81 “At the time they were acquired by the federal
government,” states Shands, “most of the lands that are now the eastern national forests
could hardly have been called ‘forests.’”82 They were primarily cut-over forestland and
worn out and abandoned farmland.83

In partial defense of the loggers, justifiably painted as villains who destroyed
these pristine lands, the forests of the Appalachian Mountains suffered tremendously
from the American Chestnut Tree Blight that struck in 1904. The American Chestnut was
a majestic hardwood that lived upwards of six hundred years, stood eighty to one hundred
feet tall, and dominated the ridgelines of the Blue Ridge. It was estimated that 25 percent
of the Blue Ridge forests were made up of American Chestnut trees before the industrial
loggers entered the region, but by the 1950s the Asian-born fungus identified as the blight
eradicated the tree completely from the eastern forests.84

Meanwhile, Congress provided authorization for the purchase of “forested, cut-
over, and denuded lands within the watersheds of navigable streams,” with passage of the
bill most often referred to as the Weeks Act, in honor of the tireless efforts of
Representative Weeks in acquiring the needed votes.85 It then created the National Forest
Reservation Commission and granted the commission authority to identify potential land
for purchase and to act as final authority for federal purchase approval, providing that the

81 Moxey, 8.
82 Shands, 20; Davis, 52.
83 Holliday, 59-60.
84 Fisher, 67; Shands, 22; Hursh, 14, 26.
85 Davis, 52; Gerald W. Williams, “Background and References on the Weeks Act of 1911 and the
2002); Pikl, 34.
parties involved fulfilled all guidelines and requirements. The commission contained members of the legislative and executive branches of government in order to maintain proper checks and balances. Its mission quickly became acquisition of up to five million acres of forestland in the southern Appalachians and White Mountains.86

Land acquisition was just the first step in the overall management strategy the U.S. Forest Service proposed for southern Appalachian forest reserves. Creation of the eastern national forests “reflected complex needs and aspirations,” according to Shands. The next goal was land rehabilitation, an effort to restore vast mountain lands environmentally compromised by logging, mining, repeated fires, and poor farming practices. The other main goal was to improve the economic foundation of the people and local governments that inhabited the region.87 Much of the land eventually acquired included those previously held in speculation, tax delinquent properties, and mountain lands too steep for grazing or agriculture. Logging operations made a habit of clearing a tract of land, and then defaulting virtually valueless property back to the local county government by refusing to pay up delinquent property taxes. As more and more discarded land accumulated in a county, property tax revenue declined significantly. As a result of declining revenues, the county governments raised property tax assessment and millage rates on cut-over and abandoned land, which inhibited the potential for future private investment in the region. On top of this, tremendous farm abandonment in the region added to the financial woes of the local communities.88 Therefore, local and state

86 Kneipp, 444; Pikl, 34; Fisher, 49.
87 Shands, 21, 33-34; Hays, 122.
88 Clark, 25; Hursh, 5.
governments, once reaching agreement on the conditions binding the Weeks Act, showed real eagerness for federal investment.89

The National Forest Reservation Commission started its work in the southern Appalachians almost immediately after passage of the Weeks Act when it established four purchase units for future acquisition and protection: the Georgia, Cherokee, Nantahala, and Savannah. The Georgia purchase unit identified 475,899 acres of land in the Toccoa River watershed in Fannin County, the Hiwassee River watershed in Towns County, the Nottely River watershed in Union County, and land in the watershed of the Chattahoochee River on the south side of the Blue Ridge that forms the southern boundary of these three counties. This purchase unit also included over sixteen thousand acres in Clay County, North Carolina, just north of the Towns and Union County boundary lines.

The Nantahala purchase unit, located primarily in western North Carolina, included 2,193 acres in northwestern Rabun County in the Tallulah River watershed. The Savannah purchase unit began with 691,276 acres identified for purchase along the upper reaches of the Savannah River watershed in South Carolina and Georgia, including Rabun County. The Savannah purchase unit also included the headwaters of the Little Tennessee River, a major tributary of the Tennessee River, which is actually located in the Rabun Gap valley in north central Rabun County. In 1920, a proclamation from President Woodrow Wilson combined the Georgia and Savannah purchase units with the Nantahala purchase unit to create the 1,027,220 acre Nantahala National Forest, with 47,511 of these purchased acres located in the north Georgia mountains. President

89 Shands, 33-34; Davis, 47; U.S. Senate Documents, Vol. 7, 32; Clark, 25; Dana, 112.
Harding’s administration, which followed Wilson’s, increased Georgia’s acquired lands in the Nantahala National Forest to 98,881 acres. The final step of this first phase of activity by the National Forest Reservation Commission in north Georgia placed the land of the Cherokee purchase unit, which was expanded south of Tennessee in 1925 to include 114,000 acres in the Cohutta Mountain area of northwest Fannin County, into the Cherokee National Forest of Tennessee and North Georgia.90

According to Shands, the eastern national forests are “purchased forests – land bought from willing sellers on an opportunistic basis.”91 In contrast, Davis suggests that the local population inhabiting the northeast Georgia Mountain area, and the rest of the southern Appalachians, was indifferent to creation of new national forests in their region. They saw no immediate local benefit resulting from their creation. Timber and mining companies that exploited the resources and left little to appreciate acquired most of the land in the region long before federal interests entered the area. By 1930, individual farmers owned only 40 percent of all private forestland in the southern Appalachians; industrialists owned the rest, according to Davis.92

The federal government, undeterred by the ambivalence of the region’s inhabitants toward the proposed forest reservations, supported the immediate objective of the purchase of five million acres of southern Appalachian forestland with the appropriation of nine million dollars. It then set a timetable of six years to complete the proposed purchases. On June 7, 1924, a significant new law, known as the Clark-McNary

90 Pikl, 15; Holliday, 60.
91 Shands, 19.
92 Davis, 53.
Act, amended the Weeks Act, and permitted “federal purchase of forest lands for the purpose of timber production” as a reason to enlarge the federal land purchase program beyond the headwaters of navigable streams.\textsuperscript{93}

Once the federal government purchased enough forestland to create manageable national forests, the U.S. Forest Service began the next stage of its environmental restoration/management strategy: to control wildfire. Forest fire management received its first real support through federal funds provided under section two of the Clark-McNary Act. Then, the year after the federal government provided the first real funding for a fire management program under Clark-McNary, the state of Georgia created the Georgia Forest Service, focused on fire control as its primary goal. Both the U.S. Forest Service and the State of Georgia realized that wildfire prevention and management needed the assistance of the local inhabitants. Therefore, the investment of local communities in controlling wildfires was absolutely necessary to the success of the strategy.\textsuperscript{94}

The local communities in the northeast Georgia mountain area agreed to join forces with the state and federal government and created timber protective organizations as a mechanism to do their part. The organized effort of a timber protective organization allowed the federal, and state governments, along with local private landowners, to pool their funds and expend them on agreed upon projects that would bring about improved wildfire control. The goal of this co-operative organization structure was to reduce administrative overhead dollars to a minimum, give local landowners responsibilities to

\textsuperscript{93} Kneipp, 446; Shands, 29-30; Pikl, 34; Dana, 126-29.

\textsuperscript{94} B.M. Lufburrow “Report of the Commission of the Department of Forestry and Geological Development to the Governor and General Assembly of the State of Georgia” (Atlanta: the State of Georgia, 1933-34), 19-21; Shands, 34.
insure their interests, and provide a conduit for local administrators to access expert scientific advice concerning land use. Private timberland owners frequently matched federal aid with construction of secondary firebreaks, timber protective organization phone lines, and lookout towers. The funds spent on fire management and prevention projects by private timberland owners were authorized for federal reimbursement at a rate “not to exceed 50 percent of the cost” according to the Clark-McNary Act and the rules and procedures for the timber protective organizations.95

According to the first Chief Forester of the state of Georgia, B.M. Lufburrow, in a 1934 report to the Governor and the General Assembly, the success of creating active timber protective organizations throughout large areas of the north Georgia mountains helped persuade the federal government to allocate an above average number of Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps and personnel to the area.96 The late 1920s and early 1930s saw the attention of the federal government turn from land acquisition to rehabilitation, according to Shands. On March 31, 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 1601, creating the Civilian Conservation Corps. The mission of the Corps was twofold: (1) employ young men who were required to send most of their earnings home to families in need, and (2) protect the nation’s long neglected natural resources by using enrollees to work on conservation projects.97

95 Lufburrow, 8-10, 21.
96 Ibid., 5.
This was a small but popular piece of President Roosevelt’s “New Deal” depression recovery program, and “represented a massive renewal of federal involvement in the thoughtful stewardship of our nation’s natural resources,” an obligation that had waned since the days of Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot, according to Craig Holstine in the forward to Edwin Hill’s book *In the Shadow of the Mountain: The Spirit of the CCC*. 98 “In fact, more forestry was done in Georgia in 1933-34 than ever before,” thanks chiefly to the Civilian Conservation Corps, Lufburrow stated in his 1934 report. 99 President Roosevelt reinforced the significance of the Civilian Conservation Corps mission by allocating another twenty million dollars to forest acquisition funds, which could also be expended for building roads, reforesting the denuded hills, constructing administrative buildings, developing picnic areas, campgrounds, and trails. 100 In addition, another of Roosevelt’s depression recovery programs, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), which was established May 18, 1933, became very active in Towns, Union, and Fannin Counties and used its intergovernmental relationship with the CCC to provide significant forest restoration assistance in those counties. 101

Clark provides a good description of the CCC’s work when he states, “in the south, the main work for the Corps was concentrated in the areas of halting erosion on abandoned farmlands, bringing devastating forest fires under control, opening roads and trails, and planting trees.” 102 Shands makes it clear, however, that, “it was the eventual

98 Hill (Holstine), forward.
99 Lufburrow, 5.
100 Shands 30, 33; Dana, 144–46.
101 Clark, 78; Dana, 147–48.
102 Clark, 77.
control of fire that truly permitted restoration of the forests.”103 And fire control was the primary goal of the combined efforts of the Civilian Conservation Corps and the timber protective organizations of the north Georgia mountain area. Private timberland owners that participated in local timber protective organizations frequently allowed the federal government to place CCC camps on their property. In return, their local timber protective organization received increased assistance developing fire protection plans, “such as firebreaks, the elimination of fire hazards,” Forest Service fire access roads, heavy equipment, and reliable area mapping.104

In 1936, the National Forest Reservation Commission established the Chattahoochee National Forest throughout a large portion of the north Georgia Blue Ridge Mountains. It assigned a gross total of 1,574,325 acres to the new national forest and placed all future land purchases in the north Georgia mountains into the newly established Chattahoochee Purchase unit. The legal foundation for this action was based on the Weeks Act 1911, the General Exchange Act 1922, the Clark-McNary Act 1924, and an enabling act for the state of Georgia that clarified and verified land titles in the region for federal purchase. Of the million plus acres within the boundaries of the Chattahoochee National Forest, the U.S. Forest Service owned and administered 679,601 acres, which included all purchased north Georgia lands that previously existed in the Nantahala and Cherokee National Forests in North Carolina and Tennessee. The remaining acres were private “inholdings” that the federal government hoped to eventually acquire. The boundaries of the Chattahoochee National Forest, from its

103 Shands, 36.
104 Lufburrow, 5, 8.
creation to present day, encompassed the large majority of land in the northeast Georgia mountain area.  

In his study of the southern Appalachian forests, William Shands concludes: “On the eastern national forests, the Forest Service is steward of a legacy. It is a legacy of human use and misuse of the land.” It is “also a legacy of concern and restoration,” he continues. These are kind words for federal authorities that attempted to make the best out of the horrible conditions found on lands they were now instructed to manage.

On the other hand, state leaders apparently maintained their desire to continue investing in local natural resource exploitation in order to improve business growth in the state. “The meaning of conservation is acquiring new and added significance in Georgia,” according to Richard C. Job, Director of the State Planning Board in his report Forest Planning Georgia, 1939. “A powerful state is being built here by the wealth of natural resources, with which the country was so liberally endowed.” Utilization was certainly an important aspect of conservation in Georgia.

The northeast Georgia mountain area is definitely liberally endowed with a wealth of natural resources. When the forces of the Industrial Revolution discovered this wealth of natural resources, they set forth, sawed down vast amounts of old-growth timber, and as will be described in the coming chapters, started to harness the potential power from the free-flowing rivers. As the technology improved, moneyed industrialists increased the

105     Pikl, 33-34; Elliot, 248; Rabun County Heritage Book Committee, 87-88.

106     Shands, 19.

107     Richard C. Job, Forest Planning Georgia, 1939 a study conducted under the auspices of the works Progress Administration of Georgia – O.P. No. 465-34-3-273 (Atlanta: State Planning Board of Georgia, 1939), iv.
rate of their exploitation. Once the conservation interests along the eastern seaboard convinced the federal government that action was right and legal, it was almost too late to recover the treasures that were now lost. But recovery efforts accomplished important goals over a long period of time, and they continue today.

The next chapter will provide a closer look at the four counties identified in the northeast Georgia mountain area. In addition, some important new actors will be introduced who can deliver more specific detail on natural resource management in each county. The U.S Forest Service and the state of Georgia did not go about recovering the destroyed lands of the southern Appalachian Mountains alone. By the same token, loggers and industrialists cannot be burdened with all the blame for destructive ecological management of lands in the northeast Georgia mountain area. A complex mosaic of interests played a role in managing the natural resources of the area from the middle 1800s to the middle 1900s, including local farmers and government officials. However, investors based well outside the region, such as well financed industrialists and huge government bureaucracies, most certainly played the primary role influencing the natural resource management in the southern Appalachian Mountains, especially in the northeast Georgia mountain area.
Native son Andrew Ritchie described a trip before 1880 from Atlanta to his Rabun County home in the following manner, “go one day by railroad, the next day by horse and buggy, a third day on horseback, a fourth day on foot, and then on all fours until you climbed a tree, and when you fell out, you’d be in Rabun County.”¹ While this anecdote does a good job of depicting the isolation of the southern Appalachians in the

¹ Andrew Jackson Ritchie, *Sketches of Rabun County History* (Rabun County: by the author, 1948), 308.
latter half of the nineteenth century, and even into the early parts of the twentieth century in some places, the story of Rabun County changed soon after this metaphorical trip was made. Its story became one of natural resource utilization, or exploitation, depending on the point of view. The availability of valuable natural resources within the county’s boundaries brought the economic transformations of the Industrial Revolution to Rabun County ahead of many other southern Appalachian Mountain communities. But, as frequently was the case when the forces of industry were introduced to pre-industrial communities, the good came with the bad. While discovering limited economic benefits from early industrialization, Rabun County residents also witnessed significant ecological destruction through the clearing of their mountain forests, multiple damming of the free-flowing Tallulah River, and the resulting de-watering of the Tallulah Gorge. As the sweeping changes of the Industrial Revolution invaded the quiet pastoral life of post-Reconstruction Rabun County, decisions made by outside interests to exploit, extract, manage, and restore the natural resources of the area dramatically changed the lives of its residents, the sustainability of its communities, and the conditions of the natural environment.

Rabun is the northeasternmost county in the state of Georgia. North Carolina sits to the north, with the Chattooga River making up the eastern border with South Carolina. The Tallulah River and its watershed identify the western and southern boundaries as it flows south out of North Carolina, and then southeast, to converge with the Chattooga River at the Georgia/South Carolina border. This region was the possession of the Cherokee and Creek Indians until an 1817 agreement ceded the Cherokee’s land east of the Tallulah River to the State of Georgia. On December 21, 1819 the Georgia legislature
established a county out of the ceded lands and named it after the eleventh governor of Georgia, William Rabun. By 1820 the state had surveyors running plot lines to include this new area in the Georgia land lottery system. The official population of Rabun County when the land lottery began was 524 residents.\(^2\) The first benefactors of the land lottery in Rabun County “were principally backwoods hunters.”\(^3\) Hermits and recluses were next to set up homesteads.

The two key rivers draining the mountains of Rabun County are the Chattooga and the Tallulah Rivers. Both rivers are important natural resources that provided attraction to outside industrial interests for their large quantities of rapidly falling water that is the necessary element for hydroelectricity generation, and for the access they both provided to the vast amounts of old-growth forests that covered the Rabun County mountains. When the industrial potential of these two rivers was discovered by both private and federal interests in the 1880s, natural resource management in Rabun County began a dramatic new phase that subjugated the area to the destructive practices of unregulated industrial capitalists for at least the next thirty years.

The headwaters of the Chattooga River fall from Whiteside Mountain, a 5,000 plus-foot peak in North Carolina’s Highland Mass of the eastern Blue Ridge described in the first chapter. Flowing south-southwest, the waters soon pass by Ellicott Rock, the U.S.G.S. marker that identifies the joining of Georgia and North and South Carolina. Continuing southwest, the Chattooga River makes up the borderline between Rabun

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\(^2\) Ritchie, 39; Ellis Merton Coulter, “Tallulah Falls, Georgia’s Natural Wonder: From Creation to Destruction,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 47 (issue 2, 1963), 128, 150.

County and South Carolina until it merges with the Tallulah River and becomes the Tugaloo River. These are primary headwaters of the Savannah River, which marks the Georgia/South Carolina border until it flows into the Atlantic Ocean at the city of Savannah, Georgia.

The headwaters of the Tallulah River spring from the sides of Standing Indian Mountain, a 5,500-foot peak in North Carolina’s southern Nantahala Mass just a few miles north of the Rabun County border. The waters of the Tallulah flow on the western side of the Blue Ridge Front proper, as described in chapter one, which topographically means that it should eventually flow into the Gulf of Mexico via the Chattahoochee/Appalachicola River system. This was the case until some point in the mid-to late-Tertiary Geologic Era (Tertiary Geologic Era: 64 million to 1.6 million years ago), according to geologist Douglas Wilson Johnson and a host of other turn-of-the-century scientists. Today, however, the waters of the Tallulah River pass through the Blue Ridge front to converge with the Chattooga River and make up the headwaters for the Savannah River, or Tugaloo River, as it is named for a short stretch after the confluence.4

The location where the Savannah River backwashed the Blue Ridge Front to redirect the Tallulah water’s journey from the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic Ocean is today known as the Tallulah River Gorge. Although the actual dimensions vary by account, the Tallulah Gorge is approximately two miles long and carves a rupture into the granite Blue Ridge Front that ranges from 600 feet deep at its upstream start to roughly

1,200 feet deep as the Tallulah River leaves the gorge and merges with the Chattooga
River. The Georgia Power Company estimates that the average natural flow of the
Tallulah River through the gorge was roughly 600 cubic feet per second and the water
tumbled more than 650 feet over the first half-mile distance.⁵

The dramatic forces of nature found in the Tallulah River gorge first received
national recognition in 1849 when a Boston newspaper column stated, “one glimpse of
Tallulah is worth a voyage across the Atlantic, or a pedestrian pilgrimage from the shores
of Boston Bay to the southern slopes of the Blue Ridge.” In fact, by this time tourists
created four separate paths to the bottom, although “it took a hardy soul to try any of
them.”⁶ It seems the Tallulah River gorge garnered a good deal of attention from a
variety of interests towards the end of the nineteenth century, with many hoping to
exploit the magnificent spectacle for economic gain.

Tourism and Resource Exploitation:
Economic Foundations for the Turn of the Century

The populace of Rabun County was small, around five thousand residents, and
mainly made up of white subsistence farming families when the first trappings of
industry arrived on the scene after 1880.⁷ In addition to the industrial loggers beginning
to saw the first large tracts of old-growth timber, there were also a few budding

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⁵ Charles Seabrook, “Northeast Georgia’s Tallulah Gorge: A Breathtaking New Park, State, Georgia
Power Enter Pact to Protect Site,” The Atlanta Constitution, 28 October 1992, Sec. A p 1; Gerry Yandel,
“With a Park on the Way, Tallulah Falls May Rise Again,” The Atlanta Constitution, 4 November 1992,
Atlanta Constitution, 4 December 1992, Sec. E p 1.

⁶ Coulter (issue 2), 129-31.

entrepreneurs from the Athens and Atlanta communities south of Rabun County interested in capitalizing on a growing tourism industry based around the awe-inspiring sights and thundering sounds of the Tallulah River Gorge. Reports assert that the beginning stages of a tourism industry developed around the gorge soon after its discovery in 1819.\textsuperscript{8} Word quickly spread about this natural wonder in the north Georgia mountains and the gorge became well known among regional tourists. Thousands of them soon began to make the arduous journey described in the introduction of the chapter in order to see the “Niagara of the South,” as the falls in Tallulah Gorge were frequently termed.\textsuperscript{9}

An 1854 act passed by the Georgia General Assembly authorized development of a railroad from Athens to the county seat of Rabun, the town of Clayton. Boosters chartered the NorthEastern Railroad, Inc. the same year and dreamed of connecting with the Blue Ridge Railroad under construction to connect Knoxville, Tennessee, with Franklin, North Carolina. The economic difficulties wrought as a result of the Civil War quickly dashed the boosters’ dream of immediate riches, however, and it was not until 1871 that construction first began.

Work began on the southern end of the line at the town of Cornelia. The maintenance shop and corporate headquarters for the NorthEastern Railroad, constructed at an elevation of 1,527 feet above sea level, sat next to the first segments of track. Unfortunately for the proprietors of the NorthEastern Railroad, financing continued to be

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{8}] Ellis Merton Coulter, “Tallulah Falls, Georgia’s Natural Wonder: From Creation to Destruction,” \textit{Georgia Historical Quarterly} 47, (issue 3, 1963), 249.
\end{itemize}
difficult to arrange in those times and construction slowed to a stop. In 1881, interests representing the Richmond & Danville Railroad system acquired the rights to the proposed and stagnant line from the NorthEastern Railroad, Inc. Construction began again in earnest, and reached the town of Tallulah Falls, on the edge of the Tallulah Gorge, the next year in 1882.10

Lodging and other accommodation services constructed for tourists arose in Tallulah Falls as tourism increased throughout the 1870s. By 1877, packaged tours began advertising three-day vacations for $10 a person from Atlanta to Tallulah Falls.11 According to Georgia historian E. Merton Coulter, “during the 1880s the hotel business at Tallulah Falls continued to grow, with livery stables supplying riding horses and vehicles for trips into the country.”12 As Coulter explains it, in 1882 businessmen from the city of Athens who were “interested in the hotel developments of Tallulah Falls and constructing summer homes there”13 developed railroad service from Athens to Clayton that ran alongside the Tallulah River Gorge. This was the beginning of mechanized industry and the first modern transportation linking Rabun County with the outside world.

A tourism economy boomed in Tallulah Falls once the journey to the gorge was made relatively cheap and easy. In 1886, Tallulah Fall’s hotelman, Colonel Frank Young, pulled a publicity stunt that would not have succeeded before the railway became accessible. He enlisted J.A. St. John, stage named Professor Leon, to tightrope across the

10     Boyd, 5-6.
11     Ibid., 7; Coulter (issue 2), 148-49.
12     Coulter (issue 2), 148-49.
13     Ibid.
gorge at its highest point. As the *Atlanta Constitution* reported July 25, 1886, it was to be “not only the longest walk, but the highest walk accomplished by a human being.”\(^{14}\) The stunt drew between 3,500 and 6,000 spectators, according to the same newspaper, a crowd certainly never seen before in Rabun County. Meanwhile, in the 1890s three hotels with “mountain atmosphere and a constant loudly thundering of the falls” accommodated up to five hundred guests with “music and gaiety and good food.” These were the Cliff House (named after the famous San Francisco hotel), the Grand View Hotel, and the Robinson House.\(^{15}\) According to Coulter, by the early 1900s the line became so heavily used to carry vacationers to the gorge that it became known as the Tallulah Falls Railroad.\(^{16}\)

While passenger travel to Tallulah Falls on the Richmond and Danville rail line sounds substantial according to the previous account, the financial support provided by communities along the rest of the rail line was apparently not adequate to keep the principal investors interested in continuing their ownership. In 1887, the Richmond & Danville sold the railroad rights and rail line to the Blue Ridge & Atlantic Railroad Company, which proposed adding this line to an expanded system running from Savannah, Georgia, to Knoxville, Tennessee. Unfortunately for the new investors, the difficulty of securing capital for industrial activity in the north Georgia mountains again created problems for the renamed Tallulah Falls Railroad and placed Blue Ridge & Atlantic into receivership for the next five years.

\(^{14}\) *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 July 1886, Sec. 3, P 5.

\(^{15}\) Coulter (issue 3), 252-53.

\(^{16}\) John Harmon, “Town Had 17 Hotels - Then the Dam was Built”, *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 November 1992, Sec. E, p 18; Coulter (issue 3), 255.
Once the Blue Ridge & Atlantic came out of receivership, construction began again to extend the line up some difficult terrain along the Tallulah River, crossing the Blue Ridge proper and, in 1904, reaching Clayton. The tracks were then pushed over the present eastern continental divide at Mountain City (elev. 2,168 feet above sea level), passed through the Rabun Gap, a high elevation valley created by the Little Tennessee River, and on to the North Carolina state line by 1905. This same year the Southern Railway Company acquired all of Tallulah Falls Railway Company’s capital stock, and in 1907 finally achieved success when the Tallulah Falls Railway reached its proposed end point in Franklin, North Carolina.\footnote{Boyd, 5-7.}

Meanwhile, the tourism industry was not alone in capitalizing on modern transport, linking the mountains of Rabun County with the more settled and populated eastern piedmont and lowlands. Once segments of the railroad opened in the 1870s, timber companies purchased large tracts of mountain forest throughout Rabun County with the hope that new railroad technology would allow them to log such inaccessible forests in the near future.\footnote{Ritchie, 306.} In the late 1890s, a college-educated businessman, turned logger, started work on a large tract of land along Little Panther Creek, the most upstream tributary of the Tugaloo River. He placed a base camp at the mouth of the creek, which is in Habersham County just a few miles south of its border with Rabun County at the Tallulah River gorge, and made sure it was easily accessible to the rail line. His name
was Andrew Gennett, and his brother and he would play a very important role in managing the forests of northeast Georgia mountain area in the coming years.\textsuperscript{19}

In May 1902, Gennett used his camp at the mouth of Little Panther Creek as a starting point, led a party up the Chattooga River, and investigated the old-growth timber along the watershed for the first time. He found the timber very attractive and after the party returned home he purchased a few thousand acres on both sides of the river for $52,500 from a large timber-holding company based in South Bend, Indiana. After hiring an experienced crew, Gennett built his main sawmill at the Little Panther Creek basecamp.\textsuperscript{20} He then sent crews into the woods to begin sawing and preparing to take advantage of the next spring rains.

Fall and winter cut was rolled into the river behind “splash” dams, which filled up as the winter rainy season created a pond. When hard spring storms arrived with their flash flood rains, the dams were dynamited and the floodwaters carried the lumber down stream. The impact of these huge tree trunks smashing down a flood-swollen river was tremendously destructive to streambeds and the riparian areas surrounding the waterways, but was the standard method for transporting sawed timber to the mill in the early years of industrial logging. At the sawmill, “rivermen” lowered the “long log boom,” constructed mainly with strong hemlock, up to 140 feet across the river to capture the timber floating down river. Judging the water level was the most difficult and important aspect of the job, as lowering the boom with too much current could break the boom and wash the timber past the mill. But, if the dam was blown too late then the river


\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 24-29.
bed would lack enough flow to carry the timber all the way downstream, instead trapping it in the rocks to be left to rot.21

Gennett declared his first run of logs on February 2, 1903, as two to three thousand sawed board feet floated down the Chattooga River to the sawmill at Little Panther Creek.22 According to Gennett’s memoirs, regular floods through the spring brought a successful first season as a lumberman, but he conveniently avoided discussing the conditions in which he left the waterways and his logged land. So, with money coming in for the summer of 1903, Gennett extended his reach up the Chattooga River and established a saw camp at the confluence of Camp Creek. The rest of the dry season was spent sawing timber along the streams above the camp. By the spring of 1904, Gennett’s lumber company reached all the way upstream to the West Fork of the Chattooga River, where he established the John Teague saw camp. From there he moved on up to the Three Forks camp at the confluence of Mill, Overflow, and Holcomb Creeks. At the peak of logging along the Chattooga River, Gennett had eight camps established on the Rabun County and South Carolina sides of the river.23

Gennett made a financial success, and an environmental disaster, of his logging operations along the Chattooga River and continued to invest in new opportunities as they became available. Not long after establishing the John Teague camp on the West Fork of the Chattooga River, Gennett acquired 12,000 acres along the West Fork and up to its headwaters on, and around, Rabun Bald. Another 13,000 acres was later acquired

21 Ibid., xii-xiv.
22 Ibid., 32-33.
23 Ibid., 37-46.
along the Tallulah River upstream from the gorge, and another 20,000 acres in the western reaches of Rabun County in the Tallulah River watershed. In addition, he had numerous smaller tracts operated by small sawmills. However, what became his most important acquisition was not located in Rabun County, but was 32,000 acres in Fannin and Union counties that will be discussed in the next chapter.24

As the Industrial Revolution chugged its way into north Georgia along the tracks of the Tallulah Falls Railway, the mountains of Rabun County gained a positive reputation amongst tourists and loggers alike. These two economic activities, tourism and logging, presented the people of Rabun County with an early taste of the dichotomous values of the newly introduced industrial society. While Tallulah Falls' tourism thrived from the 1890s through the early 1900s, the logging industry worked hard denuding the mountains and hills of Rabun County and when finished, largely abandoned the area, leaving the forests, soil, and waterways in terrible condition. 25

Meanwhile, the majority of the county population continued to live in communities such as Clayton, Burton, or Dillard, situated in river or creek valleys that were utilized for subsistence farming. Unfortunately, as a map provided in a 1908 report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to the U.S. Senate concerning the condition of

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24 Ibid., 54.

25 U.S. Senate Documents, Vol. 7, Report no. 91, Report on the Southern Appalachian and White Mountain Watersheds (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1908), 8; U.S. Senate, Message from the President of the United States Transmitting a Report from the Secretary of Agriculture in Relation to the Forests, Rivers, and Mountains of the Southern Appalachian Region, 57th Congress, 1st Session, Document no. 84 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1902), 84-85; Raphael Zon, “Management of Second Growth in the Southern Appalachians,” in U.S.D.A. Forest Service Circular 118 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1907), 8-9, “100 Years, A Centennial”, The Clayton Tribune, 1997, Special Section, 6 - All of these references provide detailed information on the poor condition of the forests in Rabun County, and throughout the southern Appalachians, how this condition helped motivate policy makers to create a National Forest Reserve throughout the southern Appalachians, and even more, how a priority was placed on purchasing land that was in poor condition because it was the most affordable, and in the most need of attention that could be provided by U.S. Forest Service management.
the mountains and streams of the southern Appalachian Mountains showed, Rabun County land, beyond these few river and creek valleys, was “mountainous and non-agricultural.” The 1910 census showed 5,562 people lived in the county, which possessed an area of 368 square miles, or roughly 240,000 acres. The average size of the 856 reported farms was just 49 acres, and the county reported only $130,000 in crop value for the year. A small amount of corn represented the only significant commercial crop grown in the county. The population even decreased by over 11 percent between 1900 and 1910, while the population of Georgia increased more than 20 percent in the same decade.

Life was simple for the residents of Rabun County around the turn of the century. The farm economy remained largely subsistence-based and the 1910 U.S. Census did not recognize that the extensive logging provided any employment or revenue benefit for the residents or local government, although this point is debated by others knowledgeable of the history of the county. The first mountain school, the Rabun Gap Technical School, was not established until 1903, and the census identified roughly a quarter of the people as illiterate. Nothing in the way of formal healthcare appeared in the area for decades to come, and rural mail delivery service was not established until 1909. Although modern

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29 “Archives of Rabun County” website.
31 The Clayton Tribune, 6.
industry made its presence felt in Rabun County before the turn of the century, sources indicate that only a few local residents or businesses associated with the logging or tourism industry saw any appreciable gain as a result of its introduction.

“The Progressive” Natural Resource Management in Rabun County the Rest of the Northeast Georgia Mountain Area, 1910-1940

The 1910s became a major turning point for Rabun County as resource brokers for private industry and the federal government made two important decisions concerning the future management of the Tallulah River and the rapidly disappearing mountain forests. Strategies proposed by these interests discussed the best way to manage the natural resources in order to provide the most benefit to the environment, economy, and quality of life. The “Progressive” values thrust upon the national political scene over the previous decade inherently influenced the strategies discussed. According to Samuel Dana in his book on the history of American forest and range policy, the social and political themes of the Progressive Movement were bounded by a reverence for scientific organization, technical competence, and efficient use of resources for the betterment of society.  


According to Dana, “conservation was part of, and perhaps the best expression of, the Progressive Movement.” ③⁴ It combined preservation of natural resources with a utilitarian ethic of “wise-use,” as determined by economic, social, esthetic, and moral considerations.③⁵ The ultimate goal of Progressive conservationists was rational planning, promoting the “efficient development and use of all natural resources.”③⁶ Prominent American and European scientists strongly influenced this federal resource policy based on applied science rather than political democratic protest.③⁷

Under these “wise-use” considerations, the management strategy chosen for the Tallulah River sacrificed environmental and community interests to provide economic and industrial development inside, but primarily outside, of Rabun County. Meanwhile, the management strategy for the previously forested mountains called for Rabun County to relinquish authority of more than 60 percent of its land to the federal government in order to provide meaningful environmental recovery. As for quality of life indicators - such as public education, reliable and convenient healthcare services, fire and police protection, recreation opportunities, and road development - both decisions appear retrospectively to have significantly improved these local government services and improved the quality of life for Rabun County residents.

③⁴ Dana, 69.
③⁵ Ibid., 70-72.
③⁶ Hays, 2.
③⁷ Ibid.
Tallulah River Management

Discussion about resource utilization and industrial development on the Tallulah River began as early as the 1880s, as discussed in the first chapter. While federal governmental departments surveyed, reviewed, and discussed various options for dam and reservoir development at the Tallulah Falls, private waterpower interests jockeyed for position and authorization to develop hydroelectricity at the same location. The water rights to the Tallulah River through the gorge were bought and sold several times through the early years of the 1900s under the authorization of Georgia’s riparian rights water laws. However, it was not until a small company, known as Georgia Power, acquired the legal rights and monetary means did construction begin on a hydroelectric dam and generating plant. Private hydropower developers would beat the Army Corps of Engineers to the Tallulah River and its falls as construction on the privately owned Tallulah Falls dam began in January of 1911.38

Locals who feared the changes to come created opposition to the proposal to dam the Tallulah River at the gorge. First, in the early 1900s, as ownership of the gorge changed hands frequently, a few visionary Georgians made an effort to save the falls and surrounding land from industrial exploitation by convincing the state government to purchase the gorge and surrounding area for esthetic protection. According to Coulter, the “movement was gaining speed for Tallulah, because at the time there was danger that

Niagara Falls might be ruined by ‘grasping capitalists’ who were wanting to divert its water for making power.” In 1905, Senator Robert E.A. Hamby of Rabun County introduced legislation to determine the purchase price for the gorge in order to create a state park. The senate resolution noted this “famous resort and pleasure ground has for a long period of time been a source of pleasure, profit, and pride to the citizens of the state.” The owners of the gorge and the surrounding areas were accused of the clearing “of its magnificent forest and otherwise dismantling and disfiguring the same,” according to Coulter. They also prevented access for the general public to enjoy the scenery of the gorge area. So, in 1906, the Senate committee reported back and recommended $100,000 for the purchase of one thousand acres of land to create a state park. Unfortunately for the proponents of state ownership of the Tallulah Gorge, the legislature never allocated the money.39

The engineering plans, initially released by Georgia Power late in the 1900s, revealed that a proposed dam, reservoir, and electric generating plant system would divert the water of the Tallulah River away from the gorge. This was unacceptable to many, most notably Mrs. Helen Dortch Longstreet, the widow of popular Confederate Civil War General James Longstreet. Being a regular visitor to Tallulah Falls from Carnesville, about twenty-five miles from the gorge, she strongly opposed the proposal because it would interfere with the esthetic qualities of the gorge. In one of the first real environmental legal battles of the state, “Ms. Longstreet used her name and money in an attempt to fend off the power barons,” according to the Georgia Department of Natural

Resources. She convinced Governor Hoke Smith to resurvey the gorge, because she believed this would confirm her argument that the gorge was never actually surveyed, which meant it was never formally distributed in the state land lottery and was therefore state property by default.

The new survey proved the legitimacy of the original survey and convinced the governor to forgo a lawsuit. This response disappointed Mrs. Longstreet, who then convinced the state legislature to take the battle to court, which it did in 1912 to try to stop construction of the dam. Unfortunately for the defenders of the river, like Mrs. Longstreet and the businesses of Tallulah Falls, the trial in Rabun County Superior Court in the spring of 1913 brought a verdict against the state. The appeals court recognized the rights of the power company and allowed construction to proceed.40

Federal authorities of the time were hardly opposed to the idea of private hydroelectricity development at locations like Tallulah Falls. As part of his second Public Land Commission in 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt advocated vast development of waterpower across the country for increased industrialization.41 Progressives bitterly opposed the preservationist idea of withdrawing the country’s natural resources from commercial development.42 In fact, President Roosevelt’s official water policy limited federal authority of inland waterway management to irrigation and navigability matters.


41 Dana, 70.

42 Hays, 2.
As for hydroelectricity concerns, “the development of those sites was generally regarded as a private undertaking,” according to Dana.43

To alleviate confusion, it should be understood that the Georgia Power Company that began construction of the dam at Tallulah Falls is not the same company that completed and owns the project today. In the late 1900s, as industrial activity increased in the state of Georgia, the capital of Atlanta found itself in need of additional electricity sources to operate streetcars for mass transportation. There were two competing streetcar companies in Atlanta that merged on October 16, 1911 for the purpose of acquiring, constructing, owning, and operating public utility properties. The new company, the Georgia Railway and Power Company, owned, or leased, almost 250 miles of track and operated 300 streetcars that moved almost 100 million passengers annually through the state’s capital city. Non-resident directors from the northeastern United States and Canada who could garner the necessary capital needed to embark on large-scale industrial development of dams and power plants managed the Georgia Railway and Power Company.44 Immediately after consolidation of the competing streetcar companies, the non-resident directors acquired the Georgia Power Company building the Tallulah Falls dam and completed construction of a hydroelectric project recognized by the Engineering News in both 1914 and 1915 for engineering innovations that maximized power generation capabilities.45

43 Dana, 75; Hays, 5-7, 91, 114-22.


45 E. Lauchli, “Building the Mathis Dam,” Engineering News 74 (1915), 529-33; Charles Adsit and E. Lauchli, “Construction Features of the Intake Dam of the Tallulah Falls Development, for the Georgia
On September 13, 1913, the spillways of the Tallulah Falls Dam were closed. All river water was diverted into a tunnel running through the granite under the town of Tallulah Falls and dropped into the powerhouse downstream. This de-watered the Tallulah Gorge for the first time since its creation when the river first broke through the Blue Ridge Front redirecting the eastern continental divide. It also dealt a tremendous economic blow to the town of Tallulah Falls, validating the fears of the opponents of the project. Finally, in 1920, as the tourism industry in town was in the process of collapsing, fire swept through and destroyed most of the hotels.46

Georgia Railway and Power had grander plans for Tallulah River development than just the Tallulah Falls site, however. By the time the final phase was complete in 1927, there stood five dams between 80 and 120 feet high, turning this once racing southern Appalachian river into five slack-water reservoirs. In addition, the dam projects de-watered two large segments of the river in order to divert the water to more effective hydroelectricity generation locations, optimizing the gravity force that could be obtained for spinning the turbines. It can be assumed that such a complex and technologically advanced development meshed perfectly with the “multi-use” river management philosophy promoted by turn of the century Progressive conservationists. This same year, the Georgia Railway and Power Company acquired a number of additional electricity generating companies operating in the state and re-incorporated itself as simply the Georgia Power Company. 47

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46 Boyd, 7.
47 Georgia Railway and Power Company, 3; Coulter (issue 3), 260-61.
In addition to the dramatic environmental changes these dams and reservoirs created in the Tallulah River watershed, Georgia Power’s farthest upstream dam also flooded-out an important community that lived and farmed along the river’s banks. The town of Burton, in the western reaches of Rabun County, was the second largest in the county at the turn of the century. It formed in the early 1800s, when the first American gold rush began with discovery in the nearby streams, and was named for Jerimiah Burton, an outstanding community citizen. The Tallulah River ran through the middle of town, and several creeks joined the river in the area. Some of the best corn croplands were found in this small river valley, and logging was important because “many of the residents depended on this to provide them with a job to care for their families,” according to the Rabun County Heritage Book Committee. Although made up of only two hundred residents, Burton was “thriving” with enough commerce to support “three general stores” when Georgia Railway and Power entered the scene.48

As previously discussed, Andrew Gennett owned roughly twenty thousand acres in the Tallulah River watershed in western Rabun County around the town of Burton, on which he proclaimed to be “careful to leave out the little bottoms along the stream where mountaineers cabins were located.” In one spot along this large purchase area, two separate tracts of property converged on opposite sides of the Tallulah River. The location was identified by two large mountain ridges pinching together, which allowed only the river to pass through. In his memoirs, Gennett tells a story that in 1917 a young sawmill man from Tallulah Falls came looking for him, eager to purchase a thousand-

acre tract of these lands that included the two ridgelines. This young sawmill man appears to have been J.E. Harvey, a local resident and purchasing agent for the Georgia Railway and Power Company, as identified by the Rabun County Heritage Book Committee.\(^{49}\) Gennett, believing Harvey was interested in purchasing the land for timber production, sold it for a value of $40,000, which he believed represented the true timber value of the land. He later discovered that the Georgia Railway and Power Company was interested in purchasing the same thousand acres for construction of a dam in the ridgeline pinch, and would have paid $150,000 for the land, but it was too late. Much to his dismay, Gennett realized that Georgia Railway and Power had snookered him once he discovered the land he sold to Harvey was actually sold to the power company. Gennett, who considered himself quite the astute land broker, was dismayed with himself that he lost potentially $100,000 in this deal because he did not understand the importance of granite ridgelines for dam building purposes.\(^{50}\)

So, life was short-lived for Burton and its residents as the power company purchased or condemned all the land in the town in 1917 and completed flooding the valley under a reservoir bearing the town’s name in 1919. There was concern around Rabun County as it lost not only valuable residents, but also land that Ritchie described as “all the best land lots that were acquired by the first settlers in the Tallulah District.”\(^{51}\) However, one resident of Burton, Mr. John LaPrade, took advantage of a foreseen opportunity and joined Georgia Railway and Power as a land-purchasing agent. He began

\(^{49}\) Ibid. Ibid.

\(^{50}\) Hayler, 136-37.

\(^{51}\) Rabun County Heritage Book Committee, 28; Celestine Sibley, “The View from Under the Lake,” Atlanta Constitution 17 Nov. 1991, Sec. M, p. 1; Ritchie, 127, 343.
buying property for the future reservoir, but LaPrade also made sure he acquired personal property along the shoreline of the future reservoir for himself. Here he established a small farm, and eventually LaPrade's restaurant that is still standing and quite popular to this day.52

Other landowners along the Tallulah River were not snookered as easily as Gennett was on the Burton dam site property. Mr. August Andreae owned a significant amount of land in one of the longest, deepest valleys in the Blue Ridge, according to the Georgia Power Company.53 When Georgia Power approached him about purchasing his property for development of the Mathis Dam and Rabun Reservoir, he rebuffed their initial offers. Instead, he “offered to trade the lake-site land for mountain land surrounding the proposed lake,” according to the Rabun County Heritage Book Committee, and “it became a financial windfall for him.”54

In 1922, he built the Lake Rabun Hotel along the shores of the reservoir and for years attracted tourists by the hundreds. In fact, the Lake Rabun Hotel is still operated to this day, and until 1952 by members of Andreae’s family; its rustic atmosphere must evoke nostalgia for life in the area at the time the hotel was developed. This includes no televisions, phones, room service, ice machines, or air conditioning. In addition, the visitors share the few restrooms. The small community of Lakemont developed around the site of the hotel, and a combination of the lumber industry, Georgia Power, and tourists traveling to see Tallulah Falls provided enough traffic on the Tallulah Falls

52 Rabun County Heritage Book Committee, 28.
54 Rabun County Heritage Book Committee, 28.
Railway to create a Lakemont train station, which guaranteed business for the town and patrons for the hotel in the early years.\textsuperscript{55}

Although opposition rose to prevent the elimination of Burton, the second largest community in the county, as well as the irrevocable changes to be inflicted on the Tallulah River watershed (especially the gorge), many others approved of the projects. The press of the time supported the activities of the Georgia Power Company. In 1914 the Georgia Weekly Press Association complemented the “scenic beauty” of the lakes after a tour of Tallulah Falls and the surrounding area, and said, “this delightful country is now more attractive than ever.”\textsuperscript{56} The press group also joined the local newspaper in lauding the industrial enterprises they expected to come looking for cheap electricity.\textsuperscript{57}

From the time construction began on Tallulah Falls Dam until they completed the system in 1927, the Georgia Railway and Power Company became the largest customer for the Tallulah Falls Railway. It was used heavily to supply construction materials and equipment for the dam projects. At the same time passenger travel decreased significantly as a result of the collapse of tourism in Tallulah Falls. In the 1920s and 1930s, the remaining tourists traveling into north Georgia to enjoy the mountains took advantage of the development of all-weather roads, which again severely impacted the volume of passenger travel on the Tallulah Falls Railway. Finally, in 1946, the costs became greater than the revenues, and passenger service was discontinued. While the railway survived into the mid-1960s before being dismantled, it was never able to regain the prestige it

\textsuperscript{55} Rabun County Heritage Book Committee, 61; Boyd, 4.

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Oglethorpe Echoe}, 31 July 1914 (5,1).

\textsuperscript{57} Coulter (issue 3), 262.
once held amongst the tourists of the north Georgia mountains. Its demise resulted from the degraded scenic value once held by the thundering falls of the Tallulah Gorge and the improved automobile transportation infrastructure allowing easier access for travelers.58

The Georgia Power Company remains the operator of the Tallulah River dams to this day, and in the late 1980s the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) required them to conduct an Environmental Impact Study for the river corridor affected by dam operations as part of the federal re-licensing process. The results of this study were ambiguous. Even Georgia Power recognized in their re-license application that no baseline information existed for past and present comparison because no previous impact study was ever conducted. So the environmental impact of Georgia Power’s activity on the Tallulah River watershed will probably never be completely understood, but the studies nevertheless revealed dramatic alterations to the dammed and de-watered sections. The water in the reservoirs underwent expected stratification that disrupted the traditional life cycles of fish and other native aquatic wildlife. Reservoir development also flooded the riparian areas along the riverside, drowning the native flora and habitat areas that wildlife traditionally utilizes along riversides. Meanwhile, the two de-watered sections also underwent dramatic alterations with the mile-long segment below Mathis Dam transforming slowly into a wetlands forest ecosystem, and the floor of the Tallulah Gorge adapting its ecology to the almost negligible in-stream flow rates.59

As stated previously, the Tallulah River management strategy, chosen and funded by Atlanta corporate interests with northeastern capital, sacrificed environmental and

58     Boyd, 7-9.
59     Georgia Power Company, FERC Relisence Agreement.
community welfare for a solid local revenue source and a modern industrialized economy. The residents of Rabun quickly realized the environmental consequences of impounding the Tallulah River and the cultural consequences of destroying the second largest community in the county. The fears of Ms. Longstreet came true, and when the esthetic qualities of Tallulah Gorge were diminished by the diversion of the river away from the falls, the burgeoning tourist industry around the town of Tallulah Falls collapsed.\(^{60}\) So, was a future with the Georgia Power Company worth this significant a cost? Georgia Power did instantly become the economic foundation for the local government and public school system. According to Icie Hamilton, Rabun County Tax Commissioner for over twenty years, Andrew Ritchie, and the power company itself, Georgia Power has been the single largest and most reliable tax payer and revenue provider to the county since the Tallulah Falls project was completed in 1913.\(^{61}\)

Outside of substantial property tax revenues paid to Rabun County government and schools, Georgia Power also provided the potential for industrial development with cheap electricity that would hopefully allow a manufacturing employment base to develop in a poor county that never had many real jobs off the family farm.\(^{62}\) It would not be until the beginning of World War II that this potential would begin to be realized, however. By 1920, the agriculture-based economy in Rabun County was moving beyond

\(^{60}\) Coulter (issue 3), 261.


subsistence levels for the first time and bringing money into the community through the sale of livestock and poultry, as well as the traditional staple of corn. This was good news for the farmers and farm laborers, but the 1919 manufacturers report for the state of Georgia concluded that manufacturing operations in Rabun County were not of enough significance to report. The 1940 census identified over half the labor force of Rabun County still working in agriculture, but it also recognized a very small portion of manufacturing employment. So, it took nearly a decade after the completion of the Tallulah River system in 1927 before a manufacturing employment and economic base began to be realized, likely resulting from government contracts and subsidies to businesses supporting the growing war effort.

The 1940s became a period of transition for the economy and employment base of Rabun County. While the 1940 census reported 30 percent of the land area in Rabun County as agricultural, with over 50 percent of the labor working the identified farm land, the 1950 census stated that just over 12 percent of Rabun County land remained agricultural, providing jobs for only 37 percent of the county labor force. Meanwhile, the first manufacturing employment recorded in Rabun County in the 1940 census data identified 112 employees in manufacturing industry. By 1950, the census reported almost 300 employees, or roughly 13 percent of the labor force, working in some sort of manufacturing business. This transition in the employment base of Rabun County occurred during the decade of the 1940s, which saw similar manufacturing growth.

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throughout the country. Over the same decade, Rabun County saw a 5 percent population decline in the county, but there was a 10 percent increase over the entire state.65

A cost/benefit analysis of the impact Georgia Power has had on Rabun County is problematic. How to weight the different values, positive and negative, will vary from individual to individual. A real benefit was, and still is, provided to the county by the Georgia Power Company with the substantial property taxes paid to fund the local government and schools that provide the quality of life services to the local communities. In the year 2001 alone Georgia Power paid over $1.6 million to the county government, and over $1 million to the county public school system.

Tax digests for the 1990s in the Rabun County Tax Commissioners office also identify Georgia Power as the largest taxpayer in the county, by substantial amounts, for each year of the decade.66 Prior to 1990, Georgia Power was required to send its local property tax payment to the Georgia Department of Revenue, according to the state tax laws for public utilities. The state would then pass the appropriate amount to the local governments where Georgia Power owned property. Unfortunately for this research project, the Georgia Department of Revenue and Georgia Power destroy their records of local property tax payments after seven years, as allowed by federal tax laws, according to Stanley Warren, utility tax manager for Georgia Power. In addition, the Rabun County Tax Commissioners prior to 1990 never recorded these payments in their annual tax


digests, which had to be approved by the Department of Revenue. Therefore, written records of tax payments are only available for recent years.

But, money is not everything, and for a quick look at what has been lost by impounding the Tallulah River residents and visitors can travel a short distance to her sister river, the Chattooga. Once the Gennett Brothers finished logging the watershed of the Chattooga, it was virtually abandoned by industrialists, restored under federal management, and never developed for hydropower. Today it receives federal protection from development with its placement on the federal government’s “Wild and Scenic” rivers list.

**National Forest Management**

On March 1, 1911, the “Weeks Act,” signed by President Taft, set conditions for purchasing previously logged land to be added to the national forest system. It took two more years for the Department of Agriculture to reach Rabun County, but in 1913 the *Clayton Tribune* newspaper reported that the federal government purchased 30,000 acres.\(^{67}\) The first property acquired by the federal government in Rabun County, via the Savannah Purchase, was a 7,335-acre tract owned by the Oakey Mountain Lumber Company. This land in eastern Rabun County near the Chattooga River was sold for eight dollars an acre, and the owner of Oakey Mountain Lumber was none other than Andrew Gennett.\(^{68}\) In 1917, Gennett sold the twelve thousand-acre tract he owned around Rabun Bald to the National Forest Reservation Commission, and later sold them the remaining

\(^{67}\) *The Clayton Tribune*, 6.

\(^{68}\) Pikl, 16.
ten thousand acres of land he owned around the Burton Reservoir. By the time the Department of Agriculture was through buying land a decade later, it had acquired over 60 percent of Rabun County and placed it under the management and protection of the U.S. Forest Service. This is a larger percentage than any other county in the southern Appalachians that possess national forest lands.

The national forest lands established in north Georgia were divided into two ranger districts, the Blue Ridge District in the western areas of the state, including much of Fannin County, and the Tallulah District, which encompass all of Rabun, Towns, and Union counties. Once the forest service completed a management plan focusing on fire control and reforestation, the responsibility for implementation fell to the chief ranger of a local national forest district. Ranger Roscoe C. Nicholson, better known as Ranger Nick, was the first ranger for the Tallulah district, and served in this position from 1912 to 1952. He is credited with negotiating federal purchase of most national forest land in Rabun County.

In the 1930s President Franklin Roosevelt provided much of the leadership and labor for forest restoration in Rabun County through the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps, as discussed in the first chapter. Due to the success of creating multiple active timber protective organizations throughout the northeast Georgia mountain area, especially in Rabun County, Ranger Nick successfully convinced the Civilian Conservation Corps to establish multiple camps in Rabun County. He then took

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69 Hayler, 138.

the lead in planning activities for the corps youth that included building and maintaining
many miles of phone lines, fire lookouts on Rabun Bald and Glassey Mountains, and
recreation areas at Rabun Beach and Warwoman Dell. During the Depression he would
“mark out small tie sales” of timber for local farmers to cut and sell as the only revenue
they could raise at the time. 71

Relinquishing control of this land to the federal government and losing future
property tax revenue most likely did little financial harm to Rabun County government
and schools from the 1910s through the 1940s. The denuded hills were unlikely to
provide the recreational and esthetic value that property-owners demand from such
vacation investments that are now found all around these hills. In addition, the decision
by the federal government to purchase the denuded land and turn management
responsibilities for it over to the U.S. Forest Service helped restore not only lands in
virtual ruin, but also the streams and rivers of the area filling up with the top soil running
off the denuded hills when the rain fell. It was not until the 1950s that conditions in the
forests of Rabun County improved to the point that these lands would provide any sort of
reliable tax revenue from vacation homes, and they may never have if not for the
tremendous public investment provided to the save the natural resources.

Benefits for the People

Rabun County’s property tax base found a solid and consistent foundation about
the time the Forest Service bought its first 30,000 acres in 1913, thanks to the Georgia

71 Rabun County Heritage Book Committee, 87-88.
Railway and Power Company. When hydroelectric development along the Tallulah River finished and became fully operational in 1927, Ritchie reported that property owned by the newly renamed Georgia Power Company held almost half the value of all taxable property in Rabun County. In 1930, this property was responsible for $2,057,393 in taxable value, while the rest of the taxable property in the county was valued at $1,879,405. Ritchie also recognized a state auditor’s report in 1947 that showed Georgia Power paid $40,977 in property taxes that year, compared to $21,919 paid by the rest of the taxable property in the county, and $3,630 provided by Forest Service funds to cover lost tax revenue from public ownership of so much Rabun County land. Included in the Georgia Power amount was roughly 65 percent of total county school taxes.\(^72\) Though these figures appear lopsided when comparing Georgia Power taxes to Forest Service fund payments, once again it is difficult to place a monetary value on the environmental restoration that resulted from allocation of the denuded hills into the national forest system.

A snapshot of Rabun County halfway through the twentieth century showed revolutionary changes took place over the previous one hundred years. Important decisions were made about how to manage the natural resources of the county, but not usually by the political or business leaders of the local communities. Instead they were made by outside interests looking to insert their collective will on Rabun County. The decisions to log the forests to the ground and dam the Tallulah River into an electricity-generating machine did incredible ecological damage to much of the county’s land. They also destroyed the second largest community in the county by dislocating its residents.

\(^{72}\) Ritchie, 448.
and drowning its valuable farm land under millions of cubic feet of water. All of this effort was made in the hope of future industrial prosperity. On the other hand, Washington bureaucrats purchased, condemned, and received in donation over half the land in the county from willing sellers and local political leaders and placed it under the management of the federal government. This resulted in Rabun County losing over half of its taxable property, which initially probably meant little to the economic conditions of the time, but in the long-run eliminated a large source of potentially valuable revenue for government and school operations. All of this effort was made in the name of future environmental restoration and a guaranteed national supply of healthy forests.

So, how did these decisions affect the quality of life, or standard of living, for the residents of Rabun County over the first half of the twentieth century? Before 1950, census reports showed a consistent pattern of reduced farming activity. The 1900 census identified 1,067 farms in Rabun County making up over half the land and employing a large majority of the labor force. By the time of the 1950 census, only 628 farms made up 12.2 percent of the land and employed 37 percent of the labor force. Over the same period, the population of the county increased from 6,104 residents in 1900 to 7,424 residents in 1950. This is hardly dramatic growth, and while the state maintained consistent growth over the five decades, Rabun County saw significant population losses in the first decade of the 1900s and again in the 1940s.

Industrial employment developed by the 1940s, but at a much slower pace than hoped for and slower than agriculture jobs were disappearing. The median family income in 1950 was just under $1000, which was half the state’s median family income. Economically, Rabun County sat in limbo through the 1930s and 1940s as the decisions
made toward the beginning of the century were settling into the routine of life found in this sleepy southern Appalachian Mountain county. There was, however, enough revenue coming into the public school coffers to construct a brand new school facility in 1911, the county's first library in 1930, and a new gymnasium in 1935. Environmentally, Rabun County reaped tremendous benefits from President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “New Deal” Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The 1930s saw multiple CCC camps established in the county with their primary goal to restore the mountain forests.

Not until the last half of the twentieth century did the decision made by outside interests to utilize/exploit the water power of the Tallulah River finally bring substantial, steady paying, non-agricultural employment to the residents within Rabun County. The Clayton Tribune’s Centennial special edition titled its review of the 1950s “Prosperity.” The historical record, however, does not exactly support prosperity in Rabun County through the 1950s. Employment and median income levels were still well below the state average, but improved quality of life indicators can be identified in the 1950s through a series of activities seen for the first time in Rabun County. A prime example of this was the 1951 opening of Rabun County Memorial Hospital. Rabun County had the good fortune to possess a traveling public nurse and a fixed birthing center before 1950, but the opening of the hospital introduced the first real healthcare institution to the residents of the county that was accessible without having to travel for hours.

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73 The Clayton Tribune, 6, 15, 21; Ritchie 306.
74 The Clayton Tribune, 22.
75 Ibid., 34.
76 Ibid.
Business development in industrial operations such as lumber and textile mills began employing large numbers of the county labor force in the post-World War II era.\textsuperscript{77} From 1947 to 1954 the number of residents employed in the sixteen manufacturing businesses tripled from 185 to 570. According to University of Georgia community and economic development specialists Howard Schretter and Ray Northam, the entire Georgia Mountains Area, fourteen counties in the northeast Georgia mountain region including Rabun County, saw a fantastic 42 percent industrial employment growth from 1952 to 1957. The most interesting characteristic about this growth was that 90 percent of it was the result of women entering the workforce for the first time.\textsuperscript{78}

The 1960 census reports that there was virtually no population growth in Rabun County through the 1950s, despite the growing industrial and newly developed service-based economies. The median family income increased to $3,102 in Rabun County, which was much closer to the state average of $4,408 than it had been in 1950. Manufacturing employed 745 people as agriculture employment dropped to just 311 men. The number of teachers in the county topped 200 for the first time and the retail and construction industries both saw consistent growth. All this said, Rabun County still had a 10 percent unemployment rate. However, education levels improved for the residents, especially the youth, of the county. The median years of school completed by Rabun County residents was over eight years by 1960, a year more than the previous census and compared to just over ten years for the state population as a whole. So, the 1950s saw

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, 35, 37.

\textsuperscript{78} Howard A. Schretter, \textit{The Georgia Mountains: A View of its Resources, Problems and Potentials} (Athens, GA: The Institute of Community and Area Development – University of Georgia, 1964), xi; Northam, v.
measurable improvements in healthcare, education, and wages for the residents of Rabun County. While the importance of electricity generated from the dams decreased over the period as a result of the growing regional power grid system, the property taxes paid by Georgia Power to fund the county government and school operations maintained its importance.

Rabun County at the turn of the twenty-first century is definitely a different place than a century before. Census data showed communities once reliant on subsistence agriculture could now employ individuals in manufacturing and service jobs that provided dependable salaries. Thanks to the U.S. Forest Service, the 140,000 acres of National Forest Land encompassed by Rabun County were greatly improved over the denuded hills that eroded huge quantities of topsoil into the streams and rivers of the area at the turn of the twentieth century. A strong tourism-based economy has been established as a result of vacation home development along the shores of the Georgia Power reservoirs and in other mountain areas of the county. In addition, the tremendous recreation opportunities provided in the Chattahoochee National Forest by the U.S. Forest Service also attract tourists from near and far to spend their money in Rabun County businesses. As a result, this project argues that the prosperity enjoyed by Rabun County today can find many of its foundations in the decisions made by outside forces in the 1910s.

As the Industrial Revolution moved into the quiet, post-Reconstruction, southern Appalachian communities in Rabun County just before the turn of the twentieth century, forces located far outside the area debated ideas and made trade-offs concerning the future direction of its natural resources and residents. Some in the affected communities
favored the decisions made, while others opposed them, but all residents of the county essentially played the role of by-stander as outsiders developed management strategies for the county’s natural resources that determined their future quality of life. Rabun County’s relationship with industrial society created positive and negative consequences, but a retrospective review shows that this relationship eventually improved services and opportunities for the residents of the small, local communities. Was it worth the environmental, community, and economic trade-offs made? As is the case with most local natural resource stories, the benefit, or detriment, is in the eye of the beholder.
Private Exploitation to Public Restoration in the Tennessee River Basin

Natural Resource Management Decisions made by Industrialists and the Federal Government from the 1850s to 1950, and some of the Impacts on the Three Counties of the Northeast Georgia Mountain Area within the Tennessee River Basin.

The three remaining counties of the northeast Georgia mountain area -- Fannin, Towns, and Union counties -- were geographically isolated from any of the southeastern population centers that began to industrialize in the mid to late-nineteenth century. Physiographically, these counties are virtually enclosed by the walls of the eastern Blue Ridge and the large mountain masses of the western Blue Ridge, with few mountain gaps providing easy access for travelers and traders. Conversely, one of these few mountain gaps provided the residents of Fannin County with an early taste of the destructive forces of the Industrial Revolution. Meanwhile, the people in Towns and Union counties remained, essentially, in social and economic isolation until after the turn of the twentieth century.

The isolation of the three-county area could not hide its vast old growth forests forever, and by the late 1800s industrial loggers were hard at work sawing them down and moving the timber to mills both inside and outside the area along newly developed logging railroads. An economy of natural resource extraction quickly developed alongside the subsistence agricultural economy supporting the communities of these counties. Unfortunately, the impacts of both created rapid, significant ecological degradation to the land. Although the Federal Government was not far behind the industrial loggers to repair much of the damage caused by cut and run logging and primitive agricultural methods, it soon found another natural resource in the local rivers that could be exploited for public benefit. Instead of simply expelling the loggers from the forests and restoring the all land with sound scientific management, the Federal
Government continued the area’s economy of natural resource extraction by building a large, multi-use, dam and reservoir system, and replacing the loggers as the foundation for this economy.

Fannin County

The history of natural resource management in Fannin County is a history of firsts for the northeast Georgia mountain area. While the first activities of truly destructive resource exploitation can clearly be seen in the copper mining region along the northern border with Tennessee, the first activities of resource protection and rehabilitation for all the eastern national forests can be identified in the southeastern hills around the southern edge of the eastern Blue Ridge. Combine these activities with the damming of Fannin County’s primary waterway, the Toccoa River, and it is not hard to see how outside
influences played a large role in shaping the direction of natural resource management in this small mountain community.

Even before the Georgia legislature established Fannin County in 1854, veins of copper were beginning to be mined on both sides of the Georgia/Tennessee line. Activity began on the Tennessee side in the late 1840s, and the first mine on the Georgia side opened in the community of McCaysville in 1850. It is in McCaysville that the north-flowing Toccoa River meets the state line and passes into Copperhill, Tennessee, the adjacent sister town of McCaysville, Georgia. Once reaching Copperhill the river changes names to the Ocoee River and turns to flow west/northwest toward the Hiwassee and then Tennessee rivers.

Unfortunately for the miners that began work in McCaysville in 1850, “the extreme remoteness of the mine severely restricted copper production and transport,” according to Don Davis in his review of Blue Ridge natural history. The nearest railroad


was thirty miles away in Dalton, and only one poor quality road passed over the
mountainous terrain. It appears the region needed some improved transportation, and the
state was ready to begin exploring economic opportunities based around tourism and
natural resource extraction in the north Georgia mountains.

On January 21, 1854, Fannin County was established, by an Act of the General
Assembly, from lands previously encompassed by Union County, now to the east, and
Gilmer County, now to the south. It is named for Colonel J.W. Fannin, a commander of
the Georgia volunteers who was captured and killed while helping “the Republic of
Texas in its successful War of Independence with Mexico,” according to Georgia
Magazine. The 1860 census, the first taken after incorporation, counted 5,139 residents in
Fannin County, with Morganton identified as the county seat.

Later in 1854, the General Assembly made the first important policy decision
influencing the future management of Fannin County’s natural resources when it
chartered the Ellijay Railroad. The Ellijay Railroad Company never laid a single rail, but
in 1858 it did conduct a survey of the proposed route from Marietta by way of Canton,
Ball Ground, Jasper, Ellijay, Blue Ridge, and on to the Ocoee River near Ducktown,
Tennessee, just a few miles north of Copperhill, Tennessee. The path surveyed for the
future rail line was obvious atopographical because the only way to run a rail line over

4 Davis, 47.
5 Georgia Historical Society, “Fannin County History,” North Georgia Internet Magazine, 2001,
http://www.georgiamagazine.com/counties/fannin/history.htm (6 June 2002); Georgia Historical Society,
“Fannin County Roadside Historical Markers”; Carl Vinson Institute of Government, “Fannin County”;
Fannin County, “Fannin County Facts”; The Blue Ridge Highlander, “Fannin County Georgia – History.”
the eastern continental divide in this region was to take advantage of the Murphy
Syncline.

The Murphy Syncline is a unique physical feature found along the western Blue Ridge that separates the Rich Mountain Mass in northern Gilmer County and the Cohutta Mountain Mass to the north in northwestern Fannin County. Millions of years of weather eroded away the mountains in this area to expose marble bedrock, which makes a solid foundation for a rail line. This feature, along with its more uniform elevation changes, made the Murphy Syncline an ideal passage for a railroad to connect the three counties in the Tennessee River basin with the industrial and population growth taking place in the state capital of Atlanta.7

Meanwhile, as economic support declined for the Ellijay Railroad and construction delays continued to accumulate, the major investors financing the industrial mining operations in Copperhill and McCaysville decided to build a new railroad along the Ocoee River. This meant that all copper ore processed for distribution would avoid the remoteness of north Georgia and instead stay in Tennessee and move down the Ocoee River to the Hiwassee River and eventually to the Tennessee River, where it could reliably be shipped by boat to a port in Memphis, Tennessee, or New Orleans, Louisiana, and then to a final destination.8 Once the mining financiers relocated their transportation outlet into Tennessee, opportunities for affordable natural resource extraction from the lands of Fannin County diminished. The forests were still accessible to the local mine

7 Davis, 7; Georgia Northeastern Railroad Company, Inc., “History of the Railroad in North Georgia.”
8 Davis, 47.
operators, however, and providing timber fuel for expanding mine development resulted in extensive cutting along the Toccoa River.

Copper mining was timber-fuel intensive, according to Davis, and this resulted in heavy logging just south of the copper basin. “Because of the local wood shortages, timber cutters began floating logs greater and greater distances down the Toccoa and Ocoee Rivers,” he said. On top of the growing pressure to find more wood for fueling the machines of the mine operations, the waste created by processing the copper included large amounts of sulfates. Once exhausted into the air these chemicals created acid rain that killed all the vegetation in the surrounding area and began a desertification process that created a brown hole in the middle of the most biologically diverse region in North America.

The visible environmental consequences of copper mining on the Tennessee border did not deter promoters of the Ellijay Railroad. They refused to give up the hope of future riches to be created from the proposed railroad line, even though important potential investors, the copper mining financiers, placed their money in a more promising railroad opportunity. In 1859, the name of the proposed Ellijay line was changed to the Marietta Canton and Ellijay Railroad. By linking the line with town names, promoters hoped the local residents of the towns would be more inclined to invest in the railroad’s stocks, bonds, and other securities. They also dreamed that once the line was complete it would connect with two additional railroads, the Western North Carolina and the

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9 Ibid., 51.
10 Ibid.; The Blue Ridge Highlander, “Fannin County Georgia – History.”
Cleveland and Ducktown, which provided access to the copper mining district. The Cleveland and Ducktown Railroad was the one supported by the copper mining financiers, but all three fell on hard times two years later with the outbreak of the Civil War.

Other than being a reputed stronghold of Union sympathizers, Fannin County was tranquil throughout the war as General William Tecumseh Sherman marched his northern troops many miles west of the area. Five years after the Union victory work began on the proposed rail line again, but only after the state guaranteed the first mortgage bonds of the railroad and provided convict labor to assist in its construction. By 1880, the Marietta Canton and Ellijay Railroad was again in dire financial straits. This time a General Phillips from Marietta successfully induced some northern capitalists to invest their money to see the project through to completion. The capitalists had ideas of their own and wanted to see some investment from the local communities that would supposedly reap the profits of this railroad. Fannin County agreed to its share of the costs and provided fifteen thousand dollars to the officers, and timber ties and quarried rock to the construction crews. Controversy arose, however, when the railroad surveyors determined that the tracks would not be laid through Morganton, the county seat. Morganton residents and businesses naturally believed the line should run through their town, but the railroad refused to defer and located Fannin County’s southern station

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12 Ibid.
several miles to the west. This resulted in the creation of the town of Blue Ridge. The line finally reached the Fannin County towns of Blue Ridge and Mineral Bluff in 1886.\footnote{13

Blue Ridge incorporated itself in 1887 after the railroad built near the Blue Ridge station a hub machine shop, which employed a large number of county residents. It became a boomtown because “mineral potions were the rage during this era, and Fannin County had pure mineral springs.” On August 13, 1895 the people of Fannin County voted to relocate the county seat from Morganton to Blue Ridge as a matter of convenience.\footnote{14}

The railroad station appeared to make a significant difference in the status, and even survival, of a town as Mineral Bluff prospered from having a railroad station for passengers to reach the supposed rejuvenating powers of the mineral springs. “Over the next dozen years, travelers from Atlanta to Knoxville came to this popular luxury resort and health spa area by the droves,” reports The Blue Ridge Highlander. “Hotels and inns sprang up along both sides of the tracks as well as restaurants, dry goods stores and stables.”\footnote{15} At this point it appears, as was the case with Tallulah Falls in Rabun County, that a tourism-based economy for Fannin County might have provided a more ecologically sound financial foundation than the growing natural resource extraction economy. But, in 1906 a more modern and efficient railroad line connecting...
Knoxville and Atlanta was constructed west of Fannin County along the same path General Sherman used to advance on Atlanta during the Civil War.\(^{16}\)

This new railroad pulled away much of the tourist traffic moving through Fannin County along the Louisville and Nashville line, the owners of the railroad by 1906. However, the logging industry continued to take full advantage of this transportation link into the 1910s. When the railroad arrived in Fannin County in the 1880s, steel rails carried “passengers, supplies and modern convenience to this new frontier, while hauling raw materials (primarily timber) from the mountains to the lowlands.”\(^{17}\) After the new Knoxville to Atlanta line was completed the tourism economy of Fannin County quickly dried up, and according to Raphael Zon in his Forest Service circular, loggers had already extracted most of the old growth forests and actively sawed the eighty to 85 percent that were second growth by 1907.\(^{18}\)

**The First Steps Toward Public Restoration**

Andrew Gennett, the north Georgia timberman discussed in previous chapters, tells a story in his memoirs of “cruising” along a twenty-thousand acre tract of land in southeast Fannin County to scout its potential for future logging. The land ran along Cooper’s, Noontootla, Rock, and Little Rock Creeks, all headwater tributaries to the Toccoa River. According to Nicole Hayler, editor of Gennett’s memoirs, he claimed that

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17 The Blue Ridge Highlander, “Fannin County Georgia – History.”

half the land was well timbered. The other half, however, had “large areas of cleared land that had been badly treated by the mountaineers who attempted to cultivate it.” He said, “It was bare of any vegetation.”19 Although Gennett’s judgment of the mountaineer’s treatment of the land is rather hypocritical considering he cleared huge tracts of forest for a living, his original intention for this piece of property was ultimately overcome by altruistic motives.

The year was 1910 and Gennett was fully aware of the efforts being made in Washington, D.C. to create federal forest reserves in the eastern United States. In fact, he opposed the proposals put forth by Secretary Wilson on the basis that federal purchase of private landholdings for the purpose of creating forest reserves was in violation of the United States Constitution. This was in fact the main legal argument of most all who opposed the Secretary of Agriculture’s goal, especially Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Joseph Cannon. Representative Weeks decided to move forward with the forest reserve proposal despite the lingering constitutionality question, however, and Gennett moved forward with his purchase of the twenty thousand acres in southeast Fannin County from the Chastain Brothers Lumber Company. Gennett then quickly assembled twelve thousand more acres in Gilmer and Union counties adjacent to the Fannin County property.20

The Weeks Act passed Congress once the sponsors of the bill found legal justification in the commerce clause of the U.S. Constitution,21 and soon after Gennett

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20 Ibid., 93-94.

took possession of his new thirty-two thousand acre tract encompassing portions of the northern and southern slope of the eastern Blue Ridge. In what he called “the most momentous land trade in which I have ever been engaged,” Gennett offered to sell the entire tract to the National Forest Reservation Commission. The National Forest Reservation Commission was eager to begin purchasing land before the first appropriation of money allocated for that purpose expired and reverted to the general treasury. Land titles, or the lack thereof, presented a serious obstacle for the purchasing agents of the USDA though, so Gennett traveled to Washington, D.C. to try and help solve the problem.

The final version of the Weeks Act required accurate land titles to be presented by the landowner before the federal government could purchase it for protection. Gennett recognized that little land in the Georgia mountains had good titles, including his, which almost unraveled his deal. “The land situation in the southern mountains was, to say the least, complex,” he stated. Geographical features described original land grants and they frequently overlapped property boundaries. In addition, many of the land grantees failed to register formal deeds with the county courthouse. This started a chain of confusion that became difficult for Gennett and the USDA to unravel. Landowners that recorded formal deeds measured their land with a staff compass and a Gunter’s chain, a sixty-foot chain


22 Hayler, 93-94.

23 Ibid., 99-103.

24 Ibid.
with one hundred links. On large tracts of land these types of measurements caused numerous errors. To complicate the picture even further, squatters frequently settled on land owned by absentee landlords and over a certain period of time they gained rights of adverse possession.25

In Washington, D.C., Gennett met with Assistant Attorney General Strickland to find a way around the problem. Their research identified a 1795 statute stating that the United States could condemn land it needed to build lighthouses “and for other purposes.” They also located precedence in the government’s purchase of Chesapeake Bay oysterbeds in Maryland for protection purposes and its purchase of land along Maine’s Penobscot River to protect White Pine trees. While the Maine and Maryland purchases provided additional precedents to satisfy the constitutionality of federal land purchase for protection purposes, the 1795 statute, once given approval by Attorney General Wickersham, became the origin of condemnation proceedings used as one method for acquiring forest land under the Weeks Act.26

On August 29, 1912, the federal government finally closed on thirty-two thousand acres of property deep in the hills of Fannin, Gilmer, and Union counties that was previously owned by the Gennett Land and Lumber Company of Atlanta, Georgia.27 This became the first land acquired by the National Forest Reservation Commission and began

25 Ibid., viii-ix.
26 Ibid., 95, 101-103.
the process of creating the eastern national forests. The commission then placed the Gennett property in the original Nantahala and Cherokee National Forest of North Carolina and Tennessee, respectively. Later in his life after he sold many large tracts of property, both denuded and forested, to the National Forest Reservation Commission, Gennett reflected on this original transaction and said that “several have involved larger sums, but none was more significant or led to greater consequences.”

Therefore, as a result of these activities, it could be a fair statement that the foundations for the eastern national forests can be found in the now reforested mountains of southeastern Fannin County.

Power from the River

The waters springing from high on the Blue Ridge in the southern and western reaches of Fannin County soon accumulate into a typical southern Appalachian river with long pooled runs and sharp rapid drops creating the ideal circumstances for hydroelectric generation. Both the Toccoa River, on the Georgia side, and the Ocoee River, on the Tennessee side, share these attractive topographic features. In 1925, the Toccoa Power Company, a subsidiary of the Tennessee Electric Power Company, began construction on a dam and reservoir on the Toccoa River about halfway between Blue Ridge and Morganton. The Toccoa dam and reservoir was initially built to “increase the amount of

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28 Hayler, 93-94.
firm power” in a growing system that included two more hydro-generation dams downstream on the Ocoee River.29

The Eastern Tennessee Power Company, another subsidiary of the Tennessee Electric Power Company, constructed two hydroelectric dams, Ocoee No. 1 and Ocoee No. 2, in 1910 and 1912, respectively, on the Ocoee River in Tennessee. By 1925, Tennessee Electric Power wanted to further guarantee the supply of water feeding these two hydroelectric generation plants by building the Toccoa reservoir with one hundred eighty-three thousand acre feet of useful storage capacity.30 A year later, Tennessee Electric Power, a new subsidiary of the Alabama Power Company, petitioned the recently constituted Federal Power Commission, seeking permits to build eleven dams throughout the Tennessee River system. Once the Toccoa project was completed in 1931, the Toccoa reservoir sat at 1,690 feet elevation and had a small twenty thousand-kilowatt generator at the base of its dam. The lake remained pristine over many years because the Chattahoochee National Forest primarily surrounds it and its upstream watershed, preventing any substantial development along the shores of the reservoir and upper Toccoa River.31 As for the remaining dams proposed by the Tennessee Electric Power Company, their fate would be determined by another major federal initiative that


30 United States Tennessee Valley Authority, The Hiwassee Project (vol. 1); David Cook, “Lake Blue Ridge”; The Blue Ridge Highlander “History of the Ocoee.”

significantly influenced life in the southern Appalachian region, especially the three counties of the northeast Georgia mountain area within the Tennessee River basin. That initiative would become the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Found at - http://www.cviog.uga.edu/Projects/gainfo/histcountymaps.htm
Union and Towns Counties and the TVA

The Georgia General Assembly established Union County on December 3, 1832 out of lands formerly occupied by the Cherokee Indians. This made the eighty-eighth county created in the state. Union County was not named after its loyalty to the federal government during the Civil War, as is frequently misunderstood by people today. The true story, according to multiple sources, is that Governor George M. Troup (1823-1827) “verbally attacked the U.S. Government and threatened to declare war on the United States if it interfered with his policy of surveying land held by Creek Indians and opening the land to white settlers.”32 His most ardent supporters came from the northeast Georgia mountain area where a political party emerged to support the governor. This party was named the “Union Party.” The county seat of Blairsville was established and incorporated in 1847, and named after Captain James Blair (1761-1839), “a man who made it his responsibility to settle land disputes between the settlers and Cherokee Indians,” according to state and local sources.33

Even as the Industrial Revolution began making inroads into the eastern and western parts of the northeast Georgia mountain area before the turn of the twentieth century, Union County remained an isolated subsistence farming community reaping none of the supposed rewards from industrialization. As settlers drove the Indians out,


they began yielding crops of corn, peppers, sorghum, and potatoes at a much more rapid pace. Finally in the 1900s, once roads were established out of foot trails over the Blue Ridge, farmers were able to send their crops to markets outside the county, providing revenue for their families and community. A good description of the isolation of the Union County region in the early twentieth century is provided by the Blairsville Chamber of Commerce on its website, “one story relates the early travails one endured when crossing the mountain in the early 1900s. Early Ford cars were fed fuel by the gravity method. Going up steep grades over the mountain placed the fuel behind the engine with no way to reach it. Folks had to back their cars over the mountain in order for the fuel to reach the engine and then had to tie a log onto their car for drag on the way down the other side so their brake lining wouldn’t burn out. Such was the determination of the mountain population.”

On March 6, 1856, Towns County was created by the Georgia General Assembly out of the eastern portions of Union County, east of Brasstown Bald, and the western reaches of Rabun County, west of the Blue Ridge divide. This 117th or 118th county, depending on the source, was named after Governor George Washington Bonaparte Towns, who died two years earlier. Towns County developed in virtually an identical fashion as did Union County, which is why they will be discussed together concerning the natural resource management on their lands.

34 Blairsville Chamber of Commerce, “Union County History”; Elliot, 252.
Being late to the dance of industrialization in comparison to their neighbors in Rabun and Fannin counties did not mean that the mountain forests of Towns and Union counties escaped the consequences of industrial logging operations. Most of the forests still met their inevitable fate at the teeth of a saw, just at a later date. The industrial loggers moving south from over the North Carolina state line still found the two main waterways of the counties, the Hiawassee and Nottely Rivers respectively, attractive for splash dam operations, even if logging railroads did not enter the scene until the twentieth century. The accumulated result of small-scale agriculture and industrial logging left denuded hills and fields that dumped millions of cubic feet of topsoil into the streams and rivers and left massive erosion scars on the land. Yet, these were the only economic activities known to the roughly ten to twelve thousand mountain people living in the two counties until the depression era of the 1930s.

The U.S. Forest Service improved management practices in much of the forests of these two counties when it began purchasing large tracts in the 1910s and 1920s. Then, in early 1932 the federal government established the Tennessee Valley Authority as another one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s depression-era recovery programs. The TVA immediately began influencing life in the three counties of the northeast Georgia mountain area within the Tennessee River basin. Its initial interest in the area was to pursue a relationship with the Georgia Division of Forestry and to assist in improving the management of the forest resources in the river basin. As a result of this interaction one

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of the state’s two new tree-seedling nurseries was established in Blairsville. The nursery became a supporting piece for the Georgia Mountain Experiment Station, which was developed in Blairsville in 1930. This was a state-funded effort to improve usage of valuable farmland in river valleys and re-establish forests on abandoned, poor quality farmlands higher up the hills. Even with the new nursery, the U.S. Forest Service was unable to meet demand for planting stock as a result of rapidly increasing interest in reforestation. Passage a few years earlier of the Clark-McNary amendment to the Weeks Act allowed timberland owners to be reimbursed by the federal government at cost for personal expenditures made toward purchasing seedlings for reforesting their property. Suddenly increased attention was growing with “Black Locust, Black Walnut and White Pine” in highest demand.

Meanwhile, timber protective organizations, groups created by local land owners and officials to fight wildfire and begin restoration in the logged out hills, continued to develop initiatives that sprouted throughout the northeast Georgia mountain area. Vocational agricultural schools established in Fannin and Rabun counties received over ten acres of land each to teach practical forest management. A roadside demonstration reforestation project developed in Union County to determine growth rates for various species on different soil sites, and in Towns County the first Vocational Forest School Camp was held at Young Harris College in the summer of 1931. The State of Georgia

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38 Hursh and Barrett, 5-6.

39 Lufburrow, 17; Pikl, 71.
paid for one student from each county with a vocational agricultural school to attend the camp and receive more extensive training.40

When Congress passed legislation creating the TVA on May 18, 1933, the act required an integrated plan of development for the entire Tennessee River system by March 1936. When that plan was released there was no intention of new large-scale river development in the northeast Georgia mountain area. The only new development planned for construction in the Hiwassee River basin, one of the larger tributaries to the Tennessee River that finds its headwaters high on the Blue Ridge of Towns, Union and Fannin counties, was to occur on the lower Hiwassee River in North Carolina.41

Times were unstable and the future was unclear when TVA released its integration plan in early 1936. Initially, the plan was favorable to the residents of Fannin, Towns, and Union counties, as it was a strong force for restoration on their local lands. A few years later, however, President Roosevelt prepared for the serious prospects of the United States entering World War II in Europe. In the first phase of its 1936 master plan for the Tennessee Valley, the TVA planned to construct six dams at various strategic locations and then purchase the entire Tennessee Electric Power Company system, including the Toccoa dam and reservoir in Fannin County. According to Roscoe C. Martin in his review of TVA’s first twenty years, “as the war situation worsened, the

40  Lufburrow, 19-22.

TVA was requested to expedite its program still further and to build additional dams, primarily for power.\textsuperscript{42}

TVA immediately went to work on developing a new “second emergency program” that added major new developments along the Nottely River in Union County, and the upper Hiwassee, spelled Hiawassee on the Georgia side of the border, in Towns County. The Union County development would include a dam and reservoir, while the dam for the upper Hiwassee development was to be located in Clay County, North Carolina, with the upper half of the reservoir flooding some of the river valley of Towns County. In a report on the second emergency program presented by TVA Chief Engineer C.E. Bleck to the Authority’s General Manager Gordon C. Clapp, and further reported to Congress, TVA proposed the construction of five new dams in the Hiwassee River basin alone. This would further enhance the already existing Tennessee Electric Power Company system that TVA planned to purchase in 1939.\textsuperscript{43} The federal government had high hopes for the Hiwassee River basin, which resulted in significant alterations to life in Towns and Unions counties.

Although increasing electrical generation capacities in preparation for potential involvement in World War II was the primary motivator for rapid development in the Hiwassee basin, flood control became a tremendous added benefit, according to Josephas Jackson Lancaster and the TVA. The Hiwassee River was a major contributor to floods on the Tennessee River, many of which devastated the city of Chattanooga, Tennessee, thirty-five miles below the confluence. In her thesis concerning Towns County

\textsuperscript{42} Martin, 85-86; United States Tennessee Valley Authority, \textit{The Hiwassee Project} (vol. 1), 1.

\textsuperscript{43} Martin, 85-86; United States Tennessee Valley Authority, \textit{The Hiwassee Project} (vol. 1), 1.
Agriculture during this period, Lancaster reiterates that the Blue Ridge in North Georgia is the second heaviest rainfall belt in the United States. Therefore, not disregarding the importance of downstream flood control, the federal government primarily sought to take advantage of the power potential found in all the water falling off the mountains of the northeast Georgia mountain area, just as Georgia Railway and Power developed Tallulah falls at the first opportunity it was made accessible to industrial interests.44

Natural springs from the northern slope of the Blue Ridge running along the southern edge of both Towns and Union counties combine with heavy annual rainfall to make up the headwaters of the Hiawassee and Nottely Rivers. Both these rivers flow almost directly toward the North Carolina line and carve a stereotypical southern Appalachian river valley out of steep mountain slopes. Lancaster describes Towns County topography as near level along the Hiawassee River Valley, but otherwise rough and steep along mountain ridges.45

For the TVA, the Chatuge Project on the Hiawassee River and the Nottely Project on the Nottely River “were not conceived in the same swift pace with which they were approved and constructed.”46 Initial United States Army Corps of Engineers surveys of the Hiwassee River and its basin began in 1930 to identify potential navigation, flood control, power, and irrigation development sites. The initial reports did not recommend


45 Lancaster, 5.

any development in north Georgia. TVA conducted its surveys in 1934, and although the 1936 report commissioned by Congress did not plan any projects in north Georgia, it did identify the Nottely River as a potential future headwater storage reservoir. The report stated, “In addition, one or two storage dams on the headwaters might ultimately be advantageous, but they are not recommended for present construction.” An accompanying map shows a site called Thompson Creek, along the Nottely River in Union County, as one of two potential dam sites.

The TVA moved forward on its previously authorized purchase of the Tennessee Electric Power Company system in August 1939, but the “second emergency program” sat on the shelf until the outbreak of war later that same year, when TVA was ready to make recommendations to Congress for system power generation additions. “The Tennessee Valley region is one of the principal aluminum-producing centers of the nation,” according to TVA’s 1948 review of the projects, “and in the period of national emergency the power needs of the area were largely dictated by the need for aluminum.” The huge wartime demand for aluminum by national defense contractors created the need for increased production at the largest sites in the Tennessee River valley, and substantial expansion of electricity generation was badly needed to supply this increased demand. The Thompson Creek site on the Nottely River was finally recommended, along with another site on the upper Hiwassee, for additional headwater storage dams. The National Defense Council agreed with the TVA’s forecasts and sent

48 Ibid. (Vol. 2), 3; United States Tennessee Valley Authority (Vol. 1), 6; Martin, 85-86; Chandler, 90.
49 Ibid. (Vol. 2), 3.
forth a recommendation to Congress to proceed with the “second emergency program” should the need arise. “The need was soon expressed,” and the TVA assembled a four-dam option that provided the quickest and most practical way to create one hundred sixteen thousand kilowatts of continuous power generation within eighteen months of authorization.50

On May 5, 1941 the federal government put the gears of bureaucracy in overdrive and final congressional authorization was provided, and the project funded by August 16. In order to complete the dams before the coming of the rainy season, construction commenced immediately. Literally the next day the heavy machinery was moving, for failure to store the winter and spring rains would cost a year of production and that loss, in terms of military necessity, would be catastrophic, according to the final TVA report on the second emergency program. The TVA acquired dam site and road right of ways by exercising pre-existing purchase options and bought 40 percent of the Nottely reservoir land from the Southern States Power Company in a single transaction. The floodgates on Nottely Dam closed on January 24, 1942, and the floodgates of the Chatuge Dam, just north of the Towns County boundary with North Carolina, closed about three weeks later on February 12. Nottely was named after the river and Chatuge was named after an old Cherokee Indian settlement located nearby.51

The closing of the floodgates and subsequent flooding of the reservoirs behind these two new TVA dams created an ironic conflict in the federal government’s proposed


goal of rehabilitating the natural resources of this area. The flooding of these reservoirs resulted in the destruction of much of the valuable river valley farmland that was targeted for rehabilitation by the Georgia Mountain Experiment Station in Blairsville. Consequently, all the families that farmed this land were forced to relocate either out of the area, or higher up the hillsides into forested areas where the soil is less productive and the tilled ground is more erosive under the rainfall.\textsuperscript{52} These conflicts in the management of the natural resources in Towns and Union counties appears to have been inconsequential to the federal government, as the focus of TVA turned to relocation of families to allow for system-wide expansion.

According to the TVA, “the rugged nature of the sparsely settled mountain region along the north Georgia border...was a favorable factor” for dam and reservoir development as a result of minimal family relocation and infrastructure and cemetery removal. In the Hiawassee Basin of Towns County the TVA relocated only 391 families, and only displaced 90 families in Union County’s Nottely River Valley. This is compared to the 2,899 families relocated in the Norris Reservoir project along the main stem of the Tennessee River. Land purchased by the TVA totaled 11,462 acres in Towns County’s Hiawassee valley for the Chatuge development, while 7,798 more acres were acquired in Union County for development of the Nottely project. Cooperative contracts gave the TVA the opportunity to assist in wildfire protection on national forest land around the Reservoir areas and also provided grants for Young Harris College to assist farmers having problems with relocation.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{52} Lancaster, 12.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. (Vol. 2), 18-20, 53.
Development of the two reservoirs dislocated the economic foundations of small-scale agriculture in the river valleys of Towns and Union counties. A full 20 percent of the residents in Union County left and agricultural production declined significantly. Even though only a small amount of cropland was flooded it was land with the best quality soil next to the river.\textsuperscript{54} Production levels of corn, the primary crop in the entire northeast Georgia mountain area, dropped by more than 20 percent in Towns County between 1934 ad 1949, and the amount of land tilled to grow corn dropped from 7,764 acres in 1934 to 3,906 acres in 1949, according to Lancaster’s thesis, which uses United States Census Bureau data.\textsuperscript{55} In Towns County, like Union County, the lack of railroad transportation forced most farming to be small and subsistence-based before the TVA came to town.\textsuperscript{56} This condition was further aggravated when much of the best producing cropland was flooded for the Chatuge and Nottely reservoirs. Livestock ranching also declined significantly, but not exclusively because of reduction in pastureland. In 1935, no grazing law existed in Georgia and livestock free ranged throughout the forests. By 1950, state laws required all livestock to be fenced, reducing the number of animals for which a small mountain family could care. Poultry farming did increase in Towns County after the flooding of Lake Chatuge and Lancaster states that many farmers credit the increase in motor vehicles and improved roads by 1950 providing easier access to

\textsuperscript{54} Lancaster, 3; Ibid; (Vol. 2), 527, 569.

\textsuperscript{55} Lancaster, 15.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 6.
markets at greater distances. The TVA also provided electricity to Towns and Union county residents, something very few had before the reservoir in 1935.⁵⁷

Life was quite different in Fannin, Towns, and Union counties almost ten years after the TVA began operating within the area. It purchased the Toccoa dam and reservoir and renamed them Lake Blue Ridge, and completed development of the Chatuge and Nottely reservoirs. The residents had much to give the federal government thanks for, as the world around them appeared to gain stability resulting from wise natural resource management practices introduced and enacted by the U.S. Forest Service and the TVA. This assistance taught local farmers more productive, and less destructive, agricultural methods, and provided a reliable mechanism in the national forest system to allow professional scientists to begin restoration in the denuded hills. On the other hand, agricultural production levels declined significantly in Towns and Union counties as a result of the new TVA projects and the relocation of many farmers onto land higher up the hillsides increased pressure on forestlands under restoration. This appears to be an interesting conflict to the environmental and social restoration goals of the federal government, but was still supported by congress.

Only a generation before, the mountain people living in these three counties knew little to nothing about the modern amenities the Industrial Revolution spread over the rest of the nation. They made their living off the surrounding land with little understanding of the how damaging their subsistence methods were to the region’s natural resources. Certainly the industrial loggers around the turn of the century, many based far outside the northeast Georgia mountain area, who denuded the woods knew the damage being

⁵⁷ Ibid., 12, 17-20; United States Tennessee Valley Authority (Vol. 2), 528, 569.
inflicted, but their methods of cut and run left no time to be sentimental about their impact on local lands. Electricity in much of the three county area was a luxury before the federal government took special interest in the region, but the ecological, and social consequences of generating and distributing new electricity to all the residents of the three counties now had a direct impact on the local communities.

By 1950, Towns, Union, and Fannin counties looked at life anew. Outside influences certainly directed the path these communities took through their introduction with the Industrial Revolution. From the industrial logger to the federal dam builder the mountain people of the area were led from obscurity to modernity by outsiders interested not so much in them as in the natural resources that surrounded their communities. Their mountain forests were re-growing well, and the TVA, despite the impact of their two new dams, actively assisted local farmers in improving their practices and methods, and finding new markets for their products. Prosperity was not yet knocking on the door for the local residents and businesses, but thanks to the Forest Service and the TVA foundations were now in place to take advantage of any new economic opportunity that might arise. Certainly federal investment in forest restoration was worth its price in gold, and healthy forests help support the tourism economy that provides for these three counties today. However, the social and ecological cost of bringing TVA electricity to the people in these three counties was certainly detrimental to the very small farm-based economy found in Towns and Union counties before construction of the Chatuge and Nottely reservoirs.

The mission of federal intervention in the northeast Georgia mountain area was somewhat confusing from 1912 to 1950. As conflicts developed between the needs of the
people and the needs of the valuable natural resources, programs emerged that had
somewhat contradicting goals. Many years later, however, it seems the investment made
by the taxpayers of the entire nation have provided a more stable and secure economic
foundation to support both these human and ecological resources so important to the state
of Georgia.
CONCLUSION

While this research project ends in 1950, the story of natural resource management in the northeast Georgia mountain area continued to develop through the last half of the twentieth century. This project focused on the years between 1850 and 1950 because available sources pointed to a story of conflicting natural resource management goals and strategies that virtually destroyed the local environment, but ultimately resulted in decisions that contributed significantly to the ecological and social restoration of the area. The continuation of the story into the second half of the twentieth century would likely reveal additional important influences that helped develop the area into the growing and viable region that it is today, but that is for another project.

In the last half of the nineteenth century budding entrepreneurs and well-financed industrialists from outside the northeast Georgia mountain area targeted the abundant timber found in the southern Appalachian old growth forests as a marketable resource to create some wealth for themselves. Their logging operations resulted in an ecological disaster as they denuded almost all of the hills of their lush forests. Without the protection of a forest canopy, the large amounts of rain that falls annually washed tons of exposed topsoil down the hillsides and into the nearest waterway. As logging operations continued to expand and landowners started to abandon their cut-over property the subsistence-based lifestyle of the local communities collapsed.

The loggers did not destroy the environmental and social conditions in the area alone, however. The local residents also inflicted plenty of damage on the land with unsustainable agricultural methods that quickly depleted the soil of nutrients and forced farmers to cut more forest in order to create more fields. They then abandoned the
nutrient drained fields and left them to wash away under the force of the heavy rains, much like the case on the hills denuded by logging clear cuts.

Soon after the turn of the twentieth century Progressive political and conservationist leaders determined that the destructive methods of unregulated logging in the southern Appalachian Mountains must end immediately. Unfortunately, the gears of government moved slowly, but after almost ten years of debate, and continued logging, Congress rewarded the Progressive conservationists for their perseverance with passage of the Weeks Act. This piece of legislation created the eastern national forests and set the northeast Georgia mountain area on a path toward environmental restoration.

The Progressive conservationists refused to pass their determination to regulate the loggers in the area onto the hydro-electricity generation developers also hoping to create some wealth by extracting local natural resources. Instead of revolutionary legislation preventing the free-flowing Tallulah River from being dammed, Progressives decided that the federal government should not interfere in the business of private enterprise. This curious conflict of goals resulted in a serious conflict of natural resource management strategies when the Georgia Railway and Power Company completed construction of the Tallulah Falls dam in 1913.

When President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Tennessee Valley Authority in 1933, which built or purchased dams and reservoirs in each of the three area counties in the Tennessee River basin by 1942, he further complicated the federal government’s goals for the natural resources in the northeast Georgia mountain area. Through the first half of the twentieth century, a few large institutions managed the natural resources of the area using conflicting strategies. This often resulted in the actions of one interfering with
the goals of another, as when the TVA pushed farmers in Towns and Union counties out of the fertile river flood plain and up into the de-forested hills where the forest service attempted to restore the badly damaged lands. However, over time these institutions resolved many of their differences and, as has been argued, re-created the environment by restoring the forests and developing new resources in the reservoirs that would become attractive to a new wave of tourists in the second half of the twentieth century.

Environmental and social conditions in the northeast Georgia mountain area turned the corner from hope to prosperity after the end of the period under review, but it was the foundations established by the natural resource management strategies described in this story that allowed the corner to be turned when improved regional economics provided the needed boost.
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