
Mississippi Chapter Sierra Club

Golden Triangle Group

CROSSROADS

September 2004 – January 2005



SIERRA
CLUB
FOUNDED 1892

EVENTS

SEPTEMBER

Sat., Sept. 11th, 9:00 a.m. **Work Outing. Noxubee Crest Trail in Tombigbee National Forest.**

Volunteers are needed to clear brush and fallen trees from sections of this fabulous biking and hiking trail. Bring gloves, lunch, water, and any of the following tools: loppers, clippers, saws, and light chain saws. We will meet at the Noxubee Crest Trailhead in the parking area next to the cemetery on Sheep Ranch Road, south of Ackerman in Choctaw County. Call Juliet Tang at 662-465-8767 to get directions.

Tue., Sept. 14th, 6:00 p.m. **Open House. Land Management for Tombigbee National Forest.**

Lake Tia O'Kata Restaurant, Louisville. The National Forest Service will be holding several Open Houses during the month of September to give the public an opportunity to submit broad and specific comments on the National Forest Revision Plan. These plans will be used to manage each of National Forests in Mississippi over the next 15 years. Written comments can be submitted at the Open House or submitted by email or mail. Get details by calling Juliet Tang or by going to:

http://www.southernregion.fs.fed.us/mississippi/forest_plan/newsletters/Magnolia_Messenger_7_29.pdf

See our *featured article* inside.



OCTOBER

Sat., Oct 9th, 9:00 a.m. **Outing. Noxubee Crest Trail in Tombigbee National Forest.** Come ride or hike portions of the 26 miles of breathtaking bike trails that meander through the beautiful forested hills south of Choctaw Lake near Ackerman. Bring lunch and plenty of water. We will meet at the Noxubee Crest Trailhead in the parking area next to the cemetery on Sheep Ranch Road. Trail map can be found at:

<http://www.southernregion.fs.fed.us/mississippi/tombigbee/recreation/biking/>

Call Juliet Tang at 662-465-8767 for directions.

Thur., Oct. 14., 6:00 p.m. **Program. What Lies in the Future for the Noxubee Wildlife Refuge?**

Refuge Headquarters, Brooksville. Come and meet the new Refuge Manager, Henry Sansing. Hear what Mr. Sansing's plans are for the Refuge and offer your own suggestions. We will also be touring the new Visitor's Center and taking Sierra Club Calendar orders. This will be a joint meeting with the Audubon Society. Call Juliet Tang at 662-465-8767 for more info.

NOVEMBER

Sat., Nov. 13th, 2:00 p.m. **View Famous Herbarium followed by Potluck.** If you are a plant enthusiast, you can't miss this event. Sydney McDaniel of 2020 Sessums Rd., Starkville, has invited us to view his tremendous plant collection. From Oktoc Rd., take left at cemetery onto Artesia Rd., take 2nd right, then take 1st right (paved road), then 1st left at firestation onto Sessums Rd (gravel). Turn at 2nd driveway on left. There is a small sign that reads Botanical Gardens. The potluck will follow at Adrienne and Rob Minerick's home, 1891 Chapel Hill Rd, just around the corner from Sydney's house. Call Juliet Tang at 662-465-8767 for more info.

DECEMBER

Sat., Dec. 4th, 6:00 p.m. **Holiday Gathering and Potluck.** Diana and Duane Lyon at 111 Grand Ridge Rd., Starkville, will be our hosts for this year's celebration. For entertainment, we may see yet another great performance by the Riddler. From Highway 12, turn onto South Montgomery St., turn right on Grand Ridge Rd. Diana's house is on the left. It has white brick and blue trim. They can be reached at (324-1426).

JANUARY

Wed., Jan. 12th, 6:00 p.m. **Potluck and Planning** at Lois Connington's home, 117 Cedar Lane, Starkville. All are invited to help plan our spring meetings. From Highway 82, go north on Old West Point Rd. Take 2nd right on Cedar Lane. Lois' house is at the top of the hill on the left. For more information, call Lois at 662-324-2594.

NATIONAL FORESTS IN MISSISSIPPI REOPEN MANAGEMENT PLAN REVISION

The revision plan for the National Forests in Mississippi has restarted finally. The industry is already getting started in working to get things back to massive clearcutting of our forestland at taxpayer expense. Below are some sample comments to help those interested in writing to Jeff Long, the Planning Team Leader for the Forest Service, Mississippi_Plan@fs.fed.us, as well as a schedule of public meetings this next month. Please attend if you can. We need for the Forest Service to know that there are conservationists here in Mississippi. I'm happy to send a copy of our "Alternative Management Plan" and short recommendations by specific district if anyone can use them. Also enclosed are some specific points regarding the Tombigbee district developed by area residents. Contact me, wdmounger@yahoo.com, for more information on meetings, forest conservation ideas, and other information.

The existing 1985 Forest Plan is way out of date and contains provisions that are hardly favorable to conservation and biodiversity, including keeping the vast majority of the state's 1.1 million acres of National Forest land open to large volume clearcutting. The plan contains no standards for road densities, a simplistic rubric of "forest types", and gives a district ranger the ability to leave only 2 percent of a timber sale area as "late seral" (trees over 50 years in age). Another weakness of this plan that has shown itself to be evident is the lack of a real management plan (required by federal law <http://www.nps.gov/rivers/wsract.html>) for the Black Creek National Scenic River and the Black Creek National Scenic Trail. As a result, the DeSoto district is planning large cuts in and near these areas that are supposed to be managed for their scenic value.

It is time for a change. We call for all Americans who care about our federal lands to let the Forest Service know that our National Forests should be bastions of healthy watersheds, biodiversity, and recreation, not tree farms for industry. With only seven percent of our state's forestland in the National Forest system and little of that protected, our districts (Bienville, Delta, Desoto, Holly Springs, Homochitto, and Tombigbee) become all the more precious.

Here are several points to address:

Ecosystem Protection and Restoration - Much of our state's forestland has been converted to loblolly and slash pine plantations. It is time to protect and restore fragile and declining forest types and ecosystems. Prairie remnants in Tombigbee and Bienville and Longleaf pine/bluestem in DeSoto and Homochitto are but two ecosystems that have declined greatly. (DeSoto is planning to log out mature longleaf along Black Creek as a supposed "restoration" project.) There are dozens of old growth forest types (burr oak, overcup oak) that have become scarce in Mississippi. The Delta district has almost the only remaining unroaded areas in the state and has great potential for Wilderness designation, particularly important since we have the least amount of protected Wilderness in the National Forest system.

Most forest plans, such as Alabama's, are moving towards forest management that manage forest areas with some degree of thought. Called "Management Prescriptions", they include: Cultural Heritage Sites, Remote Backcountry, Recommended Wilderness Study, Sensitive Viewsheds, Watershed Restoration. These classifications offer varying degrees of protections based on an area's historical, scenic, biological, or watershed importance. If one looks at district after district of Mississippi's current plan, most of the maps say the same prescription: "General Forest Management", which translates into "high-volume logging". Mississippi forests are more than tree farms. May we have some of these conservation-oriented areas as other forests do? We hope that citizens and scientists will help identify special places that fit these prescriptions, like Prairie Mount in Tombigbee and Whiskey Creek in DeSoto.

Roads - Mississippi National Forests have some of the highest road densities in the country, subsidized by taxpayers at thousands of dollars a mile. Some areas in DeSoto and Homochitto have five miles of road and more per square mile of forest, not counting all the unofficial ORV roads and old logging paths. This has caused agency budget problems, contributed to forest fragmentation, and reduced water quality. Some districts are now "classifying" user-created roads, a questionably legal practice in light of specific directions made by the national Roads Rule, which was intended to curb excessive road volumes in National Forests.

Recreation - As mentioned before, our state's most well known recreation area is under assault. Rather than hammer at the few places that are supposed to have an emphasis other than "timber production", the agency should explore the many opportunities for recreation in our forests. Tombigbee has recently opened a foot/bicycle trail that spans the district. With increased urbanization, people are seeking to hike, hunt, and camp in remote, wild places. Instead of invading these places with roads and cutting, they should be treasured for the rare jewels that they are. Let's give our conservation heritage the respect that it deserves.

Clearcutting - This practice, along with its variants (Seedtree and Shelterwood cuts) has reduced soil and water quality and threatened sensitive wildlife. Called "even-aged management" in the current plan, this program

usually creates pine monocultures that have little biodiversity and lowered resistance to disease. Alternative programs can include no harvest or thinning.

Request for a no commercial harvest alternative - We request a LRMP revision alternative that would fairly and accurately weigh the benefits and costs of commodity extraction, especially timber harvest on the National Forests in Mississippi. Such a non-commercial, restoration alternative is NOT the same as the No-Action Alternative. The No-Action Alternative as it relates to forest plan revisions is clear.

In developing alternatives for analysis in forest planning the Forest Service is obligated to formulate a wide range of alternatives that reflect and respond to major public issues. (36 CFR §219.12[f]4.) Again, according to the CEQ, the agency must analyze a "full spectrum of alternatives." Commercial logging on National Forests is just such a major public issue that has been raised regularly by conservation organizations.

Preserving core forest areas - Mississippi lacks much remote, unfragmented forest. The Forest Service should look into managing those that remain as Remote Backcountry, places where commercial extraction would not take place, and wildlife, scenic, and wild recreation values would be the standard. Places that qualify include: Whiskey Creek in the DeSoto, Tallahala in Bienville, the Hawk's Nest and Pinchback in Tombigbee. The Six Mile Bayou/Ten Mile Bayou areas of the Delta deserve Wilderness protection.

Request for a comprehensive socio-economic analysis- National Forests generate vast economic benefits simply by existing as natural ecosystems. When National Forests are logged, these benefits are lost, resulting in externalized costs to communities, businesses, and individuals that derive economic benefits from unlogged forests.

We call upon citizens to send comments supporting greater protection for our National Forests. The Forest Service says the process will take three years, until an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is released. They will continue to take comments throughout the process, but need early "scoping" comments by Nov. 10 to identify issues.

We also hope that the Forest Service will hold public meetings that cover specific forest issues and publicize these in the mainstream media, something that hasn't been happening for many years. We hope further that these meetings will have qualified personnel with detailed maps and data to aid in meaningful discussion. Explore your local forest district and get involved.

Please send comments to:
Jeff Long/Planning Team Leader
National Forests in Mississippi
100 W. Capitol Suite 1141
Jackson, MS 39269
601-965-4391 ext.149

or Mississippi_Plan@fs.fed.us

National Forest Protection Alliance (lists MS NF in its "10 Most Endangered Forests" survey)
<http://www.forestadvocate.org/>

To compare Mississippi's and Alabama's plans:
http://www.southernregion.fs.fed.us/mississippi/projects/forest_plan/
<http://www.southernregion.fs.fed.us/alabama/planning/planning.htm>

Schedule of National Forest Open Houses

Holly Springs National Forest
Benton Co. Courthouse, Ashland, Sept. 27, 1-3 pm
MS State Extension Office, Oxford, Sept. 27, 6-8 pm

Tombigbee National Forest
Lake Tia O'Khata, Louisville, Sept. 14, 6-8 pm

Homochitto National Forest
Franklin Co. Library, Meadville, Sept. 2, 2-4 pm & 6-8pm

Bienville National Forest
Community Center, Forest, Sept. 16, 2-4 pm & 6-8 pm

De Soto National Forest
District Office, Wiggins, Sept. 20, 5-7 pm
Community Center, Orange Grove, Sept. 21, 5-7 pm

Chickasawhay NF & DeSoto Ranger Districts
Hattiesburg Library, Hattiesburg, Sept. 23, 5-7 pm

Delta National Forest
Community Center, Rolling Fork, Sept. 9, 6-8 pm

Some Recommendations for the Tombigbee District

- Hawk's Nest/Noxubee Crest/Pinchback - seek to purchase private land inholdings; possible Wilderness or Remote Backcountry Area (unsuitable for timber production).
- Trails - link Noxubee Crest trail with the Scatteredtown Trail on the Noxubee NWR.
- Expand trail system to include the historic Robinson Road as a Cultural Heritage Site.
- Jones Creek/Mill Creek-Watershed Restoration areas (unsuitable for timber production); encourage joint management of red-cockaded woodpecker with Noxubee NWR.
- Identify and Protect Old Growth Stands - possible trail extensions to guide visitors to old or diverse stands
- Prairie Restoration - prairie areas in the Trace unit should be restored; Black Belt Prairie ecosystem is listed by the Forest Service as an endangered ecosystem, with over 98% of its range gone.
- Witch Dance-Primary Recreation Area (Unsuitable for timber production).

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Nominations are being taken to fill 3 positions on the Golden Triangle Group Executive Committee. The

term of each position is 2 years and will begin January 2005. Any member in good standing is eligible for nomination by the nominating committee or by petition, i.e. you nominate yourself. The deadline for nominations is Nov. 1. Call Juliet Tang at 662-465-8767 for more information or to make submissions. Voting ballots will be mailed to all members in early December. Please vote.

SIERRA CLUB CALENDARS FOR SALE

Two styles are available, a hanging wall calendar for \$11.95 and a desk engagement calendar for \$12.95. To order, call Juliet Tang at 662-465-8767 by Oct. 31st. Calendars can be picked up at our December meeting.

NEWSLETTER ARTICLES

The next newsletter will be published in February. Send any suggestions or announcements to Juliet Tang (662-465-8767).

GOLDEN TRIANGLE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Lois Connington** Starkville
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Ex Comm

* Two year term, ends Dec. 2005

**Two year term, ends D



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