



# The Trail Not Taken Pine Mountain at FDR State Park

COMMUNITY REPORT  
PINE MOUNTAIN TRAIL ASSOCIATION, 2010



**Above:** Pine Mountain at FDR State Park is part of a hogback ridge that stretches more than 50 miles across Harris, Meriwether and Upson counties.

**Below:** Pine Mountain forest after a state-authorized prescribed burn, a forestry management tool that is common practice in pine stands, but not in hardwood habitats.







The view looking east from Dowdell's Knob.

## Overview

# Dramatic change set for FDR State Park

**Officials at the Georgia Department of Natural Resources are taking** Pine Mountain and Franklin D. Roosevelt State Park down an unchartered trail. To the dismay of park enthusiasts, it's a volatile path of fire, upheaval and seismic change.

For the benefit of ecological science, DNR agents are attempting to **transform the composition of Pine Mountain** from a natural forest dominated by oak and hickory trees to a regenerated timber preserve of montane (mountain) longleaf pine.

**DNR officials have aggressively moved forward with their massive forest reconstruction plan** by executing "prescribed burns" at Pine Mountain. These "controlled" fires are harmful and fatal to hardwood trees, but are beneficial for growing and cultivating longleaf pine.

**In January of 2011, the DNR plans to burn 1,578 acres** of the Pine Mountain forest at FDR State Park. This will be the state's fifth year in a row of burning the venerable forest, which has stood unspoiled for more than 80 years.

**With change, or dramatic change in this case, comes resistance and opposition.** The Pine Mountain

Trail Association (PMTA), keepers and preservers of the park's popular 43-mile trail system, is alarmed by the magnitude and recklessness of the DNR's prescribed burns, **which are destroying hardwood habitats, creating erosion problems on steep slopes, damaging riparian (stream) zones, defacing large sections of the Pine Mountain Trail, and wrecking heavily used campsite areas.**

"We oppose the widespread and destructive burning of the entire 9,045-acre park. It's not right and it makes no sense," said PTMA board member and Georgia certified forester **Richard Ramey**.

This report to the community, endorsed by the PMTA and its hundreds of members, was created **to educate the general public and increase the community's awareness of the DNR's drastic plans for Pine Mountain** and the pending repercussions.

This report also details the PMTA's position opposing the DNR's long-term plan for Franklin D. Roosevelt State Park, and reveals why the plan, if executed, will **reduce outdoor recreation, diminish the park's aesthetic value, decrease tourism dollars, and disrupt the historic integrity of the land.**

## Playing With Fire

# Prescribed burns growing in size at FDR State Park

The Pine Mountain Trail Association **opposes the widespread and destructive** prescribed burning of Pine Mountain that is currently being executed by the Department of Natural Resources with the primary purpose to regenerate montane longleaf pine. The PMTA supports limited longleaf pine restoration, but **not at the expense of other tree species and hardwood habitats**. Consider the actions of the DNR over the last four years at FDR State Park:

1. **Wholesale burning** with no regard to any of the other equally important ecosystems found on the mountain.
  2. Ignoring the extremely important **recreational value** of the Pine Mountain Trail.
  3. Total disregard to the **preservation of nationally recognized campgrounds**.
  4. **Failure to protect critical riparian zones**, damaging streamside vegetation, animal habitats and water quality.
  5. **Increased erosion on steep slopes** by the destruction of protective ground cover and duff.
  6. **Failure to protect the rare American Chestnut stands** in the forest, a discovery so astounding it made national news.
  7. **Continued increase in the size of prescribed burns**, making intensive management virtually impossible.
- For a State Park to be managed to promote a single ecosystem at the exclusion of all others, especially disregarding the significant multiple use aspects of recreation that the Park provides, violates the Mission and Core Values of the Georgia State Parks System.*

### THE RING OF FIRE

No. of acres burned by year at Pine Mountain

<b>2007</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>2008</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>2009</b>	<b>580</b>
<b>2010</b>	<b>800</b>
<b>2011</b>	<b>1578</b>
<b>2012</b>	<b>2500</b>
<b>2013</b>	<b>2500</b>
<b>2014</b>	<b>2500</b>
<b>2015</b>	<b>2500</b>
<b>2016</b>	<b>2500</b>
<b>2017</b>	<b>2500</b>

Source: DNR

2012-2017 Projected



**LEFT:** In January 2011, a prescribed burn team from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources will burn 1,578 acres of the 9,045-acre FDR State Park. This will be the largest burn to date at Pine Mountain. The area to be burned is marked in yellow and includes three PMT campsites. The biggest swath of targeted fire includes hundreds of acres of the important Oak-Hickory Forest Ecosystem, which is full of red oaks, scarlet oaks, white oaks, chestnut oaks, pignut hickories, shagbark hickories, flowering dogwoods, hawthorns, and mountain laurels—all of which are fire intolerant.



Open Fire

# State Burn Team in Action at FDR

SLIP SLIDING AWAY



UP THE CREEK



**TOP:** Burned on steep slopes, destroying protective ground cover and creating erosion. **RIGHT:** Failed to protect critical riparian (stream) zones, damaging streamside vegetation, animal habitats and water quality. A buffer zone must be established.

APOCALYPSE POPLAR



Burned and severely damaged a popular poplar tree, estimated to be over 100 years old and 85 feet high. Cavity at bottom is 10 feet high, can fit 3-4 people.

CAMP WASTELAND



Burned and destroyed a PMT campsite after volunteers worked all morning to rake an 8-foot-wide firebreak ring 100 feet around the site.



The Main Attraction

# Autumn splendor of Pine Mountain



YOU CAN'T GET  
THESE KIND OF  
COLORS IN A  
LONGLEAF  
PINE FOREST





Outside Play

# Plan ignores outdoor recreation

In its exhaustive and tedious 50-page Natural Resource Management Plan for Franklin D. Roosevelt State Park, outdoor recreation is listed as an “other important goal.”

The plan goes into great detail describing the regeneration of the montane longleaf pine ecosystem, but never mentions the Pine Mountain Trail and its 42-mile trail system and 14 popular campsites.

Incredibly, in the plan’s detailed map of forest communities and other park assets, only one small section is identified as recreation, that being the picnic area and state-run campground by Lake Delano. There is no reference on the map, or in the entire report, to the Pine Mountain Trail and its 50,000 annual visitors who come to hike, camp and sightsee. Was this just a bad oversight? Did the planning committee of 17 natural resource professionals forget about the volunteer organization—the Pine Mountain Trail Association—and its contributions to the welfare of the state park and its visitors?

Established in 1975, the PMTA is dedicated to the preservation, enhancement and promotion of the Pine Mountain Trail. Below are some highlights of the association’s contributions and accomplishments.

## Partial list of PMTA deeds & kudos

- Brown Dog Campsite #2 ridge campsite in U.S. — *Backpacker Magazine*
- Furnished and erected all wooden signs on PMT and parking areas.
- Annually create & print 3,000 detailed topo style trail maps
- Purchased 2-way radios for FDR State Park staff
- Helped halt relocation of Hwy. 27 into state park by locating title records
- Maintain the trail weekly for 35 years at no cost to the State.
- Cleared the trail and some of Hwy. 190 after Hurricane Opal in 1995
- Provided over 20 Eagle Scout project opportunities.
- Guide over 13 public trail hikes annually
- Led hike with students from Georgia Academy for the Blind
- Led hikes with students from LaGrange College, Georgia Southern, Columbus State, Georgia Tech, and West Georgia College & State U.
- Furnished and installed the trailhead structure at Dowdell’s Knob
- Beautified Rocky Point parking lot. Won cash award from the Garden Club of Georgia. Donated cash to the FDR State Park.



Some 800 runners from around the U.S. attempted to conquer the Pine Mountain Trail in the North Face Endurance Challenge that took place on Oct. 16-17 at FDR State Park.



Backpacking is a popular activity on the Pine Mountain Trail. Friends and families frequently backpack and camp together. Plus, nearly every weekend Boy Scout groups from Alabama, Florida and all over central and southwest Georgia use the trail system for outdoor learning and fellowship.

## Open Fire

# Top 10 Negatives of Prescribed Burning

**1. The major negative is that it releases huge amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> that would otherwise be safely bound.**

**2. It alters plant community structure.** Sometimes (after a few burns) the plants that dominate are the fire-climax type that burn more readily than those they replace. Sometimes species are lost and biodiversity falls. It can help spread weeds and increase the erosion rates of steep-slope soils.

**3. It removes much of the ground and near-ground habitat structure.**

It makes life very difficult for small mammals and some reptiles. Much of this wildlife dies because it has nowhere else to go.

**4. By removing leaf litter on the forest floor, it interrupts the soil formation process.** Plant matter that would otherwise break down and add to soil humus is instead turned to ash. It raises soil pH. Continued burning will alter soil structures.

**5. All too often the control burns escape and do other damage.**

**6. It defeats the years of work that the Georgia Forestry Commission** has done to decrease the incidence of wildfire by making people think it is OK to indiscriminately burn our forests.

**7. It creates a false sense of security.** In extreme heat, when the tops (crowns) of the trees are alight, it does not matter at all whether there had been recent control burns.

**8. It is necessarily done in cool weather with slightly damp fuels** that results in incomplete combustion (lower temperature), which produces more toxic smoke.

**9. Control burns hasten the loss of mature trees.** Hollow trees (important nesting sites) are often cut down to put out internal fires after the burns.



**FACT:** Repeated prescribed burns in hardwood habitats, as planned for Pine Mountain, do not reduce the threat of wildfires. If anything, it increases the threat due to the accumulation of woody fuel (above) from dead trees, shrubs, sticks, and branches.

**10. The use of fire in hardwood stands does not reduce the threat of wildfires.** Studies on similar sites in the Daniel Boone National Forest have shown that repeated prescribed burns remove annual leaf litter, which is quickly replenished by the next leaf fall. These repeated burns actually *increase* the amount of woody fuel by killing the small trees and shrubs in hardwood stands.



## Visitors

# Tourism drives local economy

Visitors come for history, natural beauty and outdoor recreation

Every year, hundreds of thousands of people from around the nation and world visit **Franklin D. Roosevelt State Park in Pine Mountain, Ga.** They come for the outdoor recreation, the natural beauty and the historic legacy of former President Franklin D. Roosevelt.



"This mountain is worth far more than any farm land in the country. People know very little about it now, but someday they will come to appreciate its true value. It will be a great playground for persons living on the coastal plain since it is closer than any other ridge."

— President Franklin D. Roosevelt

At Dowdell's Knob, left, visitors can experience President Roosevelt's favorite spot on Pine Mountain.

The four-term President first came to the area in 1924 seeking relief from his polio in the warm springs that flowed from the foot of Pine Mountain. He quickly fell in love with the scenic beauty of the southern mountain terrain and would spend the rest of his life devoted to protecting the area's economic welfare and preserving its natural resources.

"People from all over the world come to see the history of President Roosevelt and learn about all what he did for this country," said **Tammy Pierce**, chairman of the Pine Mountain Tourism Association.

One popular place for visitors to see is **Dowdell's Knob**, a rocky outcropping 1,395 feet

atop Pine Mountain that was Roosevelt's favorite spot to picnic with friends and ponder the nation's ills in isolation. Today, a statue of President Roosevelt gazes out at the vast Georgia countryside and his stone grill remains preserved for visitors to see.

President Roosevelt predicted that Pine Mountain would become "a great playground for persons living on the coastal plain since it is closer than any other ridge."

## TOURISM DOLLARS

Pierce, a lifelong Pine Mountain resident, said the local economy relies heavily on tourism. In

2008, the **economic impact of tourism** in Harris County was \$45.4 million, according to the Georgia Department of Economic Development.

"**Tourism drives our economy**," said Pierce, a lifelong resident of Pine Mountain. "There's a lot to do around here. Pine Mountain is Harris County's biggest industry. People come up from Florida all the time because we are the first mountain range they can get to. People



The colorful fall foliage of Pine Mountain draws leaf watchers from Florida.



want to see the **fall foliage**, which is gorgeous, but it is just as gorgeous in the spring."

Visitors often stay in local hotels, state park cabins, or accommodations at Callaway Gardens, a popular resort community located in Pine Mountain. They also spend money on gas, souvenirs, dining, and other items.

"Our local merchants are happy seeing visitors in town," said **Hank Arnold**, executive director of the Pine Mountain Tourism Association. "We have no empty storefronts in downtown Pine Mountain."

## RECREATIONAL MECCA

Fifty years after President Roosevelt first visited the area, a man from Columbus, Ga., also recognized the immense recreational value and inspiring natural resources of Pine Mountain. With permission from the State of Georgia, **Neal Wickham** began his quest to build a hiking trail that would traverse the mountain ridge and meander through the natural beauty of the land.



Trail running is popular on the Pine Mountain Trail.

Along the way, thousands of volunteers pitched in to help build the **Pine Mountain Trail**, a 43-mile network of hiking trails with 14 popular campsites. Today, **more than 50,000 outdoor enthusiasts** per year spend time hiking sections of the Pine Mountain Trail, and some 4,000 annually use the

I ran the Pine Mountain 40-miler this weekend and was truly impressed with the trails. I've wanted to run this race for at least a decade and for one reason or another, didn't get around to it until now. I wasn't disappointed. You're so fortunate to have these trails. Thanks for all the work you do to maintain the trails. I steward a trail in my hometown and know that the work isn't simple or quick. I really appreciate the trails and the opportunity to run and explore them. Thanks!

Susan Donnelly  
Oak Ridge, TN, 12/8/09

trail's campsites.

The Pine Mountain Trail is also the site of many special events such as endurance runs conducted by **North Face** and the **Georgia Ultrarunning & Trailrunning Society**

(GUTS). In October, some 800 trail runners and their families from across the U.S converged on Pine Mountain for the two-day North Face Endurance Challenge, which conducted seven races with distances ranging from 5K to 50 miles.

Most participants, such as **Andrew Pacetti** from Austin, Texas, turned the race into a mini-vacation by bringing their families, staying the weekend and enjoying the many activities that Pine Mountain and FDR State Park have to offer. Pacetti was in town to conquer his first marathon. He estimated that he would spend more than \$1,000 in the local economy before he departed. "I wanted to run a marathon and thought I would try it on trails since it is more scenic," said Pacetti. "This place is pretty sweet."

## TOURISM SPOILER

Pierce is concerned when she hears that the Georgia Department of Natural Resources is going to **kill all of the hardwood trees** in its extreme plan to transform Pine Mountain into a giant longleaf pine ecosystem.

"That would be ridiculous," said Pierce. "I would not like to see all of the hardwoods killed."

If the government agency is allowed to pursue its objective, the process will take decades and the 9,045-acre forest of mainly deciduous and colorful hardwood will slowly change into a monotonous green hue of pine trees.

"People would be **less inclined to visit** if you didn't have a variety of trees. We have such a variety of trees on the mountain. We need that diversity," said Pierce.