

# Conservation

... with Marie Mellinger

## The Ravaging of a River

The Proposal to put the Chattooga River under the Wild and Scenic River Act met with almost overwhelming approval at hearings held in the three states bordering the river. Impact studies on the river have been completed, and it remains for the Legislatures of Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina to approve the act. It may take as long as two years before the final law is signed.

Meanwhile, what is happening to the river? It is being silted and polluted, the natural resources of the river and its tributaries are fast disappearing, and nobody seems to care. Dirt is pouring into the river from Stecoa Creek, Dick's Creek, Cliff Creek, Overflow Creek, Sara's Creek and many more. Almost every tributary stream on the Georgia side of the river is running full of mud. Dirt is pouring off Screamer Mountain, flowing from an elite country club, a proposed shopping center, a new fried chicken joint, and countless more. Developments creep ever closer to the main river. Logging and clear-cutting are denuding the tributary streams. Ghosts of the Cherokees and pioneers should rise in protest as roads are bull-dozed across old village sites, mine sites, and historical areas. The river is being turned into a Roman Circus of movie making, raft floats, and camp-outs. Twenty-two large bags of trash and litter were picked up at the highway 76 bridge in one day.

And nobody seems to care. Who cares if the last of the ladyslippers are offered for sale in the market bulletin? Who cares about the Golden Eagle, shot, and carelessly mounted, displayed in a local grocery store? Who cares if 40 herpetologists gathered for a meeting at Highlands each collects 40 salamanders of each species? Of what use is a salamander, anyhow? Who cares if the last vestiges of ginseng and golden seal are destroyed by clear-cutting. Who cares if a botanist collects all the mad-dog skullcap for his thesis? Who cares if all the water snakes are killed off?

Think about what is happening to one of the last free flowing, unencumbered rivers in eastern North America! A river having its beginnings in springs and small trickling rills high in the mountains, flowing for 40 miles through gorges and over rocks, under laurel slicks and the last lingering remnants of the once primeval white-pine hemlock forest.

Listen to the spirit of the river-

"Mine is the voice of the wailing wind,  
My sigh is the softness of greening fern,  
My spirit soars in the hawk's high flight  
Where the fiery colors of autumn burn.  
Forever I live in a granite crag,  
Or dance in a brief-lived mayfly hour,  
My thunder and lightning can threaten the stars,  
My touch can caress a fragile flower.  
I live in each shining fungus face  
That spring's newborn from the forest sod,  
I rage like a demon in waters white  
Or softly whisper a prayer to God."

Are we going to continue to ravage the Chattooga River?