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Sunrise Photo at the Hike Inn by: Ralph Heller



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National Trails Day...June 2:by Pam Sullivan

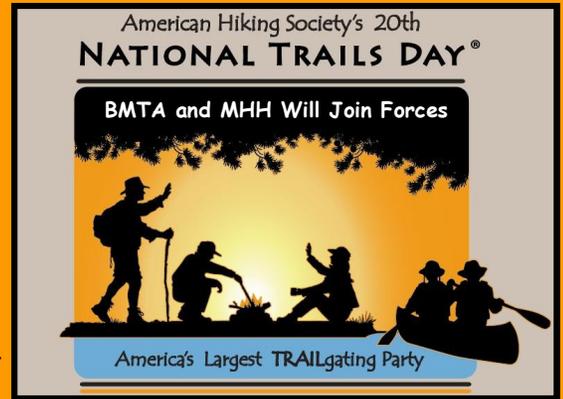
In the spirit of celebrating hiking on a national level, BMTA and Mountain High Hikers will join forces to celebrate National Trails Day on Saturday, June 2 with a potluck picnic and guided hikes.

We have reserved Pavilion #1 (the Overlook Shelter) at Black Rock State Park in Mountain City, GA., just north of Clayton. This pavilion is located adjacent to 3446 ft Black Rock Overlook and has water and electricity.

Guided trips will be provided to accommodate all hikers. Hikers need to meet at the pavilion at 9:00 am and be prepared to hike (water, hiking boots, etc).

Please bring a covered dish to share with the group. Paper goods, ice and drinks will be provided by the clubs.

All visitors are required to have a park pass and a lawn chair would be a good idea as well.



Short hikes (approx. 3.5 mi. total)

There will be a series of short hikes with lake, vista and cove views. Hikes will vary in difficulty.

- Black Rock Lake Trail, 0.85 mi. easy loop trail.
- ADA Hi Falls Trail, 0.5 mi. RT, moderate.
- Tennessee Rock Trail, 2.2 mi. moderate loop trail.
- New Norma Campbell Cove Trail, .01 mi. easy.

Potluck picnic follows. Hike leaders: George Owen, Richard Sullivan.

Depart from Pavilion #1 (Overlook Shelter) at Black Rock State Park at 9:00 am. Fee area

Long hike (approx. 7.2 mi. total)

One long hike will be offered which is rated difficult.

- James E. Edmond Backcountry Loop Trail climbs to the summit of Lookoff Mountain and offers a stunning vista of Wolfork Valley and surrounding mountain ranges.

Potluck picnic follows. Hike leader: TBD

Depart from Pavilion #1 (Overlook Shelter) at Black Rock State Park at 9:00 am. Fee area

President's Column... Dick Evans

BMTA Members and Friends,

I want to take this opportunity to update you about some of the over-reaching projects or initiatives affecting the lands thru which the BMT travels on its 300 mile journey.

As most BMTAers know, the trail crosses six US Forest Service Districts, in three National Forests. It can come as no surprise to anyone that funding from Congress for Natural Resource Agencies, like the USFS, has declined and is likely to further decline in future budgets. While folks can view this as either a good or a bad thing from the national perspective, there is no doubt that reducing funding does cause reductions or eliminations in services. The US Department of Agriculture, parent Cabinet-level agency of the Forest Service, has started a process of trying to increase citizen/volunteer involvement to decrease or offset some of these reductions. The Cherokee National Forest went thru this process a couple of years ago, and last year, the Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forest conducted a public review and restructuring of this, resulting in the "COTrails" Initiative which is actively holding training classes for various user groups and individuals to involve them in management and maintenance of the trails throughout Georgia. The Nantahala National Forest is in the early stages of such a program for trails in North Carolina. Although there are variations in each National Forest's approach and coverage, they are all actively pursuing policies to increase use of volunteers to keep the trails in good shape. The BMTA has been in the forefront of these programs, really for more than 30 years. Our Section Maintainers, who take responsibility for a specific section of the Trail, have been keeping the trail in great shape. In one of the (sometimes seemingly) endless series of meeting with the Forest Service to address these concerns, a District Ranger very publicly stated that she wished she had other groups like the BMTA to maintain all the trails in her District. This is a real compliment to the scores of BMTA volunteers, past and present, that have taken a personal interest in the trail and its condition. As this process goes forward, I am confident that the BMTA will continue to be used as the model for other groups which wish to take over maintenance of trails. To all the section maintainers and others who volunteer their time and effort to keep the trails in great shape, thank you!



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Many of you will remember that last summer, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park proposed a restructuring of back country operations, including a fee for camping in the back country, mandatory reservations for all campsites, use of a national reservations system and other goals in an effort to control what they characterized as over-crowding of the back country, as well as controlling dogs on trails, difficulties in reaching the Back Country Reservations Office and related issues. I asked the membership for comments and received more than 100 responses addressing various issues. The vast majority were of the thought that, although they would prefer to not have a fee for backpack camping, if it would improve the trails, then a reasonable fee would be acceptable. Most of our folks, however, felt there was not wide-spread overcrowding in the back country. Many folks, who spend a lot of time in the Park, felt that the over crowding issue was related to the AT Corridor thru the Park and generally during the "Spring Break" rush of thru hikers heading north at the end of March and beginning of April. I prepared a four page response to the proposal and submitted it electronically as well as in person at one of the two public meetings. I had the opportunity to spend close to 45 minutes with Chief Park Ranger Clay Jordan going over the issues in our response, including our feeling that two poorly advertised meetings to get public input was inadequate, and that the Park needed to give the public a much bigger opportunity to express their opinions. I also pointed out that I could find no one outside the Park Employees who agreed with the overcrowding statements, and that charging backpackers a fee to fund law enforcement to control dogs on trails was just wrong. In short, other than addressing the difficulty of reaching the Back Country Reservations Office, we could find little in their proposal to support. I want to thank Ernie Engman, Mark Yost, Ken Jones and many others for their detailed comments to me to back our objections.

In originally preparing this column, I sent a copy of the draft to our National Park Service contact, basically asking if I had anything wrong in my thoughts about the proposal. I was very surprised to later that day receive a phone call from Park Superintendent Dale Ditmanson to discuss the proposal and implementation plans. I had been fairly skeptical about the benefits of the proposal as I understood it, but frankly, after spending close to twenty minutes on the phone, in a full and open conversation, I have changed my mind (and my wife says that rarely happens.) Let me try to recap the conversation in an effort to fully explain the situation.

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We started out discussing the back country overcrowding issue, and the Superintendent said that they never intended to imply there was a widespread and pervasive overcrowding issue, but there certainly is an overcrowding issue at certain sites at certain times, and I fully agree with that. He indicated that the main focus of the proposal was to improve the service of the Back Country Information Office and the Back Country Reservations Office, and to get more of presence of NPS folks in the back country. They intend to expand the hours of the Back Country Information Office from the present three hours per day to match the hours of the Sugarlands Visitors Center (where it is based), some eight hours daily during the busy season. While this will probably provide no benefit to those of us familiar with the Park, it will make it much easier for the lesser-experienced to get quality trip planning assistance. Having interacted with two groups last year that came to hike the Park and were just totally unprepared for the experience (although properly equipped), I agree that this would be an overall benefit to visitors to the Park and can fully support this effort.

Additionally, in looking at the Back Country Reservations Office, they came to the conclusion that a reservation system that operated 24/7 would be a tremendous benefit for folks, and I have to totally agree with this. I have experienced this frustration of trying to "get thru" to the Reservations Office, and then when I finally reach them, being told I should have called earlier and "planned better." Using a system that is available on line, and I think even Benton MacKaye would be on line nowadays, the Superintendent indicated that we would be able to see what other reservations have been made for the campsites in which we are interested, etc., and make planning easier. I can understand that for folks traveling to the Park, having this information would be beneficial. Short notice "drop and go" type trips can still be accommodated, since the reservations service would be available nights and weekends. Often, many of us that live close to the Park make a last minute decision, "Hey the weather is good, let's go hiking." and any new reservation system would support this. Obviously, good sense would still need to be used during heavy travel times, but it would eliminate the experience of getting to a non-reserved site and finding a big group there. While there might be some benefit in using this system for just the current Reservation Only sites, I can understand the thought to impose mandatory reservations at all sites. It does seem that making a site Reservation Only just pushes the folks to the nearest non-reservation site, thus creating overcrowding issues there.

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This does seem to be the issue at the Proctor Campsite, for example, which used to be wildly overcrowded most weekends during the season. Making it reservation only, which limited occupancy to twenty, made folks just go up the trail to campsites 85 & 84, making them overcrowded and which are now Reservation Only. Likewise, trying to limit the Reservations Mandate to just the "busy season", etc., would undoubtedly produce a lot of confusion. We did discuss some of the operational issues raised in our response letter last August. Ernie Engman, Mark Yost, Ken Jones and others raised issues with various policy problems with the site they originally proposed, and the Superintendent assured me that these would be addressed, even if it meant they had to use another provider than Recreation.gov. My personal feeling is that the site can make the necessary changes, as they currently manage sites with similar issues. The Superintendent asked if members of the BMTA would be willing to be part of the "Beta Test" of the new system, and I assured him that would be glad to do so.

Another issue we discussed was announced by the fine group, Friends of the Smokies, recently. In their periodic newsletter, they announced that they were funding improvements in the Back Country operations, including funding for back country or wilderness rangers. Superintendent Ditmanson indicated that he had asked that group to fund these for this season, with funding in the future coming from the fees for camping. In our note in August, we had indicated that we preferred a system of such, non-law enforcement, rangers in the back country, and they could pass information back to Park HQ, allowing law enforcement to concentrate on problem areas, and the Superintendent indicated that this was his thinking on the issue. He did mention that two additional, part time law enforcement folks for 800 miles of trail, by themselves, would be of little value, but combined with the wilderness rangers on site, he felt that a multiplication of effort would be beneficial. It does not seem that this is an overall law enforcement "full court press", so to speak, but a targeting of specific problem areas. I think it was unfortunate that they seemed to be publicizing the "dogs on trails" issue, as this would just be a side line of having greater presence on the trails. We did discuss the iconic sign indicating no dogs on trails, and that it was confusing to some folks, as it shows an unleashed dog, leaving some predisposed folks to assume that dogs with a leash were permitted. He indicated that they would look at that, and they did need to examine the overall issue of trail signs.

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Without making this a multi-page column, I have to say that overall, the impression I got was that this is an effort to improve things for the majority of the visitors and not a big law enforcement push, as seemed to be the case earlier. While I hate to see the Park go to mandatory reservations, I do have to admit that a system where I can jump on line anytime and make a reservation would be a big benefit. I think there are still issues regarding thru hikers, whose arrival date may vary, and I think that for AT thru hikers, they are going to have to make adjustments due to the volume headed north in late March and early April, but that is an issue for others. We had indicated before to the Park that we had no problem with a reasonable camping fee as long as it benefited the trails and hikers. Their preferred option of \$4 per person per night does sound reasonable, and is administratively the easiest. If the funds are used in the manner indicated by Superintendent Ditmanson, I think that it will be a benefit to the overall hiker community. I can certainly understand those who want no fee and no reservations, but I think the proposal, as discussed, is something I can support as a benefit to the public. The current intention is to start the program next year, but I would guess that beta tests of the reservation system would need to start this summer to get valid data to make final changes to the system. As this is announced, we will keep the membership informed.

'Til next month,
see you on the Trail.

Dick



Great Smoky Mountains National Park
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Office of the Superintendent



Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring Plan April 2012

Introduction

Great Smoky Mountains National Park management is implementing a process to improve visitor services by restructuring the Park's backcountry reservations and permitting processes as well as assisted backcountry trip planning services. The Park also expects to improve protection of backcountry natural resources and public safety through expanded Ranger presence.

Background and Scope of Problem

- The Park consistently receives complaints about the amount of time and effort it takes for visitors to get a backcountry reservation and/or acquire backcountry planning information. This is a reflection of insufficient staffing for the volume of customers, both call-in and walk-in, requiring reservations and/or trip planning information.
- The Park also frequently receives feedback from the public that they desire to see more rangers in the backcountry to address problems such as dogs on trails, and permit and camping violations. This includes use of backcountry campsites by non-permitted campers.
- Non-reserved sites currently comprise over half the Park's backcountry campsite inventory. Because they are non-reserved, capacities can easily be exceeded, which results in food storage violations, increased wildlife encounters and the need to close campsites to protect visitors and wildlife. Requiring reservations for all sites will enable the Park to contact registered campers before they enter the backcountry so that they are aware of hazards such as bear activity and/or site closures.

Proposed Solution and Outcomes

1. Expand the operational hours of walk-in/call-in trip planning service and develop an online reservation service to which customers will have 24/7 access and can print their backcountry permit prior to arriving in the Park. These actions will reduce the number of reservation calls to the Backcountry Information Office and allow staff to spend more time assisting customers with high-quality trip planning services, both walk-in and by phone.

The reservation system will increase reservation/permit customer service and ensure customers have improved access to high-quality trip planning information, both through personal contacts and improved on-line planning tools.

2. Create a cost recovery fee structure for reservations that will generate revenue to cover both the cost of the reservation system and support an increased National Park Service presence in the Backcountry Information Office and in the Park's backcountry.

The Park evaluated several cost alternatives and has settled on the lowest and simplest formula: \$4 per night per person, which includes both the user fee for the site and the cost of making the reservation.

3. Require reservations for all backcountry sites. The reservation system will have the capability of notifying reservations holders of site closures, safety issues, or emergency information via phone calls, text messages or emails.

By placing all sites on the reservation system and having an increased Ranger presence in the backcountry, negative impacts to both the natural environment and to the visitor experience by ensuring compliance with the reservation requirement and with food-storage and other regulations.

Conclusion

Implementation of this proposal will result in an improvement to customer service that will make obtaining backcountry reservations quick, easy and convenient for customers, as well as increase their access to Backcountry Information Office personnel for trip planning. Additional rangers in the Park's backcountry will improve visitor experience by actively addressing commonly reported backcountry camper concerns.

Civic Engagement and Current Status

The Park solicited public input on the proposal in August 2011 and received some 230 written comments and two petitions during the comment period. The public comments provided a great deal of constructive input on the concerns Park backcountry users had about the fee plan.

The Park received approval from the National Park Service in February 2012 to move forward with developing an on-line system to collect a fee beginning in 2013 for reserving and use of the backcountry by overnight hikers and equestrians. The Park will provide periodic updates as plans for the reservation system evolve.

Reprinted From: www.nps.gov/grsm/parkmgmt/.../BC-Res-Fee-plan-April-2012.docx

BMT Sections 13 and Oswald Dome Worktrip..

April 5, 2012

TN/NC Section of the BMT.By Rick Harris

Thursday, April 5, 2012 - BMT Sections 13c-d and Oswald Dome Trail

Seven workers came out for this work trip to tackle a couple of large and dangerous logs on steep sideslopes. We first went to the BMT/John Muir Trail between Towee Creek and Big Bend. There was a very large tree with the root ball sitting on a bluff above the trail and the tree extending down to the trail. While we had three people down below on the road to stop traffic, we secured the root ball with a come-along, then cut the root ball away from the trunk. Then we cut the tree in two other places to make the tree safe. The root ball and the segments we cut rolled down the hillside toward the road, but did not make it all the way. We then logged a 16" tree off the trail, then four of us went to the BMT section east of Towee Creek. We brushed out this section and planned to log it out following reports of several logs. However, it was obvious someone beat us to it. There were no logs across the trail except for one fresh branch. We did see evidence of very recent logging out. The other three went to the Oswald Dome Trail and hiked about 2 miles up the trail to a very large log estimated to be about 30" in diameter across the trail on a steep sideslope.

A total of 47 hours were accumulated from the volunteer trail maintainers.





Easy Trek Hike-April 7...BY: Sara Bland



A beautiful, sunny and mild Saturday morning was the setting when 16 eager hikers (aka Easy Trekkers) headed out from Wal-Mart's parking lot in Ellijay to the Amadahy Trail (Cherokee for "Forest Water") on Carter's Lake. Actually, the adventure began when one of the volunteer drivers (an anonymous gentleman) inadvertently drove off without the two ladies (also anonymous) he had just promised a ride to the trailhead. Later we learned he did not hear them say they were going to their cars to get their gear. This incident got much more good natured

mileage than the actual hike! Of course, the story ended well: the "sweep car" took care of the women almost left behind.

After assembling at the Trailhead, the Easy Trekkers headed out. We all enjoyed the blue skies, gentle climbs and view of the lake sprinkled with fishermen and a variety of boats. On the 3-mile trail, a few enthusiasts identified several different wild flowers and plants. After completing the loop, we headed to the picnic area located on a peninsular which the Heller's had secured for us. Afterwards, six hearty souls headed out on the optional 1.2 mile hike on the Oak Ridge Nature Trail. It was a definite challenge to make the choice between a hike with some pretty steep climbs or take a siesta next to the water after lunching in the sunshine. However, the half dozen Trekkers were glad they did.

It was a great day for several reasons: meeting new people, the synergy and congeniality of the group, the weather (thank you, Mother Nature) and the setting. We'll be back on the Amadahy next year!



The 2012 Georgia Walk-Thru...by Tom Keene

Cobbler to the Rescue!

Walk-thru day cleared nicely in Georgia and for the first time in some years nearly everyone walked on the officially designated day. As a result, the late afternoon meeting at the Pink Pig was well attended, though some had left by the time the last party arrived.

Speaking of the last party, as is often the case, the Section Eight walkers were the last to show. That's Georgia's longest section at 12.7 miles. This year a threesome of BMTA veterans took it on: Darcy Douglas, Chuck Logan and George Owen. They looked a little worn down when they walked into the Pig, but it was only when they placed initial order of five (5) sweet teas and six (6) blackberry cobblers that we realized how tired they were!

Thanks to all who walked:

- Section 1 – Heather Ray, Claire Broadwell & Jane Keene
- Section 2 – Walt Cook, Wally Emerson & Jode Hanson
- Section 3 – Thomas Johnson
- Section 4 – Ralph Heller and Mark Yost
- Section 5 – Gerrit Voogt
- Section 6 – Larry Dumas and Bob Ruby
- Section 7 – Renee Evers, Patty & Marshall Smitherman
- Section 8 – George Owen, Darcy Douglas & Chuck Logan
- Section 9 – Gene Nix and Bob Danzinger
- Section 10 – David Dunn



GA Walkers at the Pig, clockwise: -- Bob Ruby, Larry Dumas, Thomas Johnson, Mark Yost, Dick Evans (presiding, as usual), Margaret Evans, Gerrit Voogt. Photo by Tom Keene



If any of you readers have trail stories, gear advice, funny stories, or just a memorable trip you would like to see published in the Newsletter, please email them to

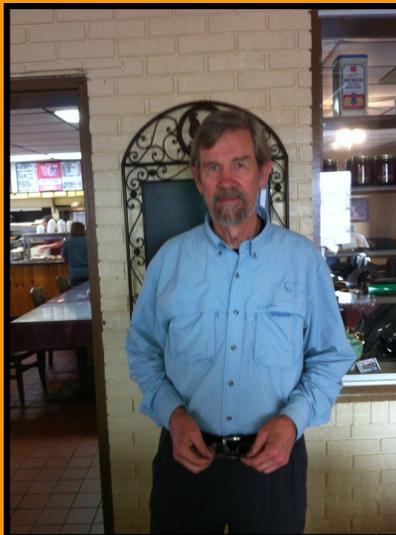
Editor@bmta.org

BMTA TN/NC Maintenance: Rick Harris

Heading up TN/NC Maintenance for 4 years, Rick was named BMTA Maintenance Director of the Year for 2 consecutive years.. Besides co-authoring the BMT Guidebooks for TN/NC and GA, he is now working on the Smokies Guidebook. Rick is involved with the trail maintainer incentives programs - t-shirts, stickers etc. He is President of the Southeastern Foot Trails Coalition, a coalition of 35 hiking and trail maintenance clubs in the Southeast. Growing up in Chattanooga, Scouting was a big part of Rick's life; and still is today as he is Assistant Scoutmaster. A partially retired physician, Rick goes to Cincinnati Children's Hospital and devotes one week per month seeing patients in the bone marrow transplant program which he developed, now the largest pediatric program in the USA. Happily married to Brenda, they live 10 miles up the Cherokee Skyway just outside of Tellico Plains, TN with their dog, Jake. Since Brenda is very much involved with the Monroe County Animal Shelter, many "fosters" are often lucky enough to find themselves at the Harris home.



BMTA GA Maintenance: Tom Keene



Board Member Tom Keene is currently serving on his second tour as Georgia Maintenance Director. He previously served in that role from 2005 to 2010. Tom is in his 39th year on the history faculty of Kennesaw State University. At KSU, he teaches the History of Science and Environmental History, among other subjects. Tom joined the BMTA in 1996 and served as Conservation Director during 2002 and President, 2003 and 2004. In recent years, Tom and his wife Jane (famous for her post work trip (Veggie Chowder) have co-lead spring and fall BMTA Fun Hikes. They live in Kennesaw and enjoy weekend time at their Cherry Log cabin whenever possible.

Editor's Note: Look for more BMTA Board Members to be featured in upcoming Newsletters. It's a great way to get to know your Board. By Marge Heller



“It’s
right
over
the
next
hill.”

Trail Work Pays Off...by Tom Keene

George Owen and Ralph Heller are shown wearing the 2011 Maintainer T-Shirts awarded to BMTA Trail Workers with 30 hours or more logged in. Earn the upcoming 2012 Maintainer's award by participating in future Georgia or TN/NC Work Days or by maintaining a section of trail. The next Work Day in Georgia is May 12th. Here are the details.

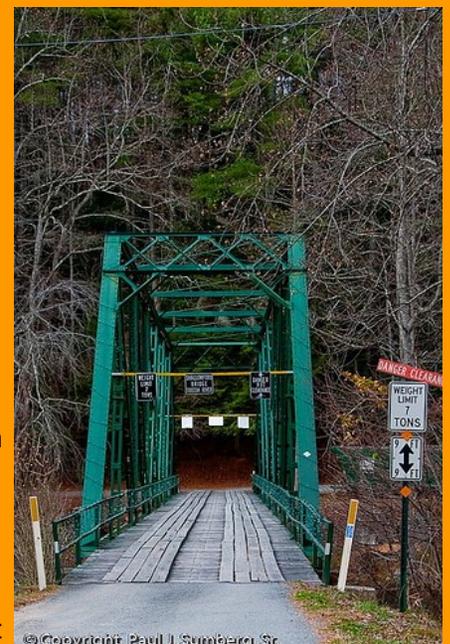


Georgia Work Trip, May 12: We will continue work on the trail relocation near No Name Gap on Section 2. Meet at the Village Restaurant in Blue Ridge at 8:00 AM or meet at the Three Forks trailhead at 9:20 AM. (Note: Trail-head meeting time is 20 minutes later than November.) The trip leader is George Owen [706-374-4716](tel:706-374-4716) (home) or [706-897-3366](tel:706-897-3366) (cell)..

Right On The Trail...by Ralph Heller

Great news! There is now a source for good cooked food, hiking resupply, showers and hostel style accommodations at the Iron Bridge Café and General Store which is located right on the BMT. The store is across from the Shallow Ford Bridge on Aska Road at mile 37.1 from the Springer Mountain trail head. The café, which serves breakfast and lunch, is open Tues. thru Sun. starting at 8am and closing at 5 pm most days. Saturday they close at 4 pm and Sunday 3 pm. The proprietors live on site, so overnight stay or showers can be arranged on off hours by hikers passing through. The hostel facility has two rooms upstairs with 6 bunk beds in each to accommodate sleeping bags. Both rooms have showers. Clean towels will be available for showers, which can also be purchased separately from accommodations.

For further information on charges or to make overnight arrangements, call Mary or Angie at 706-632-5060.



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Easy Trek Hikes Set For May...by Sara Bland

- **Saturday, May 19** - Easy Trek from Falls Branch Falls to Weaver Creek Road, 6.2 miles, moderately difficult. Contact Hike Leader for meeting location and time: Ralph Heller (cell) 770-235-9760 or rshbmta@gmail.com. Bring lunch for trail.
- **Wednesday, May 23** - Easy Trek, 3.5 miles on BMT to Suspension Bridge. Bring lunch and we'll sit by the Toccoa River for fellowship. Contact Hike Leader, Sara Bland, for meeting location and time: 770-366-6053 or jsbland@yahoo.com



TN/NC Walk-Thru Article and Pictures Will Be In Our Next Newsletter.....

BMTA Member Volunteers to Treat Hemlocks

Contributors: Donna Shearer of Save Georgia's Hemlocks and Marge Heller/BMTA Publicity

Ralph Heller, as BMTA's representative, was one of 12 volunteers treating hemlock trees in the Wolf Creek Hemlock Conservation Area near Vogel State Park on April 14th. A total of 180 hemlocks that were treated 5 years ago were re-treated. Those hemlock trees that were not treated 5 years ago are now dead.

Donna Shearer of Save Georgia's Hemlocks helped establish a Challenge Cost Share Agreement between the U.S. Forest Service and Save Georgia's Hemlocks to allow SGH trained Facilitators to treat hemlocks in designated Hemlock Conservation Areas (HCAs) of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. Brian Jackson and Jim Wentworth of the USFS worked closely with SGH to craft the agreement. This was the initial treatment project and others will follow in the near future.

Anyone interested in volunteering is invited to call the Hemlock Help Line - [706-429-8010](tel:706-429-8010) or visit their website: www.savegeorgiashemlocks.org



Hemlock Treatment at Sosebee Cove with Save Georgia's Hemlocks volunteers on April 14, 2012. In photo are Ralph Heller of BMTA and Chris Curtin. Photograph courtesy of USFS

Franklin NC Trail Days Represented Well . . .

By Marge Heller

BMTA Board Member Ernest Engman represented the trail at Franklin NC Trail Days on April 1st. After retiring from the Army in 2008, he hiked the entire Benton MacKaye Trail and is now a section maintainer. Ernie also wrote a publication aimed at the long distance BMT hiker. The **Benton MacKaye Trail Thru-Hikers' Guide** has been in publication since 2010.



Ernest Engman