



ForestWatch Faces

Get to know the folks who make it happen

This web feature spotlights some of the special folks behind the scenes of Georgia ForestWatch. If you'd like to nominate someone for ForestWatch Faces, please contact our office by clicking the e-mail link below.

Meet Jess Riddle: A young man with a yen for old growth

The first time I laid eyes on Jess Riddle, then a somewhat scrawny teen, he and his father, Doug, were hiking back to a campsite in the very far backcountry of Rabun County's national forestlands on a cold, dank day. They'd been out all day looking for champion trees.

Today, at 27, with more than 40 Georgia champion trees notched on his belt, and some 7,000 new acres of old growth identified on the Chattahoochee National Forest, Jess is readying, he hopes, a return to the forests of Southern Appalachia that he knows and loves so well.

Jess is a born ForestWatcher, not only because he worked with the organization for three successive summers on the old growth project (2001-2003), but also because he is so willing to share his vast knowledge of the flora in these national forestlands. He's currently finishing up work on a master's degree in Ecology from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse. Jess received his bachelor's degree (summa cum laude) from Furman University in multidisciplinary plant ecology.

"I've been interested in big things since I was six years old," he said. "Now, I'd like to do something outside."

Jess has an intuitive, discerning feel for the woods and their make-up, able to spot a possible champion tree at a distance. He'll hike you up hill and down dale, up and above big rocks, under rhododendron hells and cross-creek any day of the week.

His impressive résumé, in addition to summer, ground-truthing jobs with ForestWatch, includes stints with the Coweeta Hydrologic Laboratory in Otto, N.C. and Appalachian Arborists, Asheville, N.C. Jess also has been active in the Eastern Native Tree Society since he was 16.

Georgia ForestWatch is grateful for his willingness to share his knowledge and expertise and pleased to count him in the ever-growing ForestWatch family.

Thanks to this young man, Georgia has an increased inventory of old growth.

Want to give us feedback or suggestions? Call our office at 706-635-8733, or send an e-mail to [info at gafw.org](mailto:info@gafw.org).