

# Rabun County Alliance

formerly West Rabun Property Owners ~ Est. 2001



## Winter 2020 Newsletter

*“Seeking Leadership and Accountability in Government”*

### USFS FOOTHILLS PROJECT

The United States Forest Service held a meeting on Wednesday, December 4, 2019 to unveil its proposed Foothills Landscape Project. The meeting was held at Kingwood Country Club, and so many people attended that there was standing room only for many attendees. According to the article in The Clayton Tribune, “The project proved to be a point of contention with locals, who had concerns about the lack of specifics about the project...and the vastness of the project.” They also “...expressed criticism about whether the proper procedures were in place to obtain public comment and move forward with the project.”

The “Foothills Landscape” consists of over 157 thousand acres and stretches over portions of Dawson, Fannin, Gilmer, Habersham, Lumpkin, Murray, Rabun and White Counties. The Project’s stated purpose is “to create, restore and maintain ecosystems that are more resilient to natural disturbances.”

According to the Forest Service, the need to improve the Landscape has not been maintained as it should be, and thus doesn’t provide “benefits for all of the different species that need a variety of natural habitats.” The Forest Service has been working with a variety of people to develop a “shared vision to address these complex conservation challenges.” Various people have been working with the Forest Service since 2016 to develop strategies to address these issues.

Just a few of the ideas for the project are:

- Designate an additional 5,050 acres of Old Growth Forest for conservation (a minimum of 5% for every single watershed)
- Add 50 thousand acres of Old Growth Forest to those currently designated for conservation
- Address hazardous fuel practices in 2 thousand acres where communities are at high risk for wildfires

- Increase the number of prescribed burns
- Increase conservation practices in areas where hemlock trees are threatened

Some of the attendees were skeptical of what they heard. Criticisms included “I don’t expect much of a change at all,” “The Service is relying too heavily on logging and herbicides for vegetation management,” there’s a “lack of specificity in what has been described,” “They set it up so you could not ask questions,” and “Members of the public only have 30 days to read the Foothills Landscape Project, which is a one-thousand-page document.” Obviously, the Forest Service was not effective in fully allaying the fears and concerns of the attendees. You can also find information about this project on Georgia Forest Watch’s website, at [gafw.org](http://gafw.org). *Extracted from an article in The Clayton Tribune*

### MORE ON THE USFS

We have also learned that the USFS “...has called for comments on their extreme proposal to change the rules for when and how the agency engages the public and uses science in making important decisions about our national forest lands.” They also wish to (in U. S. Forest areas):

- Permit timber harvests of up to 4,200 acres, including clear-cutting, with no public notice or input
- Permit bulldozing for installation of pipelines and utility rights-of-way
- Permit “special uses” of up to 20 acres in size
- Build up to 45 miles of new roads **at a time**, and
- Close access roads for hunting, fishing and recreation

*All of the above would be with no public notice or environmental review.*

**COMMUNITY CALENDAR:** Visit the Chamber of Commerce at [gamountains.com](http://gamountains.com) for Rabun County events.

Visit [georgiapowerlakes.com](http://georgiapowerlakes.com) for helpful lake information from Georgia Power.

Visit [lakerabun.org](http://lakerabun.org), [lbca.net](http://lbca.net), and [seedlake.org](http://seedlake.org) for the various Association events.

Men’s Christian Fellowship meets every Friday, 7:45–9:00am (706-782-7425 for more info).

Visit [rabuncountyalliance.com](http://rabuncountyalliance.com) for items of importance you may hear or wonder about between newsletters.

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This information was quoted and extracted from an article in the Fall 2019 issue of the *Chattooga Quarterly*. The thrust of the potential changes is quite disturbing. If you wish to read more of what is reported, go to [chattoogariver.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/CQF19-color.pdf](http://chattoogariver.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/CQF19-color.pdf). If you are troubled by what you read, we encourage you to contact the USFS to express your thoughts about the plans that have been reported.

### RECENT SPLOST STATUS

Here are the recent audited numbers for SPLOST 6 and the balance remaining in each category as of June 30, 2019. SPLOST 5 closed out last year before June, and SPLOST 7 did not start collections until September, 2019. We also have learned that the County plans to issue bonds to advance spending on Jail expansion construction.

	SPLOST 6 2013 Est. Cost	Spent as of 6/30/2019	Balance Remaining 6/30/2019
Water & Sewer	\$ 9,100,000	\$ 7,428,556	\$ 1,671,444
Parks & Recreation	2,000,000	969,634	1,030,366
Solid Waste Mgmt.	300,000	95,482	204,518
Senior Center	200,000	198,767	1,233
Fire Improvements	1,500,000	612,857	887,143
Roads, Streets, Bridges	5,000,000	748,142	4,251,858
Total	\$ 18,100,000	\$ 10,053,438	\$ 8,046,562
Intergovernmental	1,900,000	1,900,000	
Total	\$ 20,000,000	\$ 11,953,438	\$ 8,046,562

### 2019 RABUN COUNTY TAXES

We have the official Rabun County Tax Report for 2019, and the taxes collected from Georgia Power lake lease lot properties are as follows:

	Taxes	# of Lease Lots	Fee Simple Lots	Total Lots
Lake Burton	\$ 7,023,129	844	328	1,172
Lake Rabun	1,301,645	210	275	485
Seed Lake	185,348	97	44	141
Georgia Power	869,157			
Total	\$ 9,379,279	1,151	647	1,798

Total County taxes levied by the County (including for schools) were \$33,345,338, and actual collections were 96.6% of that total. The total taxes collected from lake property land leases was \$8,510,122. This does not include the taxes paid on improvements, nor does it include taxes paid by fee simple land owners on the Lakes. Lake property owners are significant contributors to the financial health of Rabun County.

### WATER QUALITY TESTING

The Lakes (Burton, Seed, Rabun, Tugalo, Yonah, and Tallulah Falls) are an enormous resource for the County and surrounding area and significant contributors to local tax revenues. These Lakes are unique due to their pristine water quality and natural beauty. As such, it is imperative that the pristine nature of this resource be adequately monitored and protected.

The Rabun County Alliance (RCA) has held discussions with various entities involved in monitoring and protecting the Lakes to better understand their responsibilities. These entities include Georgia Power, the Georgia Department of Environmental Protection (GaDEP) and the Lake Community Associations.

The GaDEP collects water quality samples and conducts analysis for a wide range of water quality parameters monthly, April through

October for Lakes Burton and Rabun. The purpose of this sampling is to assure the water quality remains high for the designed uses (primarily recreation and fishing). On the GaDEP website, there is a link to the sampling results for several years. Only the raw data is presented without summaries and therefore it is difficult to review. Our scanning of the data collected by the GaDEP reveals that the waters in Lakes Rabun and Burton are of extremely high quality.

Georgia Power plays an extremely important role at the Lakes with personnel closely monitoring activities and responding to threats that they detect. We understand from Jeff Jackson, of Georgia Power Company, that they made significant changes to their monitoring plan for the Lakes a few years ago. Georgia Power is working on a paper to highlight their current efforts to monitor and test for water quality on the Lakes. We hope to make their report available in an upcoming quarterly report.

We also understand that the Lake Burton Civic Association (LBCA) did water quality testing in 2008, and subsequently recommended that the Tallulah River Watershed Council (TRWC) perform ongoing testing. The testing was limited, showing only legacy chemicals bonded to core samples in sediment and thus not posing a threat. Another testing was arranged by the TRWC in 2012 via funding from the LBCA. That testing was extensive, checking for evidence of 62 various chemicals potentially present from wash of fungicides, herbicides and pesticides. That testing was specifically aimed at organic synthetics, which GPC does not test for, and included all potential chemicals that could be present, taking into account flow from the golf course, upscale landscaping and roadside run-off. The testing mostly alleviated such concerns about chemical intrusion and created a degree of comfort regarding water quality.

Unfortunately, the TRWC is no longer active and therefore did not continue sampling beyond 2012. The Lake Rabun Association did resume fecal coliform sampling this year after not doing so for several years. All samples they collected were clear of contamination.

We are fortunate that the watershed supplying the Lakes is of such good quality with no industrial discharges and minimum agricultural impacts. That is good news, as there are numerous threats to water quality that can emerge and harm fish, endanger swimming or make life on the lakes less enjoyable. Over the years there have been many reports of sedimentation wash entering the lakes, whether from travel or maintenance on the County's many gravel roads, improperly attended construction on hillsides adjacent to the lakes, or wash from homesite grading, lawn maintenance, gardening, etc. around the lakes. We believe it is critically important that water quality testing continue, potentially every 7 to 10 years (or more frequently if an event or change from current status so indicates), so that any threats can be detected early and treated. —Hal Taylor (RCA), Bill Russell (LBCA)

### UPCOMING ELECTIONS

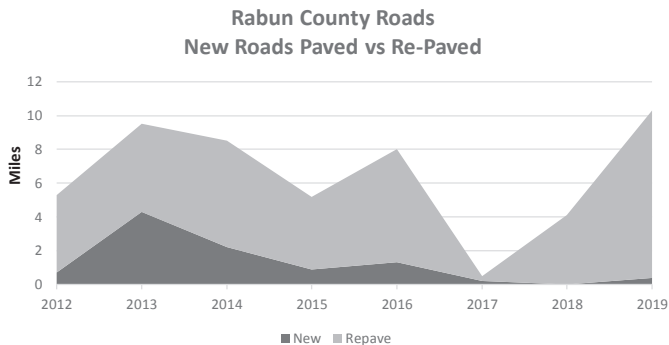
A recent edition of The Clayton Tribune provided information pertaining to the upcoming 2020 election process. A new process will be implemented which will provide voters with a paper ballot as well as a ballot that will be counted electronically. The County is planning to hold sessions with voters to help them understand how to use the new equipment in order to prepare voters for election day. Three Commissioner Posts, as well as three Board of Education Posts will be on the ballot this fall, as well as the posts for the Tax Commissioner, Clerk of Superior Court, Sheriff, Judge of Probate Court, the Coroner and County Surveyor. *If you desire to vote but are not yet registered to vote, you may do so through but not after April 20, 2020.*

## SPEAKING OF ELECTIONS

In looking through the history of presidential elections, we have noticed some very interesting trends in Rabun County over the years. The earliest information we have is from 1912. From that time until 1964, Rabun County voting leaned heavily toward the Democratic candidate. During this period, votes for Democratic presidential candidates ranged from 66.9% to 91.9%. Thereafter, votes for Democratic candidates declined dramatically, except for 1976 and 1980, when Georgian Jimmy Carter ran for and won the presidency. But for those two years, votes beginning in 1984 in Rabun County for the Democratic nominee ranged between 18.1% (in 2016) and 40.8%, tilting the votes moderately to heavily toward the Republican. And we have no rational explanation for one oddball year, 1968, when 25.4% of Rabunites voted for the Republican, 22.1% voted for the Democrat, 52.5% voted for third parties. If you might enjoy delving deeper into these statistics, go to [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabun\\_County,\\_Georgia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabun_County,_Georgia).

## COUNTY ROAD WORK

The County has provided us with information regarding road work done over the past 8 years, and we must admit it is not particularly encouraging regarding newly-paved roads in Rabun County.



The numbers above equate to an average new paving of roads of 1.25 miles each year and a repaving average of 4.1 miles each year, not indicative of focused attention of keeping roads well maintained and as safe as possible. Also, the State DOT reports that only 63% of Rabun County roads are paved as of 2018, compared to 58% in 2001. And remember that rain on unpaved roads adjacent to our lakes creates dirt flow into the lakes. If based on the foregoing our readers believe the County should put more attention on roads, ***we strongly encourage you to make your opinions known to County officials.***

## SHERIFF'S REPORT

The County Sheriff's Office is proud to provide a summary of a productive year of service to our community. The Patrol Division responded to a total of 7,603 calls that were dispatched through the 911 service. Sheriff's deputies completed 1,339 incident reports, 325 accident reports and issued 580 citations, along with 875 warnings. Deputies provided an array of services, including 396 vehicle unlocks, 1,149 business checks and responded to 352 business/residential alarms. In accomplishing this, deputies patrolled over 246 thousand miles in the year. Deputies made 166 drug arrests, the K-9 Unit was deployed 79 times to assist in searching for drugs and missing/wanted people. The Criminal Investigation Division had 222 assigned cases, and 170 of them were ultimately resolved, an 83% case resolution record (10% higher than 2018). We offer sincere congratulations to our CID.

We enjoyed working on several collaborative efforts this year, the most significant of which resulted from support from County citizens

who raised almost \$100 thousand, which was used to outfit our deputies with body armor, and we are working with the community to raise \$50 thousand for additional protective equipment. We participated in a state-wide sex offender registration initiative, partnered with Walmart in participating in the DEA Prescription Drug Take Back Program, and one of our officials traveled to Maryland with other County officials to attend the Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools program. Sheriff Nichols contacted the Board of Commissioners to secure funding to support several programs, including peer training. And in October, 19 deputies and other County officials attended training to learn how to recognize and assist peers in crisis, a powerful course in building relationships amongst the public safety sector.

A total of 1,255 people were processed through the County's Detention center in 2019, and an average daily population of 94 inmates were housed in our jail. Detention officers transported 470 inmates to court and 20 people to mental health facilities across the state. And we are extremely proud to have offered courses to inmates designed to equip them with skills to make better life choices upon release.

Our deputies provided security for 252 sessions of court and 20 Commissioners and/or Planning and Zoning meetings. And our Training Division not only conducted in-house training but also coordinated training through other agencies as well, resulting in our staff receiving a total of 5,427 training hours in 2019.

The Sheriff's Office continued participating in various community events and offered several educational events at no cost to the community (e.g., Citizens' Firearms classes and the Citizens' Law Enforcement Academy). Other community services included a Car Seat Safety program at Walmart, conducting threat assessments and security training to church teams, and holding a Celebrity Golf Tournament at the Waterfall Club, which raised over \$24,000 for Georgia Sheriffs' Youth Homes. Please consider following our upcoming activities and accomplishments on our Rabun County Sheriff's Office page on Facebook, or checking out our website at [www.rabunsheriff.org](http://www.rabunsheriff.org). Also, check out our Rabun County Sheriff's Office App, available in both the Apple App Store and Google Play (download for free).

As your Sheriff, I want to THANK YOU for allowing me to serve you, and I look forward to the future of Rabun County and our Sheriff's Office. Please join me in congratulating and appreciating the men and women of the Sheriff's Office for the challenging, difficult and dedicated work they do each day in order to serve you, our citizens.  
—Sheriff Chad Nichols

*(Editor's Note: Sheriff Nichols was selected and honored to attend the Georgia FBI Law Enforcement Executive Development Seminar, and was recognized by Clayton's Rotary club as Law Enforcement Officer of the Year.)*

## FIRE SERVICES REPORT

Rabun County Fire Services is proud to release our end of the year statistics for 2019. We responded to 1,847 calls. 36 were structure fires and 19 were other multi-station calls such as a brush fire or vehicle fire close to a structure. 171 motor vehicle collisions were dispatched as well as 148 false alarms. Our members accumulated 11,357 training hours. We had 1,740 fire safety education contacts which included school visits and other PR events to spread our fire safety messages. 197 smoke alarms were given out with 133 installed during the Red Cross safety blitz. We replaced two of our oldest rescue trucks.

I would like to take this opportunity to explain how Rabun County Fire Services operates. We have 12 stations in our county. 10 of the 12 are under our direct supervision and the other two



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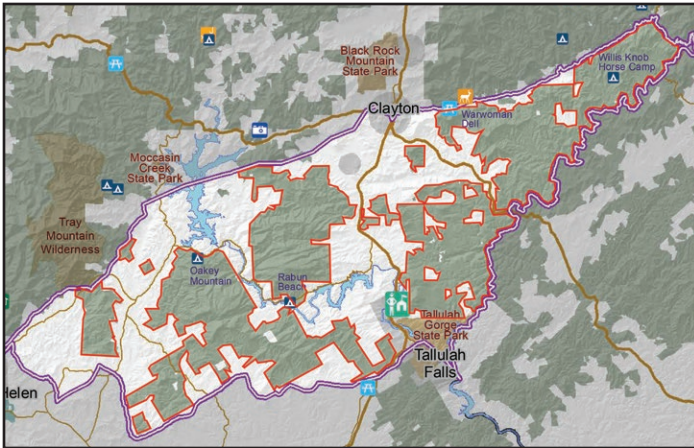
P.O. Box 377

Tiger, GA 30576

### *Partial Map of USFS Foothills Project*

*a. Purple line encompasses Rabun County Area Impact*

*b. Red lines show USFS-owned land inside the Project*



(Tallulah Falls and Sky Valley-Scaly Mountain VFR) are separate departments that operate under their own command structure. We are a combination of volunteers and paid staff working together. Our department is headed by Chief James Reed and myself, Assistant Chief Justin Upchurch. We operate with six additional paid employees. Four work on a 24-hour-on/72-off shift and the other two are on duty in a rotation 7am–7pm schedule. This means that during the week we have four personnel to respond 8am–4pm, two from 4pm–7pm and one from 7pm–7am. On the weekend, there are two firefighters until 7pm and one after. The paid staff respond to all calls County-wide along with the volunteers. This means that we possibly could go from a medical call on Highway 197 to a wreck on Warwoman to a structure fire in Dillard.

The volunteer stations respond as well to all calls within their respective districts. We have approximately 160 volunteers in the county. Each of the 10 stations is led by a Captain with 2-3 Lieutenants working under them. The number of members varies from station to station. Each station has at minimum one fire engine, one tanker, and one squad or rescue vehicle. All stations but Station 11 (Wildcat) have extrication equipment to disentangle patients from vehicle and machinery accidents. Several stations have multi-purpose trucks that are equipped with rescue equipment as well as a pump and water to fight a small fire such as a brush fire. We also have fire boats on the three lakes.

A typical structure fire will have three stations on the initial dispatch and often a fourth or fifth station will be requested for water and/or manpower depending on the water supply at the scene. A typical medical call or auto accident will have a single station dispatched along with EMS. Approximately 60% of our

calls are medical in nature. Annual call volume with each station varies significantly across the county from 34 for Station 8 (Satolah) to 714 for Station 1 (Clayton).

As always, if you have any questions or concerns about the department, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at 706-782-2751 or [jupchurch@rabuncounty.ga.gov](mailto:jupchurch@rabuncounty.ga.gov). —Justin Upchurch

### **MAJOR SALE OF BUSINESS PARK FACILITY COMPLETED**

The Development Authority of Rabun County (DARC) proudly announced the sale of the former Fruit of the Loom building in the Rabun Business Park to ELK Group International, a manufacturer of lighting fixtures, decorative accessories and furniture headquartered in Pennsylvania. DARC members proudly posed for a picture showing a mock-up of the check for \$8.1 million that the sale brought about. Some folks considered such a sale to be nearly impossible. "We have a million-square foot building in rural Georgia. How do you market that?" said DARC Board Chairman Claude Dillard. Apparently, the answer was with effort and diligence! Todd Webb, ELK group Chief Operating Officer said "It's obviously an opportunity for us, and it's great to come into this community and be part of it."

With the sale of the building complete, DARC will be looking for ways to develop the remaining property in the Business Park. "We sold the building, but the County, the water and sewer authority and DARC still have over 80 acres up there" Dillard added. "There's still a lot there to do." *Extracted from an article in The Clayton Tribune*