

Webinar stresses natural forest management

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“Forests are very complex, and people don’t want to manage them like they are complex.”

This was one of many guidelines on successfully managing a forest, like White’s Woods, that Jess Riddle, a consultant with Georgia Forest Watch, an organization whose mission is to promote sustainable management, told listeners of the Friends of White’s Woods webinar on Thursday (recording available at <https://www.friendsofwhiteswoods.org/events>).

Riddle stressed that even when forest managers have the best of intentions, a lack of research can result in unintended negative consequences. He gave the example of the Bramley Mountain project where planners hoped to restore the golden warbler population by creating an open woodland area. After opening the canopy, using prescribed fire, applying herbicide and doing selective timbering, the result seven years later was that that bird population continued to decline.

It seems that the population decline had to do with the tropical area where the birds wintered.

However, the negative consequences of the management efforts included the failure of the herbicide to prevent tree sprouting, temporary logging roads that didn’t take reseeding and whose presence caused increased sediment flow. In addition, more deer moved into the new open woodland to consume the new grasses and wildflowers.

Instead, Riddle advised using the ecosystems’ natural disturbances, like tree blow down, which create small canopy openings to allow smaller trees and ground cover to grow. “Natural canopy gaps are sufficient to regenerate every tree species native to the area,” Riddle said. “It takes about 100 years in the shade for a tree to get to the canopy,” he said. “Then, that tree will survive

another 100 to 200 years. Calling an 80-year-old forest old is like calling a 30-year-old a senior citizen.”

Another hazard to logging, Riddle said, is the need to haul the logs out of the forest. This requires logging roads that destroy the soil and alter water flow patterns and can impact the landscape for more than a century.

“A person cannot spend a few days in a forest measuring trees and then write a plan for the future of the forest,” he said.

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