

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Prescribed Fire in Tallulah Gorge

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

For the fifth time in ten years, North Georgia's Tallulah Gorge will see a prescribed fire, as part of an effort to restore and maintain wildlife habitat in and along the two-mile-long canyon.

Controlled burns have long been used to manage for habitat and timber and help prevent destructive wildfires. Additionally, at Tallulah Gorge the burns are done to help rare plants and animals, and in fact, previous burns at Tallulah Gorge have already yielded results, improving habitat for several rare and declining native plant and animal species.

Among them are the white monkeyface orchid, so named because its flowers look like a monkey's head, and carnivorous plants called roundleaf sundews, which eat small insects. Both of these plants are rare in north Georgia. Found along the northern rim of Tallulah Gorge, they need the sunny conditions that controlled burns provide. Also benefiting is a rare lily called turkeybeard, which flowers prolifically a year after fire with spikes of white flowers that can reach chest high.

The area's table mountain pines, which need fire to open their cones, should benefit, as should ruffed grouse since the burn will support the brushy habitat they use.

The burn will be done when weather conditions are just right in late February or March and will be visible from U.S. Highway 441.

The burn is a joint operation between the Forest Service and Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.