

3-07-2015 Penitentiary Branch & Hemp Top Trail

Under the direction of Forest Service Ranger Kevin Vaselinda, the March 7, 2015 work day in the Cohutta Wilderness was on Penitentiary Branch Trail which goes west off of Hemp Top Trail down to Jacks River. Rehabilitation of existing waterbars was the task. Due to the remote location, the call had gone out to Back County Horsemen of Northwest Georgia (BCHNG) for their workers with enhanced mobility.

The improved (larger) Dally Gap parking lot gathering at 9:00 am/30 degrees included the BCHNWG equestrians, the Benton McKaye Trail section lead, Conasauga District Trail Volunteers (CDTV), and Southern Area Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) members. I counted 20 volunteers.

Tannis and I requested to be assigned to remove a troublesome overgrowth of wild roses from an east-facing sunny corner of Hemp Top Trail. No trimming was done on that section of Hemp Top in 2014 and rose briars were arcing over the tread path. Every year, beating back the briar-studded growth exacted a bloody toll on workers armed with swingblades. We removed the tops of the bushes and dug up the root crowns, all without being scratched. We worked together using a rake, lopper, and pulaski tool set. We intended to take out two privet hedge trees in the area, but ran out of time and energy to do it this trip. Before and after pictures are attached.

Due to the lateness of the day, we were not able to stay for the after work social, which we had prepared for, but had to forego with regrets.

Looking forward to hearing in a separate report how the waterbar work went.

Tom & Tannis Blackwell



