

**Hikers Find Rare Georgia Aster on Dobbins Mountain**

Tony Potts

11-01-2012

After completing a hike through the Euharlee Wildlife refuge and Dobbins Mountain, wildflower enthusiasts confirmed concerns that significant environmental damage could result if the state sticks to its current plan to construct a highway through the property. The hikes, which were hosted by Cartersville Ranch and the City of Euharlee, included representatives of the Georgia Botanical Society, Georgia Native Plant Society, Georgia Department of Natural Resources and others. The Bartow County Mountain area has been confirmed as an active habitat for numerous plants including the Georgia Aster and Pink Ladieslipper, both of which are Georgia protected species. The Georgia Aster is also a candidate for federal listing as an endangered species.

Jim Allison, a leading expert on Southeastern wildflowers enthusiast and botanist for 13 years at the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, led the hike. Allison has conducted plant surveys on 12 separate visits to the Euharlee wildlife refuge, and observed and photographed a total of 88 diverse native flowering plants within the refuge.

Previously Allison documented the presence of 596 Georgia Aster flowering stems even though his study only included the Cartersville Ranch and Euharlee wildlife refuge area and not the entire corridor of the highway project. Allison stated that he believes the population of Georgia Asters in the Dobbins Mountain area may be the largest in existence.

Allison expressed grave concern that the negative impact to the Georgia Aster would be significant if GDOT proceeds with the 411 Connector using the mountain route also known as DV-E.

"It could be a factor in having to put it on the endangered species list," said Allison. "Right now it's a candidate for that listing."

"It would be sensible to do all we can to preserve the larger populations of Georgia Aster in the center of the species' range." Tom Patrick, Georgia Department of Natural Resources Botanist. "Only a partial study of the Dobbins Mountain area has been completed, the next step should be an exhaustive study of the upland woodland habitat so we have complete information to act on."

The wildflower expedition was the second in a series of hikes sponsored by the City of Euharlee and the Cartersville Ranch this fall. The hikes are consistent with the major purpose of the conservation easement, which is to preserve wildlife and wildlife habitat. Plans are underway to schedule additional hikes taking into consideration both the public interest and the logistics required for successful events.