

**"Southern Wild Lands: Exceptional Remnants of the Great Eastern Forest"
Opening Reception, Fernbank Museum of Natural History.**

Report by Frank Peterman

More than 150 invitees and their guests attended the Opening Reception of "*Southern Wild Lands: Exceptional Remnants of the Great Eastern Forest*" at Fernbank Museum of Natural History, July 22, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. The overflow crowd stayed well after the official closing of the reception, to study the photographs by well-known nature photographer Kathryn Kolb, and to socialize. The exhibit graphically demonstrated for the audience their connection to Georgia's most ancient forests, and reminded everyone of our roots and responsibilities.

"Why Wilderness? What the Last Remaining Wild Lands of the Southern Appalachians Mean to the People of the Southeast," a publication of TWS, was a centerpiece of the reception. Several poster size copies of Congressman John Lewis' moving preface to "Why Wilderness?" were displayed around the exhibit hall.

Welcoming the audience, Frank Peterman of TWS addressed the need to raise public awareness about the importance of wild lands in the Southeast. He cited the increasing divestiture of forestlands by timber companies in Georgia and throughout the Southeast. He emphasized that urban communities should recognize that protecting forestlands is vital to their own health and wellbeing. He said that Georgia's pristine forests, rivers, and mountains provide opportunities for recreation and spiritual renewal and that it is important to protect them so that future generations can enjoy clean air and water, beauty, wildlife.

Photographer Kathryn Kolb talked about her work and her passion for conserving large landscapes as well as protecting green space in urban communities. She outlined related events including the gala dinner October 1, 2005 at Clark Atlanta University, featuring keynote speaker, the Hon. John Lewis. The dinner will recognize Congressman Lewis' work in conservationist, and celebrate The Wilderness Society's publication of "Why Wilderness?"

Kathryn also outlined the series of events to follow the dinner in 2005 and in 2006, including seminars, meetings and hikes. The events will bring together members of local and national environmental organizations, urban and rural community leaders, decision-makers from government and private institutions, scholars, journalists, and other interested members of the public.

Almost 50 percent of those in attendance were African Americans from the Atlanta metro area. They included professors from Morehouse and Spelman Colleges and Georgia Tech University; the widely-recognized author of the biography of Zora Neale Hurston (*Wrapped in Rainbows*); renowned ethnobotanist Dr. Anthony Andoh and his wife, nutritionist Kali Sichen Andoh, founders of the North Scale Institute; the founder of "Edge of Night Campers," who brought four of her colleagues, including a scout troop

leader, and Carolyn Finney, Ph.D candidate in Geography examining “Black Faces, White Spaces: African Americans and the National Parks.”

The conservation community in attendance included Atlanta Audubon; the Appalachian Trail Conference; Southern Environmental Law Center; Sierra Club; Southern Appalachian Council, and the Institute for Georgia Environmental Leadership. The writer Melissa Walker (*Living on Wilderness Time*) and her husband, Dr. Jerome Walker --long time wilderness activists – as well as US Forest Service archaeologist Quentin Bass and his wife, Anelle, were present.

Representatives from the corporate community included REI, Southern Companies and Georgia Power. The latter two companies express a keen interest in learning more about “Keeping It Wild.” REI committed early on to supporting “Keeping It Wild” through contributing as a sponsor of the Dinner and by providing assistance with hiking events.

Comments received so far include:

“I attend many conservation meetings around the country and I have never seen this much diversity at any conservation meeting I have attended!” -Dr. John Wegner, Emory University, Campus Environmental Officer, Environmental Studies.

Dr. Wegner then expressed interest in having the University support “Keeping It Wild” financially and by facilitating seminars.

“It was great to cross paths with you again at the exhibit at the Fernbank Museum yesterday. That was an excellent event -- and I'm most impressed with what you're doing to broaden the community of interest in the enjoyment and protection of natural landscapes. It appears that you are making some real tangible progress.” Marianne J. Skeen, ATC, in a note to Frank.