

From: **Emily Coffey** ecoffey@atlantabg.org 

Subject: ABG *Torreya taxifolia* policy

Date: February 15, 2018 at 12:21 PM

To: conniebarlow52@gmail.com

Cc: Jennifer Ceska - State Botanical Gard jceska@uga.edu, Carrie Radcliffe cradcliffe@atlantabg.org, Rebecca Byrd rbyrd@atlantabg.org, Ron Determann rdetermann@atlantabg.org, Negron-Ortiz, Vivian vivian_negronortiz@fws.gov, SMITH,JASON ANDREW jasons@ufl.edu

EC

Dear Connie,

I was forwarded your message by Carrie Radcliffe. I would like to take the opportunity to introduce myself and explain our work with *Torreya*. I am the new Vice President of Conservation and Research at ABG and took over the position in August. My team currently works with USFWS, Florida Park Service, University of Florida, and GPCA to conduct research and provide safeguarding for *Torreya taxifolia*.

We feel we need to clarify our stance and the work related to *Torreya taxifolia*. ABG and all of our GPCA partners work within strict scientifically driven conservation parameters. I am attaching a statement released by GPCA and the Botanical Guardians of Georgia from 2016 on *Torreya* as well as the GPCA *in situ* and *ex situ* policy. These documents summarize the collective viewpoint and policy of the GPCA, which resolutely opposes assisted migration of *Torreya*.

Regarding the paleoecological argument, as a conservation paleontologist by training (I went to University of Oxford, UK where I studied long-term ecology under Professor Kathy Willis), I have found no scientifically sound evidence that can support *Torreya taxifolia* as a northern species during the Pleistocene - no sedimentary evidence has been shown and based on the plants biology/physiology/habitat requirement it is not suited for northern climates including the Appalachia Mountains. Non-sanctioned introduction of this species into a novel ecosystem, outside of its natural range, could have catastrophic consequences and is staunchly opposed by the USFWS.

The argument that outplanting action should be taken prior to rigorous scientific experimentation and conformation is truly shocking and reckless. We do not under any circumstances condone the assisted migration of *Torreya taxifolia* or the outplanting of a Federally listed species on public or private lands without proper permitting and approval from the USFWS. Furthermore if we find evidence of any individual removing propagules or any plant material from local, state, or federal lands in GA or elsewhere, without appropriate state and federal approvals we will involve the authorities. This includes you and your affiliates, additionally, the transportation of seed or seedlings across state lines without proper permissions would also involve the authorities.

GPCA is aware of previous trespassing to illegal harvest seed followed by illegal transporting and selling of *Torreya* across state lines. Further actions of this nature will not be ignored. ABG strongly opposes the sale of Federally Listed Endangered Species - this kind of activity can only hurt the native populations and careful work we and our collaborators are conducting. We encourage that these un-permitted activities cease, as they are harmful and undermine official research and safeguarding efforts. Please review the attached documents for additional information.

We take the conservation and long-term survival of this species very seriously as well as the health of all other conifers in the eastern US. ABG has spent over 17 years actively working on *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation of this species and we work within a stringent scientifically driven methodology taking into account the most recent and up to date research.

We hope you will seriously take into account the current scientific findings for this species and reconsider your position on assisted migration or 'free-planting' of *Torreya taxifolia*. Please feel free to read the most recent article published by Dr. Jason Smith. We all wish to save this important species however we must do so within the appropriate legal parameters and with the full weight of current scientific knowledge.

Sincerely,
Emily

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5 May 2016
GPCA and Botanical Guardians:

As members of the GPCA and Botanical Guardians we can feel justifiably proud of our ethics, our teamwork, our mutual support and open sharing of information. But in light of a recent occurrence, we would like to remind the entire group of our official GPCA Safeguarding Policy Statement. It outlines basic best practices and our code of ethics.



None of us have permission to remove propagules or any plant material from state or federal lands for our own purposes or for projects that lie outside those sanctioned by GPCA at our project planning meetings.

We mention this because in the last several months, someone removed all of the fruits from the *Torreya* safeguarding collections at Smithgall Woods State Park. All of the fruits had been bagged for a GPCA seed-collecting project. Nevertheless, every fruit was methodically removed at some time after the park was closed. This would have required a great deal of time and planning.

We have no information about where these fruits went, but we press upon all of you to take seriously any stories you hear about taking from public lands. And, if you have a chance, please correct anyone you hear even joking about taking plant material. This is serious and can slow or even halt our careful and planned work with imperiled plant species.

While we have no knowledge of who was responsible for the above action, we would like to point out that the *Torreya* Guardians and their volunteers are not members of the GPCA. They have been linking their work to ours but they are not partners of the GPCA. The GPCA does not sanction assisted migration of *Torreya* outside its range, and we do not support the movement of *Torreya* outside the state of Georgia. Furthermore, we have grave concerns about the fusarium disease present within all *Torreya* tissues and its potential for spread.

The assisted migration and the outplanting of plant material with no plans, monitoring, reporting methods, or permission from public landowners is counter to the GPCA's methods and philosophy. Our safeguarding plans for *Torreya taxifolia* have been very specific, carefully monitored, planned with iterative feedback from colleagues outside our organization, and are currently being revisited as our knowledge grows regarding the fungal pathogen.

GPCA members and Botanical Guardian volunteers are advised to be cautious when speaking to any members of *Torreya* Guardians. They have taken advantage of professional courtesies, making broad claims from simple correspondence, and linking their work with members of the GPCA. GPCA is publicly distancing itself from *Torreya* Guardians and their methods of rewilding an endangered species outside its range.

Our thanks go out to you all for your hard work and support in safeguarding and advocating for threatened and endangered Georgia species. The above incidence has been extremely troubling, but with your help we hope it is an isolated one. For questions or comments, please send an email to GPCA Coordinator, Jennifer Ceska (jceska@uga.edu).

Sincerely,

Donald W. Imm, Ph.D.
State Supervisor/Project Leader

Matt Elliott
Program Manager, Georgia DNR

Jennifer Cruse-Sanders, Ph.D.
VP for Science and Conservation

U.S.Fish & Wildlife Services



Henning Von Schmeling
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