

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,

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