

Chapter 4

Migrants, Markets, and the Transformation of Natural Resources Management: Galax Harvesting in Western North Carolina

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Introduction and Background

Latinos are present in increasing numbers in U.S. forests as consumers and producers. This change is transforming the physical and social spaces of natural resources management. For example, extended families from Mexico and Central America seek picnic areas where many people can spend a day preparing food and socializing, a need not met by the typical arrangement of individual picnic tables disbursed throughout a recreation site (Carr and Williams, 1993; Carr and Chavez, 1993). Where English was once the lingua franca among people who work in the woods, Spanish has become the dominant language among reforestation crews and Christmas tree workers (Hamilton, 2004; Hansis, 2002; Brown, 1995). Such changes in the composition of people who work and play in forests have generated concerns about ecological sustainability, conflict between forest users, and the equitable provision of services by natural resource management agencies (Hansis, 1998; Richards and Creasy, 1996; Salazar, 1996; Schelhas, 2002).

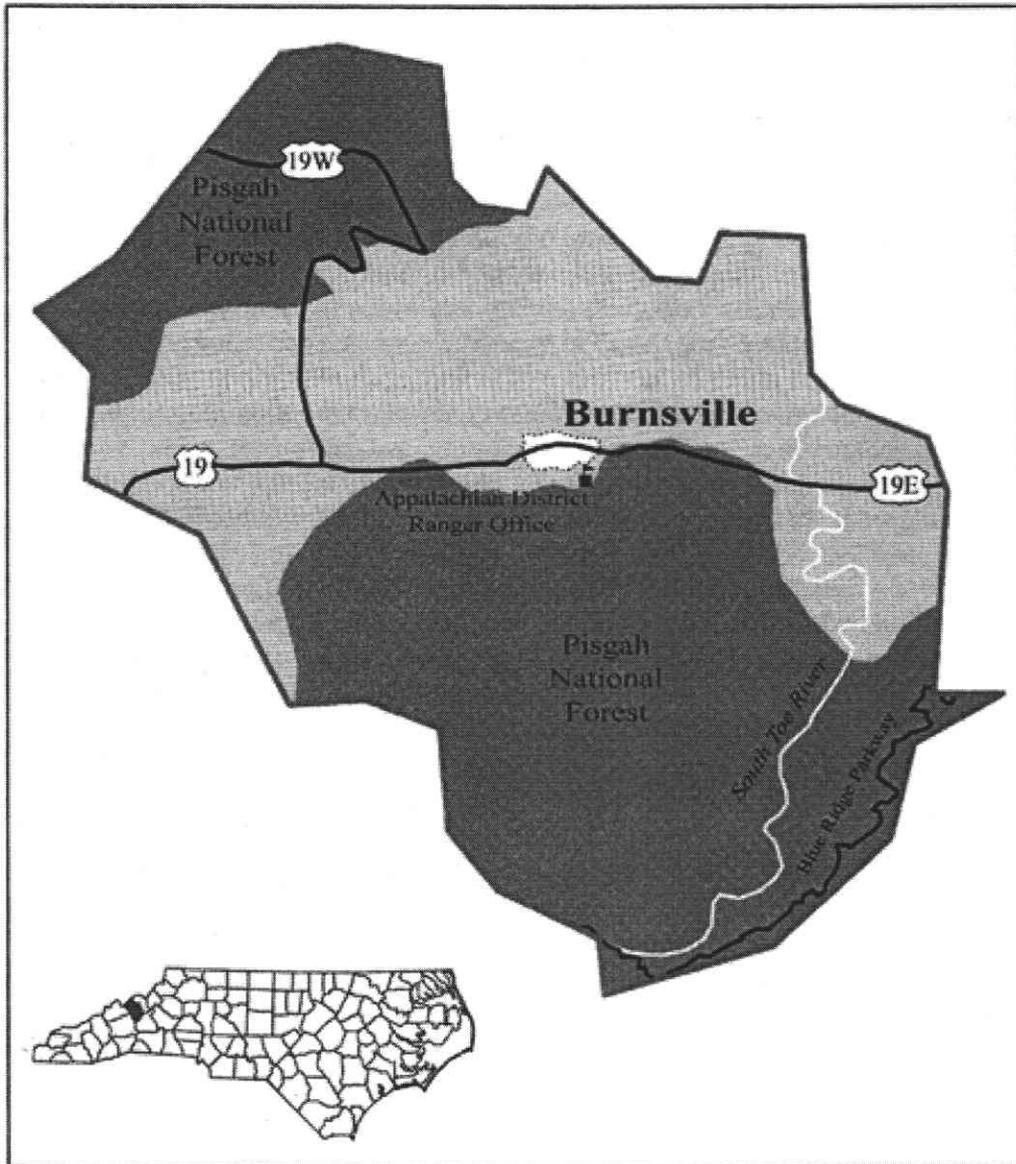
Researchers first documented these changes in the western United States. However, similar changes are occurring in southern natural resource management landscapes. This is especially evident in the labor structures of forest industry. Spurred on by the collapse of the timber industry in the Pacific Northwest, the South has become the nation's most important timber-producing region (Smith et al., 2001). Latinos are a growing component of the forest products industry in southeastern states, where they work in logging and millwork and provide a majority of the tree-planting and herbicide-application labor (Casanova and McDaniel, 2005). Increasingly, Latinos also are harvesting nontimber forest products, such as evergreen foliage and other floral greens, in southern woodlands. This chapter examines transformations that have taken place as a result of changes in the markets, management, and labor structure of the floral green, galax (Galax

urceolata (Poir.) Brummitt, synonym *G. aphylla*), and its focal point in Yancey County, North Carolina (Figure 4.1).

Evergreen foliage has long been harvested from U.S. forests for use in flower and funeral arrangements, wreaths, and baskets (Alexander et al., 2002). While formal economic data on floral greens are scarce, historically they have been important sources of income for rural households (Emery, 1998; Alexander et al. 2002). Since the mid-1990s, researchers in the Pacific Northwest have observed growing numbers of Latinos among commercial harvesters of many types of nontimber forest products, including floral greens (Hansis, 1996, 1998; Richards and Creasy, 1996). In their report on the floral greens industry in western Washington State, Lynch and McLain (2003) noted that in 1994 Latinos were an increasing component of the harvester population and by 2002 comprised an overwhelming majority. This shift in harvester labor was preceded by formalization of the terms of access to floral greens, with customary usufruct claims being supplanted by a system of permits and leases. The participation of resident European Americans (subsequently referred to as Anglos) in floral greens harvesting as a supplemental income source declined as the costs of access increased, daily earnings decreased, organized work crews became a part of the workforce, competition for the resource increased, and alternative employment became available to Anglo youth. A similar transformation has occurred in the North Carolina-based galax industry.

Restructuring of the U.S. labor market has led to especially strong growth in the Latino population of North Carolina, which experienced a 45 per cent net immigration rate between 1995 and 2000 (Schachter, 2003). The influx of Latinos into the state has been attributed to the growth of the construction and service industries and the restructuring of the meat and poultry industries, in combination with chronic labor shortages in the state (Johnson-Webb 2002, 2003). This growth is evident in non-metropolitan counties in the state as well as urban centers (Furusest, 2005; Johnson-Webb, 2002). The Latino population of western North Carolina remains much smaller than that of the eastern portion of the state. Nevertheless, Latinos are the primary labor force in the apple and Christmas tree industries, located in the mountainous west (Hamilton, 2004). In less than a decade, they also have become an important component of the commodity chain for galax.

Galax is a short evergreen groundcover found in the forest understory of the southern Appalachian mountains (U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2004). This native plant, with heart-shaped leathery green leaves historically was used by Cherokee Indians to alleviate kidney ailments and nervous problems (Hamel and Chiltoskey, 1975). The primary use of galax today is as a complement in floral arrangements. The earliest markets for galax were local and regional (Beavers, 1977). Today, this small leaf finds its way to large wholesale floral markets throughout the United States as well as the world's largest wholesale floral market at Aalsmeer, the Netherlands. Western North Carolina is the primary source of galax leaves entering this commercial market, with both first tier buyers and galackers or pullers, as they are called,



Source: Authors

Figure 4.1 Yancey County, North Carolina

concentrated in Yancey County. Throughout most of the 20th century, descendants of the region's largely Scots-Irish settlers (Davis, 2000) collected and sold galax leaves to supplement their incomes. By 2002, Latinos appeared to constitute some 90 per cent of the labor force harvesting galax.

In 2000, we initiated a research project to explore the changes that have occurred in the labor, state, and capital dynamics of the galax industry and their implications for forest management. We also hoped to identify opportunities for action that could reduce conflict and ensure the long-term viability of this activity as a source of income for both multigenerational Anglo residents and recent Latino immigrants while protecting the galax resource. Our study focused on three major categories of actors in the galax commodity chain: gatherers, government agencies, and buyers. Within each of these categories, there exist subgroups with distinct histories, perspectives, and roles in harvesting and marketing galax. Gatherers include Anglos and Latinos. Government agencies that play a role as landowners and managers include the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service, and the National Park Service. The North Carolina Division of Motor Vehicles also has had an impact through its regulatory activities. Finally, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, now part of the Department of Homeland Security, has a presence in the region. Most buyers are long-time Anglo residents of the area. One has been purchasing galax and other native plants for more than 50 years. Several began as galackers and began purchasing from others to increase their incomes.

Results reported here draw on semi-structured interviews with 55 gatherers (23 Latino men, 20 Latina women, six Anglo men, and six Anglo women), 22 employees of the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service (district rangers, resource specialists, biologists, permit administrators, and law enforcement officers), and 11 buyers. We compiled permit data from records in U.S. Forest Service ranger district offices in western North Carolina and collected documents pertaining to gathering of nontimber forest products more generally. Additional information was obtained from buyers through a focus group workshop and mail survey. Finally, we conducted a review of the literature on the galax industry (Predny and Chamberlain in press).

Markets – The Galax Commodity Chain

Galax grows from Georgia and Alabama, north into Maryland and West Virginia and as far west as Kentucky (Greenfield and Davis, 2003). However, forests along the Blue Ridge escarpment in western North Carolina are the major source of leaves for the global market. Although the majority of timberland in the area is owned by private nonindustrial landowners, more than 80 per cent of the annual galax harvest probably comes from federal, state, and county forests (Greenfield and Davis, 2003).

The majority of first-tier galax dealers are located in the narrow mountain valley along the South Toe River in Yancey County. These buyers are individuals

or firms that purchase leaf directly from pullers. When this study began, there were approximately 11 galax dealers in the county. Two years later that number had dropped to nine.

From their origin in northwestern North Carolina, galax leaves are shipped domestically and internationally. While most local buyers ship their product to distribution centers in Florida, some export directly to international markets. Within the United States, distribution centers consolidate galax leaves into bulk shipments with a variety of floral products bound for regional wholesale markets in New York, Boston, Chicago, and Oakland. Galax leaves destined for the international market are combined with other floral products into container-sized shipments. Most go to large floral houses in the Netherlands, although some shipments may be delivered directly to smaller wholesale markets in Europe, Asia, and South America. In some cases, galax leaves shipped to floral houses in the Netherlands may be shipped back to the United States for redistribution to retail outlets.

Commercial quality leaves should be three inches or greater in diameter, with no tears or blemishes. However, two long-time Anglo galackers said that buyers now accept smaller, less perfect leaves than they have in the past. Harvesters deliver galax to buyers secured in bunches of 25 leaves each. These are packaged into boxes containing either 100 bunches or 200 bunches (for 2,500 or 5,000 leaves per box, respectively), which are then ready for shipment.

The price paid to galackers for these leaves varies from year to year and over the course of a year. In July 2002, harvesters received from \$50 to \$100 for a box of 5000 leaves, the equivalent of \$0.01 and \$0.02 per leaf (Greenfield and Davis, 2003). During 2001, prices paid to harvesters ranged from a low of \$20 to a high of \$80 for a box of 5000 leaves. The prices paid at terminal markets and through wholesale mail-order firms are, as expected, much greater. For example, according to the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2002), the price at the Philadelphia terminal market for a bundle of 25 galax leaves ranged from \$0.85 to \$1.25, which would be the equivalent of \$170-\$250 for a box of 5,000. A wholesale Florida-based firm, priced a bundle of 25 galax leaves at \$2.25 (Greenfield and Davis, 2003), equal to approximately \$450 per box. This represents a 3 to 5 fold increase in price from collectors to wholesalers, with little value-added activity.

Galax leaves are pulled on the forested mountainsides of the region and finding them often requires a good deal of walking up and over ridges. The harvester must bend over or stoop to pull each leaf one at a time. Leaves are put into sacks and carried out of the mountains. The number of leaves an individual can pull each day varies widely based on luck, effort, and skill. Experienced galackers indicate that they might pull 5,000 to 7,000 leaves in a full day's work and as many as 9,000 or more on an exceptionally good foray. All indicate that it is also possible to spend several hours looking and return with almost no leaves. Cold temperatures, high winds, and rain keep galackers out of the mountains on many days.

Harvesters often walk long distances to find good patches of galax. Even pullers who have been harvesting since their childhoods in the 1930s and 1940s

say that they might go up and over multiple ridges in a day's work. However, these individuals and others who have been pulling for several years say that now one has to go farther to find leaf. They indicate that the more accessible patches, where individuals and families had pulled for years, are now harvested earlier and more intensively. Several Latino harvesters commented that they know where to begin their search for leaf by following the trails that have been made by other galackers. Such an approach concentrates newer harvesters in well-known areas. However, a number of the more serious Latino pullers indicate that they may walk from one to three hours into the mountains to find dense patches of high quality leaves. This fact is echoed in the comments of one older Anglo woman who said, 'Mexican people will walk way back in'. She noted also that Forest Service road closures and all-terrain vehicle restrictions have made it difficult for her to get to some galax patches and even more difficult to get the leaves back out. These changes in the spatial distribution of dense, high quality galax patches has led some Yancey County gatherers to drive as far as 100 miles or more in search of mountains and galax patches with fewer pullers.

Galackers – Migrants and Others

Galax has been a part of Yancey County livelihoods since the turn of the 20th century. In 1977, the USDA Forest Service estimated that approximately 1,000 people pulled galax in the mountains of western North Carolina, particularly the South Toe region of Yancey County (Beavers, 1977). Our interviews with lifetime Yancey County residents in their 60s and 70s confirm the historical importance of galax to many area families. One woman indicated that she and her seven siblings grew up pulling galax with their mother, father, and grandmother. Money earned pulling leaves helped ensure that the family had adequate food and clothing. An older man said that he was one of 13 children who grew up galacking. 'It's how we put groceries on the table'. Two sisters reported that income from galax became critical when their father was disabled and his Social Security benefits were not adequate to support their family of six children. All the children pulled galax from a very young age, earning the money to buy a milk cow, refrigerator, and washing machine. By the time she was 8 years old, the older sister was buying her own clothes with money earned from galax.

Galax plays a similarly important role in the household economies of Latino harvesters. For many, it is a critical first source of cash when they arrive in the region, although most new galackers move on to more reliable sources of income if they can. However, galax is a regular component of an annual labor cycle for others. For one extended family, galax fits into two gaps in a yearly round of work that includes work in apple and peach orchards. They credit galacking with making it possible for them to reunite their family and live permanently in one location, where their children can attend school (Emery et al., 2003). For a very few Latinos, the leaf is a primary livelihood resource. The activity appears to be particularly important for women, who have fewer alternative employment opportunities in the

area. As one galacker from Michoacan put it, 'It's how we pay the light, the rent, how we put food on the table'.

Latino immigration to Yancey County appears to have begun in the early 1990s. The 1990 Census figures show 49 residents of Hispanic origin out of a population of 15,419 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990). By the 2000 Census, the officially recorded Hispanic population had increased nearly tenfold, to 478 individuals out of a population of 17,774 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Nearly all Latino residents of the county are from the mountainous state of Michoacan in central Mexico. Interpreters serving in the courts and school systems report that a majority of these are from the village of Cherán (Clark, 2002), an indigenous Purépecha enclave in the forested highlands of northeastern Michoacan, approximately 200 miles west of Mexico City (Martinez, 2001). Nearly all speak Spanish, although Martinez (2001) reports that most residents of Cherán also speak at least some Purépecha. Residents of Cherán and other Purépecha Highlands villages have traveled to the United States to work since the early 20th century. In 1940, Beals (reported in Castile, 1974) reported that in nearly every household, someone had gone to work temporarily in the United States or had a relative who had done so. In 1969 and 1970, Castile (1974) found that it was common for men to work as seasonal agricultural laborers in the United States. In some cases, today's 'Cheranes' are second and third generation migrants (Martinez, 2001). While young men make up the largest group, women and extended families are also present in substantial numbers in Yancey County. Some received legal resident status through the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (Martinez, 2001), although a majority probably live and work in the area without benefit of legal status.

North Carolina tobacco fields were, and continue to be, one destination for the men of Cherán and other towns in Michoacan (Martinez, 2001; Castile, 1974). Apple orchards, in the hilly western part of the state also employ many of these workers, as do the live-plant nurseries that dot the region. The Christmas tree industry, concentrated in the mountainous counties of western North Carolina, has also become a substantial employer of Latinos.

Hamilton's research (2004) provides a detailed description of the western North Carolina Christmas tree industry and its labor practices. Western North Carolina is currently the second largest producer of Christmas trees in the United States, with its production exceeded only by Oregon. The North Carolina industry began in the early 1950s, with a few individuals cutting the tops off fir trees on national forests and selling them in nearby urban centers, such as Atlanta. By 1997, there were approximately 1,400 growers cultivating firs on tree farms. Some of these growers began hiring Latinos in the early to mid 1980s, reportedly as a result of growing tree farm size and local labor shortages. By 2001, among 185 growers who were surveyed, 79 per cent of their labor force was Latino and included both full-time, year-round workers and seasonal workers (Hamilton, 2004). Many of these workers are from Michoacan (Hamilton, personal communication). The first Latinos hired by Christmas tree growers were recruited from among agricultural laborers who worked in apples and other crops. Currently about 10 per cent of

Latino Christmas tree workers are hired through the H-2A agricultural guestworker program. More than double that amount is recruited by labor contractors and individual employers. However, social networking appears to be the most widespread method of recruiting Christmas tree workers (Hamilton, 2004).

The Christmas tree industry appears to have been at least one route by which Latinos entered the galax labor market. One Latino interviewee said his family was introduced to galax when his mother immigrated to western North Carolina to join her sister, who is married to a labor contractor for the Christmas tree industry. He helped her buy a harvesting permit and introduced her to someone who would buy the leaves. Others report being given permission to harvest leaves on land owned by Christmas tree farmers. Live-plant businesses likely provided another gateway to galax. One long-time buyer indicates that in the early 1990s Latino workers at local nurseries were encouraged to pull galax when the need for nursery labor was low. Our interviews suggest that at least one galax buyer also may have made direct efforts to recruit Latinos.

Networks of family and friends are fundamental to the recruitment of new galackers and the transfer of knowledge to them. This appears to be equally true for both Latino and Anglo harvesters. All of our Anglo interviewees learned to pull galax from family members. One older woman indicated that young people in Yancey County are still taken out to galack during the summer months so that they can earn money for school clothes and other special things. A majority of the Latinos with whom we spoke indicated they learned about galax as an income opportunity from family, friends, or other members of the Latino community residing in the area. Those with well-established family connections appeared to arrive with the knowledge that pulling galax could provide immediate cash. Others, who arrived with less information about the area, inquired within the Latino community about work opportunities and were told about galax. In either case, being taught the basics of how to harvest and sell the leaf by family, friends, or acquaintances is the primary form of ongoing recruitment of new Latino galackers. Harvesting knowledge appears to be transmitted almost exclusively through social networks. Someone takes the prospective harvester into the mountains, shows them the leaf, and teaches them to pick it. There appear to be similarities and differences in the information that is shared within Anglo and Latino social networks. Given that most Anglos who galack in Yancey County are members of families that have resided for multiple generations in the area, it is not surprising that wayfinding and the location of patches on both private and public land seems to be common knowledge within this community. By contrast, getting lost poses a significant danger to newly arrived Latinos. One couple told the story of a young woman who was lost in the mountains for several hours, a situation that became sufficiently grave for a group of Latino Christmas tree workers to be summoned to help look for her.

Long-time Anglo galackers suggest that sustainable harvesting techniques and market quality demands were a part of their informal training. Besides being ecologically sound, this has clear economic advantages to the galacker. A galax patch that is harvested selectively, without removal of roots, can be reharvested

year after year. Some harvesters suggest that the disturbance may even increase population density. However, reduced populations in areas that have been picked by newcomers and the experience of several Latinos who pulled for three or more years suggest that strategies for sustainable harvesting typically are not a part of the informal knowledge that is transferred within that community. These individuals indicate that at first they were unaware that removing roots with the leaf compromises future supply. However, they realized this when they returned to patches they harvested in previous years and found the plants were gone or their density had been severely reduced. With that discovery, they began making an effort not to pull root with the leaf. When root does come out, they immediately remove it and let it fall to the ground with the hope that it will grow again.¹ Other Latinos told of arriving at buyers' locations with leaves that they could not sell because they were too small or blemished. Given the effort required to pull leaves, galackers quickly learn what is required in terms of leaf quality. However, initial lack of knowledge of quality requirements can be costly for both the harvester, who loses the income from one or more days of work, and the leaf, of which less residual is left to support continued growth. Long-time harvesters, including both Anglos and Latinos, report that heavy picking of the most accessible patches has caused some of them to stop galacking or forced them to walk and drive longer distances to obtain leaf.

Knowledge of other woods' lore and etiquette also seems to differ between the two groups. Safety considerations in relationship to wildlife are conveyed to local Anglos from childhood. Although most Latinos also come from mountainous areas, the more recent arrivals do not have the benefit of multigenerational experience with the creatures they may encounter in this particular region. Three Latinos reported frightening encounters with black bears and an uncertainty as to how they should have behaved. Nearly all are aware that there are dangerous snakes in the region but do not know which are poisonous and which are benign. Ground-nesting wasps also can be aggressive, leaving a galacker with dozens of stings. One Latina harvester worried that this could produce a fatal reaction and wondered if there was a way to avoid them.

Some aspects of what is considered to be acceptable behavior in the woods also differ from norms in Mexico. Several Latino interviewees were aware that throwing trash on the ground is illegal in the United States and littering is a source of friction with local residents and officials. An activist who works with the Latino community in Yancey County indicated that expectations regarding disposal of human waste in the mountains are also different from customs in their place of origin and have been a source of conflict.

Management Agencies – Regulating Galax

As noted above, a majority of galax entering the commercial market probably is harvested on federal lands (Figure 4.1). Federal lands in the study area are managed under the jurisdiction of the USDA Forest Service and the National Park

Service. The Pisgah National Forest was established on October 17, 1916 by Presidential Proclamation 1349 (39 Stat. 1811). The initial area purchased for the national forest consisted of 87,700 acres of land obtained by the federal government in 1915 from the Biltmore Estate. By the early 1920s, the forest was comprised of 325,000 acres. At the time it was acquired, much of this land had been heavily logged, burned, and was in need of restoration (Schwarzkopf, 1985; Davis, 2000). Today, the Pisgah encompasses more than 1 million acres and is divided into four administrative units, known as ranger districts. Roughly 38,000 acres are in Yancey County,² where the Appalachian Ranger District office is located. The study area also includes a significant portion of the Blue Ridge Parkway, which is managed by the National Park Service and crosses the middle of the Pisgah National Forest on the southern boundary of Yancey County. Galacking is prohibited on the Parkway.

Galax was harvested in the area prior to the creation of the national forest and the parkway. According to two Forest Service employees, an informal system of family and individual patches was observed throughout much of the 20th century. Older galackers indicate that permits were not required for legal access to the leaf on national forest land in the 1930s and 1940s. The first evidence of a permit system that included galax appears a Forest Service report published in the 1970s (Beavers, 1977).

The Appalachian Ranger District is located on the main highway through Yancey County, not far from the majority of galax buyers. Its central location makes it easy to find and obtaining a permit there adds little time and travel cost to the galacker's expenses. Not surprisingly, the Appalachian Ranger District sells the greatest number of permits, while the numbers of permits issued at other ranger districts decreases with distance from the buyers³

All Forest Service personnel who administer the permit program are European American and none is fluent in Spanish, although some have learned key phrases in an effort to make Latino applicants feel more comfortable. Nevertheless, permit transactions are conducted almost exclusively in English. Whether galackers or agency personnel, all of the people we interviewed who participate in the permitting process took note of the communication difficulties that arise as a result of language differences. The Appalachian Ranger District has made efforts to address this by having the application translated into Spanish. Frequently, Spanish-speaking applicants also try to facilitate the process by having at least one person who speaks English act as a translator for a group of applicants. In spite of these attempts by both parties to make the process easier and more accessible, several Latino galackers indicated that because of language difficulties they fear they do not fully understand permit rules and therefore may violate them inadvertently, risking the sanction of fines and confiscation of a day's harvest.

This anxiety is particularly acute surrounding their understanding of areas that are off-limits to galacking. In addition to the Blue Ridge Parkway, a number of areas in Yancey County are closed to galax gathering. On the national forest, galacking is prohibited in specially designated sites, such as wilderness, research, and intensive recreation areas, along developed trails and designated parking areas,

within buffer zones along streams, or inside active logging areas. Private landowners must give galackers permission to harvest on, or cross, their land and several have posted no trespassing signs. Some of these areas have easily identified boundaries, such as roads, but many do not.

The issue of personal identification is the final factor that can affect the ease with which an individual may obtain legal access to galax on Forest Service land. It is important to note that the Forest Service does not require people to show evidence of legal status in the United States. This is not part of their mandate and several employees indicated that they do not see this as a factor to check in issuing permits. Nevertheless, the Forest Service has begun to require applicants to provide photo identification with their permit application. This change occurred at about the same time that the North Carolina Division of Motor Vehicles, which provides the two most common forms of photo identification (driver's license and state identification card), was directed by the state legislature to change the documents required as a part of their application process. Statutory provisions, passed in 2001, required applicants to provide proof of residency in the state of North Carolina and two forms of identification (NC Sess. Law 2001-424 Sec. 27.10A; NC Gen. Stat. § 20-7). This included a requirement that applicants provide either a social security number or taxpayer identification number as a part of their application for a driver's license or state identification card. Because the application for a social security number requires original documents showing citizenship or lawful noncitizen status, changes in the permit process in the Forest Service became linked, in the perceptions of members of the Latino community, to the system that seeks to verify the legal status of immigrants.

Since its inception, the Forest Service has reviewed and revised the terms of its permits many times. Agency records indicate that between 1996 and 2000, the prices and terms of galax permits changed five times (Table 4.1). Prior to 1996, a galax permit entitled the bearer to pull 1,000 pounds of leaves during the course of a year at a cost of \$25. By May of 2000, those terms had changed to allow the harvest of 100 pounds in a one-month period for \$25. At some point, each individual 16 years of age or older was required to purchase an individual permit. This switch from one-year to 30-day permits, coupled with the challenges of working across a language barrier, has dramatically increased the amount of time Forest Service personnel spend on galax, but has not been accompanied by an increase in resources to accomplish this task. The result has been a significant impact on daily operations in district offices.

The period of change in permit pricing and duration corresponds with changes in the galax labor pool. We recorded data from all available original permit records on the Appalachian Ranger District for fiscal years 1994 through 2003.⁴ The numbers of individuals purchasing galax permits peaked at 525 in 1999 and followed a pattern of alternating highs and lows with a steadily decreasing trend (Table 4.2). At the same time, the demographic profile of those purchasing galax permits changed steadily.⁵ From 1994 to 2002, the numbers of Anglos of both genders experienced a continuous decline while Latino men and women became an increasingly greater proportion of total permits sold. That trend continued in 2003.

Table 4.1 Changes in the terms of galax permits

Effective Date	Maximum Volume	Price	Permit Duration
Before 1996	1,000 lbs.	\$25	12 months
1996	400 lbs.	\$10	12 months
February 1997	1,000 lbs.	\$25	12 months
March 1999	100 lbs.	\$12	30 days
October 1999	100 lbs.	\$13	30 days
May 2000	100 lbs.	\$25	30 days

Source: USDA Forest Service.

Table 4.2 Demographic distribution of galax permittees by fiscal year

Ethnicity and Gender	1994	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003*
Anglo Men	254	59	56	29	12	13	9
Anglo Women	132	34	38	16	13	10	5
Latino Men	44	153	329	133	317	210	188
Latino Women	8	38	101	52	42	55	28
Missing Data	2	1	1	0	0	4	1
Total	440	285	525	230	384	292	231

*October 1, 2002 through April 23, 2003 only.

Source: USDA Forest Service.

As the composition of the galacking population has changed, Forest Service resource specialists have become concerned about their own lack of information about, and the long-term sustainability of, current practices. Biologists identified a relative lack of knowledge about galax ecology. For example, while they know that it spreads through a system of rhizomes, they do not know whether it also seeds itself, nor do they have data about rates of regeneration. One person commented that galax is difficult to model because it grows in many different vegetative communities. Scientific information about whether any particular conditions (temperature, soil type, light, and moisture) are related to rates of growth is lacking. Finally, there are no data on the effects of harvesting on galax population density. Overall, however, the biologists' assessment is that, if harvested properly, galax is not likely to become ecologically threatened, though it could exhibit different spatial patterns and reduced densities. However, one biologist noted that this assessment is based on current market demand for leaves three inches or greater in diameter. If this requirement were reduced, the biologist feels that it would be possible to severely limit or exhaust the supply of leaves.

Lack of ecological information is matched by concern and uncertainty among Forest Service personnel about galackers and their behavior in the woods. While

no one reported observing such actions, a perception that Latinos litter, create drag lines in the mountains by pulling heavy bags of leaves across the soil, and start forest fires, appears to be part of institutional assumptions. Several people also expressed uncertainty about how many people are gathering galax and how much galax is being harvested. For some, this represents a gap in knowledge that should be filled to inform management actions and budget decisions.

Law enforcement is another concern for both Latino pullers and agency personnel. Many Latino galackers indicate they feel like they are constantly under observation. Given the shortage of law enforcement officers on the national forests and national park lands, this perception requires some explanation. One law enforcement official commented that everyone wearing a uniform, including campground hosts, rangers, and people with authority to enforce laws, may look like a law enforcement official to galax gatherers from Mexico. In fact, Forest Service law enforcement officials report having relatively little time to spend on violations related to gathering nontimber forest products such as galax. With just 10 law enforcement officials for the national forests in North Carolina, some are responsible for more than 150,000 acres. In the summer, when recreational use is intense, assault and other person-to-person crimes dominate their efforts, while surveillance for people harvesting marijuana occupies much of their time in the autumn. When galax becomes the object of Forest Service law enforcement, officials describe a variety of approaches to catching people who are violating the permit system that seem to validate Latino anxieties. One approach identified by Forest Service personnel is to wait at an access point where they observe parked cars. As galackers arrive at their vehicles, the officer checks their permits and the amount of material they have gathered. A second approach involved law enforcement officials from other government agencies (e.g., the state wildlife officer, a local police officer) discovering people gathering without permits. In these cases, the official might contact the Forest Service law enforcement person to issue a ticket by mail.

Law enforcement officials differentiate between two levels of illegal activity: violations due to lack of knowledge and violations that extend beyond galax to illegal identification and criminal activities. The former is considered less serious and does not always result in a citation. In the latter instance, officers are likely to issue citations for anything they see as a violation. The majority of cases involve simple permit violations, which are considered misdemeanors. These are generally handled in the field and result in \$100 fines. A few Latino galackers report that at times their leaves also have been confiscated. In the case of more serious violations, an individual may be turned over to the judicial system. While it rarely does so, the Immigration and Naturalization Service could become involved at this point.

The presence of some 30 National Park Service officers in a relatively small area results in more concentrated levels of law enforcement along the Blue Ridge Parkway. In the past, some of the pullouts along the Parkway served as places where galax gatherers parked and ostensibly walked across land in the Park Service jurisdiction to pick galax leaves in the national forest. In addition, one of

the roads that cross the Parkway provides a direct route between buyers and national forest land in an adjacent county. During the time of our study, the Park Service began to prohibit parking along the Parkway and using the on-grade cross road to traverse the parkway with galax leaves. In at least one case that has gained notoriety within the Latino community, four individuals who were apprehended with galax on the Parkway were ultimately deported.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the mid-1990s, the galax labor force of Yancey County was transformed. It changed from a largely Anglo population that had resided in the area for multiple generations to a group dominated by people newly arrived from the highlands of Michoacan, Mexico. This shift followed a reduction in the number of Anglo galackers as other sources of income became available in the region. Simultaneously, the Christmas tree industry and other agricultural and horticultural businesses in western North Carolina began to employ Latinos, extending the process of in-migration that had already begun in the eastern part of the state. Galax plays much the same role in the livelihoods of Latinos that it traditionally has in Anglo household economies. Money earned selling the leaf is a quick source of cash, part of a mixed income stream, and, for a few, a primary source of resources to buy life's necessities. However, limited knowledge of English and lack of familiarity with the region mean that Latinos have not entered the galax labor pool with the same level of knowledge commonly available to the Anglo community. Nearly all the Latino galackers with whom we spoke wanted to know how the leaf was used and where it went after they sold it to a local buyer. They also expressed anxiety about the ability to avoid fines, confiscation of leaf, and more serious sanctions, because most do not feel able to understand the details of permit regulations, particularly in regard to areas that are off limits. This fear persists in spite of the fact that the local Forest Service ranger district has translated the permit into Spanish. Although they come from a similarly mountainous region, most Latino galackers lack basic information about safety risks in the new environment and how to avoid them. Finally, unfamiliar norms for behaviors such as disposal of litter and human waste have created additional conflicts for Latinos.

Adjustments in Forest Service and National Park Service policies coincide with recent changes in galax labor and practices. Several increases in permit prices and a reduction in permit duration from one year to one month has significantly increased the cost of legal access to the leaf on national forest land. This cost increase may have been another reason that fewer Anglos sought permits; in contrast to Latinos, their local knowledge enhances their ability to negotiate access to private lands and feel confident of avoiding legal sanctions. Permits also require that galackers record the weight of leaves harvested each day and purchase a new permit when a poundage limit is reached. Although buyers pay by the leaf, weight was chosen as the unit of measure by the Forest Service to ease the task of law

enforcement officers checking harvest volumes in the field. While this rule seems largely to be ignored, it may provide an incentive to harvest smaller leaves because they weigh less and, thus, increase per-leaf earnings relative to permit costs. Forest Service regulations have been modified primarily in response to regional and national policy that requires recovery of revenue from products harvested on national forest lands. In implementing these requirements, local agency personnel weighed their understanding of the importance of galax to all the people who harvest it with their responsibility to provide an ongoing supply of the leaf. This was particularly the case in the implementation of a closed harvesting season, which staff at the ranger district in Yancey County worried would cause a financial crisis for Latinos. Interestingly, our interviews suggest that many Latino galackers support the closed season as important for guaranteeing their continued ability to rely on the leaf as a source of income. Some even suggested that the closed season should be longer. One woman expressed appreciation that the Forest Service had announced the closure several weeks in advance, taking care to get the word out via Spanish language sources so people could prepare to get through the period without income from galax. Changes in National Park Service policy also have had direct impacts on Latinos. When galackers were prohibited from parking on and walking across the Blue Ridge Parkway, access was lost to several well-known galax patches on surrounding national forest land. The deportation of four people who were caught violating this prohibition served to heighten the fears of many Latino galackers.

Adjustments in the structure of the galax industry both predate and provide a constant context for transformations in harvesting labor and government regulation. At some point in the mid-20th century, galax changed from a largely local and regional commodity to one that is traded through the largest floral product market in the world. While we suspect that this shift occurred as part of a general globalization of the floral industry, further research is needed to clarify the timing of this change and its effects on the Yancey County galax economy. Recently, the number of first-tier buyers in Yancey County increased, attracting at least one more highly capitalized entity headquartered outside the immediate area. More buyers have meant more options for galackers to sell their leaves and opportunities for buyers to engage in pricing strategies designed to capture the optimal amount of supply. Not surprisingly in such an environment, patronage relationships do not appear to motivate Latinos' choices of where to sell their leaves, as word of the prices being offered by various buyers travels quickly. At the same time, it has become common for galackers to arrive with leaf only to find that the buyer is not purchasing that day. Indeed, one joked that the only Spanish many buyers have learned is '*No compramos hoy*' [not buying today]. One long-time buyer indicated that the demand for galax has been down since the events of September 11, 2001, and was the lowest she had ever seen in the winter of 2002-2003. Prices being paid to pullers also have been depressed. Lower prices, coupled with higher gasoline costs and the need to walk ever farther to find leaf, led a man who has depended on galax as a primary source of income to say '*Ya no es negocio*', [You can't make enough money at it any more]. Lower earnings are

reflected in fewer Latinos purchasing permits, as they look elsewhere for income opportunities. Our interviews suggest that several Latino galackers have begun to wonder if they might earn more for their labor by bypassing a middleman or two in the process. Even for those who are legal residents, such a move is probably not a viable option in such a volatile and increasingly competitive environment. At the time of our last fieldwork, at least two of the new Anglo buyers had left the business and the most specialized and capitalized enterprise appeared to be struggling.

Sadly, though both Anglo and Latino galackers spoke eloquently about the peace and joy of being in the woods, fear and conflict have appeared in the galax landscape. Some Latinos have returned to their vehicles after a day of harvesting to find smashed windshields and slashed tires. One older Anglo woman told of going out to a patch that she had been harvesting for years and eventually leaving because she felt intimidated by two young Latino men who clearly wished to pull the leaves themselves. While none of the Latinos we interviewed said they had experienced a direct confrontation in the woods, it was not uncommon for them to mention being held responsible for things they believe others had done. One man complained that he and his compatriots are blamed for starting fires and leaving behind quantities of beer containers that were actually left by hunters. However, the same individual and several others who had been in the United States for some time acknowledge that littering has created problems for Latinos, who are accustomed to leaving beverage containers and food wrappers in the woods.

While many of the challenges identified here are beyond the scope of local action, a number of steps could be taken to increase the safety of Latino galackers, reduce conflict, and assure future viability of the resource. At the time of publication, Emery had prepared Spanish-language information sheets on bear and bee safety that can be distributed with permits. However, more information is needed on woods safety and etiquette in formats that also can reach those with limited literacy capabilities. Maps that are legible to new immigrants and clearly indicate areas that are off limits to galax harvesting would enhance Latino galackers ability to comply with Forest Service regulations. An oral history project that documents the experiences of both Anglo and Latino galackers could be used as a tool to increase understanding between these two communities that currently regard each other with anxiety. A training program on sustainable harvest of galax, presented by experienced Latino pullers, would help to reduce the incidence of poor practices.

The lengthening of the commodity chain has brought the Yancey County galax economy in direct contact with the global economy. At the conjunction of the global market for floral greens, the ongoing economic crisis in Mexico, and the restructuring of the U.S. labor market, hundreds of Latinos have found that a little leaf in the mountains of western North Carolina can provide a significant source of income. These people, most of whom come from the mountains of Michoacan, are part of transformations in the galax industry even as their lives are shaped by its demands and possibilities. Our research suggests several opportunities for action that could reduce some of the conflicts that have arisen and increase the chances

that galax will continue to be a livelihood resource for both Anglo and Latino residents of Yancey County in years to come.

Changes in the galax industry reflect larger alterations in the context of natural resources management in the New South. The entry of Latinos into forest industries of all types creates a new source of labor that is valued by many but presents public agencies and private contractors with the need for new language and cultural skills. The introduction of new residents to long-homogeneous communities brings younger people into aging rural populations but sets up the conditions for overwriting informal land tenure systems. Furuseth (2005) shows that the growing Latino populations of the South are not confined to urban areas and traditional agricultural zones. The case of galax illustrates that this diffusion of Latino spaces extends to some of the most rural mountain communities of the southern Appalachians. The attendant transformations range from the items on grocery store shelves to the culture of work in the woods.

Notes

- 1 Our interviews indicate a difference of opinion among long-time Anglo galackers as to whether roots will regrow.
- 2 Yancey County's total area is 220,320 acres.
- 3 Each ranger district issues permits for pulling in the area it manages only.
- 4 Only permits issued for the months of February through April were located for fiscal year 1993. For fiscal year 2003, our data reflect permit sales from October 1, 2002 through April 23, 2003 only. Permit data were not available for 1995-1997.
- 5 Note that the North Carolina national forests do not track the demographics of permittees. We determined gender and ethnicity on the basis of names recorded on permit applications.

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Latinos in the New South

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