



THE EDDY LINE

VOLUME 59 NO. 2

MARCH/APRIL 2024

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PADDLERS DAY AT THE CAPITOL AND FREEDOM TO PADDLE

By Carol Proctor

On Wednesday, March 13, 2024, a group of about 40 paddlers gathered at the Georgia State Capitol. Our presence was officially recognized in sessions of both the House and Senate and we lobbied our personal representatives and senators in an effort to protect our freedom to float Georgia’s rivers and streams. Participants from Georgia Canoeing Association included: David & Margaret Asbell, Mark Buterbaugh, Fred Couch, Sonia Delgado, Janina Edwards, Charles Geis, Charlotte Hand, Dan MacIntyre, Jonathan Mann, Roger Nott, Carol & Brannen Proctor, Laurel Sybilrud, Suzanne & Tom Welander, and Mark Wilson. Many thanks to you and to everyone who has written letters and made phone calls.

Background

In recent years, conflicts between fishermen and private property owners have led to legal disputes regarding public access to fishing. SBI 15, which became law in 2023, and HBI 172, which passed the House and Senate in 2024, both attempted to address these disputes. However, they left even navigable rivers vulnerable to property owners who can trace their land title back to a pre-1863 state or crown grant. Where property owners can prove they have this special title to the streambed, not only fishermen but boaters would be unable to stop in the streambed or on a rock to scout a shoal or rapid.

The Question of Navigability

HBI 172 also fails to clarify boating rights on streams that do not meet Georgia’s test of “navigability” which dates back to an 1860’s definition involving river freight. That leaves hundreds of miles of rivers and streams – including designated water trails and frequently paddled destination rivers – at risk of being declared or presumed “non-navigable,” putting our right to paddle them legally in question.

Navigability laws in many states have evolved to support the interests of recreational activities and moved away from archaic definitions that rely on defining navigability through commerce. North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee have adopted a “pleasure craft” test which allows boaters to float rivers capable of floating a craft. We ultimately hope to persuade Georgia legislators to follow our neighboring states’ example.

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(Paddlers Day at the Capitol, continued from page 1)

In the meantime, in Georgia, “navigability” continues to be conflated with the idea of legal passage. As a result, the legislature decided the solution would be a list of “navigable” rivers.

What’s Next?

At the end of the 2024 legislative session, the House passed [HR1554](#) to create a special study committee to investigate and seek input from the public on what streams should be considered navigable. Paddlers, outfitters and other stakeholders will be making an all-out effort to have this list be as comprehensive as possible and by no means a final determination of where we have the right to paddle.

The Georgia Canoeing Association is participating in a collaborative effort along with Georgia River Network, American Whitewater, and American Canoe Association as well as many other paddling stakeholders to educate legislators on the value of keeping Georgia’s waterways open to the public. We want to ensure what is considered legally navigable extends to the farthest reaches of waters we paddle within the state of Georgia. We will be coordinating various campaigns throughout the state as more information on the committee hearings becomes available.—*EL*

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Participate in Georgia River Network’s Paddle-A-Thon, a paddling contest where participants log their trips through online forms.
- Link to get started: [Paddle-a-thon 2024: Freedom to Float in Georgia! | Mightycause](#)
- Film your paddling adventures with GoPro and cameras. GCA will be presenting your documentation of trips as evidence that these waterways are navigable.
- Attend hearings of the study committee. Keep track of what’s happening at the GRN website here: [Protect Your Freedom to Float Georgia Rivers](#)
- Invite your legislators to paddle with you.
- Talk to outfitters and local businesses likely to be affected by stream closures. Encourage them to make their voices heard by their legislators, county officials, and news outlets.



Georgia paddlers at the Capitol

GCA Smoky Mountains Paddling Trip

By Roger Nott

For this year's annual Smoky Mountains trip, we had low but passable water conditions, mild weather, and an enthusiastic crew of 27 paddlers. Since our take-out was 5-6 miles upstream of the Oconaluftee USGS gauge at Birdtown and its level was falling, I estimated the levels we had from readings about 2 1/2 hours after our take-out times as 2.04/558 cfs on Saturday and 1.93/ 488 cfs on Sunday. Both readings are above Dave and Bob Benner's Carolina Whitewater minimum of 1.7, but still portended rocky, very technical, "slalom" runs both days, particularly on the Oconaluftee from Smokemont to "the Wall" and on Raven Fork from the Straight Fork confluence almost to the high school. Because these levels would have been particularly difficult for our kayakers in inflatables, they and Terri Abbott opted to paddle the Nantahala Saturday. Paddling in Cherokee both days were Tim Carlton, Chris Elwell, Jeff Lankford, Jim Mazzola, Cage Spoden and I (Roger Nott). Also joining us on the Oconaluftee only were Jay Cawley and Russell Dutta.

We had a great trip Saturday with no swims. We put in along the Smokemont Road about 100 yards downstream of the Bradley Fork confluence and immediately below a downed, river-spanning tree. Luckily, we encountered no other blockages requiring portage. Yet we got lots of maneuvering practice and enjoyed the exceptional scenery, frequent elk sightings, and crystal-clear water within the park. Shortly after we passed the pioneer Village buildings Raven Fork doubled the flow, transforming the river into a more open, powerful stream. We lunched just upstream of the Blue Ridge Parkway bridge, where Jeff showed us how to enjoy every inch of the fine surfing holes we encountered there and also at several other spots downstream.

On Sunday we were joined by David Asbell, Christine Blumberg, Michael Collins, Larry Hall, Jeff and Kelly Jenkins, Barbara Kaumeyer, Mike LaTorre, Tim Lee, Jay Manalo, Kevin McInturff, Tim Miner, Taylor Smith, Daniel Watson, and Hunter White. Being the only Canadian canoeist Saturday, I was glad to be joined Sunday by open boaters Christine, Michael, Tim Lee, and Kevin. The others paddled whitewater kayaks. We discussed that the river had fallen, and everyone agreed that we should put in at Bunches Creek, about a mile downstream of our usual put-in at the Straight Fork confluence. However, most wanted to check out the rapids just downstream of the Straight Fork which have a gradient of 75 feet in the first half mile. On our way upstream we all stopped to scout Crack-in-the-Rock. Kevin climbed onto the rock and confirmed that there was no blockage in its dramatic center slot, where our beloved member Ed Green was fatally pinned under wedged driftwood December 23, 1998. This slot, which drops about six feet, has an easy approach, is fun and normally safe to run, but is very difficult to scout from the river when approaching from upstream. We then drove upstream to Straight Fork, but I and five others stopped at the Bunches Creek bridge to check the access and parking there. Then David and I drove upstream to meet the others at Straight Fork, where there is large parking lot along the river. We found the other 15 boaters already most unloaded; they had liked what they saw and were ready to paddle the extra mile, despite knowing that there were some rocky stretches about a half mile down.



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(GCA Smoky Mountain Weekend, continued from page 3)

The somewhat raucous scene was complicated by the presence of a distraught middle-aged Cherokee lady who was telling everyone that they could not paddle the Raven Fork, as it was illegal. I assured her that I had talked to the police and representatives of the tribe's Natural Resources Department each year since 2018 and that they had assured me that it was not illegal for private individuals to boat within the reservation, and that I had specifically gotten their permission for our large group to paddle this weekend. Kevin agreed to lead the 15 boaters who had already unloaded down to Bunches Creek to meet David and I and the four others. In about a half hour, eleven of the fifteen arrived at Bunches Creek and said they had had a great time and no adverse incidents. When the other four did not immediately arrive, I asked Kevin and six others to paddle on first and said that the other ten should wait till the other four arrived, so we could split up into two more groups of seven. Then the first seven left and I paddled about 20 yards upstream to get a better view upstream. About two minutes later I turned around and saw that all but David had already left and were disappearing downstream. David and I waited about 45 minutes more before the other four arrived safe and sound. Therefore, we ended up with two groups: one of 15, and one of six following about an hour later. We six had a great time, and Kevin assures me that his group did too, though two kayakers, our only swimmers of the weekend, flipped at Crack in the Rock and missed their rolls. Also one of our kayakers got stuck on a rock and, while trying to free himself, blew his sprayskirt, swamped and lost his paddle.



We faced continual challenges and very little flatwater for the first six miles, well past Crack-in-the-Rock. The largest of the three fish weirs was too low to get through without a lot of humping and scraping, and we decided to stop for a lunch break after that effort. We also made another short stop to talk with a couple who lived along the right bank. She said she was glad to see boaters again and noted that she, like the angry woman at the put-in, had not heard that they had been allowed in the reservation again. We discussed the history of paddling in the reservation since the 1960's and GCA's annual trips since 1980. We saw no other evidence of animosity among the many people we saw along the river, who general waved and smiled at us, enjoying this beautiful, warm, cloudless day.

Raven Fork is a challenging, delightful stream with frequent, complex class II and III rapids where the smooth line was often circuitous and passed closed to piles of flood-strewn boulders. Jeff and I generally led the way, and my ability to stand in my 16-foot Buffalo Canoe to scout was very helpful. There is not much better than good, exhilarating runs of Raven Fork on a perfect March day. By the time we got to the Cherokee city limits all our trip-mates except Kevin had left. While we ran shuttle Jay was visited by curious elk and a tom turkey. Thanks crew for some great trips.—EL

ALL ABOUT THE EDDY LINE

The Eddy Line, the official GCA newsletter, is available in pdf format. To subscribe, contact Vincent Payne at 678-343-5292 or Vincent.payne9354@gmail.com, or mail your request to P.O. Box 611, Winston, GA 30187.

Submissions/Advertising: All submissions and advertising should be sent to *The Eddy Line*, at: EddyLineEditor@gmail.com.

Adventures in a Few of Florida's Less-Traveled Waterways

By Kris Petti

After a little mis-communication involving a creek and a river by the same name, an early March trip was finally planned in order to explore rivers near the “big bend” area of Florida, near Tallahassee. The group of five included Kris, Angi, Diane, Susan and Cindy. We reserved two campsites at the strange but adequate Wakulla County Newport Campground which is on the St. Marks River, just across from the entrance to the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. This inexpensive campground with hot showers and bright lights was within walking distance of a small restaurant with oysters and good smoked trout. Bring a sleep mask and earplugs if you camp there. It is quite bright at night and the road noise is loud.

The campground had many long-term campers escaping the snow and ice of Michigan, Minnesota, and other chilly climes, including the affable Tom from Minneapolis, with his incredibly impressive truck camper (1 of 4!) and his unique kayak transportation system. He had been kayaking with his adult sons and had lots of good information for us. After setting up camp we were eager to get on the water, and spent about an hour paddling upstream on the St. Marks. With little to no current to fight, it was a very relaxing way to see the flora and fauna of the area, which included an owl flyover immediately after launching. We marveled at the enormous red buckeyes in bloom, giant fringe trees (aka Grancy Graybeard), and other Florida beauties. Hawks, woodpeckers, and other birds were spotted, as well as bay laurel, native azalea, majestic pines and the usual Florida trees and bushes.

The next morning, we set out for the Wacissa River to put in at the Wacissa Springs Public Boat Ramp. There is a LONG shuttle to Goose Pasture takeout and campground, where we will probably camp if we return, so be prepared to kill an hour or more at the headspring with the boats. We managed to pick up the trash and play a little Rummikub while we waited. The Wacissa is a wide, crystal-clear river with some named springs that you can paddle to on both sides of the river. We checked out Little Blue Spring, where we saw a lovely night heron, and also lingered a while at Big Blue Spring where a few brave souls were swimming or jumping off a tall tree. Along the way we found Tom who spotted a water moccasin sunning on a root. It took us forever to see it, despite his clear directions. Keep clear of low branches and look before stepping out of your boat!



Wacissa River put-in

The Wacissa river was full of long grass and other lovely river plants that impeded paddling only slightly at times, but there was abundant wildlife, especially at the beginning of the trip where multiple species of birds were present and active, including eagles, egrets, little blue herons, limpets, anhingas, hawks, osprey, marsh hens, ibis, and more. Only a few small gators were spotted, and they didn't inhibit the locals from swimming and wading in the river and spring.

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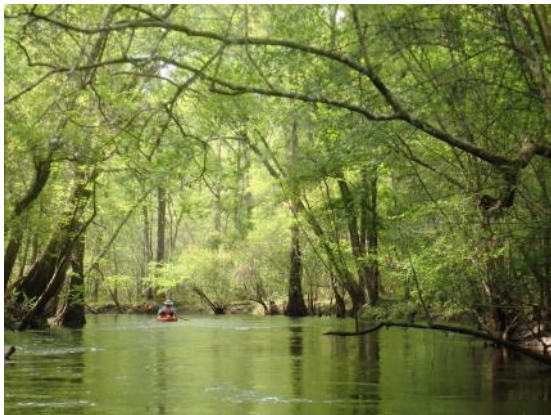
(Florida waterways, continued from page 5)

The paddle to the Goose Pasture take-out was 10 miles, and it was completed in about 3.5 hours, even with a lunch stop, island pit stop, and a couple extra miles of meandering. Goose pasture is a primitive (and free) campground that looks like a good alternative to Newport, although it lacks water and power. There are porta-potties, however. There was another potential take-out at Welaunee Landing that may have saved us some time shuttling, but I don't know that we would have ever found it if not for the sound of kids swimming and splashing, as it required a sharp left turn and paddling upstream a bit.



Wacissa River

After much discussion we scrapped the plan to paddle the Econfina River on day two due to low water levels, and decided to paddle the Aucilla River from the bridge at Lamont to Herndon Landing. There is a



Aucilla River

short shuttle of about 10 minutes to the take out – a lovely spot with cypress trees in the river. The gauge at Lamont should be between 48 and 50 feet for ideal paddling. The level that day was about 48.9, and it was just fine. This blackwater river was swift and not very wide (25 feet?) with oaks stretching over the river to make a beautiful canopy and plenty of shade. There are some twists and turns with fast-moving water at times, so decent boat handling skills are needed

We didn't see any other paddlers, but were delighted by the gorgeous fringe trees, rain lilies, and other fauna. Not too many birds - only a few kingfishers, kites, and ducks. There were some small gators and one snake noted. We all enjoyed the contrast to the previous day's sunny, wide, clear Wacissa. This is a very remote peaceful section, with almost no buildings, and very little proof of civilization, yet the route was maintained well enough that despite some downfall no portage was needed. It is on this river that evidence was found of the first Floridians hunting mastodons at least 12,000 years ago. No artifacts were found on this trip, however.

Next time, we'll plan to take out farther downstream to Reams Landing, Old Railroad Bridge, or even further, as we did 7 miles in a about 2 1/2 hours. We debated re-shuttling but decided to check out the Wildlife Refuge where we enjoyed a walk, despite very high winds. A plethora of birds, including eagles and an eagle nest were seen. A few of us took some chiggers home with us, unfortunately. A thunderstorm hit as soon as we returned to camp, and rain continued through the night, dampening our desire to paddle more of the Wacissa before we headed home in the morning.

Despite a few difficulties, this is a trip that is worth repeating. There is much more to see on all the rivers we paddled. Not sure how mosquito season may affect the enjoyment if you go later in the year, however.

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(Florida Waterways, continued from page 6)

For good intel on these rivers, I suggest you order this paper map/guide: Aucilla/Wacissa/Econfina Rivers: An Explorer's Guide to North Florida's Region of Rivers for \$5.00 from the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida - <https://wildlifeflorida.com/product/aucilla-wacissa-econfina-rivers-an-explorers-guide-to-north-floridas-region-of-rivers/> They also have a saltwater paddling guide for the area –which can be found under the book section of their online shop.—EL



Aucilla take-out

Keeping In Touch

To contact the GCA, write Georgia Canoeing Association, Inc., P.O. Box 611, Winston, GA 30187.

Groupmail: GCA maintains a group email list to help members share information of general interest. To signup, send an e-mail to gcalist-subscribe@groups.io.

Website: Information about GCA, forms (including membership application and GCA waiver form), a link to the GCA Store and links to *Eddy Line* advertisers are all at <http://www.gapaddle.com>.

Facebook: Visit the GCA Facebook page for photos, video, trip reports, or to join an upcoming impromptu trip.

TRIP AND EVENT SCHEDULE

Please see the GCA Calendar for details, updates, and to sign up at www.gapaddle.com.

May 3-5: Common Sense Rescue with H2O Dreams (see GCA website for information)

May 4: Slalom for Skill Building with ERA (call ERA at 828-488-6199 to register)

May 11: Boat-based Rescue with ERA (call ERA at 828-488-6199 to register)

May 17-19: Spring Extravaganza (see GCA website for camping details and trips)

May 25: Directional rolling with ERA (call ERA at 828-488-6199 to register)

May 25 and May 26: Hiwassee River, Class II (contact Carol Proctor, 404-597-2128 or cproctor11@gmail.com for questions)

June 9: Nantahala paddle (contact Terri Abbot at abbott.terri@gmail.com for information)

June 9: Work the Nantahala with ERA (call ERA at 828-488-6199 to register)

We need trip coordinators for all types of trips, from flatwater to Class 4 whitewater. Our excellent trip schedule depends on the efforts of volunteers, so get involved and sign up to coordinate a trip on your favorite river today! The GCA needs YOU!

GUIDE TO ACA SKILL LEVELS (KAYAK):

Level 1: Flat water: Ability to control the boat on flat water, moving the boat forwards, backwards and sideways; ability to turn the boat.

Level 2: Up to Class I rapids: Efficient forward paddling, ability to stop the boat, ability to paddle in reverse with reasonable control, ability to use sweep strokes to turn on the move, ruddering, low braces, eddy turns, peel outs, forward ferrying, side draws.

Level 3: Moving water with class I-II rapids: all Level 2 skills, plus reverse ferries, C-turns, S-turns, low and high brace to prevent capsize, the ability to turn on the move using edging and bow draws.

Level 4: Moving water with class II-III rapids: all Level 3 skills, plus the ability to surf and the ability to perform a safe and effective roll from a non-setup position in class II-III water.

Level 5: Moving water with class III-IV rapids: all Level 4 skills, plus the ability to utilize a variety of draw strokes, ability to navigate rapids using a variety of strokes and edge management, ability to use surface features and maintain angles while ferrying, ability to enter, exit and sustain surfs with control in both waves and holes, ability to blend strokes during maneuvers while maintaining safe, efficient and effective technique in challenging conditions a safe and effective roll from a non-setup position in class III-IV water.

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GCA welcomes paddlers from all races, genders, and sexual orientations. We will continue to strive to promote diversity among the paddling community and work to create a safe space for all to enjoy our paddling adventures.



The Eddy Line, © 2024, is published monthly as the official newsletter of the Georgia Canoeing Association, Inc., publication address: 9354 Grapevine Drive, Winston, GA 30187.



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[WE'RE ON THE WEB:]
www.gapaddle.com

The purpose of the GCA is to have fun and promote safety while paddling.

GCA is a member-operated paddling club with over 500 family and corporate memberships comprising more than 1500 Individuals. Canoeists and Kayakers of all ages and paddling abilities are equally welcome. Some of our mutual interests include whitewater river running, creeking and playboating, river and lake touring, sea kayaking, paddle camp outs and competition and racing activities. We espouse conservation, environmental and river access issues as well as boating safety and skills development. Group paddling, training and social activities of all kinds are conducted throughout the year thanks to the volunteer efforts of our many members and friends. Membership is NOT limited to Georgia residents.