



## Paradise Found: Paddle Georgia 2011 on the Oconee River

**E**xcerpted from Joe Cook's Paddle Georgia 2011 blog post - read it all and see more pictures on the blog at [www.garivernetwork.wordpress.com](http://www.garivernetwork.wordpress.com).

The seventh edition of Paddle Georgia is now in the books. Sleep-deprived, sun-kissed, stiff-muscled, mud-caked, we have returned home. This year our Paddle Georgia Canoe-a-thon participants raised \$20,000 for river protection! Those funds will go to protect the Oconee and promote development of water trails on Georgia rivers. In seven years, Paddle Georgia has generated more than \$100,000 for river protection in Georgia!

And here are a few memorable moments from the journey...

**Mitchell's Bridge Shoals:** This was our only real whitewater on the trip, but it came just a mile into the affair. Low water levels made picking a path through these shoals tricky, and novice paddlers were thrown to the proverbial wolves. All persevered, however.

**Snakes in Boats:** One of the biggest myths of paddling is that snakes fall into canoes when you paddle beneath overhanging trees. We've all heard these stories, but such encounters are so rare that when we polled the 300-strong Paddle Georgia Navy one night during the trip, only a handful admitted to experiencing such. On the first day of the trip,

though, two first-time paddlers from Camp Best Friends had their fears realized. Within four miles of the launch site, a snake dropped into their boat. They quickly exited the same.

**Portages Are a Lot of Work:** 300 paddlers would gladly take out defunct dams one brick at a time if given the chance (there were three such dams on this trip).

**Paddling into Paradise:** On Day 4 of our journey, we left behind Milledgeville and the "urbanized" river and slipped into the Coastal Plain and its wild bottomland swamp forests. Mississippi kites greeted us from the air, and wild hogs, deer and alligators lurked on the shore. It was a place of wild beauty where even the river seemed "alive," cutting new paths and carving off oxbow lakes. Venturing into this place in the supportive company of the Paddle Georgia community, it felt as if we were entering paradise.

**Rain on the River:** Day 6 brought torrential downpours. Generally, paddlers as a group avoid day trips in the rain, and thus we rarely experience the beauty of rain rippling the river's surface. If it was a bit frightening being chased by the thunderstorms, the reward was the cooling wind and rain and the thrill of tasting nature's fury without the protection of four walls.

**Potsherds, Pop Tops and Pop Bottles:** The Oconee's sandbars (and its eroding banks) held many treasures, spanning more than 1,000 years of the region's cultural



*Paddle Georgia participant brings in a tire on river clean up day.*

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### *Working Together for Healthy Rivers*

#### MISSION

*Georgia River Network is working to ensure a clean water legacy by engaging and empowering Georgians to protect and restore our rivers from the mountains to the coast.*

#### GOALS

- Help citizens work together to protect and restore their local rivers
- Support local river groups and citizens by helping build their capacity to protect and restore their rivers
- Work with citizens and local river groups to advocate for strong, responsible protections for Georgia's rivers

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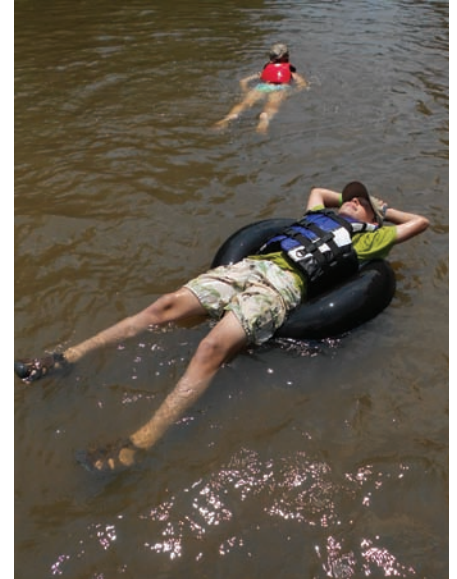
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*Georgia River Network is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Contributions are fully tax-deductible.*

## Paddle Georgia continued...

history—from potsherd remains of Native American pottery to circa-1960 pop tops and soda bottles. One wonders what our descendants will make of our detritus. Hopefully, 100 years hence, the river will not be the place to find today's trash.

Mark your calendars: Paddle Georgia 2012 will take place June 16-22 on the Altamaha River! Visit the Paddle Georgia website to join the info list for the 2012 trip on the mighty Altamaha.



*L-R, Top to Bottom: Mud Pit Belly Flop contest participants Stan Sewell, Ray Levesque, and Joel Lydon at the Rivers End Celebration; Taking a break from paddling; Bob & Alex Beaulieu*

**Thanks to Our Paddle Georgia Sponsors:** Georgia Power, Hennessey Land Rover, Patagonia, Kettle Chips, Big Dogs on the River, Burt's Bees, Café Campesino, Coca-Cola Refreshments, Mohawk Foundation, Oglethorpe Power, REI, StreamTechs, The Outside World, Advanced Disposal Services, Broad River Outpost, China Clay Producers, Downtown Athens, Half Moon Outfitters, Organic Valley, The Rain Barrel Depot, Barberitos, Bee Natural, Bending Branches, Chick-Fil-A of Dublin Current Designs-Wenonah Canoe, DePalma's Italian Café, Earth Fare, Georgia Aquarium, Len Foote Hike Inn, Jackson Spalding, Masada Leather and Outdoor, Menasha Ridge Press, The National, and Rapid Media. Partners: Georgia Canoe Association, Upper Oconee Watershed Network, Lake Oconee Water Watch, Oconee River Project of Altamaha Riverkeeper, Georgia Adopt-A - Stream, Project WET, Athens-Clarke Convention & Visitor's Bureau, Dublin Laurens County Chamber of Commerce, and the Milledgeville-Baldwin County Convention & Visitor's Bureau

# Paddle Georgia Works Together with UGA for Summer Class on the Oconee

**U**GA's College of Environment and Design and Georgia River Network have teamed up to match the planning and design power of the college with real life projects on Georgia rivers. Conversations about how we could work together on projects such as water trails in Georgia led to the creation of an 8 week summer course designed to discover the cultural, community and recreational components of the Oconee River system and uncover its untapped potential in linking local communities and interpreting river resources. Taught by Professor Brian LaHaie, 6 students joined Paddle Georgia on the Oconee to experience the river first hand. After the trip, students completed a variety of mapping projects that covered settlement distribution, historic sites, land use and water quality correlation, and river access according to land ownership types. These maps are included in a studio report, along with photo documentation, resource lists, and an outline of plans for a Design Charrette on the Oconee River scheduled for Fall 2011. The pioneering class of the Paddle Georgia Summer Studio - besides making the adventurous trek down the Oconee River from Athens to Dublin, GA - has taken on the task of establishing the template for the program to continue working with a different river system in the state each year. Learn more at [www.ced.uga.edu/index.php/services\\_outreach/detail/paddle\\_georgia\\_summer\\_studio/](http://www.ced.uga.edu/index.php/services_outreach/detail/paddle_georgia_summer_studio/).



UGA Class & Crew led by Professor Brian LaHaie on right



Tiffany Trowell paddling the Oconee River on Paddle Georgia 2011

## GRN Awards the 2011 Turner Re-Grants

**T**he following organizations were awarded re-grants through Georgia River Network's program funded by the Turner Foundation. Grants were awarded to projects that directly impact high priority problems causing water quality degradation, impaired instream flows and/or inefficient use of water.

**Altamaha Riverkeeper** - To focus legal and technical attention on unresolved issues affecting the Altamaha River, mobilize citizen concerns, and make progress on improving water quality.

**Oconee River Project of the Altamaha Riverkeeper** - To coordinate efforts to continue to assess toxicity in Athens' Trail Creek, provide information to the public and decision-makers and advocate for long term remediation.

**Coosa River Basin Initiative** - To address non-point source pollution, ill-conceived development proposals, and inefficient water use.

**Savannah Riverkeeper** - To form the 2011 Healthy Water Task Force to address water quality issues in four impaired waterways in Augusta: Rocky Creek, Butler Creek, Spirit Creek and Raes Creek.

**Ogeechee Riverkeeper** - To address and resolve the lack of authoritative response and guidance regarding the potential human health risks from the May 2011 fish kill and to demonstrate the need for tougher discharge permit regulations and better communication and response from government officials regarding emergencies.

**South River Watershed Alliance** - Georgia River Network will provide capacity building assistance and make implementation funds available for needs identified through this assistance.

# Grassroots Spotlight: St. Mary's Earthkeepers

**P**art of Georgia River Network's mission is to support the network of over 30 river groups that are protecting your home rivers.

Sometimes people ask us—why do there need to be so many small river groups in the state of Georgia? Why can't one large group do the work of many small ones? The reason is that a small group—even a very small group—that is locally based is in a better position than anyone to know and catch things that are happening to a river. This story is a great example of why we work to support local river groups:

The St. Marys River in Southeast Georgia is a lovely blackwater river recently designated by the Southern Environmental Law Center as one of Georgia's "endangered places." It surfaces as a tiny stream known as "River Styx" and flows from the western edge of Trail Ridge, the primordial remnants of a barrier island system, and into the southeastern Okefenokee Swamp. From there it roams around until finally, after a journey of 125 river-miles, it delivers its unique tannic brew into the Atlantic Ocean near St. Marys, GA and Fernandina Beach, FL - just 50 miles from its birthplace.

But the St. Marys has troubles. Miocene Holdings LLC of Dallas, Texas, has applied for a surface water withdrawal permit application – a permit that is currently under consideration by the EPD. This proposal would remove about 350,000 gallons of water per day from the St. Marys River (a naturally low-flow river), extract tannins from the blackwater river (to be used as a soil additive for fertilizer) and then return the water to the river.

The dark tea color of Georgia's blackwater streams is a result of decaying vegetation that produces tannin, a naturally occurring organic compound. Through a filtering process to remove these tannins, Miocene Holdings would alter the

fundamental nature of the river's water. Discharging the altered water back into a low-volume blackwater river would have immeasurable impact upon the river's ecological functions. In addition, the proposed industrial filtration process could also further deplete dissolved oxygen levels in the water being returned to the river, which is already naturally low in dissolved oxygen. By altering the water chemistry, the St. Marys is at

risk of losing native plants and animals that rely upon it.

St. Marys Earthkeepers (SME) is an all-volunteer grassroots organization that works in the St. Marys watershed on all sorts of environmental issues, from recycling to river issues. SME stumbled across the Miocene water withdrawal permit, researched it and realized it meant bad news for the St. Marys. SME engaged the help of the Southern Environmental Law Center and Georgia River Network and is now actively opposing the Miocene withdrawal at the statewide level.

We appreciate SME's dedication to the beautiful and unique St. Marys!

To you all...please speak out against this permit application by writing to Mr. Ade Oke, Georgia Environmental Protection Division, 4220 International Parkway, Suite 101, Atlanta, GA 30354 (Subject: Miocene Holdings surface water withdrawal permit).



*St. Mary's Earthkeepers at a recent river clean up.*

## Janisse Ray Book Launch Event



Join us for a book launch event for Janisse Ray's new book "Drifting Into Darien: A Personal and Natural History of the Altamaha River"

Tuesday, October 11 at Seney-Stovall Chapel in Athens, 7 pm.

Georgia River Network is co-sponsoring the event with University of Georgia Press, Environmental Ethics Certificate Program/Southern Nature Project, Georgia Review, Oconee River Project of Altamaha Riverkeeper, University of Georgia Libraries.

# Join us in Going GREEN!

Printing quarterly newsletters consumes paper and time. We can be more efficient in delivering our programs through relying on e-mail, our website, and social networking tools. You can help by making the switch, too.

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For our electronic subscribers, each quarterly issue of *Confluence* is e-mailed to you and archived on our website.

## Members Hike to the Len Foote Hike Inn

**G**RN members were invited to hike with us to the Len Foote Hike Inn in July for a special retreat. After making the 5 mile hike to the inn, everyone was treated to a fantastic family style dinner. Eric Graves, Hike Inn staff member, provided a slide show about his experience paddling with his daughter Kristen on Paddle Georgia 2011. Learn more about the Hike Inn at <http://hike-inn.com/>.



## Become a River Partner

Our River Partners join together to make monthly contributions to support Georgia River Network's programs. With your monthly support we can invest more of our resources where they bring the highest returns for future generations. Start your monthly gift today by visiting [www.garivers.org](http://www.garivers.org) and clicking on DONATE.

As a River Partner...

- You strengthen Georgia River Network with your steady, reliable support.
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- You decide how much to give.
- You save time and trouble—no need to write checks.
- You receive special updates on our work.
- You have direct contact with GRN staff.
- You decide when to raise, lower or stop your gifts.

Thank you for considering this unique opportunity to step up to a critical leadership role in supporting Georgia River Network's efforts to protect and restore Georgia's rivers.



# Success! Motorized Off-Road Vehicles No Longer Allowed in Georgia Waterways

**A**fter four years of work by a committed group of people, legislation was passed last year on an issue that's as critical to fish as it is to the people who like to fish for them. HB 207 passed the General Assembly in 2010, and thanks to the efforts of a coalition of dedicated folks, the use of motorized off-road vehicles is prohibited in perennial streams and rivers throughout Georgia.

"You mess with my fishing and you're messing with me," said Representative Chuck Sims of Ambrose, Georgia, the author of the bill. Sims, who lives on the Satilla River in Coffee County and who is a member of the Coffee County Fishing Club had been noticing ATVs eroding the banks of his local river for years and decided to do something about it.

"People would ride the river bank from highway bridge to highway bridge—you know what kind of erosion that was causing," Sims said. "It just made me so mad that they could do that. I love to fish and the river is part of life for me—and really the whole region."

Sims wasn't the only person who was angry about the way the Satilla was being treated. In 2009 the Brantley County Commission passed a local ordinance that prohibited the use of ATVs in the Little Satilla and Satilla Rivers of Brantley County. State law at the time prohibited ATV use on roads or road shoulders statewide, but the penalty for this activity was a fine of only \$25. The Brantley County Commission (all five of whom were members of the Satilla Riverkeeper) passed an ordinance that changed the fine structure to \$250-\$1000 for violating the existing state law, and expanded upon it to protect over 100 river miles in the county.

"This came about for a few different reasons," said Gordon Rogers, who was the Satilla Riverkeeper at the time the Brantley County ordinance was passed.

"For one thing, the Brantley County Commission was a group of people that cared about the river and they knew that this was a problem that needed a solution. For another,

people were using the Satilla and Little Satilla as highways to get to private property they wanted to ride around on. They'd put in the river at a bridge and drive a long way—5 or 6 miles—down the channel to trespass on somebody's property. This ordinance made all that illegal."

It wasn't long before Brantley County's new ordinance got statewide attention. It wasn't just South Georgia rivers that were being affected by irresponsible ATV use. Trout

streams in North Georgia were being treated poorly by ATV riders as well.

According to Rogers, "Trout Unlimited really kicked in support for the statewide bill and brought the support of some state Senators from North Georgia like Chip Rogers and Jim Butterworth."

"Down in South Georgia, people were riding their ATVs on the banks and in the river when it was low enough in the summer. Up in those north Georgia trout



*Photo by Satilla Riverkeeper. Satilla River at US 1 bridge north of Waycross. Several Redbreast beds lie within 10 feet of the ATV tracks.*

streams, people were riding in them all year long and just destroying the trout habitat. HB 207 passing is a win-win for everybody," said Representative Sims.

Passage of this measure took four years of diligent work by House and Senate legislators, the Satilla and Flint Riverkeeper organizations, the Georgia Wildlife Federation, Georgia Trout Unlimited, and many others, including DNR Commissioner Mark Williams (who was a Brantley County legislator for much of the process).

Now that HB 207 is a law, enforcement is the key to keeping motorized vehicles out of Georgia's rivers and streams. If you see someone riding an ATV on a road, the shoulder of a road or in a river or stream, chances are they are breaking the law (although it should be noted that the law does not apply to roads or streams on private property and there are exemptions for certain types of ATV use). This activity can be reported to any state enforcement agency—local police, the DNR, highway patrol, etc. So keep an eye out!

Visit this website for a look at HB 207: [www1.legis.ga.gov/legis/2009\\_10/fulltext/hb207.htm](http://www1.legis.ga.gov/legis/2009_10/fulltext/hb207.htm).

# River Hero: Chandra Brown, former Ogeechee Riverkeeper

**C**handra Brown was the founding Riverkeeper of the Ogeechee Riverkeeper organization and recently retired as their Executive Director and Riverkeeper. Over the past ten years, Chandra implemented programs to monitor streams, educated the public on stream preservation, and advocated for clean water in the Canoochee and Ogeechee rivers. Under her leadership, Ogeechee Riverkeeper strengthened protection of wetland forests, helped secure lower mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants, and was a leader and successful coalition partner advocating for strong state and federal river protections including preventing the injection of chemically treated sewage into Georgia's groundwater.

The Ogeechee River, and its major tributary the Canoochee River, are two of Georgia's natural gems. These beautiful blackwater rivers flow freely through eastern Georgia, draining a 5,540 square-mile basin that encompasses wetlands, forests, farms, and scores of towns and cities, including Statesboro, flowing to the Atlantic Ocean south of Savannah. The freshwater streams in this river system are known as blackwater streams due to their dark, tea-colored water, caused by tannins from the swamps that surround the rivers. The rivers are also known for their "sugar sand" sand bars and beaches, where families and fishermen have gathered for generations to enjoy these natural treasures.

Within the basin, hundreds of thousands of Georgians rely on the rivers, their tributaries, and underlying aquifers for drinking water. The Ogeechee and Canoochee rivers also support a diversity of wildlife, offer many opportunities for recreation, supply water for agricultural and industrial uses, and carry off wastewater. In short, these rivers are perhaps the most distinctive natural features in the region and certainly among its most important natural resources.

Some have called the Ogeechee and Canoochee

rivers "enchanting," "intimate, beautiful, and serene," and even "pristine." And yet, due to increasing pressures from agribusiness, animal processing operations, population growth, and water withdrawals, both rivers have undergone drastic changes in water quality and are facing serious ecological decline.

To reverse this trend, the Ogeechee Riverkeeper was formed. Their mission is to protect, preserve and improve the water quality of the Ogeechee River basin. Chandra worked with her board and staff to build an organization that now includes thousands of members and supporters and worked together with them to keep our waterways clean and protect these rivers. What began as several small groups of people working to protect their corners of the watershed has now grown into a mature and cohesive movement to ensure clean water throughout all communities in the Ogeechee watershed.

Chandra showed great courage and thoughtfulness in her role, and under her watchful eye, it was no longer "business as usual" for polluters in her watershed. The group stopped polluting landfills, sewage dumps and industries, advocated for cleaner and healthier communities, educated children about our waters, and grew its membership to over 2,000 members committed to a clean water movement for their rivers.

Chandra, her husband Doug, and daughter Marley welcomed baby Virginia to their family in April. Chandra will receive GreenLaw's Environmental Hero Award in October. The organization continues her legacy with new Riverkeeper Dianna Wedincamp and Executive Director Emily Markesteyn, who have led a valiant effort to track down the culprit of a massive fish kill in May of this year, and hold them accountable. To learn more about what you can do to get involved and support the Ogeechee Riverkeeper visit [www.ogeecheeriverkeeper.org](http://www.ogeecheeriverkeeper.org).



*Chandra Brown, former Ogeechee Riverkeeper*

## Volunteer With Your Local River Group

Visit our website at [www.garivers.org/protect-your-river/discover-a-local-river-group.html](http://www.garivers.org/protect-your-river/discover-a-local-river-group.html)

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## Calendar of Events

October, 2011  
Rivers Alive Clean Up Month  
Sign up for a local river clean up!  
<http://riversalive.org>

October 11, 2011  
"Drifting Into Darien" Book Launch  
event with Janisse Ray  
Athens, GA, 7pm  
See page 4

June 16-22, 2012  
Paddle Georgia 2012  
Altamaha River  
Registration opens in February

## Join Georgia River Network

### Type of Membership:

- \$1,000 River Hero    \$500 River Guardian  
 \$250 River Supporter    \$100 River Friend  
 \$50 River Watcher (*Family Membership*)    \$35 Individual River Enthusiast



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