

# Tailwaters Tango

June 25

**Distance:** 17 miles

**Obstacles/Rapids:** **Mile 2** Rescue Rock Rapid—This mild rapid is easily navigated. If the boat in front of you meets with success, follow their path. If the boat in front of you takes a swim, take a different route! Safety boats will be stationed at this rapid to assist with any problems.

**Restroom Facilities:** Mile 0            Buford Dam  
Mile 5                Settles Bridge  
Mile 13              Abbotts Bridge  
Mile 17              Medlock Bridge

**Points of Interest:** **Mile 0**--Buford Dam—Begun in 1950 and completed in 1956, this U.S. Army Corps of Engineer Facility changed the face of the river and the face of Metro Atlanta when the reservoir finally filled in 1958.

**Mile 1**--Buford Trout Hatchery—Here because of Buford Dam. Water flowing through the dam off the bottom of Lake Lanier is a bone-chilling 50-degrees Fahrenheit and trout love it. Water is pumped from the river to the hatchery's raceways where rainbow and brown trout are bred. The fish are then released to the Chattahoochee. The Chattahoochee tailwaters fishery which stretches from the dam to Atlanta hosts an estimated 115,000 fishing trips that add up to \$10. 5 million for the local economy.

**Mile 5**--Settles Bridge—Here you'll see the remains of an old iron bridge that once joined Fulton and Gwinnett counties. Further downriver, you'll pass beneath Littles Ferry Bridge—the site of a great bank robbery getaway in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two thieves who'd just robbed a Gwinnett County bank made their escape across the bridge here. Upon reaching the Fulton County side, they reportedly stopped, hopped out and tossed the timber planks of the bridge into the river, rendering the bridge impassable

**Mile 11**--Rogers Bridge—Another iron bridge. This was the last operating iron bridge between Buford Dam and Atlanta. The bridge carried cars across the river into the late 1970s.

**Mile 15**--Atlanta Athletic Club—Located on river right just upstream from Medlock Bridge, this is the first of several upscale, gated communities located on the banks of the river in North Fulton County.

## **Narrative:**

This section of river flows through several units of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, a national park that encompasses some 4200 acres along the river between Buford Dam and Atlanta. In 17 miles you will witness, in microcosm, the trends now impacting rural communities across the country. Here, 100-year-old farms share property lines with multi-unit residential developments. If by chance, there has been a recent rain, you will also witness the impacts of land development on the river and its tributaries. At James Creek and Suwanee Creek, you might find the red, sediment-choked water of these tributaries mingling with the clear, blue-green tailrace of the river.

Despite the sediment load contributed by tributaries, trout are thriving in the tailrace between Buford Dam and Morgan Falls Dam, so much so that researchers have documented trout reproduction in the river. The state is currently studying the tailwaters fishery to develop protections that will enable the trout to continue to thrive. The primary threat to this fishery is land development. When too much of the land surface becomes covered with roads, parking lots and buildings, the stormwater runoff generated during rain events can dramatically raise the temperature of the river, making it an inhospitable place for cold water species like trout.

Of course, Buford Dam has fueled the growth that threatens the very fishery it created. Because of Buford Dam Metro Atlanta has been able to grow by leaps and bounds. Without it, Atlanta would be a water-poor city not unlike western cities like Las Vegas and Los Angeles. A clipping from a 1958 Atlanta Journal says it all. In the throws of an extended drought, the newspaper reported: “ Because of the reserve supplies of water turned into the river by Buford dam, the river has been full and in the flush of health...Atlanta water users should give thanks for the big impounding system and the water it doles out each day to keep the river at proper level.”