



MEDIA ADVISORY

Georgia River Network

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Opportunities for interviews, photographs, and trip participation available prior to, and throughout, the event. Please contact to arrange.

300 People Prepare for Week-Long Canoe/Kayak Adventure

Paddle Georgia 2006, on the Etowah & Coosa Rivers, begins Saturday

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - Georgia River Network (GRN) is gearing up for Paddle Georgia 2006, a week-long canoe camping adventure on the Etowah and Coosa rivers from June 24 – June 30, 2006.

Following up on the wildly successful Paddle Georgia 2005 in which some 300 people paddled all, or portions, of a 110-mile, seven-day course on the Chattahoochee River, Paddle Georgia participants have set their eyes on the Etowah River, northwest Georgia's paddling gem. This year approximately 260 people are expected to make the entire 120-mile, seven day journey from Dawsonville to Rome. 300 people total are expected to participate in the event throughout the week.

Fashioned after the annual Bicycle Ride Across Georgia, Paddle Georgia is more than just a canoe trip. The event will include camping, nightly games and entertainment, educational programs on the river's cultural and natural history, tours of facilities located along the river such as coal-fired power plants, and even a research program in which participants will help scientists collect chemical and biological data to give a snapshot of the current health of the Etowah.

The Paddle Georgia 2006 route takes paddlers through the scenic Dawson State Forest, through Georgia's fastest growing counties in Forsyth and Cherokee, on to Lake Allatoona, past the Etowah Indian Mounds Historic Site, beyond the shores of antebellum plantations and into the ghosts of Northwest Georgia's riverboat history, finishing at Lock and Dam Park west of Rome.

Over the week, participants will paddle through portions of Dawson, Forsyth, Cherokee, Bartow, and Floyd counties, passing through Canton, Cartersville, and Rome.

"This is truly a paddle through time. The history on the Etowah is very visible and very much alive," said Joe Cook, the coordinator of the event. "From the 1,000-year-old Native American fish weirs to the Euharlee Covered Bridge, participants will really get a history lesson. And, if it's anything like last year's trip on the Chattahoochee, they'll have a darn good time too."

Participants will paddle each day and then be shuttled by buses and vans to nearby facilities where participants will camp, enjoy games, entertainment, educational programs and catered dinners and breakfasts. Along the event route, participants will also have the opportunity to tour facilities located along the river such as the Etowah Indian Mounds Historic Site and Georgia Power's Plant Bowen, a coal-fired power generating facility near Euharlee.

Paddlers will have the opportunity to participate in a scientific research project made possible through a grant from Georgia Power. Under the direction of professional scientists, biologists and naturalists, participants will perform chemical and biological water quality assessments of the Etowah and its tributaries as they make their way down river. The purpose is to give a snapshot of the river's health.

The trip is suitable for novice paddlers as well as experienced paddlers and is open to any person-powered vessel, although canoes and kayaks are best suited for the trip.

"We expect a lot of families," Cook said. "A week-long canoe trip is not an easy thing for a family to plan. This trip allows a family to participate in a great adventure without having to fret over all the logistics."

The trip begins Friday, June 23, with a kick off dinner in Dawsonville and ends June 30 with a River's End Celebration at Lock and Dam Park in Floyd County.

The idea for the event was hatched during Cook's 100-day, 540-mile canoe trip down the Chattahoochee in 1995.

"That trip from the mountains to the Gulf of Mexico was an incredible experience. It was really a lesson in how a river works, how it changes on its journey to the sea and how much it provides for us," Cook said. "Ever since that trip, I've wanted other people to experience Georgia's rivers. The best way to understand and appreciate a river is to get on it and follow in its path."

In 2000, Cook and his former wife, Monica, published a coffee-table book, *River Song*, which details the couple's adventures on the river. In 2002, the Cooks also paddled the 160-mile length of the Etowah River with their three-year-old daughter.

Georgia River Network's Executive Director, April Ingle, and Administration and Outreach Director, Dana Skelton, latched on to the idea of a paddling adventure in the spring of 2004 and decided such an event would be a tremendous service to Georgia citizens.

This year's event sold out in mid-April. The event is limited to the first 270 registrants. Registration fees for the full event are \$185 for adults, \$165 for seniors and college students and \$130 for children 8-17. Children under 8 paddle for free. Paddle Georgia is also available to a limited number of people wishing to do just a portion of the trip, or day paddlers. Discounts are offered for Georgia River Network and American Canoe Association members.

Paddle Georgia thru-paddler registration fee includes a T-shirt, boat decal, pocket-size dry box, a ticket to the kick-off feast and party and the journey's end feast and celebration, a year's membership to Georgia River Network, camping facilities, shuttles to campsites, maps and river descriptions, entertainment, activities, educational programs and safety services. Day-paddler registration includes all of the above except tickets to kick-off feast and journey's end feast.

Each year, a portion of the Paddle Georgia proceeds will benefit a watershed group protecting the river. In 2006, the Coosa River Basin Initiative (CRBI) in Rome will receive a portion of the proceeds. CRBI, or the Upper Coosa Riverkeeper, is a non-profit organization with the mission of informing and empowering citizens so that they may become involved in the process of creating a cleaner, healthier, more economically viable Coosa River Basin.

Participants will also have the opportunity to win prizes through Paddle Georgia's Canoe-a-thon in which participants solicit donations on a per-mile basis to benefit GRN and CRBI. Participants generating the most Canoe-a-thon donations will receive prizes, and any participant generating more than \$360 in Canoe-a-thon pledges will have their registration fee reimbursed. The top prize this year will be a new Wenonah Canoe, donated by the Minnesota-based boat manufacturer.

Paddle Georgia sponsors include Georgia Power, Lake Allatoona Preservation Authority, Chattahoochee Nature Center, Goldkist, Georgia Adopt-A-Stream, Project WET, Georgia Canoe Association, Coosa River Basin Initiative, Atlanta Sea Kayakers, Wenonah Canoe, Patagonia, Earthfare, REI, Outside World, The Dam Store, High Country Outfitters, Paddler's Paradise Canoe Shop, Current Designs and Go With the Flow.

Paddle Georgia is a project of Georgia River Network (GRN), the only statewide environmental non-profit organization solely dedicated to the conservation of Georgia's waters. GRN helps people organize to protect and restore rivers and watersheds by building local group capacity and providing statewide water policy analysis.

For more information, contact Joe Cook at 706-235-1170 or via e-mail at joe@joecook.net or contact April Ingle at 706-549-4508 or via e-mail at ingle@garivers.org or visit the Paddle Georgia website by going to www.garivers.org and clicking on the Paddle Georgia icon.

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