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Georgia River Network Celebrates 15th Year of Paddle Georgia with Journey on the Withlacoochee and Suwannee Rivers

A week-long canoe/kayak adventure from Valdosta, GA to Mayo, FL set for June 15-21

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Feb. 4, 2019 This summer, Georgia River Network (GRN) will celebrate its 15th annual home-grown canoe-kayak-paddleboard adventure, the largest of its kind in the country, by going where Paddle Georgia has never gone before—across state lines.

Paddle Georgia 2019 will begin June 15 in Valdosta, Georgia on the Withlacoochee River and end June 21 and 92 miles downstream on the Suwannee River near Mayo, Florida. Registration for the event opens Feb. 7 at <https://garivers.org/paddle-georgia/>. Organizers expect more than 300 people to participate.

Since the Athens-based river protection group began organizing its annual, week-long Paddle Georgia trips in 2005, it has ventured on 13 Georgia rivers and covered some 1400 miles, but no journey has ever ventured into a neighboring state, though multiple Georgia rivers flow into Alabama, Florida and Tennessee.

"In a day when disputes over water with our neighbor states steal the headlines, we decided it was time to highlight the fact that rivers care not a wit for arbitrary human boundaries and that our water is a shared resource," said Joe Cook, Paddle Georgia Coordinator. "Of course, we also get to see some of the most beautiful and storied rivers in Georgia and Florida."

The Suwannee, celebrated in Stephen Foster's song, is well known. With its origins in the Okefenokee Swamp, the Suwannee sports blackwater and moss-draped tupelo and cypress tree-lined banks and is among Florida's most popular paddling destinations. Though lesser known, the Withlacoochee serves up the same heavy dose of Deep South river vibe.

But Paddle Georgia organizers are emphasizing the surprises participants will find along these rivers. The Withlacoochee, despite flowing through flat terrain is home to unexpected shoals, and both rivers are dotted with beautiful, cold, blue hole springs, some of which have been named among the best swimming holes in North America.

Participants will have the opportunity to visit Florida's Madison Blue Springs and Lafayette Blue Springs state parks as they travel through Lowndes and Brooks counties in Georgia and Hamilton, Madison, Lafayette and Suwannee counties in Florida.

The group will camp at Grassy Pond Recreation Area in Lake Park, Georgia and Camp Suwannee in Dowling Park, Florida. Participants traditionally tent camp during the adventure, but facilities at both campsites will give paddlers the opportunity to bed down in hostel-style lodging.

GRN will commemorate the event's 15th anniversary by awarding 1500-mile paddler decals to those who have participated in every trip since 2005.

"We have many paddlers that return year after year," Cook said, "That's one of the special things about Paddle Georgia. There's lots of camaraderie and paddlers support one another. Over the years, it has become something of a family reunion as much as a paddle trip."

Registration fees are \$425 for adults, \$230 for children 8-17 and \$30 for children 7 and under. A very limited number of spaces are available for "Paddle Georgia Lite," an abbreviated version of the trip that includes either the first two days of the trip (June 15-16 on the Withlacoochee) or the last two days of the trip (June 20-21 on the Suwannee). Registration fees for Paddle Georgia Lite are \$120, \$70 and \$15. Additional registration information is available at <https://garivers.org/paddle-georgia/>

Billed as an environmental education adventure for the whole family, the trip is designed to connect people with Georgia's rivers. In addition to paddling about 13 miles each day, participants will enjoy catered meals and learn about the river through programs about the river's ecology and cultural history as well as special tours of historic sites and industrial facilities

Paddle Georgia serves as a fundraiser for GRN and local watershed protection groups. Since the inaugural Paddle Georgia in 2005, GRN has introduced more than 4,300 paddlers to Georgia's rivers and raised more than \$430,000 for river protection projects. WWALS Watershed Coalition (WWALS) and its projects, Suwannee Riverkeeper and the Withlacoochee and Little River Water Trail, will be the beneficiaries of this year's journey.

Sponsors of the event include Hennessy Land Rover, Cedar Creek Park and Outdoor Center, CYA Insurance Agency, Oglethorpe Power, Cary S. Baxter & Harbin, LLC; R. Terry Pate CPA, China Clay Producers Association, Colonial Pipeline, Outside World Outfitters, Brown and Caldwell, Hike Inn, The Rain Barrel Depot, Fruit of the Loom, Jerzees, Solar Tyme USA, Patagonia and EarthShare Georgia. Partners include American Canoe Association, Café Campesino, WWALS, Suwannee Riverkeeper, Georgia Canoeing Association, Georgia Adopt-A-Stream and Project WET.

Founded in 1998, Georgia River Network is a non-profit 501c3 organization that serves as the voice of Georgia's rivers and works to empower everyone to enjoy, connect with and advocate for economically vital and clean flowing rivers.

Those interested in participating can get more information at the Paddle Georgia website at http://www.garivers.org/paddle_georgia or by contacting Joe Cook at 706-409-0128 or joecookpg@gmail.com, or contacting Dana Skelton at 706-549-4508 or info@garivers.org.

Photos of past events are available upon request. If you would like to arrange a photo shoot or interview on the river, please contact Joe Cook or Dana Skelton.

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