

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

We're Go for: Third Annual Mayor and Chairman's Paddle, Withlacoochee River

Valdosta, Georgia, February 17, 2021 — "Water levels are good, the weather prediction is satisfactory, so we're Go for paddling the Withlacoochee River this weekend!" said Suwannee Riverkeeper John S. Quarterman.

Lowndes County Chairman Bill Slaughter said, "It's warm enough this time, so good paddling!"

Valdosta Mayor Scott James said, "So we're all agreed: Saturday, February 19, 2022. Come as early as 8 AM to get on the shuttle."

"Seeing a child experience something for the first time is life-changing. We have this opportunity every time a young person gets out exploring the natural world," said Bill Holt, Vice President of Operations, Valdosta Boys & Girls Club, which is providing shuttle vans.

"Dress warmly in layers because it will be in the fifties when we start but in the mid-sixties later, and you'll be getting warmer from paddling. The water temperature is in the fifties, so bring a change of clothes in a dry bag, just in case. It will be fun!" said Bobby McKenzie, leader of this WWALS expedition.

"We had fun last year, and this year we listed it in our calendar!" said Davy Shaw, Recreation Coordinator, Valdosta State University CORE Outdoors.



Photos: Russell Allen McBride 2020-01-18, John S. Quarterman 2022-03-27

We will paddle eleven miles, past the future site of Troupville River Camp and Nature Park, along the west side of the most populous city in the Suwannee River Basin, past Valdosta's clean outfall of its Withlacoochee Wastewater Treatment Plant, with many creeks, oaks, cypresses, pines, fish, turtles, and maybe an alligator, down to Spook Bridge, so scary it has its own movie.

Valdosta Mayor Scott James added, "I am excited to partner once again with WWALS, plus this time with Lowndes County, to show people our fabulous blackwater rivers, only a few miles from City Hall and VSU. Valdosta is proud to

hardly ever have a sewage spill anymore, and now we're working on eliminating trash from the river. We remain committed to preventing any issues that may impact our Withlacoochee River. I invite everyone to come out and join us for a day of fellowship on the river."

"Come on down to where I used to fish as a child, and with my children," said Lowndes County Chairman Bill Slaughter. "I've spoken at this paddle every year, and this year I hope you will paddle."

"Welcome to this one of our many paddles," said WWALS Executive Director Gretchen Quarterman. "We have at least one daytime river paddle a month, in Florida or Georgia, plus an evening Full Moon paddle at Banks Lake, near Lakeland, GA. We'll be testing temperatures with an infrared thermometer as people arrive. If you're ill in any way, please stay home."

Come as early as 8 AM, Saturday, February 19, 2022, to Troupville Boat Ramp, drop off your boats, and drive to Spook Bridge. Two 15-seat vans provided by the Boys & Girls Club will shuttle you back to Troupville. This will be an outside event, but riders taking advantage of the shuttle service, please wear a mask.

"I will be recording 360-degree views to go on Earthviews, where everyone can see them," added Bobby McKenzie. "And if the water is too high, or the weather will be bad, don't worry, we'll reschedule, as we did last year."

"Yes, this time I told the Mayor he had to share, so it's the Mayor and Chairman's Paddle, meaning the Chairman of the Lowndes County Commission," added Suwannee Riverkeeper John S. Quarterman. "All elected officials present, from both Florida and Georgia, will have three minutes each to speak, both at the put-in and at the midway point. Don't worry: only a few of them will. But you can paddle up to them and ask questions. Just remember to stay six feet apart. Wear a mask if you get any closer to anybody not in your party, either on land or water."

Take a look at the signs by the boat ramp for the WWALS Withlacoochee and Little River Water Trail. They show the whole trail and what you can expect to see near Troupville Boat Ramp.

The paddle starts at the site of historic Troupville, the Lowndes County seat before Valdosta. The entrance road is the old north-south Broad Street of Troupville, which continues into the woods. That greatly simplifies planning for the future Troupville River Park. Paddling a few thousand feet, we come to the Little River Confluence with the Withlacoochee, with its view of rivers in three directions. The Confluence is in the private Land Between the Rivers (LBTR), now with a conservation easement and in negotiations for sale to Valdosta or Lowndes County to become part of Troupville River Nature Park. Just upstream on the Withlacoochee is the future site of a paddle boat take-out for Troupville River Camp, with screened-in sleeping platforms and bathrooms with hot and cold running water and air conditioning. Paddle on down the Withlacoochee River and see the turtles, birds, fish, and cypress and pine trees.

The clean water outfall from Valdosta's Withlacoochee Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) makes an impressive waterfall. Valdosta now tests three times a week on forty river miles from US 41 to the state line, which is one big way we know the river is clean from *E. coli* most of the time, along with twice-weekly downstream testing by Madison Health in Florida, and tests by WWALS, plus occasional bacterial tests and DNA marker and chemical tracer data from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. WWALS will also test the water quality from the river the Thursday before the paddle, as we do every Thursday, with results published Friday. See <https://wwals.net/issues/testing/>

We will pass the site of an old railroad bridge, several creeks, and the notorious Sabal Trail methane pipeline. Stay left at County Line Shoals, just upstream from US 84. Just below US 84 is the CSX railroad bridge, and around the last bend is Spook Bridge, so famous it has its own movie. We take out on the left bank just below the bridge.

When: Gather 8 AM, launch 10 AM, end 4 PM, Saturday, February 19, 2022.

Put-In: [Troupville Boat Ramp](#), 19664 Valdosta Highway, Valdosta, GA 31602: on GA 133 off I-75 exit 18 in Lowndes County.

Directions: Head west from Valdosta on GA 133 (St. Augustine Road), cross I-75 and the Withlacoochee River, and at the light for Val Tech Road turn left into the VLPRA park around Troupville Boat Ramp.

GPS: [30.851842, -83.346536](#)

Take-Out: [Spook Bridge](#), west from Valdosta on US 84, left onto Ousley Road, right onto Old Quitman Highway, stop at the gate, and park beside the road. If you have relatives who can shuttle you back to the put-in, that also works.

“Thanks again to The Langdale Company for riverside access through their private property at the midway lunch stop, and at the Spook Bridge takeout, and for water quality testing,” said Suwannee Riverkeeper John S. Quarterman.

Bring: Face masks for the shuttle, warm clothes, a change of dry clothes in a dry bag, the usual personal flotation device, boat, paddles, food, drinking water, and first aid kit. Also trash pickers and trash bags; every WWALS outing is also a cleanup.

Free: This outing is free to WWALS members, and \$10 (ten dollars) for non-members. You can pay the \$10 at the outing, or online: <https://wwals.net/donations/#outings>

We recommend you support the work of WWALS by becoming a WWALS member today!
<https://wwals.net/donations/#join>

Event: <https://www.facebook.com/events/594912931835711/>

<https://www.meetup.com/Withlacoochee-Alapaha-Suwannee-Rivers-WWALS-Outings/events/281745083/>

Paddle distance: 11 river miles

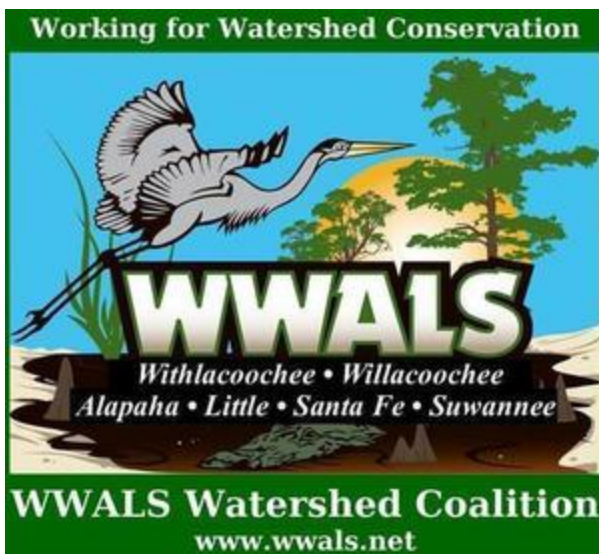
Paddle duration: 6 hours; actually probably much less, since the river is high and fast.

Expedition leader: Bobby McKenzie. Do what he says for safety and enjoyment.

Backup: In case of weather or high or low water, we will postpone, probably several weeks later, as we did last year.

About WWALS: Founded in June 2012, WWALS Watershed Coalition, Inc. (**WWALS**) advocates for conservation and stewardship of the Withlacoochee, Willacoochee, Alapaha, Little, Santa Fe, and Suwannee River watersheds in south Georgia and north Florida through education, awareness, environmental monitoring, and citizen activities. Since 2016, John S. Quarterman is the **Suwannee Riverkeeper®**, which is a staff position and a project of WWALS as the member of Waterkeeper® Alliance for the Suwannee River Basin.

Contact: John S. Quarterman, Suwannee Riverkeeper
WWALS Watershed Coalition



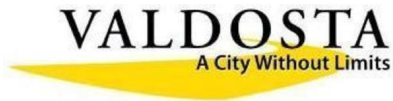
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