

[Alapaha River Water Trail](#) >

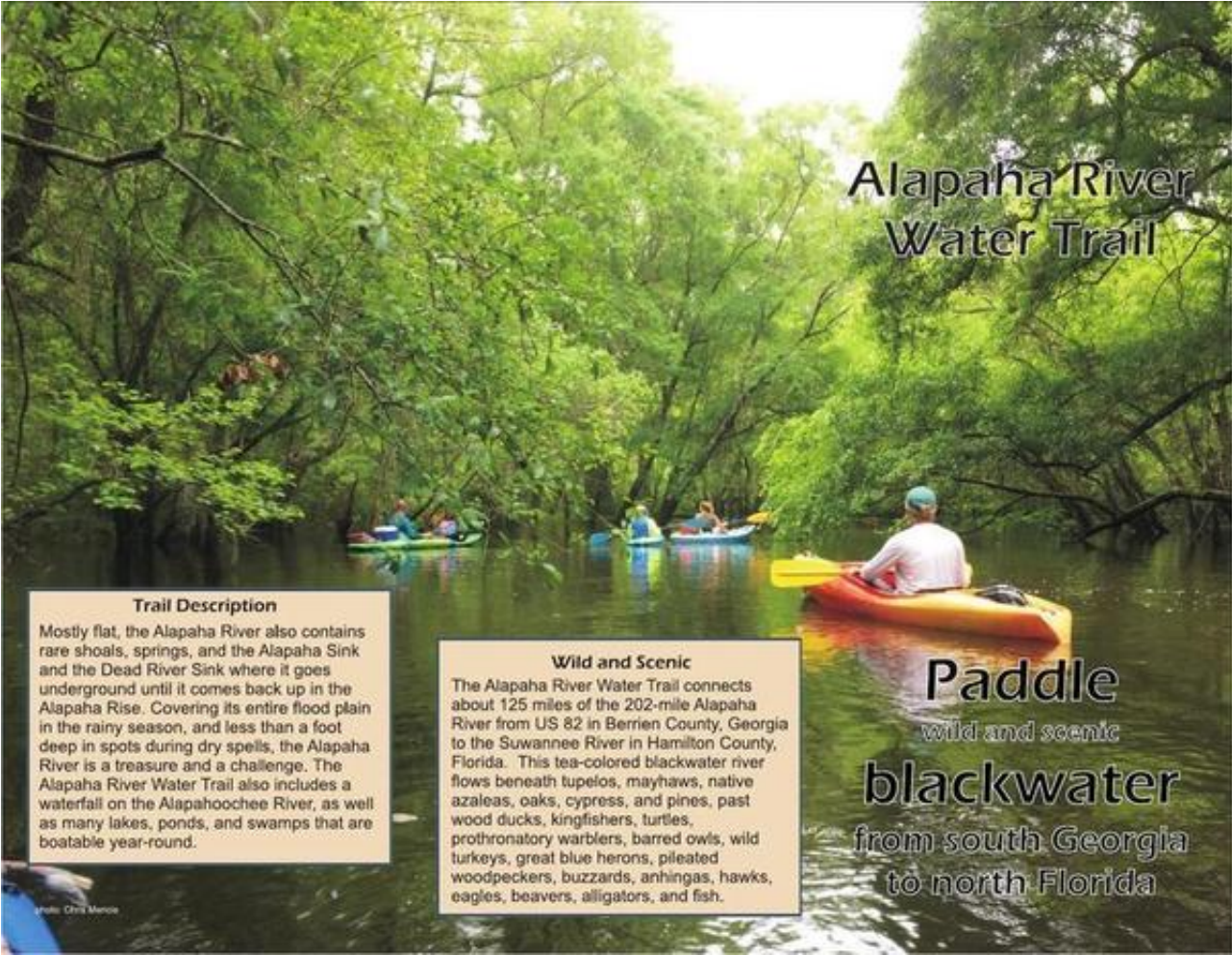
## Final Progress Report ARWT 2015-05-15

From: John S. Quarterman, President, WWALS Watershed Coalition, Inc.  
To: Dana Skelton, Director of Administration & Outreach, Georgia River Network  
Cc: Gwyneth Moody, Water Trails Coordinator, Georgia River Network

As requested in the grant contract, here is the final progress report for the Alapaha River Water Trail (ARWT).

Summary: WWALS has spent the entire \$500 grant amount on purchasing marketing materials to promote the project and encourage community use of the river. WWALS also raised an additional \$750 from other [sponsors](#), and spent most of those funds similarly; the remainder is for signs at access points. We have met all the [requirements of the grant contract](#), and we have already met [all the stated criteria](#) of a Water Trail except placing [signage](#) at access points. The members of the [Alapaha River Water Trail Committee](#) and WWALS continue to do more.

Unusual features of the ARWT include: the Alapaha River runs between two states (Georgia and Florida) with different legal and landowner situations. The Alapaha River Basin includes several tributary rivers: the Willacoochee River, Alapahoochee River, Dead River, and the Little Alapaha River, the last three of which and the Alapaha River itself at least sometimes disappear into sinks at the [Cody Scarp](#), a geological feature of north Florida that so far as we know has no parallel in Georgia. Water levels in all these rivers vary widely during the year, depending on rains, and WWALS publishes a web page with [water levels](#) at all the gauges on the Alapaha River, plus a table of boatable low and safe high levels at each gauge appears there and on the printed materials. Numerous [lakes, ponds, and swamps](#) in the Alapaha River watershed are boatable even when the rivers are too low or too high. Finally, an [Alapaha River Canoe Trail has already been established for more than 35 years](#), so there is already a history of many years of harmony between boaters and landowners. All these interesting features are incorporated into the Alapaha River Water Trail materials.



This is a wild and scenic river, and even experienced paddlers do not know all of it. We continue to hold numerous [outings](#) in the Alapaha River Watershed, ranging from [easy one-hour floats](#) to [expert exploration](#). Outings during the grant period so far have included two cleanups on the Alapaha River, one [upstream where the Water Trail begins at US 82](#), and one [downstream in the dry riverbed below the sinks](#), near the end of the Water Trail at the confluence with the Suwannee River. Plus several Committee members and other WWALS members attended an Adopt-A-Stream [water quality chemical and biological testing training and certification session](#).

We have held a successful December ARWT [Workshop](#) and we announced the winners of a high school logo contest for the Alapaha River Water Trail at our March ARWT [Conference](#), with news coverage in five different articles.

The rest of this report details these points.

### Progress

The GRN [Georgia Water Trails](#) page says:

*Georgia River Network considers a water trail established once there is a website and map for paddlers to reference. In addition, the trail must have a minimum of two accessible boat launches.*



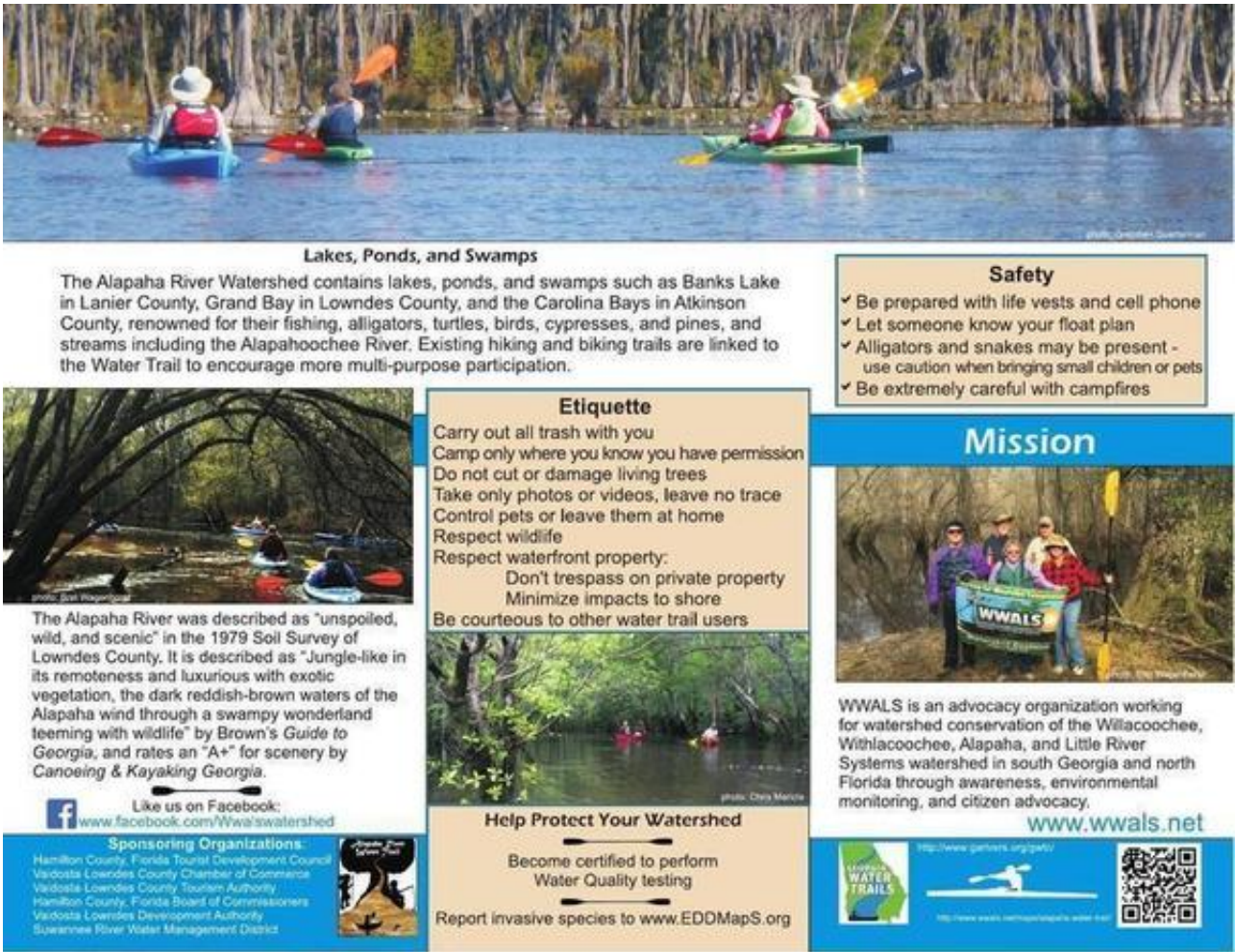
WWALS has met those three criteria.

Accounting

As required in the grant contract, WWALS has spent all of the grant funds on marketing materials. WWALS has also increased the funds available by 150% from two other sources, and has spent most of those funds similarly.

Amount	Date	From
\$500.00	2014-06-19	GRN
\$250.00	2014-10-26	Hamilton County, Florida Tourist Development Council
\$500.00	2014-11-05	Valdosta-Lowndes County Convention Center and Tourism Authority
\$1,250.00	Total	All sources
-\$852.87	2015-05-15	Printing
\$397.13	Remainder	

Printing: 5,000 copies of an 11x17 brochure, color on both sides, folding z-fold, and shipping. This brochure serves as brochure, map, and card all in one.



Website


On the WWALS website there is a page for the [Alapaha River Water Trail](#) (ARWT), with numerous links to related material. This is a website in the same sense as the [Georgia River Network Water Trails Website](#), which is hosted under the main GRN website. Nonetheless, the Committee is continually considering and implementing improvements to the ARWT website, including possibilities of different formats and even a separate domain name.

The ARWT website covers every topic from GRN's [web pages for each established Water Trail](#), plus some additional topics.

Additional topics include links to [live river level gauge graphs](#), numerous [Lakes, Ponds, and Swamps](#) in the Alapaha River watershed, and [Many Years of Harmony](#) among landowners and paddlers, considering that an Alapaha Canoe Trail was actually already established with maps, brochures, and prizes [in the 1970s](#) and is still listed in guidebooks.

Material from the new ARWT website is also used in a general WWALS brochure and in the new ARWT combination brochure, map, and card.





**Sinks or Siphons**

The Alapaha River undergoes a dramatic change about three miles downstream of Sasser Landing and one mile upstream from Jennings Bluff Launch. Through cavernous openings in the limestone the Alapaha River departs the river bed into two sinks or siphons and travels underground approximately 10 miles to the Alapaha Rise on the Suwannee River. During low water levels all of the river is taken into these siphons leaving the river bed downstream a sandy path, good for hiking, with occasional pockets of water. During medium and high water levels the sinks cannot take the entire volume of the river, allowing the excess water to flow to the Suwannee.

The upstream sink is on the west bank of the river and is known by several names, the Alapaha River Sink, the Suck Hole and Devil's Den.

The downstream sink (approx. ¼ mile downstream), known as the Dead River or the Siphon, is also on the west bank and is a narrow winding run, almost whitewater in nature, about ¼ mile long, dramatically ending with all the water in the run being violently sucked underground. Use caution when approaching this area.

**Water Levels**

Water levels vary and the river may be navigable only a few weeks or months per year. All the record high levels have been from January through April, but the Alapaha River can be high in almost any other month. When the Statenville gauge shows more than six feet, it is too high to paddle; less than two feet is too low.

**Summary Water Level Table**



Gauge	Flood	High	Low
Alapaha	16'	10'	7' *
Statenville	24'	6-9'	2' **
Jennings	83.5'	68'	65'

\* deadfalls a problem at lower water; seeking data  
\*\* dragging across shoals below 1.5'

**Alapaha River Water Trail**

Miles	Access Point	Miles to next	Paddle time	Notes	GPS Lat/Long
125.32	US 82	18.82	9.4	●	31.386278, -83.191609
106.5	GA 135 Atkinson	18.26	9.1	● ★	31.303791, -83.063091
88.24	GA 168 (Berrien Beach)	16.51	8.3	●	31.159076, -83.045554
71.73	Lanier Park	13.83	6.9	● ▲ ■	31.043011, -83.042564
57.9	Hotchkiss Road	1.14	0.6	● ★★	30.93669, -83.0406
56.76	Naylor Boat Ramp	0.13	0.1	● ★★★	30.92507, -83.03867
56.63	US 84	11.63	5.8	●	30.923559, -83.03701
45	Mayday	13.64	6.8	●	30.82827, -83.017179
31.36	Statenville Boat Ramp	10.26	5.1	● ●	30.70426, -83.03275
21.1	Sasser Landing	3.58	1.8	●	30.60071, -83.07326
17.52	Jennings Bluff Launch	17.92	9.0	● ▲	30.579864, -83.039308
-0.4	Gibson Park Ramp		0.0	● ● ● ▲ ■	30.437858, -83.093319

★ for low water use GA 135 Berrien  
★★ use Lanier side ONLY  
★★★ under construction, please check WWALS net for updates



**Legend:**

- Access
- Boat Ramp
- Restrooms
- Picnic
- ◆ Lakes
- ✓ Point of interest
- Parks
- ★ Trailhead
- Outfitters
- ▲ Camping
- Confluence
- ▼ Sinkhole

**Float Plans**

For the safety of you and your companions, always fill out a float plan form so emergency responders can locate you if an emergency occurs. Plan forms may be found at: <http://www.wwals.net/maps/alapaha-water-trail/float-plan>

Maps

In addition to the [pre-existing maps from the 1970s](#), WWALS has an ongoing [google map](#) made from a live working [spreadsheet](#) of information about the Alapaha River Water Trail. The spreadsheet and map include [a dozen public access points](#) on the Alapaha River, at least one in each of the six ARWT counties, plus some on lakes, ponds, and swamps.

We are also making the spreadsheet information available in [the online location requested by GRN](#). Since we keep quite a bit more information in our spreadsheet, such as mile markers, boatable low and safe high water levels, and tax assessor parcel numbers, we remove many fields and remap others with a program before inserting into the GRN spreadsheet. Plus we have added many new rows since the mid-term report, such as several Hiking Trails and a Waterfall.

Launches

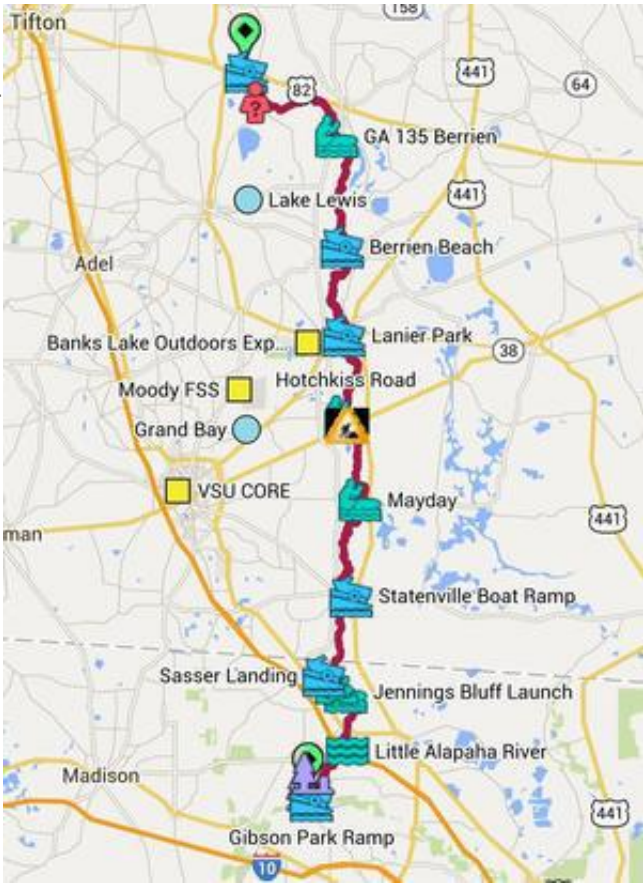
The Alapaha River has not two but [seven existing canoe launches or boat ramps](#), plus five other access points. All dozen public access points are in the spreadsheet and on the map.

Detailed Criteria

In addition, GRN has [a longer list of criteria](#). Here is that list, with progress by WWALS on the Alapaha River Water Trail for each item.

- [Trail is sponsored](#), maintained and promoted by a local entity or partnership.

The principal sponsor is WWALS, plus financial support from the Hamilton County, FL TDC and the Valdosta-Lowndes County Tourist Authority.



In addition, [we have](#) letters of support from the Hamilton County TDC, from the [Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce](#), and from the [Valdosta-Lowndes Development Authority](#). We have contacted the County Commissions of all the counties on the Alapaha River (Hamilton County in Florida, and Lowndes, Echols, Lanier, Berrien, and Atkinson in Georgia), plus their county seats, some of their other cities, and some of the chambers of commerce or development authorities. So far we have one resolution of support from the [Hamilton County, FL Board of Commissioners](#). The Lowndes County Commission promises another resolution of support when they finish their Naylor Boat Ramp; earliest likely completion September 2015. Specific members of the Alapaha River Water Trail Committee have volunteered to continue contact with each of the counties, plus with other [affected organizations](#).

- [Publicly accessible areas](#) that paddlers can legally access and safely unload boats and park vehicles.

All twelve access points fit this item.

- [River access sites are appropriately spaced](#) apart on the river so that they may be reasonably paddled in a few hours or a full day.

Spacing is a bit of an issue, since some access points are quite far from the next one on this 125-mile Water Trail. We are researching additional access points by contacting likely landowners. Plus at least one county is considering buying land for another access point.

- [Depending on the length of the trail](#), water access to public overnight camping sites.

In Florida, [camping on SRWMD lands is free with a permit](#). In Georgia, technically rough camping on islands is legal with no reservation, permit, or fee, and we are attempting to identify specific islands where landowners don't mind camping. In addition, there is camping at [Grand Bay Wildlife Management Area](#).

- [Information about the water trail provided](#) to paddlers through a website and maps created by the sponsoring entity

See the [Alapaha River Water Trail](#) website.

- [Signage/ kiosks](#) placed at all water trail access points that include: river etiquette information, paddling safety information, and a map of the water trail.

Affordable signs and kiosks are a major topic of Alapaha River Water Trail Committee discussions, since the available funds will not pay for a dozen signs. Hamilton County, Florida has funded its own kiosks for two access points, and WWALS will be able to place ARWT materials there. The Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority (VLPRA) has promised a kiosk at the Naylor Boat Ramp when finished, with ability to place ARWT materials there.

Outings

WWALS has monthly outings on our rivers, especially on the Withlacoochee River, the Little River, and the Alapaha River. Previous outings on the Alapaha River included:

- 19 January 2013 upstream from private land near Willacoochee, Georgia.
- 17 May 2014 [Lewis Lake Rookery near Nashville, GA](#)

Since we received the GRN grant, we have been focussing most [outings](#) on the Alapaha River, plus informal outings or pictures by WWALS members, including:

- [2014-07-24: from Lanier County Hotchkiss Road to US 84](#), the site of the park funded and in development by Lowndes County: WWALS Outing
- 2014-09-03: [Pictures of Alapahoochee River at GA 135/141](#) by ARWT Committee member April Huntley.
- 2014-09-16: [In Search of Alapaha's End](#) “a last minute Labor Day trip down the Alapaha in search of where it goes under ground or dries up”, by ARWT Committee member Bret Wagenhorst.
- [2014-09-27: Rivers Alive Cleanup at US 82 on the Alapaha River](#): WWALS Outing.
- 2014-10-05: WWALS table at [Second annual Flatlander Canoe and Kayak Race at Lake Irma in Lakeland, GA](#) got good contacts and information for the Alapaha River Water Trail.
- 2014-10-26: [Dead River Sink Outing](#), on a very odd tributary of the Alapaha River near Jennings, FL: WWALS Outing
- 2014-11-01: Alapaha River Water Trail mentioned at [Alabama Sierra Club annual retreat](#) in Eufaula, AL by WWALS president John S. Quarterman.
- 2014-11-04: [Hamilton County, FL Board of Commissioners considered a Water Trail resolution but tabled it](#).
- 2014-11-08: [WWALS at Alapaha \(Georgia\) Station Celebration](#), assisting with their theme of River Days.
- 2014-11-13: [Committee members Chris and Deanna Mericle hiked to the Alapaha River Sink](#) and reported back with pictures.
- [2014-11-13: Letter of support from the Hamilton County, FL Tourist Development Council \(TDC\)](#).
- [2014-11-18: Hamilton County, FL Board of Commissioners unanimously passed a resolution supporting the Alapaha River Water Trail](#).
- [2014-12-20: Cleanup on Alapaha River near Jasper, FL: WWALS Outing](#)
- [2015-01-10: Water testing certification at Reed Bingham](#); thanks to Adopt-A-Stream, Golden Triangle RC&D and Margaret Tyson of the Ochlockonee River Water Trail for organizing this chemical and biological testing training and certification.
- [2015-01-17: Expert paddle on the Alapaha River from US 82: WWALS Outing 2015-01-17](#), exploring one of the more difficult areas of the Water Trail, including cataloging deadfalls.
- [2015-01-21: Letter of support from Valdosta-Lowndes Development Authority](#)
- [2015-02-15: Statenville to Sasser Landing](#)
- [2015-02-17](#): Deadline for high school student submissions to logo contest for Alapaha River Water Trail
- [2015-03-14: Easy paddle upstream from GA 135](#)
- [2015-05-25: Paddle with Gwyneth Moody of GRN](#) to the Lake Lewis Bird Rookery and upstream on the Alapaha River from GA 168 near Berrien Beach.

The WWALS May Outing is our third annual BIG Little River Paddle Race at Reed Bingham State Park on the Little River, a tributary of the Withlacoochee River, which also flows into the Suwannee.

After that, three more Alapaha River outings are already announced, in addition to the special May outing for GRN Water Trails Coordinator Gwyneth Moody; see [the WWALS Outings spreadsheet](#).

Meetings

WWALS held a Water Trail workshop in the fall, and a Water Trail Conference in March.

- [2014-12-13: Organizational Workshop](#): 18 attendees participated in three hours of talks with extensive questions and answers.
- [2015-03-14](#): Water Trail Conference, emphasizing organizing for ongoing upkeep, outreach, and expansion after establishment, plus announcement of high school ARWT logo contest winners, selected by a panel of judges, with prizes donated by local businesses, and five news stories.

WWALS thanks Georgia River Network for the ARWT grant.

And stay tuned for the [Withlacoochee River Water Trail](#).