

The Gauley Access Mess

The mess gets worse. Now, Appalachian Whitewater and Class VI (AW/VI), who own all of the major access points along river right, have decided that they will close all access to private boaters.

AW/VI wants the Park Service to buy their Woods Ferry access property, but have asked a price for it that is more than double the appraised value. The Park Service, by federal law, cannot pay more than the appraised value. So AW/VI wants to increase the value of their access by creating the biggest private boater crisis they can create.

Boaters respond:

A new group of boaters, Friends of the Gauley River (FOGR), has been created, and is working on solutions. FOGR arranged a meeting with Congressman Rahall on July 8, which included Passages to Adventure, FORVA (Friends of the Rivers of Va), FFV (Float Fishermen of Va), the NPS, the WV Wildwater Association and American Whitewater. The road has been kept open and maintained since 1983 by Passages and FFV. The FFV and FORVA have been working on reopening Woods Ferry Road since April of this year.

FOGR wants to address both short-term and long-term issues of Gauley access. A federal law mandates that before any other Gauley access is developed by the NPS, that a Woods Ferry private boater access be developed. This was a bill written by Rep. Rahall with input from AW/VI.

Public Access Plans:

FOGR is now raising funds and volunteers to reopen the public Woods Ferry Road, parts of which have been closed for about 100 years! We are making good progress but need volunteers to clear brush and move rocks. We estimate we will need a budget of \$10,000, and have raised \$1,120 so far.

All work will be done with hand tools to minimize environmental damage. When the work is completed, outfitter Benjy Simpson (Passages) will operate a boat shuttle in and out of the gorge. As was true at Mason's Branch, paddlers will have to walk in or out of the canyon themselves. A donation will offset the costs, with the surplus being used to maintain the road.

How to Help:

If you are interested in helping to resolve this matter, please let Bill Tanger know as soon as possible. Email address: tanger@mediavisionva.com. Home tel. 540-366-2228. If you can send a donation, make checks out to FORVA, earmarked to FOGR, and mailed to FORVA, PO Box 1750, Roanoke VA 24008. For a \$100 donation, FOGR will send you a letter to use as a free pass to use Woods Ferry Road without making any further contribution! (FORVA is a 501(c)3 non-profit.)

Our next work weekends are August 20 & 21, and then August 27 & 28. We will meet at Surf City on Milroy Grose Road at 9 am each morning. This is directly across from Wildwater Expeditions on Rt. 19.

FYI: Rep. Nick Rahall's aide on river issues is jim.zoia@house.mail.gov