Wild Celebration

Upstate recognizes anniversary of Wilderness Act, Chattooga Wild and Scenic designation

Saturday events

Sumter National Forest, Andrew Pickens Ranger District
9 a.m.
Foothills Connector Loop guided hike
9 a.m. and 11 a.m.
Chattooga River Trail/ Foothills Trail and Kings Creek Falls guided hike
Spoonauger Falls guided hike
9:30 a.m.
Guided family hike to Station Cove Falls

Oconee State Park
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Fly-fishing and cross-cut saw demonstrations, kayak and raft rides, Banjo the Bear photos, kids activities

Oconee State Park
Noon – 1 p.m.
Bring a picnic lunch and meet Smokey Bear at shelter No. 3

Andrew Pickens Ranger District
1 p.m. – 4 p.m.
Fly-fishing on the Chattooga River, River Critter Crawl
1:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.
Half-day whitewater rafting mini trip on Section III of the Chattooga
2 p.m. – 3 p.m.
National Public Lands Day river cleanup
3 p.m. and 5 p.m.
Geology of the Chattooga

Chattooga Belle Farm
All day
Disc golf (bring your own discs) and fruit picking (some fees apply).
3 p.m. – 6 p.m.
Free horse rides around the farm
6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Celebration dinner with live bluegrass music

BY CHRISTINA CLEVELAND
THE JOURNAL

MOUNTAIN REST — Oconee County residents have several advantages when it comes to the outdoors. The abundance of waterfalls, hiking trails and scenic views at their fingertips is proof enough.

Saturday, several community partners will join the U.S. Forest Service to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, which protects around 110 million acres of wilderness areas in the U.S. The event also recognizes the 40th anniversary of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River.

Jennifer Barnhart, Andrew Pickens ranger district recreation program manager, has worked to organize the event. Barnhart said different celebrations and activities are being held across the nation to recognize the wilderness act, which was signed in 1964.

"I've only been working on the district for a few months," Barnhart said. "But it was clear to me when I arrived that people in this area truly love the Chattooga and the Ellicott Rock Wilderness. It just didn't seem right to let these two special anniversaries go by without giving them the recognition they deserve."

The public can join this event in Oconee by participating in a day of outdoor activities scheduled at Sumter National Forest, Oconee State Park and Chattooga Belle Farm on Saturday.

Several hikes will be conducted by the Sumter National Forest Andrew Pickens Ranger District throughout the morning, but for the true family fun, visitors are encouraged to head to Oconee State Park at 9 a.m. where kids and parents alike can enjoy fly-fishing demonstrations, boating, kayaks, standup paddle boards, family-friendly hikes, a scavenger hunt, face painting and crosscut saw demonstrations.

Park manager Jo Anna White said admission is free Saturday and the park is acting as a host site for its end of the forest service area. Later, the public can travel to Long Creek to continue activities there.

"It is important we are celebrating a Wilderness Act that's protection because the same thing is true for the park," White said. "We're here to protect our site and our resource.

"It's a beautiful fall drive coming to the park and seeing the activities that we offer. We're gearing this end of the day's activities toward families and with everything we have to offer — camping, fishing and boating and lots of activities they can engage in."

For the children, Clemson University professor emeritus John Morse is educating youth about the animals and insects that live in the ecosystem around and in the Chattooga River, helping kids explore different the different critters that live under the rocks.

Smokey the Bear will be present, too. During a picnic lunch, participants can meet the mascot, take photos and eat free cake.

The second half of the day is located at the Southern part of the forest. Fly-fishing, whitewater rafting trips and geology exhibits all await. Starting at 3 p.m., Chattooga Belle Farm will host free horse rides and live bluegrass music from local group Conservation Theory.

Farm owner Ed Land said this day is important in more ways than one, but overall it is "just a celebration." "It's important that people come out for people to remember it's a wild and scenic area," Land said. "We have our own wilderness right here in Oconee County. "It's special (and) people should take care of it, recognize it and enjoy it."

Barnhart said the Wilderness Act continues to hold meaning even today. She keeping the land in its natural state creates solitude and prevents human disturbance of certain elements, which provides a unique recreation experience.

"If we didn't have that act 50 years ago, people would not be able to have that experience today, and the generations ahead of us would not be able to have that experience," Barnhart said. "It's keeping that character there, where you have that solitude."

She said the act helps with clean water, natural resources, wildlife and plants as well as preventing the Forest Service from going into a wilderness area and using machinery like a chainsaw to clear out trees.

Saturday is also National Public Lands Day, which Barnhart said the Forest Service was aware of when organizing the celebration. The group is not only promoting the fun-filled activities, but also hosting a volunteer clean up on the S.C. Highway 76 bridge.

Barnhart has worked for months with community partners to head the celebration this year and tie in the Wilderness Act's anniversary to the 40th anniversary of the Chattooga River being designated by Congress as "wild and scenic," which she calls monumental.

"We have a lot of partners. This day is really important because it shows how many partners are invested in this community and take pride in the fact that the Chattooga is a wild and scenic river — and is kept that way," Barnhart said. "It's definitely a jewel here in Upstate South Carolina."



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Smokey the Bear will be present during celebrations at Oconee State Park Saturday. Bring a picnic lunch and celebrate the Wilderness Act with free cake.

For more information on Saturday's events or registration questions, call (864) 638-9568 or email aprd@fs.fd.us. To find activity details, visit go.usa.gov/VwuB and www.facebook.com/scnfs.