

cause for concern?

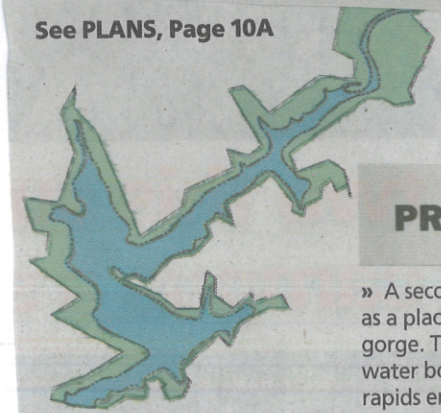
Whitewater paddlers call for changes in Twelve Mile River park plan's details; proposed fishing pier is a potential problem area



PHOTOS BY LAUREN PETRACCA/STAFF

TOP: Mac Dickard kayaks while John Winchester paddle boards in Twelve Mile River on Thursday. ABOVE: Dickard kayaks in the river.

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PROPOSED "PUT-IN" SITE

» The plan calls for building one of the recreation areas on nine acres just below where Norris Highway crosses the river. That has been described as a "put-in" site for paddlers. By putting in at this site, boaters would lose 15 percent of the river's rapids, according to Ben Peters, president of the Greenville-based Foothills Paddling Club.



PROPOSED "TAKE-OUT" SITE

» A second park is planned five miles downstream. It would serve as a place for kayakers to take their boats out after riding down the gorge. The "take-out" location is "not a viable option" for white-water boaters, Peters said, because it's three miles below where the rapids end. So they would have to go down three miles of "absolutely flat water that has really no interest to our paddlers."



LEFT: Twelve Mile River on Thursday. RIGHT: Dickard walks toward Rodeo Hole to kayak.

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Whitewater paddling enthusiasts say they're glad to see that Pickens County is planning to build two parks to give better access to the Twelve Mile River, but they're taking issue with some of the details – including the locations of the parks and some of the design features.

A fishing pier planned at one of the sites would collect debris floating down the river and could dislodge and get swept downstream, they say.

"If that pier does go downstream... it would look very poorly on whoever made that final decision," said Ethan Talley, state co-director of the American Canoe Association and a frequent paddler of the river that runs from Pickens to Lake Hartwell.

Cement boat ramps would make more sense, he said.

County Council members say the plans drawn up by Hulsey McCormick & Wallace are only preliminary and are subject to change.

And they note that boating isn't the main reason for building the parks, under the grant that's paying for the them.

Council Chairman Jennifer Willis, who said she is a whitewater kayaker herself, said she understands the inherent safety issues.

"But fundamentally we had an opportunity to leverage money for the citizens that were wronged by damages from environmental concerns and open up this area, and that's what we're trying to do," she said. "And it's not just whitewater paddling but fishing and picnicking."

Wes Hulsey, president and CEO of the company that's designing the parks, said the firm is open to making changes.

"These are our concept designs. They're not the final design," he said. "We are working with our engineering team as well as our landscape architectural team is in the process of evaluating the function and form of the parks."

Smith added, "We spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to go after the money and also tried to figure out how to accommodate as many people as we possibly can. So we also recognize that we've got a lot of other issues. But this is just the initial step."

"We're not trying to restrict you on where you put in. You've got to understand that where you're putting in is not under our control so if that landowner decides to do something different, that's not us."

NEIL SMITH
COUNTY COUNCILMAN



LAUREN PETRACCA/STAFF

Mac Dickard kayaks in Twelve Mile River on Thursday.

Plans

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The $1.9 million project will be paid for mostly by funds from the Lake Hartwell Natural Resource Damages Settlement, which is to compensate for contamination of chemicals called PCB's that were discharged into the river by a manufacturing plant in Pickens decades ago.

That will cover about $1.5 million, and the county is seeking a grant of more than $400,000 from the Appalachian Regional Commission.

"We are going after the money that had to do with the fishery...so that had nothing to do with secondary use with paddlers," County Councilman Neil Smith said.

The plan calls for building one of the recreation areas on nine acres just below where Norris Highway crosses the river. That has been described as a "put-in" site for paddlers.

A second park is planned for five miles downstream, at Madden Bridge Road. County officials have said it would serve as a place for kayakers to take their boats out after riding down the gorge.

Ben Peters, president of the Greenville-based Foothills Paddling Club, said most of the club's more than 200 members have paddled down the Twelve Mile River since two dams were removed, restoring the river to its natural state.

The dams were taken down by court order to allow the free-flowing water to wash the PCBs downstream where they would be buried by sediments.

Paddlers now put their boats in at the base of the Easley-Central Water District Dam, upstream from the planned put-in spot, Peters said.

By putting in at the planned site, boaters would lose 15 percent of the river's rapids, he said.

The "take-out" location is also "not a viable option" for whitewater boaters, he said, because it's three miles below where the rapids end. So they would have to go down three miles of "absolutely flat water that has really no interest to our paddlers," Peters said.

Smith suggested that boaters could put in at the site below the Norris Highway bridge where the county plans to build and paddle upstream to catch the rapids there on the way down.

"We're not trying to restrict you on where you put in," he said. "You've got to understand that where you're putting in is not under our control so if that landowner decides to do something different, that's not us."

Talley said the water is too swift for paddlers to get far if they tried to put in at the planned park and try to make it upstream to the base of the dam.

"You might could go about 200 feet, but you would greatly find yourself in a pickle," he said.

Talley also warned that the riverbank is very unstable and said building a park there could add to the instability.

"I would highly caution you to think a little more outside the box than what you might have been given just to make sure you're not endangering the environment of the river," he said.

"That river changes just about every time it rains as it is."

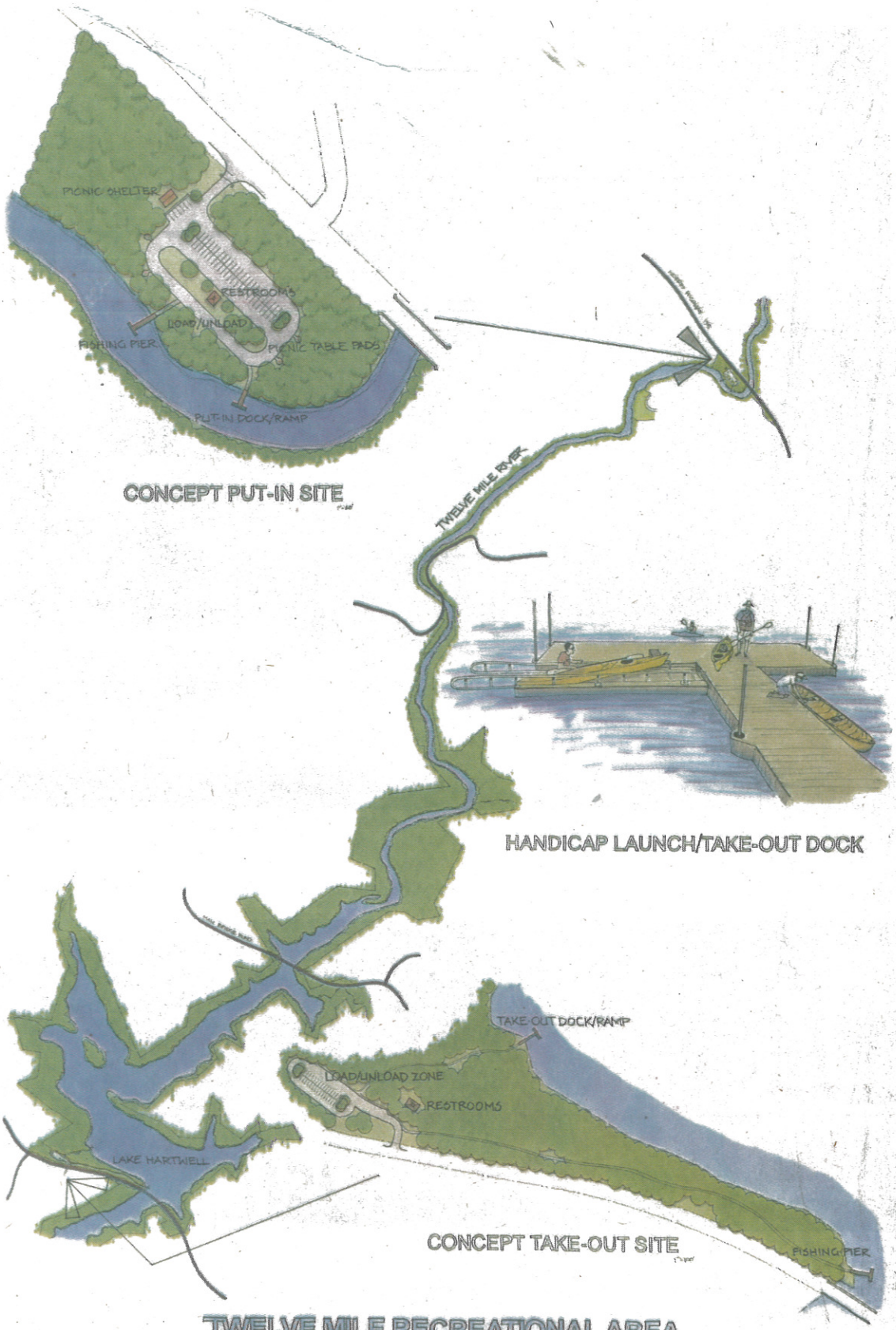
There was a death there a few years ago, said Talley, a member of the Pickens County Swift Water Rescue Team.

"There are already enough swift-water issues."

Ultimately, however, Talley said it was "a grand plan and I truly support it."

Smith said he's aware of the instability of the banks, noting a potential problem with the old Cateechee Mill, which perches precariously at the edge of the river.

"This is our first attempt to get on the river and everything else so I'm sure that we're going to find that there are a lot of things to we've got to look at," he said.



HULSEY MCCORMICK & WALLACE, INC.

A concept design of two parks along the Twelve Mile River planned by Pickens County.