

# Wildwater celebrates Green Friday zipping

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THE JOURNAL

**LONG CREEK** — The folks at Wildwater celebrate the day after Thanksgiving a little differently. They call it Green Friday.

"For every person who goes on our Chattooga Canopy Tour on the day after Thanksgiving, we will donate half of that money back to the local community," Wildwater special projects manager Becky Wise said.

The company's Long Creek location will donate to two local efforts — the Walhalla Heritage Oak project and Arbor Source hemlock treatment programs.

"The city of Walhalla is redoing their downtown and they had to uproot a bunch of the trees. So they're replacing the heritage oaks," Wise said. "Last year, we raised enough money to buy two of those trees to be replaced."

Arbor Source is a

company working locally on hemlock treatment programs. An aphid-like insect known as the hemlock woolly adelgid has threatened the population of eastern hemlocks and Carolina hemlocks of the eastern U.S. since it was first reported in 1951. The adelgid, native to Asia, has caused extensive tree mortality and decline from Maine to Georgia.

"Arbor Source is constantly checking our local trees and making sure they're healthy," Wise said. "They're also treating a lot of the hemlocks that are already infested with the woolly adelgids."

This is Wildwater's fifth annual Green Friday. The outdoor company opened its doors in 1971, and up until recently rafting was its mainstay. Since the rafting season ends in early November, they started offering zip-line canopy tours seven years ago.

But the Chattooga Ridge Canopy Tour is more than just a zip line. It's a series of 13 zips through

multiple ecosystems, into the treetops of grand old white oaks and maples and over a forest floor blanketed in mountain laurel and rhododendrons.

"It's not like the zip lines where you free fall and then bottom out and drop off. It's a slow gradient, about five to seven degrees, taking you all around the property and then finishing off with a 1,200 footer," Wise said.

The canopy tour launches visitors off of the 50-foot bell tower express with 360-degree mountain views, zips them across Academy Lake and gives them a-half mile of air time.

Two rangers accompany each group tour, not only to provide a safe experience, but also to offer information about the wildlife and history of the property and surrounding area.

"Basically the whole group moves as one unit from one platform to the next. One ranger receives

each person, and the other ranger sends each person," Wise said. "As opposed to cruise ship-style zip lines that just have a person standing at each tree."

One avid fan of the Chattooga Ridge Canopy Tour is Wayne Morton. Morton grew up fishing on the Chattooga River back in

## Folks through the forest

the 1950s and 1960s near his hometown of Westminster.

"I always wanted to be a river guide," Morton said. "So at the age of 33 I became a guide for a couple of summers. I still take some people down the river several times a

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Wildwater's Chattooga Canopy Tour is a series of 13 zips through treetops and over Academy Lake.

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