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Mid-year progress report, Alapaha River Water Trail

To: Gwyneth Moody
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As requested in the grant contract, here is a mid-year progress report for the Alapaha River Water Trail (ARWT).

Summary: we have spent no funds; rather we have increased available cash by 150% and in so doing acquired additional [sponsors](#). We have already met all the [requirements of the grant contract](#) except printing maps and brochures, and we have already met [all the stated criteria](#) of a Water Trail except placing signs at access points. However, the ten members of the [Alapaha River Water Trail Committee](#) and WWALS continue to do more.

[Signage](#) is an issue due to the sheer number of access points. Ongoing issues include [spacing between access points](#) and [camping](#). These are partly due to the sheer length of this Water Trail (125 miles).

Other unusual factors 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: Willacoochee River, Alapahoochee River, Dead River, and Little Alapaha Rivers. The Dead River, the Little Alapaha River, 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, and the Committee is collecting information on boatable low and safe high levels at each gauge. Numerous [lakes, ponds, and swamps](#) in the Alapaha River watershed are boatable even when the rivers are too low or too high. Finally, it turns out that an [Alapaha River Canoe Trail has already been established for more than 35 years](#). All these features make this Water Trail more interesting, and all are being 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 will announce the winners of a high school logo contest for the Alapaha River Water Trail at our March ARWT [Conference](#).

The rest of this report details these points.

Accounting

WWALS has spent none of the grant funds to date. Instead, we have increased the funds available by 150% from two other sources.

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
\$0.00	-	Spent

Progress

The grant contract requires some or all of "Brochures, maps, guides, cards" to "promote the project and encourage community use of the river". We have prepared materials for those, and will be ready to print them before the end of the grant contract period.

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 already met those three criteria.

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 has already been used in general WWALS brochures, along with a draft map. A standalone ARWT brochure is in progress.

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 [twelve public access points](#) on the Alapaha River, at least one in each of the six ARWT counties, plus some on lakes, ponds, and swamps.

The Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) has used the spreadsheet to draw additional maps. We are also talking to other potential sources of maps.

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 and remap a number of fields with a program before inserting into the GRN spreadsheet.

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 and from the [Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce](#). 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](#). Additional letters of support and resolutions have been promised. 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.

- [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. Some counties may fund their own kiosks with ability for WWALS to place ARWT materials.

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.
- [2015-02-17](#): Deadline for high school student submissions to logo contest for Alapaha River Water Trail

Meetings

As promised in the grant proposal, WWALS has held a Water Trail workshop in the fall, and is preparing a Water Trail Conference for 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. This conference will use the same general format as the Workshop, but with updates and more attendees.

To attract more people, we have in progress a contest among high school students for logo designs for the Alapaha River Water Trail. The deadline for submissions is 17 February 2015. A panel of judges is being assembled, and prizes are being solicited from local businesses. The prizes will be presented at the March Conference.

We look forward to seeing Georgia River Network at an upcoming outing or event.