

Natural History

There are many rare and threatened animal species within the recreation area including the Allegheny woodrat, cerulean warbler, black-bellied salamander (a rare species), and finescale saddled darter.

Vegetation is diverse and abundant along the Gauley River. Extremes in topography, elevation and microclimate have caused tremendous variation in plant life. Most of the recreation area is below 2,000 feet. Central hardwood trees thrive here such as red oak, white oak, American beech, yellow poplar, hemlock and dogwood.

High-energy rivers are an ecological driving force for some plant communities. Gauley River is an excellent example of a high energy system which supports rare plant species and their communities such as Virginia spiraea, Appalachian blue violet, and Barbara's buttons.

The Three Rivers

Gauley River National Recreation Area is one of three National Park units in southern West Virginia, together with New River Gorge National River and Bluestone National Scenic River. The diversity of natural and historical resources found in these three parks are preserved as part of a larger family of nearly 400 nationally significant places which make up the National Park system. These special places are sanctuaries for national pride, a sense of place, and renewal of mind, body, and soul.

For park information:
Gauley River National Recreation Area
P.O. Box 246, 104 Main Street, Glen Jean, WV 25846
304-465-0508 www.nps.gov/gari



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Gauley River National Recreation Area

Gauley River



Gauley River National Recreation Area offers big thrills to thousands of whitewater enthusiasts along its path through narrow gorges. The park includes 25 miles of the Gauley River and 5 miles of the Meadow River.

The Gauley River is ranked among the best whitewater rivers in the world by expert boaters. Dropping more than 668 feet through rugged terrain, the river's complex stretch of whitewater features more than 100 rapids with a steep gradient, technical runs, an incredible volume of water and huge waves.

Established in 1988 for its recreational opportunities, the Gauley River offers whitewater boating, fishing, camping, hunting, and picnicking. Immediately adjacent to the recreation area is Summersville Dam, which regulates the flow of the Gauley River creating an outstanding fall whitewater season.

Thousands of whitewater enthusiasts come to the Gauley every fall for Gauley Season. Gauley Season begins the first weekend after Labor Day and continues for six weekends (five 4-day weekends and one 2-day weekend).

Cultural History

The Gauley River and its gorge have been a barrier as well as a corridor for human activity. The area was used for fishing and hunting by Native Americans for 10,000 years and was populated by Europeans in the late 1700s.

The confluence of the Gauley and Meadow rivers was the site of an 1861 Civil War battle. Union troops forced Confederate forces from their position overlooking the Gauley. The site is part of Carnifex Ferry Battlefield State Park.

In the late 1800s railroads and lumber companies came to the gorge to harvest its vast supply of timber. Industrial pollution drained directly into the Gauley River, earning it the nickname “the River of Ink.” This pollution killed fish and prevented people from swimming and enjoying the river’s water.

In 1922, the West Virginia State Wildlife League was successful in cleaning up the Gauley River, forcing the industrial plants along the Gauley’s tributaries to dispose of waste properly.

Directions

The main entrance to Gauley River National Recreation Area is located off US Route 19 south of Summersville and north of Fayetteville, West Virginia. Turn off US Route 19 onto WV Route 129 toward Summersville Dam. Take the second left after you cross over the dam and follow the signs to Gauley River.

There are two other public access areas to the Gauley River. They are both on river right. Turn off of Route 19 onto Route 129 toward Summersville Dam. Go 9.9 miles west toward Drennen. Take a left onto Panther Mountain Road (County Route 22) in the town of Poe. Mason’s Branch public access area is 3.7 miles on Panther Mtn. Rd. then turn left and go another 1.1 miles to access the parking/boat launch areas. To access Wood’s Ferry public access area, continue on Panther Mtn. Rd. another 2.1 miles past Mason’s Branch until you reach the parking/boat launch areas.

Be careful, these narrow roads have sharp curves and poor visibility.

