

August 17, 2013

An Open Letter to Gauley River Boaters

Dear Boaters,

The rangers and staff of the Gauley River National Recreation Area welcome you to the 2013 boating season. National Park Service (NPS) employees have been working, and are continuing to work, on preparing the put-ins and take-outs, and other public use spots for upcoming Gauley River NRA visitation. We hope that this season will prove to be a safe and spectacular one for every one.

The NPS reports few changes for the upcoming season over last year and hopes to continue to build on successes and make improvements with respect to public facilities. This said, the Gauley Tailwaters campground and the boat launches will continue to operate much like they did last year without much change.

Camping at the Gauley Tailwaters campground is free of charge and is on a first come, first served basis. There is a maximum of 8 people allowed in each campsite. There is a 2 tent, 2 vehicle maximum at each site. Quiet hours are from 10pm to 6am in the campground. Rangers provide patrols and may register each campsite. Campers who bring their pets are asked to keep their pets on a leash. The public boat launch at the Tailwaters is being improved by the park maintenance staff prior to the boating season.

Mason's Branch will continue to be managed as in the past. Due to the limited amount of public land available at this access, the narrowness of the road, and the retained rights of both the upstream and downstream adjacent landowners, the park, again, plans to manage vehicle access on the road and in the parking lot. Parking at Mason's Branch for private boaters is offered in the upper parking lot until it fills. To help with parking, American Whitewater has leased the Legg field above Mason's Branch. The field will be available throughout the Gauley season for private boater parking. The NPS is also making arrangements to continue the free boater shuttle service from Mason's Branch to the Legg field. This free service has worked well since the acquisition of the property and is a benefit to boaters who cannot park their personal vehicles at the take-out on the weekends. Masons Branch access road usually opens up for unrestricted travel after 4 pm or whenever commercial bus traffic is through for the day.

Parking at Wood's Ferry will be managed like it has in the past with few restrictions. Boaters are asked to park close together in an organized fashion to take advantage of all the available space and to create parking opportunities for others. Wood's Ferry fills to capacity on some weekends. Boaters should be aware that this may happen again on particularly busy days and that parking is available but not unlimited.

A public take-out is available at Swiss since the NPS acquired the property from a private landowner in 2011. Open for both private and commercial use, it is the only lower Gauley public take-out within the NRA. Parking is available to boaters in the field. The parcel, both the field

and boat launch remain closed to camping. The park offers camping opportunities at the Tailwaters campground and there are other private and public campgrounds in the area.

NPS river patrol operations will continue as in the past. The NPS provides daily river patrols during the scheduled releases with an emphasis on EMS and rescue. The NPS river ranger patrol boat carries an AED in addition to other medical supplies and they are available to provide both routine and emergency boater services as they arise.

Park Rangers and local emergency personnel may request a reduction of the scheduled water release from Summersville Dam in the event of an emergency. Such a request was made on two different occasions during 2010. To help prevent boaters from being surprised by the sudden and unexpected drop in water level, NPS river rangers will implement a sign and signal flag program to provide visual aids along the river in the event of an emergency. The press release will be posted on the American Whitewater and Gauley River NRA website.

As our Gauley season planning efforts progress, we will post information on our web page at www.nps.gov/gari as well as continuing to communicate with private boaters through partnering organizations such as American Whitewater and the West Virginia Rivers Coalition. For this season as in the past, we appreciate all of the boater public cooperation that helps to make the Gauley boating season the special time that it is.

Sincerely,

Jeff West, Chief Ranger
New River Gorge National River
Gauley River National Recreation Area
Bluestone National Scenic River