

Submitted By: Athens-Clarke County Resident
Peter Norris
Phone: (706) 206-3466 Alt. Phone: (706) 542-8007
Email: info@uown.org

Project Classification: Social Well-Being
Project Focus: Quality of Life
Project Type: Other - Water Trail Park System

Previously Submitted and Rejected: No
Continuation Project: No

Project Total Cost: \$ 2,593,000

Total Operating Cost: \$ 61,000

Project Description: The project will design and construct a water trail system for non-motorized water activities (e.g. canoeing, kayaking, stand up paddle boarding, or fishing) on the North, Middle Oconee, and Oconee Rivers.

A water trail is an established route along a river and at its minimum is a series boat launches along the river. Each launch is located a comfortable paddling distance for novice paddler (5-8 miles) from its upstream predecessor. Features of a water trail can include: canoe/kayak boat launches; facilities for parking; restrooms and picnic facilities; safety signs and route markers; maps and materials promoting the routes.

The design will integrate the best practices guidelines outlined by the National Water Trails System, an interagency collaborative effort administered by the National Parks Service through the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program and the National Trails System, Conservation Assistance Program and the River Management Society. The trails will be ADA accessible as terrain allows.

The proposed water trails will have up to six launch sites along the North Oconee, Middle Oconee and Oconee rivers. The scenic water trail passes along beginner Class I and II shoals, beautiful rocky bluffs, historic textile mill ruins, wide sandbars, and many miles of secluded forest. A complete trail extends 98 river miles on the North Oconee and Middle Oconee rivers; and provides access to Lake Oconee via the Oconee river.

Project Mission Statement/Goals & Objectives: The mission of this project is to provide ecological, economic, and recreational benefits to the region and to attract regional, national, and international visitors.

The project will achieve the following goals and objectives:

1) Develop water trails along the North Oconee, Middle Oconee, and Oconee Rivers providing safe access for kayakers, canoeists, and anglers in various locations within Athens-Clarke County.

- a) Determine (up to six) access points using established evaluation process
- b) Obtain matching funding (if applicable)
- c) Obtain access to public property or, if necessary, acquire property from private owner(s).
- d) Design access points, boat launches, and applicable amenities (such as parking, picnic facilities, and restrooms).

2) Construct sustainable river access points that meet all the standards of Athens-Clarke County Unified Government while complying the environmental area permits and protections that are in place at the local, state, and federal level.

3) Develop the North Oconee and Middle Oconee rivers as an outdoor recreation destination.

- a) UOWN will, in conjunction with local and regional economic development agencies, create and distribute maps and promotional literature that includes public access points, parking, local outfitters, and equipment shops
- b) UOWN will create a website with real-time trail condition data such as water flow readings and river hazards.

4) Restore and/or rehabilitate eroded stream banks, buffers, and other riverine features within the scope of boat launch and/or amenity construction.

5) Foster partnerships between the Athens-Clarke County Unified Government and partner groups such as the Upper Oconee Water Trails (a committee of the Upper Oconee Watershed Network), Georgia River Network, Oconee Rivers Greenway Commission, Northeast Georgia Regional Commission, Sustainability UGA, Keep Athens-Clarke Clean and Beautiful, Oconee River Land Trust, and Athens Land Trust, to maintain water trails, remediate areas of environmental degradation, preserve cultural/historic sites, and help protect native plant and animal species.

Projected Useful Life of Project: Water recreation amenities such as river launches and public convenience structures are designed for an expected 25+ years (determined by environmental factors and materials used).

The waterways along our rivers can, if properly protected and maintained, last indefinitely. Water trails will help protect our rivers by focusing attention upon the ecosystem services and recreational opportunities our rivers provide. Additionally, a coalition of governmental and private organizations will, within this project, work together to restore and protect the riverine environment.

To meet the Project Goals & Objectives, when should this project be completed? This project will proceed in overlapping phases beginning with site selection, followed by concurrent processes to design, build, and develop the water trails until the entire corridor (within Athens-Clarke County) is

developed. The project could occupy the entire SPLOST 2020 authorization period.

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building System compliance: This project is exempted under the standards defined in Athens-Clarke County Sustainable Building Policy; however, construction will be implemented so as to protect and enhance our natural waterways.

How will this project help meet the Public Safety, Basic Facilities/Infrastructure, and/or Quality of Life needs in Athens-Clarke County? Water trails can mitigate the negative effects of urbanization upon our riverine ecosystem by providing citizens a place to exercise outdoors, promote restoration of water quality and flood mitigation in riparian areas, preserve cultural/historic sites, and help protect native plant and animal species.

Athens-Clarke County has "an abundance of natural open space and agriculture, further enhanced by a large park system focused on greenway and stream protection" (ACCUG, 2018). Unfortunately, its citizens have limited access to the North and Middle Oconee rivers. Access to the North Oconee River is limited to Sandy Creek Nature Center, North Oconee River Park East, and Dudley Park (as proposed in Dudley Park Master Plan). Ben Burton Park is the only access point along the Middle Oconee River. Past and recent Greenway improvements allow observation of our rivers, but do not enable access to the river. A water trail enables citizens to directly engage with the river and adjacent environments.

Fabos (2006) established that greenways promote the restoration of natural environmental services (such as pollutant filtration, sedimentation control, and flood mitigation), provide opportunities for exercise, preserve sites of cultural heritage, promote preservation of existing flora and fauna, provide economic development in the form of recreational tourism and increased adjacent property values, and enhance the quality of life for urban residents. Water trails possess many of the same benefits of greenways with less capital expenditure.

Athens-Clarke County Unified Government. (2018). Comprehensive Plan. Retrieved from:

<https://www.accgov.com/DocumentCenter/View/53447/2018-Comp-Plan-ApprovedFinal>

Fabos, J.G., Ryan, R.L. (Eds.), (2006). An introduction to greenway planning around the world. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, Vol.76 No.1/4 pp.1-6 ref.14.

How is this Project recommended/included in any approved ACCGOV Land Use Plan, Master Plan, Study, Service Delivery Plan, Envision Athens, etc.? In 2003, ACCUG entered into an Intergovernmental Agreement with the Georgia DNR (RiverCare 2000 Program) to improve water quality and provide recreational activities by utilizing parcels of land along the North Oconee.

The North Oconee River Blueway Charrette, developed in 2011 by UGA in partnership with ORGC, developed solutions for the creation of a water trail along the North Oconee.

On 9/2/2014, the ACC M&C approved a resolution that "affirms and supports water trails on the Middle Oconee, North Oconee, and Oconee Rivers to be of value and benefit to the citizens of Athens-Clarke

County."

The Greenway Network Plan states that "demand is growing for recreational canoeing and kayaking on the North Oconee and Middle Oconee in the greenway corridor." The plan identifies a number of possible river access points.

Envision Athens states "the community should ... develop a strategic development plan that provides better access and attention to the river." The plan also recommends that we "improve the health and quality of rivers and streams. ...Improving the health of streams positively affects wildlife, improves recreation options like kayaking and canoeing, and secures the amenity and water source for future generations."

Upload restrictions prevent attachment of Greenway Network Plan (<https://www.accgov.com/DocumentCenter/View/36389/Greenway-Network-Plan>) and Envision Athens Action Agenda (<https://www.accgov.com/7382/envision-athens>).

Triple Bottom Line Impacts

Positive Benefits for the Prosperity of Athens-Clarke County: Athens is a destination for sporting events, music, and food. With the construction of the Greenway and Firefly Trails, it will also become a destination for hiking and cycling. The Oconee River is navigable from Barnett Shoals to Lake Oconee. Within the time horizon covered by SPLOST2020 the River can be navigable from northern Athens-Clarke County to Lake Oconee, making Athens a recreational destination for non-motorized boating vacationers.

Water trails create significant new opportunities for local revenue generation through tourism, patronage of local businesses including retail, dining & lodging, new business development, gear and equipment sales and rentals, and development of new festivals and events related to our rivers and water trails. Boating vacationers will require lodging, food, and gasoline (for their cars); thereby contributing to the local motel and sales tax funds. Additionally, vacationers and local boaters can be expected to rent or purchase equipment from local outfitters and sporting goods retailers, generating additional sales taxes.

According to research conducted by the Georgia River Network, in the state of Georgia:

- \$11.3 billion is spent annually on canoeing, kayaking, and rafting (Discover Georgia Outdoors)
- there are approximately 1 million paddlers (Outdoor Industry Association, 2002)
- 58% of residents participate in outdoor recreation each year (The Outdoor Industry Association, 2017)
- residents are more likely to participate in fishing than the average American (ibid.)
- the outdoor recreation industry directly provides 238,000 jobs and generates \$1.8 billion in state & local tax revenue (ibid.)

In 2016, the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area welcomed 2.7 million visitors from across the

country and around the world to hike, bike, and paddle its river and trails. These visitors spent \$119,071,900 in communities near the park which in turn supported 1,841 jobs in the local area and had a cumulative benefit to the local economy of \$166,687,300. (NPS, 2016).

Individuals of the 'Millennial Generation' seek to settle in cities that have a higher quality of life than previous generations. Recreational activities are a fundamental amenity contributing to quality of life calculations. The North and Middle Oconee Rivers are a significant but relatively untapped amenity that can be leveraged to attract new taxpayers to the county.

(References attached)

Detrimental Impacts to the Prosperity of Athens-Clarke County: As a destination for boating vacationers it is conceivable that Athens may experience increased traffic, especially adjacent to the rivers. This traffic will not be as onerous as that produced by sports fans. During the wetter seasons with higher river flows, parking availability at boat launch sites may be diminished.

Emergency services may be called upon to perform water rescues; fire departments may need to obtain additional equipment conduct such rescues.

Positive Benefits for our Citizens and Visitors: Stand up paddling has been described as a vigorous exercise demanding balance, flexibility, and moderate stamina. Canoeing and kayaking engage twitch response muscles and strengthen core muscles. A water trail system will enhance the physical strength of citizens and visitors. "Water trails provide a safe, inexpensive avenue for regular exercise for people living in rural, urban and suburban areas...This kind of exercise is also known to protect against injury and disability because it builds muscular strength and flexibility, which helps to maintain functional independence in later years of life (Bergerson)".

Access to natural environments enhances quality of life by providing for relaxation and reflection in a native environment. "Water trails provide paddling opportunities for visitors and residents while enhancing a community's quality of life. Water trails strengthen the link between residents and the natural environment through direct interaction and education. The result of this proactive stewardship is evident in volunteer support of water trails. The vast majority [users] indicated water trails are effectively providing recreational opportunities, promoting access to the water and promoting stewardship (Johnson)".

Benefits of Water Trails (Terry Bergerson, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department), retrieved from https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/PLANS/docs/trails/trail_benefits_water.pdf

Case Studies of water trail impacts on rural communities (Lindsey Johnson, University of Oregon) retrieved from http://headwaterseconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/Trail_Study_6-water-trail-impacts-on-rural-communities.pdf

Detrimental Impacts for our Citizens and Visitors: Depending upon the water level, boaters may be required to navigate hazards such as fallen trees, litter, and pipelines crossing rivers. Injury from such hazards may be mitigated by periodic removal of hazards and litter (volunteer groups such as Athens Paddlers, UOWN, and KACCB are already performing these tasks) and installation of appropriate warning

signage.

Georgia's Environmental Protection Division classifies portions of the North and Middle Oconee rivers as impaired and not attaining their federally designated use for recreation and fishing. This impairment is partially due to fecal contamination from non-point sources. Those who are immunocompromised may contract infection or disease.

Environmental Benefits, including but not limited to Positive impacts on existing Infrastructure/Systems:

Vegetative stream buffers capture and process contaminated runoff, thereby leading to a healthier riverine system. Facility construction may include the following improvements to storm water systems and riverine habitats: rain gardens to collect and process runoff, stream buffer remediation, and/or stream banks restoration. Additionally, boaters who are members of the volunteer coalition will work to remediate the impacts of non-point pollution by restoring stream buffers (the most efficient method of mitigating non-point pollution). The Upper Oconee Watershed Network, Athens Land Trust, and UGA River Basin center have previously obtained federal grants to perform riverbank restoration. Given their proven track record, it is reasonable to predict that additional grants/projects will be forthcoming.

The majority of boaters exhibit a keen concern for the quality of the environment. An increased presence of boaters is equivalent to increased patrols on the river, each observant for sources of pollution and litter. Many will pick up litter when they see it. Additionally, a number of volunteer groups currently remove litter from our rivers on an annual basis.

Detrimental Impacts for the Environment, including but not limited to Negative impacts on existing Infrastructure/Systems: The construction of boat launches will temporarily negatively impact the environment directly adjacent to the launch by disturbing the river bank and river bottom. These effects can be mitigated by deployment of best practices as defined by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

It is also possible that upon completion of the launches there may be some increased soil compaction adjacent to the launches from recreational users.

Malevolent users may deposit additional litter or damage riverine habitats.

Positive/Negative Impacts on ACCGOV Departments, Agencies, or other Organizations, if not covered in one of the above questions: none

Project Costs

Detailed project capital budget costs (to be funded from SPLOST 2020 only):

Project Costs (round to thousand)	Amount
1. Land Acquisition / ROW / Easement:	\$ 500,000
2. Design Fees: (Min.12% of New Const.; 14% of reno,; 16% for LEED proj.)	\$ 259,000
3. Miscellaneous Fees: (Min. Minimum of 3% of Construction Costs – used for permitting, etc. Utilize minimum of 10% if land acquisition if necessary.	\$ 49,000
4. Fixtures, Furniture, and Equipment (for a facility): A detailed estimate is preferred – but dependent upon the specific project, utilize at a minimum \$15 to \$20 per square foot.	\$ -
5. Construction:	\$ 1,170,000
6. Construction Contingency: (10% of the Construction line item)	\$ 117,000
7. Acquisition of Capital Equipment:	\$ 30,000
8. Testing:	\$ 49,000
9. Project Management: (4% of the total budget line items above)	\$ 87,000
10. Project Contingency: (10% of the total budget line items above)	\$ 227,000
11. Public Art: Calculated at 1% of the Construction line item.	\$ 12,000
12. Other 1: Storm water enhancement and stream restoration.	\$ 17,000
13. Other 2:	\$ -
Project Subtotal:	\$ 2,517,000
14. Program Management (3% of Project Subtotal):	\$ 76,000
SPLOST 2020 Project Total:	\$ 2,593,000

Operating Cost

Total Annual Net Operating Costs when Project is complete:

Only identify additional or net operating costs to be paid by ACCGOV. Identify the additional or net costs needed above ACCGOV's current operating budget to operate the requested project and any additional project related revenues that would be generated. Provide budget costs for each identified category below.

Operating Costs (round to thousand)	Estimated Impact for Annual Operating Expenditures
TOTAL PROJECTED REVENUES FROM PROJECT	-
PROJECTED EXPENDITURES	
1. Personnel Costs: from Appendix A	40,000
2. Annual Utilities:	
• Gas:	-
• Electrical:	2,000
• Water:	2,000
• Sewer:	2,000
• Phone:	-
• Solid Waste Collection:	1,000
• Other:	-
3. Operating Supplies:	4,000
4. Equipment Maintenance:	2,000
5. Facility Maintenance:	2,000
6. Fuel:	2,000
7. Other: hazard tree felling	2,000
8. Other: custodial supplies	2,000
9. Other:	-
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	61,000
NET OPERATING COSTS OF PROJECT:	\$ 61,000

Project Financing

Is the proposed Project to receive funding from source(s) other than SPLOST 2020? Yes.

No funding commitments have been secured at time of application; however, UOWN will coordinate with ACCUG to obtain grants from the following possible sources that may provide funding to offset capital costs:

REI Corporate Giving Program: Since 1976, REI and The REI Foundation have invested more than \$87 million in organizations across the country that share their goal of creating access to outdoor places and enabling transformational experiences in the outdoors for all people.

Robert W. Woodruff Foundation: This foundation supports public/private efforts to promote good stewardship of Georgia's natural resources.

The Coca-Cola Foundation: The foundation funds projects that protecting the environment by providing access to clean water or engage in water conservation and recycling.

The Tull Charitable Foundation: The Foundation's Trustees make grants that will have a significant and lasting impact on an organization as well as its community.

Turner Foundation, Inc.: The Foundation funds initiatives to expand natural infrastructure solutions - such as forests, wetlands and urban parks - that provide multiple environmental, economic and social benefits.

Riverview Foundation: The foundation provided \$20K for the construction of the boat launch at Ben Burton Park. The executive director has expressed a willingness to provide additional funding for a water trail in Athens-Clarke County.

Georgia Department of Resources - Recreational Trails Program: This program has supported the development of water trails throughout Georgia.

New Staffing

Position	Title	Hourly Rate	# of Hours /wk	# of Positions	Total Annual Expense
Part Time	Park Assistant	\$13	29	2	\$39,208

Park Assistant – Park Assistant will monitor Water Trail for damage and/or hazardous conditions, remediate and/or repair damage and hazardous conditions.

Project Site

Will the proposed Project require any land, whether existing sites, new site, easements, or Rights of Way? Unsure but likely. We do not intend to acquire boating easements along the river corridor as public right of passage has been established by ACC ordinance. We may obtain recreational easement for access to the river for boat launches.

Will the proposed Project be on a site currently owned by ACCGOV? If at all possible

Approximately how many acres is available or will be needed for the new facility or Park?

Project Location/Address (Existing or Proposed): Varies

Will the Project require fee simple additional land acquisition?

Will the Project require Rights-of-Way or Easement acquisition? Likely

Site Criteria and Standards

Current Property Owner (if applicable):

Minimum acreage necessary for Project.

Topography: Adjacent to one of the Oconee Rivers

Estimated cost per acre: