



UPPER OCONEE WATER TRAIL

Vision:

The Upper Oconee Water Trail will be developed according to best practices, providing ecological and economic benefit to the region and attracting regional, national, and international visitors.

Mission:

The Upper Oconee Water Trail Stakeholder group will coordinate the implementation, management, maintenance, and activities of the Upper Oconee Water Trail to promote recreational and economic benefits to paddlers and river enthusiasts of all ages.

The Upper Oconee Water Trail (UOWT) will include 98 river miles on the North Oconee and Middle Oconee rivers, which converge to create the Oconee river, and then continue into Lake Oconee. There are currently 16



existing public access points and a portion of the UOWT flows alongside the Oconee River Greenway and the Oconee National Forest. The scenic UOWT passes along beginner Class I and II shoals, beautiful rocky bluffs, historic textile mill ruins, wide sandbars, and miles of secluded forest. The UOWT is in the development phase with support from various stakeholders including Athens-Clarke County Unified Government, Oconee Rivers Greenway Commission, Georgia River Network, Upper Oconee Watershed Network, Lake Oconee Water Watch, University of Georgia - Office of Sustainability, and more.



What is a Water Trail?

- Water equivalent of a hiking trail.
- Blueways, canoe trails, and paddle trails are all water trails.
- It has access points along the river, like trailheads, for putting boats in the water or taking them out.
- Suitable for day-trips in canoes, kayaks, & paddle boards
- Water trails can be various lengths and are used by paddlers, anglers, hikers and picnickers of all ages and ability.
- Water trails have many benefits for relatively little investment.

Recreation

- Paddling is an easy outdoor activity for many types of people.
- The recent America's Great Outdoors Initiative in 2010 found that Americans want access to their rivers, lakes and streams.
- Communities benefit from increased recreation and tourism in their town.

Tourism and Economic Growth

- In Georgia, recreationists spend \$11.3 billion annually on canoeing, kayaking, and rafting
- In Georgia, approximately 1 million paddlers participate in the sport.
- Outdoor recreation participants spend \$86 billion annually on watersports (kayaking, stand-up paddling, rafting, canoeing, and motorized boating)
- Communities throughout Georgia are realizing the economic benefits of highlighting their waterways.

Conservation

- Paddlers see the conditions of the river and become advocates for clean water.
- The river teaches paddlers about wildlife habitat.
- Protections that can help keep the river clean can include improved zoning and buffer requirements, improved storm water practices, prevention of new water quality threats, and enforcement of water quality laws.

Take Home Points:

- Water trails have many benefits for relatively little investment.
- Water trails can help diversify local economies.
- Many Georgia communities are already taking advantage of the benefits water trails.



What can I do to help?

- Encourage the adoption of local resolutions which show support for the Upper Oconee Water Trail (Jackson, Oconee, Greene counties)
- Share your photos of river wildlife and fun paddling experiences with us!
- Join the Upper Oconee Water Trail team!
- Conduct a river cleanup and get involved with water quality monitoring
- Alert us of hazards or access issues along the river
- Promote Upper Oconee Water Trail to friends, family and visitors too!
- Become a sponsor of Upper Oconee Water Trail and have your logo included in brochures, signs, & maps.

Georgia River Network's Water Trails Clearinghouse has information about all 15 established and 17 developing water trails in Georgia (www.gawatertrails.org).



Resources

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Learn more at **UOWT.org** and **UpperOconeeWaterTrail@gmail.com**