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Friends of Chattahoochee: Volunteer day Saturday at park along the river

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The Friends of Chattahoochee Bend have been busy observing National Volunteer Month.

April is National Volunteer Month, and the friends group has had events every weekend in April — and some weekdays — at the state park in western Coweta County.

Up next is the regular volunteer day this Saturday. The main focus will be trail maintenance, said Steve St. Laurent, trails committee chairman for the Friends of Chattahoochee Bend State Park.

Volunteers are asked to bring their own tools and meet at the visitor center by 9:45 a.m. Bring water, snacks, and insect repellent.

The biggest event this month was the group's first-ever river cleanup — done by volunteers on kayaks and canoes.

There were 22 volunteers and 24 boats at the river cleanup, St. Laurent said.

Volunteers hauled 400 pounds of trash out of the river.

The river cleanup was suggested by volunteer Tony Burrows, St. Laurent said. "He is there pretty much every time we have a trail day. The last couple of times he always had two kayaks in the back of his pickup."

As it turns out, the Chatt-Bend river cleanup was held on the same day the Upper Chattahoochee River Keeper was having a river cleanup event.

"We had no idea. We just did it spur of the moment," St. Laurent said. "From there, it was really just a lot of planning — pretty much a solid week of social e-mail marketing."

A plastic container was strapped on to each kayak. When the containers were full, the trash was transferred into one of several canoes, some of which were being towed behind the kayaks. There were also two motor boats helping out with places that kayaks couldn't access.

A wide variety of trash was pulled out of the river.

"A lot of it was bottles, styrofoam, and other bits of stuff," said St. Laurent. "The weirdest thing I found was a confetti-filled bouncy ball... it still had the label on it."

There were some "trash islands" made of assorted limbs and logs and trash.

"We found pretty much a whole shoe and then we found a shirt," St. Laurent said. "Somebody else who was up on the bank found a helmet."

The flotilla covered the three-and-a-quarter-mile stretch from the northern boat launch area at the river's "bend" to the boat ramp at the main amenity area.

The river level was pretty high on the Chattahoochee, and there were some areas that couldn't be accessed, St. Laurent said. "One of them we can get to by land, if the water drops another couple of feet," he said.

He said the Friends would like to have another cleanup either this summer or in the fall to clean the areas up and down river from what was cleaned this month.

Volunteers were out April 2 scouting for proposed horse and mountain bike trails. Horse trail scouting continued on April 7.

On April 21, in celebration of Earth Day, volunteers planted wild flowers along parts of the Bobwhite Way, the main road into the park. And mountain bike trail scouting continued.

The Friends group holds regularly scheduled volunteer days the fourth Saturday of each month.

The May volunteer day will be held the third Saturday, May 19, to avoid conflicts with Memorial Day.

For more information about the Friends of Chattahoochee Bend State Park, visit www.bendfriend.com. For more information about the park, visit www.gastateparks.org/ChattahoocheeBend.

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