

Published Friday, June 01, 2012

Naturalist offers hikes at state park

BY SARAH FAY CAMPBELL

sarah@newnan.com

The new naturalist is on the job at Chattahoochee Bend State Park, hosting programs on the weekends — including guided hikes and an arts and crafts program this weekend.

Part-time naturalist John Hubbartt started working last weekend at the park, located in western Coweta along the Chattahoochee River.

He'll be making the rounds at the park starting at 3 p.m. today, introducing himself to everyone.

Tonight, there will be a guided nighttime hike along the river trail. The emphasis will be on the sounds of the river and nighttime critters. Hikers should meet at 8 p.m. at the boat ramp. No dogs, please.

On Saturday, Hubbartt will be leading a hike at 10 a.m. from the visitors center. There will be "water games," including water balloons, at the boat ramp at 1 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Sunday's 10 a.m. guided hike will leave from the boat ramp.

There will be an arts and crafts event Saturday at 4 p.m. on the porch of the visitors center. Participants will make "pinecone owls." There is a charge of \$1 to cover supplies.

"We're glad to have a naturalist at Chattahoochee Bend because it adds so much to our visitors' experience," said Kim Hatcher of Georgia State Parks. "They can join a guided hike and learn about the plants and animals living within the park. Kids can do nature crafts to take home as souvenirs," Hatcher said. "John even has a Roving Ranger program where he greets campers and other guests, telling them about all we have to offer."

Saturday is also the day for the fourth annual meeting of the Friends of Chattahoochee Bend State Park.

Updates will be given on trail construction and other friends projects, and new board members will be elected.

Following the meeting, Bill Mayer of the friends group will be leading a guided hike at 3 p.m. from the visitors center, said Dean Jackson, vice president of the Friends of Chattahoochee Bend.

Hubbartt's position is being funded by Coweta County for the next three years.

"We really appreciate both the state and Coweta County funding the position and getting behind that," Jackson said. "We are very excited about the expertise he brings to the park," he said.

"The community, I think, is going to get a lot out of him" being at the park, Jackson said.

The annual meeting will be held at noon, at the pavilion at the river.

The Friends group has held an annual meeting every year since 2009, but this will be the first one since the park opened to the public last July.

"One of the main things we do is talk about the things that have gone on over the last year," Jackson said. "We're excited about a number of things that have gone on out at the park, not the least of all the actual opening of the park itself," Jackson

said.

The presentation will primarily center on the construction of the trails — volunteers have built more than eight miles of hiking trails.

And volunteer groups have come together in the past several months to being the process of planning, flagging, and eventually building horse and mountain bike trails.

“They’ve made a huge amount of progress,” Jackson said. “We’re hoping, going into this next year, that they can continue to make progress toward that.”

All are welcome to attend the meeting, but only paid members of the friends chapter can vote.

You can join the local chapter at the park visitor’s center at any time, or you can join online at bendfriend.com or friendsofgastateparks.org.

Be sure to choose Chattahoochee Bend as your home park.

Individual membership is \$50 a year, and includes a park pass good for parking at all Georgia State Parks, as well as an individual pass for state historic sites.

There will be lunch at the annual meeting, but to eat, you must RSVP by Friday at 4 p.m. For more information, visit www.bendfriend.com.

Admission to the park is in the form of a parking pass. Passes are \$5 for passenger vehicles, and are higher for passenger vans and buses.

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