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SECTIONS

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# Volunteers 'Sweep The Hooch' At Park

by SARAH FAY CAMPBELL

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SARAH FAY CAMPBELL

James Stephens, right, helps Archie Davis unload his canoe, as Anthony Kirby paddles to the boat ramp at Saturday's Sweep the Hooch river cleanup at Chattahoochee Bend State Park in Coweta.

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Thirty-six volunteers pulled 726 pounds of garbage from the Chattahoochee River along Coweta County's border Saturday, as part of the third annual "Sweep the Hooch" river cleanup organized by the Chattahoochee River Keeper.

There were 22 sites along the river, with the on-river and on-bank cleanup at Chattahoochee Bend State Park counting as two sites.

Approximately 7,318 pounds of trash, garbage, and debris were removed from the river and its banks on Saturday.

This was the third river cleanup at Chattahoochee Bend, and the first one in cooperation with the Chattahoochee River Keeper.



"It was great," said Greg Hyde, River Committee chairman for the Friends of Chattahoochee Bend State Park. He said the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper group was "very excited to get us."

"We've been talking to them before," he said.

The organization is trying to reach out more to communities and get more people involved, particularly on the south side of Atlanta.

"It was good to get the publicity and work with them. They are very organized in how they do it — I learned a few things," Hyde said.

Additionally, all the volunteers got a free riverkeeper membership.

Sixteen volunteers, led by James Stephens, tackled the banks. They had their hands full and only got to go a little more than a mile. They took a ladder to help access the banks but didn't end up needing it, Stephens said.

They knew that stretch of riverside trail is the worst, because Trails Chairman Steve St. Laurent and Jan Pierce had been scouting from the river beforehand, looking for spots with the most junk.

Stephens said his team also came upon "the most beautiful owl."

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“I had a blast,” said volunteer Laura Kearns, who was canoeing with Botanical Committee Chairman Dave Smith.

Stacy Duke and Angela Greene came from Roswell and Smyrna, respectively, to help clean. They had been signing up for Sweep the Hooch online and saw available spots at Chattahoochee Bend and decided to focus their work there.

The river water level was up fairly high on Saturday, leading to swifter currents than usual.

“We were afraid it was going to be too strong to safely go ahead and get trash off the side of the banks,” Hyde said. But it wasn’t that bad after all, he added.

The higher water levels covered up some trash, but “it also let us reach a lot of the trash we wouldn’t normally be able to reach,” Hyde said.

There was a wide variety of junk pulled from the river, including dozens of sports balls and bottles and even a Big Wheel youth tricycle. Hyde said the strangest thing was the plastic buggy portion of a shopping cart from Richway. The old Richway department stores were an offshoot of Rich’s and most closed in the 1980s.

They also found a nearly full gas can that looked as if “somebody had dropped it into the river yesterday.” Hyde found a coconut, and there were plenty of toys. And the foam. There were plenty of styrofoam cups and plenty of large chunks of foam insulation.

“The foam just never goes away,” Hyde said.

They saw lots of trash just left on the riverbanks, and there were a lot of out-door related items, such as cans of bug spray and charcoal lighter fluid.

“It was a fun experience,” said Morgan Honaker of Hogansville. “I would definitely do it again.”

“It’s a great thing. Everybody needs to come out,” said Vicki Corley, who loaded the shopping cart on top of her canoe.

Hyde thanked the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and park staff, the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, the Newnan Meet-Up Paddle Group, Great Oaks, which donated the 20-yard dumpster, and the Coweta County Fire Department, which had its rescue boat and Waverunner on hand, as well as the volunteers who made the event a success.

The Friends will be organizing another river cleanup this fall.

