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With new park, boat traffic up: 'Phenomenal increase' on river

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Since the July opening of the new Chattahoochee Bend State Park in west Coweta County, boat traffic on the river is picking up.

"We've seen a phenomenal increase in traffic along the Chattahoochee," said Daryl Johnson, ranger at McIntosh Reserve park, across the river in Carroll County. "Folks are going up and down this little stretch more and more, especially between Highway 16 and the McIntosh Reserve. I think we're only going to see more and more people discovering it."

Johnson decided it was time for him to take his first river journey via kayak this weekend. He'd traveled the 15-mile section by raft before, but he said he was looking forward to taking things slowly and really soaking up the scenery.

"I'm mainly doing some sight-seeing today," said Johnson as he put his kayak in at the Highway 16 bridge Friday. "It's getting to where it's not unusual to see eagles and hawks fishing on the river. You can see a lot of different wildlife."

Tim Lawson of Georgia Trail Outfitters led Friday's expedition. He said the corridor between the bridge and Franklin, Ga., is still largely undeveloped.

"It's one of the prettiest little sections," said Lawson. "It's not over-built. There are very few houses you can see between here and Franklin. Close to the McIntosh Reserve there are probably seven or eight houses, but from there to Franklin you only see about four houses in that 15-mile stretch."

"The Carroll County side of the river is still mostly agricultural and forested land," said Johnson. "It's a little more developed on the Coweta side, but still not too much. It's a nice trip."

He said that when the Moore's Bridge park is completed upstream boat traffic should pick up even more.

"Moore's Bridge will give us one more green space to fit into the plan," said Johnson. "We're going to have a lot of parks and recreational opportunities on the Chattahoochee River on the south side of Atlanta. In fact, we'll have three parks and boat ramps within just a few miles of each other. That'll be really nice."

If the money's there, the Moore's Bridge project could eventually include a reconstruction of the original wooden bridge built by freed slave Horace King.

“It’s actually kind of ironic that the bridge was burnt by Sherman’s troops” during the Civil War, said Johnson. “They didn’t want to be flanked, so the bridge had to go.”

It was later re-built and burnt again, after which the Carrollton-Newnan road shifted to the west, to the current Highway 16 location.

“They never re-built it again,” he said. “But hopefully they’ll keep talking about restoring it.”

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