

August 13, 2008

## **An Open Letter to Gauley River Boaters**

Dear Boaters,

The 2008 Gauley season is going to be an exciting time for the Gauley River National Recreation Area. For the first time in the since the Gauley River NRA was established, the park now owns mid-river access where upper Gauley trips may take off the river and lower Gauley trips may put on. The river accesses recently acquired are the Masons Branch river access and the new Woods Ferry river access. In both cases, the park was only able to purchase what the landowners were willing to sell. Therefore, the areas are not as large as we would like, and parking will be limited.

The Woods Ferry access is the larger of the two river access we purchased. The Woods Ferry access is located on river right and off of Panther Mountain Road approximately 4.7 miles west of Route 129 and 1.1 miles west of Masons Branch. By river, the Woods Ferry access is approximately 2.75 miles down stream from Masons Branch. The access has a medium size parking lot at river level that will be designated for private boater vehicles. The Parking area is a short walk, approximately 100 yards, from the boat ramp. At the river's edge, we leveled and graveled two ramps to the river, one for private boaters and one for commercial boaters. Next to the private boater ramp we will designate a vehicle loading and unloading area. Private boaters will be able to drive up to the ramp to drop off boats and equipment. The commercial boat ramp is just up stream, approximately 25 yards, so private and commercial vehicle traffic will be on the same road and will share the same turn-around. The park will provide portable toilets near the boat ramps and the parking area.

At Masons Branch the park acquired the road to the river access, the small turnaround, and the boat ramp. In addition, several of the commercial rafting companies retained legal access to, or across, the land in the form of retained rights-of-ways. Due to the limited amount of land available at this access and the retained rights, we plan to restrict vehicle access at Masons Branch this year. Access will be managed much like it has been in past years. To help with parking, American Whitewater has leased the Legg field above Masons Branch. The field will be available throughout the Gauley season for private boater parking. During the Gauley Festival and the following weekend, the West Virginia Rivers Coalition will be providing a boat shuttle from Legg field to the Masons Branch river access. This shuttle will be operated as a fundraiser for the West Virginia Rivers Coalition.

Depending on visitation/traffic levels, the park is going to try to allow private boater vehicle access to Masons Branch river access on Fridays and Mondays. Access will be allowed for loading and unloading only. Boaters will still park at the Legg Field. Our park maintenance crew has been working to improve the road to Masons Branch. They will be trimming back the road shoulders and repairing the potholes; however, the road will still be a one lane narrow road with limited pull-offs for passing oncoming traffic. Please restrict use of this road on Mondays and Fridays to vehicles used for dropping off or picking up equipment. On the weekends when

the West Virginia Rivers Coalition is not running the equipment shuttle at Masons Branch, the park will try to provide an equipment shuttle. The details of this are being worked out at this time and we anticipate having the equipment shuttle in place for the opening weekend of Gauley Season.

As our planning efforts progress, we will post information on our web page at [www.nps.gov/gari](http://www.nps.gov/gari) as well as continuing to communicate with private boaters through partnering organizations such as American Whitewater and the West Virginia Rivers Coalition. This will be our first year managing these two new accesses on the Gauley River. We expect there will be some growing pains and there are still many details to be worked out. However, with the cooperation of the boating community, we anticipate this year's Gauley season will be very successful and a significant improvement for private boaters.

Sincerely,

Gary Hartley, Chief Ranger  
New River Gorge National River  
Gauley River National Recreation Area  
Bluestone National Scenic River