

## Gorges State Park Plans Interim Facilities by Fall

by Lillie Mills

Visitors to Gorges State Park are streaming in this summer despite the lack of facilities available there. The popularity of our new state park is evidenced by the lines of vehicles roadside on Hwy. 281 South on any given day. There is currently no official parking area.

An elevation that rises some 2,000 feet in only three to five miles combined with rainfall in excess of 80 inches per year creates a temperate rain forest and supports an extensive collection of waterfalls. North Carolina's newest state park will be managed to protect these nationally significant natural resources as well as to provide high quality outdoor recreation activities.

Special interest areas include: The Horsepasture River (National Wild and Scenic River), Toxaway River, Bearwallow Creek, Thompson River, Bearcamp Creek, Windy Falls, Lower Bearwallow Falls, Toxaway Creek Falls, Chestnut Mountain, Grindstone Mountain, Gridstone Mountain, Mistry Mountain, major trout streams, native and numerous rare species of wildflowers.

The fascinating ecology of Gorges State Park is the subject of numerous natural heritage inventories. Plans are being formed to address the immediate need for safe parking and restroom facilities for visitors to this treasure land. But until park inventories and studies are completed, these plans are termed "interim" or temporary. Only after the long range plans for the park are completed, will construction of permanent facilities begin.

When visiting the park, please stay on designated trails. Many of the park's rare plants live on thin soils or wet rocks and are very vulnerable to damage from climbing, scrambling, or scraping. No entrance fee is required.

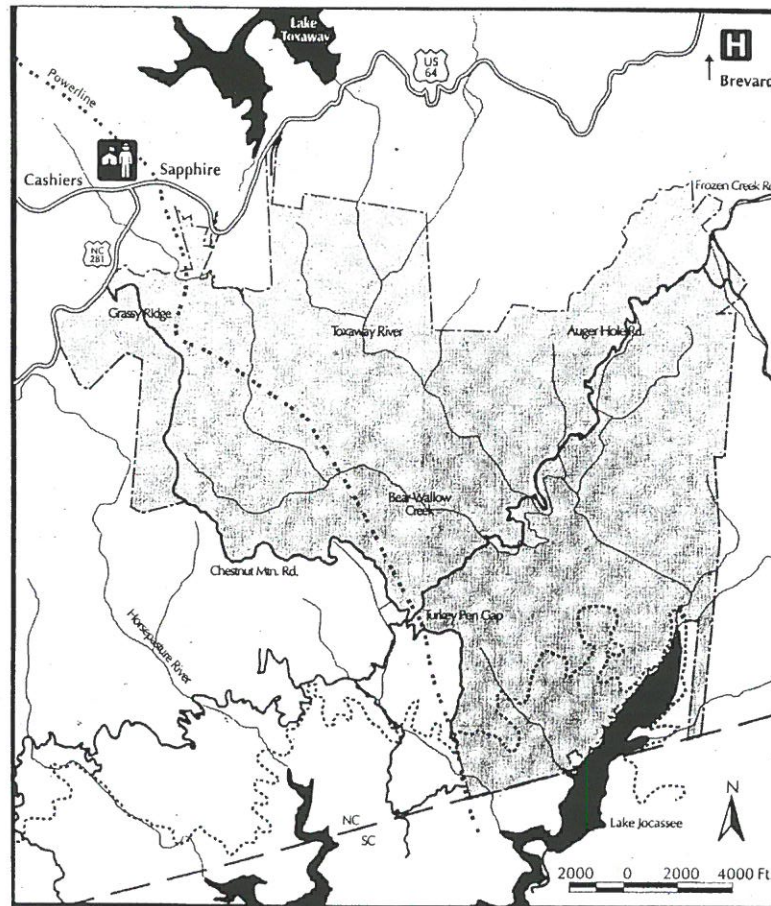
Hiking trails are open. The ongoing evaluation may open additional trails and/or close existing trails in sensitive areas due to concern for natural resource protection. Backpack camping is permitted at traditional sites. Horses and mountain bikes are currently permitted on Chestnut Mountain Road from Hwy. 281 southward into the park and Auger Hole Road from Chestnut Mountain Road toward the northeast boundary of the park.

Unlicensed ATVs are currently prohibited by state regulations throughout the State Park System. Licensed 4-wheel drive vehicles are permitted on Auger Hole Road for access to WRC game lands during hunting season. Boat access to Lake Jocassee is currently available through Devil's Fork State Park in South Carolina.

Scientists from Western Carolina University are conducting a rare plant survey in the park updating 30 records and adding eight new rare plant population records. This summer, the survey continues in its second year focusing on areas proposed for park facility development.

Scientists from North Carolina State University have mapped vegetative cover in the park. Over 100 natural community sites have been surveyed and scientists continue to work on being able to predict additional sites.

The NC Geological Survey is preparing a geologic inventory and hazard assessment including geologic engineering studies to help with long range planning. These surveys will not be completed until the leaves are off the trees later this



fall.

Fish communities are being surveyed and stream habitats are being studied in the Horsepasture and Toxaway Rivers. Jason Robinson at the Highlands Biological Station and Tim Thorpe at Lake Toxaway BP are recruiting volunteers to help with the sampling. If you are at least 15 years old, capable of lifting 30 lbs. and are interested in helping, contact Jason at 526-2498 or Tim at 883-8968.

A biologist from the State Park Resource Management Program is leading an amphibian and land snail survey to characterize typical species in the park's communities. Early observations reveal an abundance of dusky salamanders and two rare green salamanders in the gorge.

The NC Museum of Natural Sciences is sampling the small mammals of the gorges. Eastern woodrats were located in the area in the 1960s and hopefully remain there still. A sample of bat species will be conducted this summer.

John Sealy of Appalachian State University has located timber rattlesnake gestation sites in the park. While working in the area, Mr. Sealy

will lead a discussion at the Sapphire-Whitewater Community Center on July 21 at 7:00 p.m. on the rattlesnake's ecology (how it relates to its environment) and life history. Reservations are required, so contact the Gorges State Park office at 966-9099 by July 17, if you would like to attend.

With support from Larry Ragsdale, Park Advisory Committee member and professor at Brevard College, the college's environmental education staff has expressed interest in working with the park staff on additional environmental education programs.

Still under development is the park's master plan. Once these natural and cultural heritage inventories are completed, the park's master plan, including facility development and long range management procedures, will be developed. Until the master plan is approved, any development within the park will be considered temporary.

Interim development plans include two access areas: Bohaney Road (NC 281 South) and Frozen

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Visitor's automobiles dominate the landscape on Hwy. 281 South in Bohaney as plans for parking areas and bathroom facilities take shape.

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Creek Road off of Hwy. 64 just west of Rosman. The Bohaney Road access will include an entrance road, parking lot, small toilet building and picnic sites. The Frozen Creek Access will include an entrance and small toilet facility. Park officials hope construction of these interim facilities will begin next month and be completed by this fall.

The NC Division of Parks and Recreation appointed a Park Advisory Committee to serve as a liaison between the park and the community. The committee is comprised of representatives from business, education, local government as well as private citizens. The committee meets once a month. If you have a question, concern or suggestion, these people represent your avenue for input: Rick Pangle (Transylvania County Parks and Recreation-884-3156), Larry Ragsdale (Brevard College-883-8292), Tom Thomas (T.C. Henderson Elementary School-883-8559), Bill Thomas (Sierra Club-885-8229), Marla Cilley (Transylvania County Commissioner-883-2017), Libby Freeman (Brevard Chamber of Commerce-883-3700), Judge Cecil Hill (representing senior

citizens-883-3207), Bob Hoxit (representing typical park users-966-4300) and Erin Bronk (US Forest Service District Ranger-526-3765).

The office for the state park is located next to the Sapphire Post Office, near the intersection of Hwys. 64 and 281 South. Office hours 8am-5pm Monday through Friday. If you need park information, their address is P.O. Box 100, Sapphire, NC 28774. The phone number there is 828-966-9099.

Park hours: June-August 8am-9pm; April, May, September 8am-8pm; March-October 8am-7pm; November-February 8am-6pm. Gates will remain locked, except in emergency situations, when the park is not in operation. Please plan accordingly.

Last Spring, 10,000 acres of the Jocassee Gorges in Transylvania County was purchased by the state of North Carolina from Duke Energy Corporation. The transaction created a 7,000-acre state park and a 3,000-acre gameland, managed by the Wildlife Resources Commission for hunting. This area of plunging waterfalls, rugged river gorges, and sheer rock walls hosts one of the greatest concentrations of rare and unique species to the eastern United States.

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