



Second Drop of Lost Paddle Rapid



Start of the Woods Ferry Bypass

## **WOODS FERRY ROAD WORK KEEPS GAULEY SEASON ON TRACK**

West Virginia's Gauley River needs no introduction; it is one of the finest whitewater runs in the country. The upper section is a challenge for experts; the lower run is a delight to advanced paddlers. Roughly 20,000 kayak, canoe, and inflatables paddlers run the river each year. American Whitewater's Gauley Festival, run in late September, has roughly 5000 paid admissions. All of this activity contributes to the tourist-based economy in Fayette and Nicholas County.

### **Access Denied**

Lost Paddle Corporation, a partnership between two outfitters, owns all of the river-right land between Sweets Falls and Koontz Bend at the mid-point of this 26-mile run. They have generously permitted private paddlers to cross their land at Mason's Branch, Woods Ferry, and Bucklick for almost two decades. Almost everyone who has run the Gauley has gotten in or out at one of these spots. Aside from a grueling trip down the entire length of the Gauley in one day there are few other alternatives.

Paddlers were notified in July of 2005 that two outfitters planned to discontinue this long-standing policy access policy. Why change things now? When the Gauley River National Recreation Area was created the law required the Park Service to purchase a public access area at Woods Ferry. The key parcel for this proposed access is owned by Lost Paddle Corporation. After eight years of negotiations and two formal government assessments the Park Service and the outfitters are still miles apart on a price.

Although the outfitters care about the land they also see it as a business investment. They feel that the price they receive should reflect its worth in other uses, like sustained yield timbering or second home development. As the talks stalled, Lost Paddle Corporation has become increasingly uncomfortable with being a free public access provider. They had warned paddlers for several years that the current situation could not go on forever. Now the plan was, in their own words, to "create a crisis" that would force the Park Service to buy their property at a fair price.

## **Woods Ferry Road is a Viable Alternative**

In the early 1900's a county road crossed the Gauley River at Woods Ferry and continued over the mountains to Anstead, WV. This right-of-way is still legally active. Because Lost Paddle Corporation has never permitted private rafters to take out on their land this has been the only place that owners of inflatables could legally drive down to river level to land and launch and their boats.

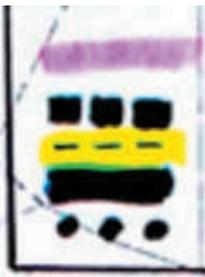
The Woods Ferry road as it now exists has been maintained for some time by two small outfitters, Wildwater Unlimited and Passages to Adventure. It is not uncommon in West Virginia for private individuals to maintain little-used, out-of-the-way county roads. In addition to being narrow and steep, the current road deviates from the right-of-way and trespasses on Lost Paddle Corporation property for several hundred yards. There is parking at the canyon rim for roughly 50 cars.

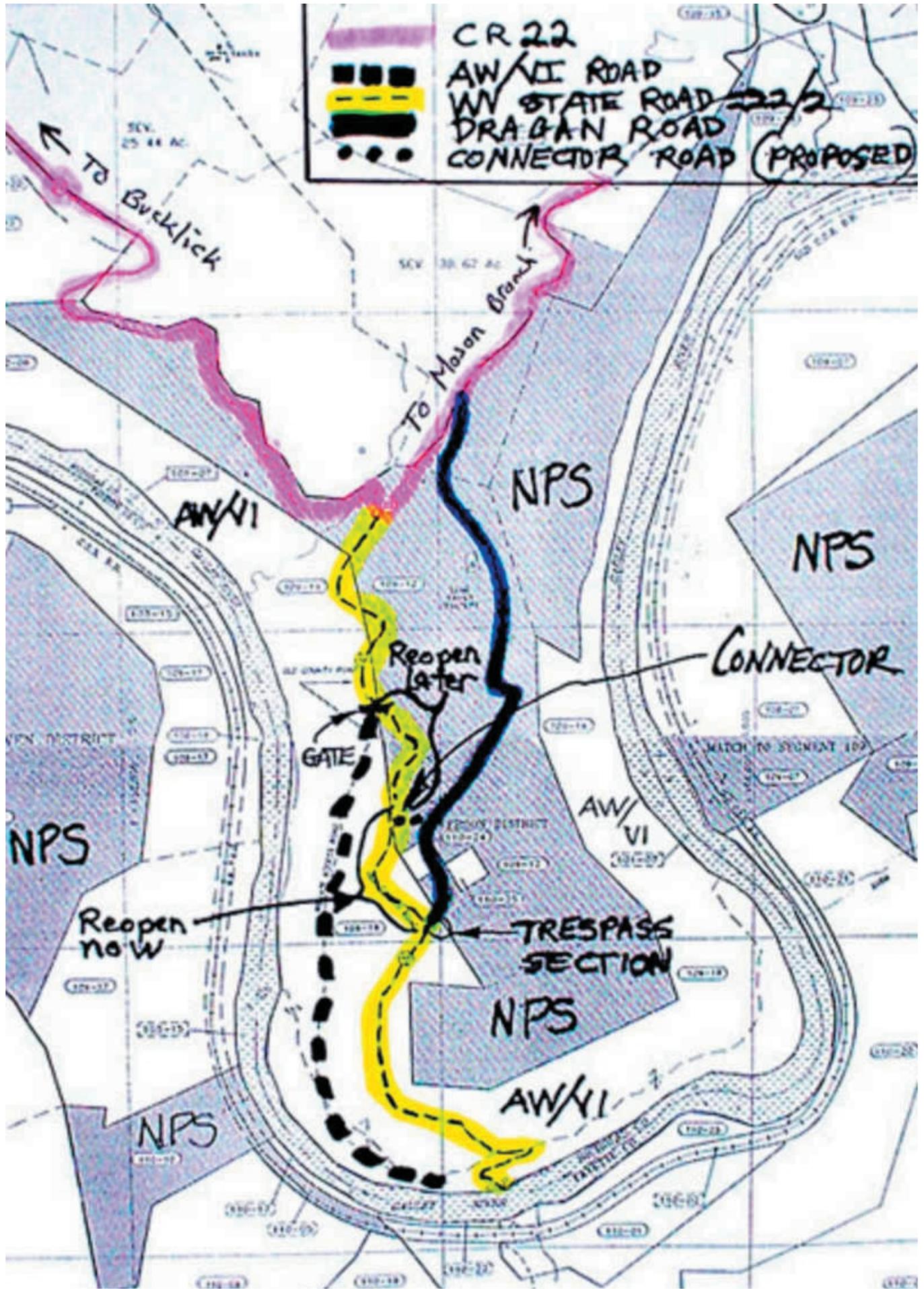
## **Road Work Begins**

Bill Tanger, a Roanoke, Virginia based private rafter, began investigating the possibility of reopening the old Woods Ferry Road this past spring. He and Passages to Adventure owner Benjy Simpson obtained the necessary permits from the National Park Service and the West Virginia Highway Department to do the work. He and members of the West Virginia Wildwater Association then formed a group called Friends of the Gauley River (FOGR) to support their work.

Tanger then organized work crews to reopen a long-abandoned stretch of the Woods Ferry Road. This would bypass a section of the current road that trespasses on Lost Paddle Corporation land. Because the bypass also crosses land owned by the National Park Service all work was done with hand tools to minimize environmental damage. When the road was completed outfitter Benjy Simpson planned to operate a boat shuttle in and out of the gorge. As was true at Mason's Branch, paddlers had to walk in or out of the canyon themselves. A donation was used to offset the costs, with the surplus being used to maintain the road.




 CR 22  
 AW/VI ROAD  
 WY STATE ROAD 22/2  
 DRAGON ROAD  
 CONNECTOR ROAD (PROPOSED)



## Woods Ferry Road Renovation Budget

Bulldozer Rental and Operator Time	\$ 3,000
Gravel truckloads: 20 x \$300	\$ 6,500
Tools, chain saw sharpening, etc.	\$ 500
<b>SUB TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>

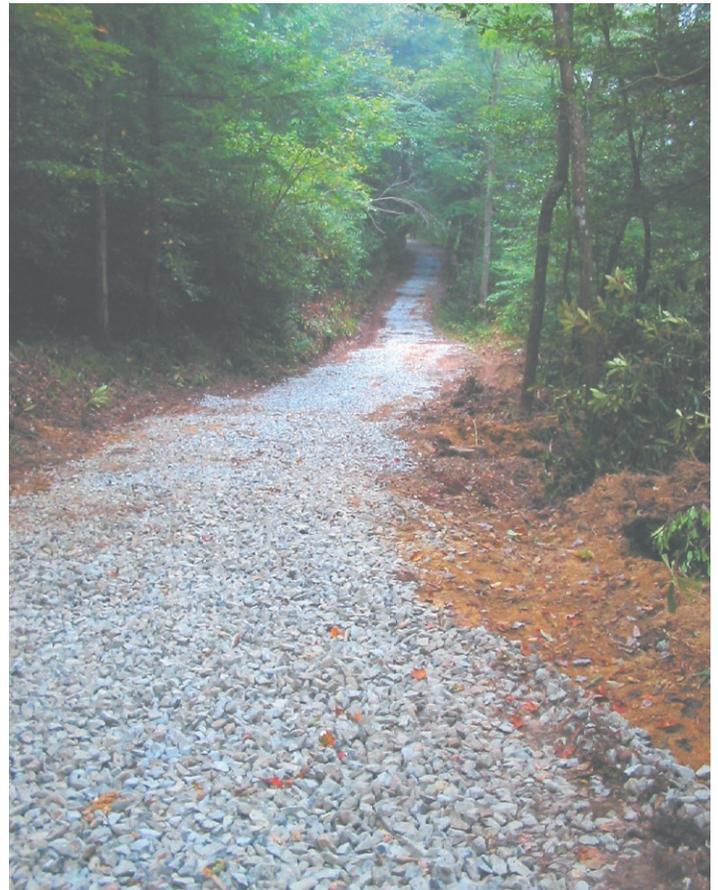
### Major Donors:

WV Tourism Commission, Charleston WV	\$5000
Confluence Watersports, Trinity NC	\$1000
American Canoe Association (CFS Grant)	\$ 816
Float Fishermen of Virginia	\$ 500
Carolina Canoe Club, Raleigh, NC	\$ 500
Chota Canoe Club, Knoxville TN	\$ 300

Plus several hundred small donations of \$20-\$100 by individuals



At the Canyon Rim



Down the Length of the Bypass

## **Outfitters Relent; Reopen Access**

In late August the outfitters relented and announced that their access points would be open again this year. But this is may only be a temporary solution, and we could be in the same place next season. The Old Woods Ferry Road is still important as an access point for inflatables and serves as insurance against future disruptions to river access. If negotiations for the sale of outfitter land break down this road might have to be used by everyone for a long time. We feel that the road also helps keep negotiations with Lost Paddle corporation focused and on track.

### **For more information contact:**

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