

FEATURES

A Breakthrough in Brevard History

-by ALISSIA NORMAN, staff writer-

Unsure about whether or not she wanted to attend college, but willfully listening to the advice of her high school counselor, Mary Alice Wilkes Mooney went on to become the first African-American to attend Brevard College nearly thirty years after it was established in its present location.

A graduate of Allen High School, a formerly existing private boarding school in Asheville, Mooney became a Brevard College student in 1962 at the age of eighteen. Although she attended for only one and one-half years, what she learned has helped her throughout her lifetime and is still helping her this very day.

"The people were civil, not very friendly, but civil," she says with a chuckle, "But then again, I was not very friendly either. I was shy, and I did not know how to communicate very well with others. My time at Brevard College helped me to mature, learn how to relate to others, and know how to conduct myself in any environment regardless of whether or not it is an environment I prefer. I have no regrets, and I am glad I went."

Mooney majored in secretarial science, taking classes in typing, short hand, history, and English to complete her degree requirements. Today she is employed as a secretary at RFS Ecusta here in Transylvania County. Her advice to all young adults is to finish high school and go on to college to become a graduate. She says it is one of the most important decisions a student will ever make.



-Clarion staff photo.-

TVA Tightens the Noose: Water Release Issues on the Ocoee River

-by CHRIS BEAUVAIS, guest writer-

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) has recently announced a fee increase on the Ocoee River in Tennessee that would force commercial outfitters to pay a great deal more for whitewater releases. They also announced that they would no longer supply free water to national events held on the river. These events include the Ocoee Rodeo and the U.S. Canoe and Kayak team trials. The fee increase has the potential to ruin small rafting companies and force larger ones to pull out of the river. This will leave a beautiful intermediate whitewater river dry. There is another, much bigger issue to be discussed here; does man truly have the right to "own" the water to a naturally free flowing river? The Ocoee issue is a long way from over.

Whitewater paddling, like every other sport, carries its own set of frustrations and issues to deal with. Being a kayaker myself, I check several websites nearly every day to see which rivers are flowing and where the closest storm is. Often, days go by with little or no rain, forcing anxious paddlers to rely on dam-controlled rivers like the Green, the Nantahala, the Pigeon, and one of my personal favorites, the Ocoee. Unfortunately, just like every other sport, when there is money to be made, people want to reach their hand deeper and deeper into the till.

The Ocoee is an incredibly diverse natural and man made river. The Upper Ocoee includes the manmade \$26 million Olympic Whitewater Center, home of the U.S. Canoe and Kayak teams, and site of the Ocoee Rodeo, and National Slalom competitions. If this section of river is closed, the U.S. Olympic Teams will be forced to find a new training ground, decreasing much of the revenue coming into the surrounding areas. As a matter of fact, the local economy gains over 30 times the amount of money that TVA forgoes for every whitewater release, and the Ocoee is the only river in the country where recreationalists are charged for water. The Middle and Lower Ocoee is home to a \$20 million a year commercial rafting industry. Thousands of people flock to the river when the dams release to catch wild rides on rapids such as Smiley's and Hell Hole, but all this can soon change.

Currently, American Whitewater (AW), a

national conservation organization dedicated to river access, has opened a forum to discuss planning and release schedules with the TVA in hopes to lower or eradicate the fee increase, and has invited professionals from around the globe to voice their opinions about the issue. This forum encourages people to voice their opinions, while at the same time take a look from the perspective of the other side. As a matter of fact, AW has placed the Ocoee issue in their top ten conservation issues list, one of two located in the Southern Appalachians.

I recently had the privilege of discussing the issue with Kevin Colburn, the Eastern Conservation and Access Associate for American Whitewater, who deals with all the paddling related issues in the Eastern U.S., and is the organizer of the Ocoee campaign.

Colburn told me that "TVA no longer receives appropriations from congress, and is apparently 25 billion dollars in debt. They feel that they were great stewards at the Ocoee because they "subsidized" the whitewater recreation industry for 5 years through providing several free releases for events and through allowing rafting companies to purchase water." This decision to increase fees means that "in a few years there could be no more water flowing through the upper Ocoee, and the 26 million dollar Ocoee whitewater center will no longer have whitewater as an attraction," and that "rafting companies will continue to buy their 20 allowed days per year at increasingly great costs until it is no longer economically feasible, which will not take long." What all of this points to is that one day, there might not be any more whitewater flowing through the Ocoee, and Tennessee will no longer have such a great source of revenue because of TVA's greed.

When I asked Colburn about TVA's stance that they "own" the water that flows through the river, he simply responded, "it is not ethical and it is not legal." He then expounded on his statement by explaining that, "The waters of the US belong to the public, thanks to the public trust doctrine. This is a wise legal acknowledgement that rivers have intrinsic value and are simply too complex and valuable to belong to anyone. TVA has taken the Ocoee hostage and is profiting from it at the expense of the regional economy, other

river users, and the river itself... If TVA were privatized, rather than a pseudo-governmental organization, releases would be required by FERC... This greedy behavior is far from ethical."

American Whitewater is fighting hard to keep TVA from increasing the fees for the river, and recently Colburn was nominated to represent downstream recreationalists on a review board for the Reservoir Operations Study (ROS) of the Ocoee. Colburn told me that AW been supplying TVA with information and possible solutions, and is trying to work with them toward a resolution. Yet, "without a huge public response, the Ocoee will likely dry up." There are three steps that the general public can do to help save the river:

Step 1. File comments on the ROS during scoping (March 21st - April) that say how important the Ocoee is and that free releases must be provided.

Step 2. File ROS comments after the Draft Environmental Impact Statement comes out in March of 03, following AW's recommendations. We are going to follow the forest services preferred alternative from a 1996 alternative that requests 74 releases per year be provided by TVA.

Step 3. Call, write, or visit with your congressional representatives and tell them that there must be releases provided on the Ocoee, or TVA should be reformed.

Thanks to Colburn and American Whitewater, "we finally have a process to get releases in the upper Ocoee. TVA's audacious attitude about owning the water should not stand without public opposition. Everyone that has ever rafted the Ocoee should file comments on this issue and demand that TVA begin sharing the Ocoee with its other millions of owners. Plenty of people think that TVA must be reformed to be more financially, ethically and environmentally responsible. With the Ocoee issue, TVA has a chance to prove them right or wrong."

The time has come for action. Grab your pens and grab your paddles. Let TVA know what you think of this kind of illegal behavior. It is time that the paddling community shares one voice. We cannot let another river go dry.

For more information, see: www.americanwhitewater.org