

Free events offered Saturday for National Hunting and Fishing Day

By JIMMY JACOBS published Thursday, September 22, 2016

Saturday is National Hunting and Fishing Day in Georgia and the rest of the nation. Back in 1972 the U.S. Congress set aside the fourth Saturday of September as a day to recognize the contribution that the nation's fishermen and hunters have made in conserving and improving our natural resources. Today those efforts generate more than \$1 billion annually for wildlife and fisheries conservation programs.

The Peach State has been a major beneficiary of the good work done in the conservation realm by hunters and anglers. The latest U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey showed that 844,000 anglers spent just shy of \$471 million annually on their sport in the state. Similarly, the state's 392,000 hunters added a bit more than \$478 million to the economy. If you figure in costs such as transportation, lodging and meals associated with trips to hunt and fish, the impact on the state's economy is even greater.



The license fees from hunting and fishing also have funded many of the land acquisitions by the DNR for our wildlife management areas. While those tracts are used for hunting and fishing, they benefit the 2.2 million Georgians that actively participate in wildlife watching as well.

Thanks in great part to the sportsmen, we now have more than 1 million acres of land in a total of more than 90 WMAs spread across the state. Additionally, 15 other federally managed parcels of land also are open to hunting and fishing.

When you add in our more than 4,000 miles of trout streams, 12,000 miles of warm water streams and rivers, more than 500,000 acres of reservoirs and countless farm and sub-division ponds, Georgia is a great place for hunters and fishermen to pursue their passions.

The Georgia DNR has a full range of events planned for National Hunting and Fishing Day to thank sportsmen for their efforts.

"I encourage you to bring friends and family to a National Hunting and Fishing Day event," said Director Rusty Garrison of the Georgia DNR's Wildlife Resources Division. "These are family-oriented, with fun and educational hands-on activities that everyone will enjoy. It is a great way to introduce youth and newcomers to outdoor sports while teaching them about the important role that hunting and fishing have for Georgia's wildlife conservation programs."

The Hunting and Fishing Day activities are all free. And, carrying that free aspect even further, on that day residents of the state can fish in any public waters without having to buy a fishing license. The free fishing day also exempts participants from having to purchase special licenses usually required for angling on Public Fishing Areas, WMAs or in the trophy trout area on Waters Creek.

National Hunting and Fishing Day activities planned for Georgia are Kid's Fishing Events and Outdoor Adventure Days. Two of those events have been set for the northeast corner of the state.

An Outdoor Adventure Day takes place at Unicoi State Park near Helen from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. This event is open to all ages, with a variety of outdoor activities planned. Those include trout fishing on Smith Creek; instruction in skeet, air gun and archery shooting; as well as live animal exhibits.

All activities for the day are free, including entry to the Smith Creek Day Use Area. The standard \$5 parking fee will apply to all other areas of the state park. For more details you can call

the WRD Gainesville office at (770) 535-5498 or (770) 535-5700. Additionally, you can contact Unicoi State Park for information at 1-800-573-9659, extension 305.

A Kid's Fishing Event is being held on the Chattahoochee River just below Lake Lanier's Buford Dam. The activities here begin at 9 a.m. and run until 1 p.m. Kids 15 and younger that are accompanied by an adult can learn to fish for trout. Fly-tying demonstrations are also planned.

Bait and a limited number of rods and reels will be available, but youngsters are encouraged to bring their own poles if they have them. Volunteers will be on hand to work with the youth anglers.

For more information on the Kid's Fishing Event, contact William Goldman at (770) 535-5498.

Similar events are planned at the Big Lazer, Evans County, Marben, McDuffie, Paradise and Hugh Gillis PFAs, along with the Richmond Hill State Fish Hatchery and Sloppy Floyd State Park.

For a complete list of National Hunting and Fishing Day events and information visit georgiawildlife.com/get-involved/nhfd. Then click the link for the 2016 schedule of events.

These activities are a great chance to take a youngster or newcomer outside and introduce them to a lifetime of enjoyment in the outdoor sports.