Points of Interest:

prevent overfishing.

Etowah. Fish traps were an important part of early Georgia history, but in the late 1800s laws were enacted that prohibited the use of

I'd have moss on my back and squirrels on my knees. I'd be old and wise, if I were a tree."—Walkin' Jim Stolz from his CD Kid for

of the cypress. A deciduous tree, the cypress is unique among conifers in that its leaves turn orangish-brown before being shed in the

the outside edge of this hairpin bend. This is one of three locations in Georgia where you can see a bear in its natural habitat for there

of the Waterkeeper Alliance, have in recent months begun a campaign to stop the sale of cypress mulch at large home improvement

evidence to support this theory. In fact, swamp-dwelling specimens whose knees are removed continue to thrive. Another possibility is

view is that the knees provide oxygen to the roots that grow in the low dissolved oxygen waters typical of a swamp, but there is little

Recoil Trillium and Lanceleaf Trillium flowers. The creek also contains unique and fragile freshwater mussels and crayfish. If the

almost pristine, bordered by a wide swath of bottomland hardwood forest (one of the largest patches of bottomland hardwoods

Weyerhaeuser sold portions of these Wildlife Management Areas in 2004 to multiple buyers, some of whom are developers with designs for turning portions of Oaky Woods into large residential developments. For the time being, most of the property remains leased to DNR, but Weyerhaeuser's Oaky Woods sale created a firestorm of controversy during the 2006
gubernatorial election. Prior to Weyerhaeuser's sale to the developers, the state, with assistance from The Nature Conservancy, could have purchased the property, permanently preserving it in its natural state, but Gov. Sonny Perdue passed on the purchase. It was later revealed that Gov. Perdue, who lives in nearby Bonaire, owned property adjacent to the Oaky Woods tract.

Today, the future of Oaky Woods remains in question. During the 2007 legislative session, Gov. Perdue proposed and the legislature approved $42.5 million in funding for land conservation in the 2008 budget. Some of these funds could be used to save Oaky Woods, but the asking price for the property in question is now at least $31 million. In 2004, the state could have purchased the property for $26 million.

This is not the first, nor will it be the last, sale of large forested land tracts in Georgia. The largest landowners in the state are timber companies like Weyerhaeuser. As development pressures push land values, timber companies are finding their large tracts more lucrative as development property rather than timber land.

June 28

Mile 4-17—Oaky Woods & Ocmulgee Wildlife Management Area—For much of the remainder of today’s paddle, Oaky Woods WMA will flank you on river right while the Ocmulgee WMA holds fast on river left. The Oaky Woods and Ocmulgee Wildlife Management areas encompass some 54,000 acres in Houston, Twiggs and Bleckley Counties and appear to have been historic hunting lands since pioneer settlement and before. Oaky Woods was once partially farmed in the early 1900s until the 1940s when the pulp/paper company, Georgia Kraft, took over its management. In the 1970s Georgia Kraft sold Oaky Woods to Weyerhaeuser Timber Company, who agreed to allow the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to manage the land for public hunting and fishing. Weyerhaeuser sold portions of these Wildlife Management Areas in 2004 to multiple buyers, some of whom are developers with designs for turning portions of Oaky Woods into large residential developments. For the time being, most of the property remains leased to DNR, but Weyerhaeuser’s Oaky Woods sale created a firestorm of controversy during the 2006 gubernatorial election. Prior to Weyerhaeuser’s sale to the developers, the state, with assistance from The Nature Conservancy, could have purchased the property, permanently preserving it in its natural state, but Gov. Sonny Perdue passed on the purchase. It was later revealed that Gov. Perdue, who lives in nearby Bonaire, owned property adjacent to the Oaky Woods tract.

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Mile 6.5—Black Bears and a Beautiful Bend—If you were a black bear in Oaky Woods WMA (and thought like a human), this is where you would hang out. This spot on the river provides panoramic views upstream and downstream from a nice sandbar on the outside edge of this hairpin bend. This is one of three locations in Georgia where you can see a bear in its natural habitat for there are few places in Georgia wild enough to sustain bear populations. The other two sites are the Chattahoochee National Forest in the mountains and Okefenokee Swamp. Scientists estimate the Middle Georgia black bear population at approximately 66 individuals or one bear for every 1.2 square miles.

Mile 9.5—Cypress Trees & Knees—“If I were a tree, I’d grow all gnarly. My roots would be knobby and limbs all snarly. I’d have moss on my back and squirrels on my knees. I’d be old and wise, if I were a tree.”—Walkin’ Jim Stolz from his CD Kid for the Wild. When you come upon this impressive grove of knees and trees, you’ll know you’ve officially entered the moss-draped land of the cypress. A deciduous tree, the cypress is unique among conifers in that its leaves turn orangish-brown before being shed in the fall. The knees so commonly associated with cypress trees are part of the root structure, but their function is unknown. One popular view is that the knees provide oxygen to the roots that grow in the low dissolved oxygen waters typical of a swamp, but there is little evidence to support this theory. In fact, swamp-dwelling specimens whose knees are removed continue to thrive. Another possibility is that the knees provide structural support in the soft soils of flood-prone areas.

The knees themselves have been the center of some controversy as of late. Environmental organizations, including members of the Waterkeeper Alliance, have in recent months begun a campaign to stop the sale of cypress mulch at large home improvement stores. The demand for landscaping mulch has increased dramatically in recent years and while cypress mulch was once created from the knees provide structural support in the soft soils of flood-prone areas.

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