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For Immediate Release:

Dog Owners Encouraged to “Bag and Bin It” in the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area

Atlanta, GA: During fall 2020, 37 new dog waste bins funded by the Chattahoochee National Park Conservancy (CNPC) and the National Park Service (NPS) were installed throughout the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area (CRNRA). CNPC is the official Friends group for the CRNRA and provides funding and volunteers to support the park’s initiatives and resources. The new dog waste bins replaced 20 previous bins and added an additional 17 to encourage visitors to “Bag and Bin It.” Bins can now be found in all 15 CRNRA park units, with additional bins in high-use areas. The volume and distribution of dog waste and bags left on the ground has increased as more people seek to spend time outdoors in the CRNRA during the COVID pandemic. The new dog waste bins include free waste bags and disposal bins to encourage visitors to properly dispose of their dog’s waste at the park.

“The installation of 37 new dog waste bins will address the issue of dog waste and bags being left in the park by providing better access to proper disposal,” said Phillip Hodges, CNPC Board President. “What we need now is for dog owners to do their part.”

Three million people visit the CRNRA every year, and many of them are dog-walkers. Although dog waste bins were already located in multiple park units, many visitors do not use them. Some owners either leave their dog’s waste behind on the trails or in other public areas, or they pick up after their pets and then leave the bags along the trails, in bushes, and next to trees rather than disposing of them in the designated waste bins.

This waste represents a public health threat on land and in the water and degrades natural and cultural resources, in addition to being unsightly. Dog waste contains deadly bacteria that enters the ecosystem and the water supply. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), NPS and the U.S. EPA conducted a multi-year study to investigate patterns in microbial source tracking marker concentrations of possible sources within the national park, finding that dogs are a primary contributor of fecal contamination in the Chattahoochee River within the national park. (*Microbial Source Tracking in the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area*, Science Direct, March 2020) In addition to the Chattahoochee River providing 70% of the drinking water for metro Atlanta, high bacteria levels in the river can result in advisories for human contact recreation such as kayaking, fishing, and swimming.

In 2017, CNPC and NPS recognized the increasing need to address the ongoing issue of dog waste in the CRNRA. Looking for a fresh perspective, CNPC reached out to Atlanta’s Miami Ad School about a potential campaign. The school’s Strategic Planning Bootcamp class was tasked to raise awareness of the importance of proper disposal of dog waste and to motivate dog owners to pick up after their pets. Student creative teams surveyed park visitors and created campaigns to address the issue. Survey results indicated that more bins were needed but, more importantly, the majority of dog owners were not aware that dog waste could be harmful to the park, the watershed, and the river. Many believed that it was good for the environment to leave

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the waste in a “natural area” as fertilizer, not realizing that the fecal material damages plants and contaminates the watershed. Others were surprised to learn that even if the bags are biodegradable, the dog waste will still enter the ground or nearby water sources and thus requires proper disposal in designated waste bins. The teams determined better access to waste bins and public education on impacts to the park were needed, presenting their campaigns and recommendations to the CNPC board and CRNRA staff. The winning campaign, with colorful illustrations reminiscent of retro-styled NPS park posters, features the tag line “Lead the Pack - Bag and Bin It.”

“We wanted to make [dog owners] feel like part of the solution instead of part of the problem. Help them lead the pack,” said Max Mager, a copywriter on the Miami Ad School’s winning team.

NPS identified optimal locations at trailheads and along high-use trails throughout the CRNRA to locate dog waste bins. 37 sites were selected, and new waste bins were funded by CNPC and NPS. CNPC used the “Lead the Pack - Bag and Bin It” campaign to produce colorful metal signage for the top of the new dog waste bins, now installed in all 15 park units. QR codes on the signs link to an informational page on the CRNRA’s website. Accompanying education efforts will focus on the importance of proper disposal and negative effects on the watershed and river when dog waste and bags are left on the ground. The recent bacterial study of the river will be used as evidence that singular actions have broader impact. Educating visitors about the environmental impacts of dog waste and promoting its proper disposal throughout all park units will create a safe and enjoyable experience for all visitors along the Chattahoochee River. Picking up after pets will be encouraged not only in the park but also in the broader community through outreach to local neighborhoods, city governments, and places dog owners frequent, such as adoption centers, pet stores, and veterinarian offices.

Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park and the Friends of Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park are joining these efforts with new dog waste bins, public education initiatives, and incentives for dog owners to pick up after their pets.

“This project is the culmination of three years of work by CNPC, CRNRA and students from the Miami Ad School studying the issue of how we might reduce inappropriate dog waste in the park and in the Chattahoochee River,” said Hodges. “We truly hope the dogs’ humans will get on board with the program and reduce unhealthy and unsightly dog waste in the park and river.”

For more information on this program or how to join, donate, or volunteer with CNPC, visit chattahoocheeparks.org or email info@chattahoocheeparks.org.

The Chattahoochee National Park Conservancy (CNPC) is the official nonprofit partner of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, a unit of the national park system. CNPC strives to build a community of support for the Park and to promote the stewardship of its natural and cultural resources. Learn more at www.chattahoocheeparks.org and on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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