

Opinions

Everybody has one...

A tax is a tax

Just when you thought the state of Georgia had run out of ways to tax the residents of this great state, well, along comes GORP.

GORP stands for Georgia Outdoor Recreation Pass. It is needed in 32 Wildlife Management Areas and Public Fishing Areas.

The cost is \$19 plus convenience fees (\$2.50 if you purchase online, \$3 if you purchase from a retailer, or \$5 if you order over the phone).

If you already have a Georgia fishing license (\$9 for the license, \$5 for the trout stamp, and an applicable convenience fee of \$2.50, \$3 or \$5, depending on how and where you get your license), you still need a GORP.

The GORP became law effective Jan. 1, 2012. It means that this pass is required to use 31 properties managed by Wildlife Resources Division. In all, Wildlife Resources manages more than 100 properties. GORP affects only one-third of the wildlife areas statewide.

It's initial design was to tax recreation users who don't fish or hunt to pay for upkeep of the properties. Well, I didn't have a problem with that. But, when you hit folks up who have already paid their user fee to hunt and fish, then I do have a problem.

I bring all this up because my buddy in Dawson County, Deputy Johnny Holtzclaw and his son Kevin got checked out by the game warden to see if they had a GORP.

Well, figuring that they had already paid for their fishing licenses, they didn't know that they had to have a GORP to fish in the Dawson Forest Wildlife Management Area.

To be honest, they shouldn't have. Our state lawmakers in their infinite wisdom have overstepped their bounds with hunters and anglers on this one item.

If you're trying to capitalize on kayakers, swimmers and picnickers, then you need to take into account that anglers have already paid \$17 for the right to fish the waters in Georgia.

Don't go gouging them for more money. They've been paying for the upkeep of these properties for ages.

But, rather than just pick on the recreation folks that don't yield a rod and reel, or a Remington 30.06 to hunt with, the lawmakers have tacked on what amounts to a \$22 annual tax increase for anglers.

Anglers that purchase a WMA stamp don't have to pay this fee. The ones who do purchase the WMA stamp usually are hunters too.

Well, not everyone goes hunting. Some, like Johnny Holtzclaw and his son Kevin, only go fishing.

The basic intent of the GORP was to hit the recreation users with a tax. Well, anglers already pay their tax through the purchase of their fishing license and trout stamp and convenience fee.

It's time to complain to your local state representative and state senator that this additional fee on anglers is unacceptable.

In an interview several years ago with then U.S. Rep. Nathan Deal, I asked him what he thought about the state's new law on user fees for State Park visitors. He told me in no uncertain terms that you can call it a user fee, but a tax is a tax.

How right you are Gov. Nathan Deal. I'm sure you'd also agree with me about GORP.

Straight Shooting

Charles Duncan



Death and Taxes

Well, the time has come and gone – that is Income Tax time. Someone long ago said “only two things are certain – death and taxes.” Indeed, the Bible declares that “it is appointed unto man once to die..” (Heb. 9:27). The statistics for death is one out of one. The government also declared that April 15 is the appointed day for taxes. At least we know the date for taxes. In fact, we ought to be grateful that our income has been large enough to tax. However, I am sure that some of us identify with Cecil. Read Cecil's lament:

Dear Sir:
In reply to your request to send a check, I wish to inform you that the present condition of my bank account makes it almost impossible. My shattered financial condition is due to Federal Laws, State Laws, Country Laws, Brother-in-laws, Sister-in-laws, and Outlaws.

Through these laws I am compelled to pay a business tax, amusement tax, head tax, school tax, gas tax, light tax, water tax, an excise tax, sales tax, income tax, food tax, and furniture tax. I am required to get a business license, car license, operator's license, truck license, fishing license, hunting license – not to mention a marriage license and a dog license.

I am also required to contribute to every society and organization which the genius of man is capable of bringing to life: to welfare relief, the unemployed relief, and the gold diggers relief. Also to every hospital and charitable institution in the city, including the Salvation Army, Community Chest, Red Cross, Purple Cross, Double Cross, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. as well as Way Stations for Wayward Girls and Boys Ranch and Boys Town.

For my own safety I am required to carry health insurance, life insurance, fire insurance, property insurance, liability insurance, earthquake insurance, tornado insurance, unemployment insurance, and old age insurance.

My business is so governed that it is no easy matter to find out who owns it. I am inspected, expected, suspected, dis-

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It's On My Mind

Danny Parris



Communications Failure

Q. What happened when the communications outage occurred on March 4, 2013?

A. At approximately 6:15 p.m., on March 4th, all telephones, Internet, cable, and AT&T as well as Verizon cell phones went dead for about 1 1/2 hours. Our E-911 Center also went dead. There was not a power outage or a radio outage, so emergency services were able to maintain contact with the emergency vehicles, but there was no way to contact anyone that did not have a 2-way radio. The E-911 Center could not receive or make any type of telephone calls. Union County was essentially cut off from the rest of the world.

Q. Does the E-911 center not have a backup communications in place?

A. Yes, we have two. First, our system is designed to automatically roll over all calls to the Towns County E-911 Center should our center go down. However, the Towns County system also was down. Second, we have a special trailer set up with all communications equipment similar to an E-911 Center. It is designed for an E-911 total backup system in case any problems developed with the actual center, such as a fire. However, in this case there was no where to hook up the trailer; all hookup points also were dead.

Q. Did anyone experience any injuries or medical emergencies during the time our communications system was out of service?

A. The good Lord was looking out for us as there were no emergencies during this particular time period, which is pretty rare.

Q. Were repair people able to be contacted?

A. That was the strange part as everyone had already gone home from work. The only way to contact anyone was to drive to their house. Windstream employees were on the road almost immediately rounding up employees to make the repairs. If someone was at home and not using the phone, computer, or cell phone, there was no way to even know there was a problem, because the power was still on.

Q. You stated in the newspaper that the county would be investigating the telephone/cellphone and cable TV outage back on March 4th. Have you completed the investigation and what did you find?

A. Investigation is probably too strong of a word to use but yes, we have had several meetings regarding the communications outage. We consider this a very serious issue and we want to do everything we possibly can to make sure this doesn't happen again or at least if it does, that we are better prepared. We have been work-

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Buy Local Extravaganza

The Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce invites you to our Buy Local Extravaganza to be held on Tuesday, May 7th from 5 p.m. to 7 pm at the Union County Community Center overlooking Butternut Creek Golf Course.

This event is being presented in partnership with United Community Bank. More than 40 anticipated local businesses will be onsite offering food samples, product samples, and door prize giveaways to the public.

Stop in to see all that your local merchants have to offer. You will likely snag a great deal on many top selling products and services.

Those who have had any interaction with the Chamber over the last year will be aware of our Buy Local campaign – an effort to promote eating, shopping, playing and staying local. This awareness campaign is intended to be a reminder to residents of Union County that buying local first allows for a healthy and thriving community.

Not only does it mean prosperity for local businesses, but is also means jobs for our neighbors, new and enhanced public assets like Meeks Park and the Union County Farmers Market, and an overall higher

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For Whom the Bell Tolls

I just came back from a stroll down to the Courthouse on the Square. It's only about 75 yards from my office, so it wasn't exactly taxing. It was a noon stroll on a beautiful spring day and the noon bells of the old Courthouse were ringing.

When I first came to Union County, 15 years ago, I was struck by the ringing of the bells on the hour. Having grown up in a small town, with the same population as Blairsville, and seven Catholic churches, I was used to that resounding ring as a child.

It had been nearly 30 years since I left my hometown. I had forgotten that angelic sound, as the dissonance of the different churches rung across the sky. Here, with just one bell tower, the sound resonates across the mountains.

In Italian, they say the sound the bells make is din! don! din! don! I'm studying the Italian language, preparing for my two-week exodus in May to Rome and Sicily. I imagine that I will hear bells ringing from cathedrals many centuries old. And though they will capture my attention, they won't be as meaningful as the ringing I heard today. At noon I heard the bells that were rung in memory of Derrick Whittle.

A few months after I moved to these blessed hills, I was employed by the Tourism Association of Towns County. The first friend I made, the very day I started work, was Sharon Whittle, Derrick's mom. We hit it off before the first cup of coffee was empty. Lord knows, we didn't have much in common. I'm a northern girl and Sharon holds tight to her Alabama ties (or is it "tides" when referring to "Bama folk?").

She was much more conservative in every fashion. I was single, only had mothered dogs and took a chance on most anything, without ever taken into consideration the possible consequences. She tested the waters and I just dove in head first. She was into "healthy

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Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



Letters to the Editor ... Do the math

Dear Editor,
Recently, our local newspaper editor wrote and printed an article about gasoline prices being lower in neighboring counties. His facts are true, but he forgot to include groceries, restaurants, banks, Walmart, hardware and medical, because each of these businesses' prices are lower and much more affordable in nearby counties.

AI Turner

Get what you pay for

Dear Editor,
I read the "Cooperative" and the "Managers Message" in the March 2013 Georgia EMC Magazine (GEMC). The two articles mention, "much consideration was given to the overall aesthetics of the new headquarters," "designed to accent the beauty of the Brasstown Valley," and "we feel very fortunate to construct such a beautiful facility." Hmm, how about a facility built at a minimum cost so as not drive up the cost of electric power, which is then placed on the backs of hard working people and fixed income seniors, in an area hard hit by high unemployment and a deep recession. So when I drive past the facility, I don't see any beauty at all. I see extravagance and excess, and a manager that has the arrogance to brag about it. By the way, the manager forgot to mention, "the beautiful landscaped, well appointed, and manicured grounds."

In a previous issue of the GEMC magazine, the BRMEMC manager said, "we are confident the membership will be proud of this facility." Now, I've talked to a lot of people in Hiwassee and Blairsville and I've never heard anyone say that they were "proud of" the BRMEMC facility. I did hear many of them say "ridiculous," "over the top," or that it looked like a Swiss Chalet Resort, or an exclusive Country Club, but not like a facility that was concerned about providing low cost electricity.

As stated in the GEMC magazine "Co-operatives are owned by those they serve," and "Co-ops are organized for the benefit of their members," and "members serving members." That sounds very democratic. However, as far as I know, BRMEMC members don't own anything except maybe the long term debt loans for the new extravagant headquarters. The BRMEMC manager says, the new loan interest rates will save more than \$10,000,000 in interest over the term of the loan, but he never tells us the total cost of the new headquarters. Now, that doesn't sound very Democratic. We also get to vote on the board of directors, the only problem is they are uncontested, and they were chosen by a nominating

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Get real

Dear Editor,
If it wasn't crazy enough that we had "Birthers" for most of President Obama's first term, we now have "truthers" coming out of the woodwork. Gun enthusiasts have spawned a "truthers" movement that insists the shooting of 26 people at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. was an elaborate conspiracy staged by the government, to set the stage for the confiscation of guns from American people. Problem with this nutty theory is, if you search enough you can find all the gruesome details of that killing spree. Get this, 10 million people have watched the You Tube video hoax purporting to show evidence that the murdered children's parents and witnesses

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Do what's best

Dear Editor,
On Thursday evening, last, I attended a public school board meeting regarding the application and distribution of ESPLOST money. I was struck by the number of parents and students who supported the construction of a performance venue. I suggested to the audience that this community is beginning to sense a rising tsunami of financial and cultural change -- and that the tsunami will soon become too big to control -- unless there is sufficient wisdom to manage it.

The parents, teachers, students were justifiably eager for a performance center. It is true that vested interests can move political mountains -- but political pressures are a two-edged sword.

During my 36-year-career, at one high school, I was fortunate to have closely integrated my English curriculum with the Drama, Chorus and Orchestra teachers so that as I taught a particular work of History or Literature, those teachers gave flesh to the words through their on-stage performances. The Drama department performed the stage version of To Kill a Mockingbird in concert with our classroom study of that novel.

Then came the dramatic version of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, set to music by the school orchestra and danced interpretively in individual classrooms by the dance classes. The audience at the performances almost blew the doors off their hinges with their shouting and applause.

When I taught Constitutional History, it was an easy transition to share Mozart with my students so that they understood that Jefferson, Madison, Washington, Adams, Hamilton, listened to such music as part of what made them

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Miss Floss

My third Grade Teacher, Mrs. Foote, was the nicest lady you would ever want to meet. But, at the age of 35, in my mind she was ancient. My perspective has now changed. In my opinion 50 is not old and 60 is not sounding so bad. I have the same opinion in regards to tractors. I have known a lot of tractors in my time and over the years some of them, because of my sentimentality, developed names.

Miss Floss was an elderly lady known by my grandfather when he was a boy. Miss Floss could be cantankerous and stubborn; however, she had a heart of gold. But, the one thing she was known for was being bossy. Miss Floss was Papa's Sunday School Teacher for 10 years. After each Sunday School lesson Papa said she would bark out orders to her class in an effort to get the front of the small church house organized and ready for preaching. Her bossy behavior was accepted by the young people. But, the men of the church took offense when she started on them and so they began poking fun at her by calling her Bossy Flossie.

One particular Sunday Papa told me that Floss showed herself at church. "She took a fit" Papa said. It seems that Floss was overwhelmed by the spirit and began to buck dance and she lay back on the floor of the church. Somehow she rolled over on her belly while her legs were kicking and her arms were waving. All of this activity caused her dress to roll up over her head and there for all to see was written across her rear end were the words, "Martha's Finest Self-Rising". The word flour was missing. Apparently, Miss Floss had made her underwear from a Martha White Flour sack.

This story was handed down through four generations in my family. The story became intertwined in the actions of my family. For example, when I was a young boy Papa had an old Ayrshire milk cow. This old cow was the boss and she let the other cows on the farm know it. She was always the first to feed and the other cows would not attempt to eat the feed until old "Floss" was finished. Nobody in the family remembers who the person was that gave the old cow the name of Floss. But, we all agreed the cow reminded us of Papa's old Sunday School Teacher.

In 1963 Papa bought an old Farnall tractor. He used that old red tractor until the late 1960's when he purchased a blue Ford tractor. I learned to plow using that old tractor and it was the first tractor my sons ever rode. It was dependable, even in cold weather. Just like Miss Floss was there for Sunday School, the old Ford tractor was always ready to work. Is it any wonder then that the tractor picked up the name, "Miss Floss".

About 15 years ago Papa called me with some news. The first words from his mouth were "I baptized Miss Floss yesterday". Papa had taken

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



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