USDA United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | National Forests in North Carolina Supervisor's Office | 160 ZILLICOA ST STE A ASHEVILLE NC 28801-1082 828-257-4200

File Code: 1950/1920
Date: January 31, 2012

Dear Interested Party,

In coordination with the Forest Supervisors for the Chattahoochee and Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests, I am pleased to issue the decision notice (DN), finding of no significant impact (FONSI) and Amendment #22 to the *Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan,* regarding recreation uses in the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River Corridor. This decision is based on information in the Environmental Assessment (EA) *Managing Recreation Uses in the Upper Segment of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River Corridor*. In response to public comments and additional analysis documented in this EA, I selected Alternative 13A. My decision best meets the intent of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and Wilderness Act, while addressing the purpose and need described in the EA.

My decision protects a wide variety of existing high-quality recreation opportunities including fishing and hiking while offering new whitewater boating opportunities that minimize the potential for conflict. It also addresses several biophysical impacts from recreation use. My decision will:

- Establish capacities that prevent new or existing use from exceeding high-use season (summer) levels. These capacities apply to all users in backcountry reaches and frontcountry areas and will maintain existing opportunities for solitude, as well as protect the rivers outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs)—biology, history, scenery, recreation and geology.
- Allow non-commercial boating on the three river reaches that provide world-class whitewater boating (Chattooga Cliffs, Ellicott Rock and Rock Gorge) at flows that are optimal for boating (above 350 cfs at the Burrells Ford USGS gauge) during winter and early spring when those flows are most likely to occur with sufficient duration for boaters to use them (December 1 - April 30).
- Protect boat-free opportunities and reduce the potential for conflict through reach, season, and flow restrictions. The existing prohibition on boating will be maintained from Lick Log Creek to Highway 28 in the popular cold-water trout fishing Delayed Harvest area.
- Provide boating opportunities from Green Creek to Lick Log Creek at high flows December - April when non-boating users, especially anglers, are less likely to be present.
- Identify temporary boating access areas via existing trails. Specific put-ins and take-outs will be designated after site-specific NEPA analysis.
- Protect the river's ORVs from recreation impacts by preventing large woody debris removal and by redesigning, relocating or closing some trails and campsites and maintaining sustainable ones.
- Develop a monitoring program to detect when use is approaching capacities and develop more precise relationships between the amount of use and impacts; if monitoring reveals undesired consequences, adaptive management will trigger actions to keep use levels from exceeding capacities.

Alternative 13A was developed based on public input and analysis and was selected over Alternative 12 (the preferred alternative in the July 2011 EA) because:

- Alternative 13A capitalizes on the differences in boating and angling flow range preferences. Alternative 12 would have maintained the current boating prohibition on the "alternating reach" during the boating season, even on days with high flows when non-boating uses were likely to be low. Similarly, Alternative 12 would have allowed boating on some days when flows were optimal for angling, increasing the potential for conflict.
- Alternative 12 also would have allowed a shorter boating season (December - February) while maintaining the current boating prohibition in March and April when non-boating use is low. Analysis indicates that capacities would not be exceeded during these months if boating were allowed. In addition, March and April typically provide the most days with optimal boating flows.
- Alternative 12 also included "alternating reach zoning" that could have concentrated boating use on the "allowed reach," creating undesirable congestion at access areas, rapids or portages.

In summary, Alternative 13A offers a management prescription that provides for use and enjoyment of the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR by a variety of recreationists consistent with protecting the rivers ORVs, while preserving its free-flowing condition, water quality and the wilderness character of the Ellicott Rock Wilderness.

For this decision, in consultation with the two other responsible officials, I have decided to use the Optional Appeal Procedures Available during the Planning Rule Transition Period available at: http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/applit/includes/PlanAppealProceduresDuringTransition.pdf (see Appendix A to 36 CFR 219.35, *Federal Register*, December 18, 2009).

Appellants must file a written appeal in duplicate that clearly states that it is a Notice of Appeal pursuant to the Optional Appeal Procedures. The appeal also must meet the content requirements of Section 9 of the Optional Appeal Procedures. Appeals must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date the legal notice of this decision is published in the newspaper of record (*The State*).

Appellants must file appeals with the Regional Forester for the US Forest Service Southern Region at:

US Forest Service
Attn: Appeal Reviewing Officer
1720 Peachtree Road, N.W.
Suite 811N
Atlanta, GA 30309-9102

Appeals may also be faxed to (404) 347-5401 or e-mailed in a common digital format to *appeals-southern-regional-office@fs.fed.us*.The agency must receive hand-delivered appeals within normal business hours of 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday-Friday (closed on weekends and federal holidays).

Pursuant to Section 10 of the Optional Appeal Procedures, implementation of this decision will not begin until seven calendar days after the legal notice of this decision is published in the newspaper of record (*The State*). Should any project or activity under this amendment be implemented before an appeal decision can be issued, the appeal reviewing officer will consider written requests to stay implementation of any of those decisions pending completion of the review. To request a stay of implementation, an appellant must file a written request with the appeal reviewing officer. The request must meet the requirements found in Section 10 of the Optional Appeal Procedures.

For additional information concerning this decision or the USDA Forest Service appeal process, contact Mary Morrison at the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests, Supervisor's Office at (803) 561-4058 or by surface mail to:

Mary Morrison
US Forest Service
Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests
4931 Broad River Road
Columbia, SC 29212-3530

Electronic copies and more information are available on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests' website at http://fs.usda.gov/scnfs. For more information on this decision, please contact Francis Marion and Sumter Forest Planner Mary Morrison at mwmorrison@fs.fed.us or at (803) 561–4058.

Sincerely,

Diane E. Rubiaco

DIANE RUBIACO
Acting Forest Supervisor

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

Amendment #22 to the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan

Managing Recreation Uses in the Upper Segment of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River Corridor

Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests
Jackson and Macon Counties, North Carolina

January 2012

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Decision Notice (DN) and the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) document my decision to establish new management direction for the upper segment of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River (WSR) above the Highway 28 bridge. I am making this decision in conjunction with two other responsible officials – the forest supervisors on the Sumter National Forest in South Carolina and the Chattahoochee National Forest in Georgia – with whom I share management responsibility for the Chattooga WSR. As a result, three forest plans provide management direction for the river. Each responsible official has prepared a decision notice to incorporate new management direction into his or her applicable forest plan. This DN outlines my final decision, as well as my decision to amend the *Land and Resource Management Plan* (LRMP) for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests.

The three national forests prepared a single environmental assessment (EA) *Managing Recreation Uses in the Upper Segment of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River Corridor.* I have based my decision and FONSI on the information in that EA and the project record.

2.0 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE DECISION

Congress designated the 57-mile Chattooga River (and its 15,432-acre corridor) as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in 1974 to preserve the river's free-flowing condition, protect its water quality and protect and enhance the river's Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs)—biology, geology, recreation, scenery and history. For five miles, the corridor also passes through the 8,274-acre Ellicott Rock Wilderness, which Congress gave additional protection under the Wilderness Act for its undeveloped setting and opportunities for solitude.

The river's many natural attributes, access, and recreation infrastructure, provide a variety of recreation opportunities including hiking and backpacking, fishing, swimming and wading, whitewater and scenic boating, hunting, photography and nature study. Many of these opportunities occur in largely unmodified natural surroundings that feature a sense of remoteness, little interaction between visitors and few signs of previous use.

This decision:

1. Responds to an appeal decision on the 2004 Sumter Revised LRMP;
2. Provides consistent management of the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR on all three national forests; and
3. Preserves the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR's free-flowing condition, protects its water quality and protects its outstandingly remarkable values (as required by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act [WSRA]), as well as preserves the wilderness character of the Ellicott Rock Wilderness (as required by the Wilderness Act).

More information on the purpose and need for my decision, as well as information on the river's ORVs, can be found in the EA, in the project record and on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests' website at http://fs.usda.gov/goto/scnfs/upperchattooga.

3.0 DECISION

I have decided to implement Alternative 13A. The scope of my decision is limited to the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR. However, I made the decision within the context of the entire river. My decision will:

1. Establish frontcountry and backcountry capacities as follows:

Figure 1. Capacities in four frontcountry areas in the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR.

Frontcountry Areas	Groups at One Time[1]	People at One Time
Grimshawes/Sliding Rock Bridge	25	65
Bullpen Road Bridge Area	15	40
Burrells Ford Bridge Area	80	205
Highway 28 Bridge Area	35	85

[1] The number of groups at one time equals the number of designated parking spaces in each frontcountry area.

Figure 2. Capacities in four backcountry reaches in the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR.

Backcountry Reach	Average Groups per Weekday	Average People per Weekday[2]	Average Groups per Weekend Day	Average People per Weekend Day[2]
Chattooga Cliffs	5	10	10	15
Ellicott Rock	10	35	20	110
Rock Gorge	15	40	30	95
Nicholson Fields	15	40	30	95

[2] Average number of people per group varies by reach.

2. Allow non-commercial boating by issuance of a boating permit consistent with 36 C.F.R. § 261.77 on approximately 17 miles of the 21-mile main stem of the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR December 1 to April 30 from the Green Creek confluence downstream to a designated take out within one-quarter mile downstream of the Lick Log Creek confluence.
3. Allow boating from the time that flows reach 350 cfs or greater at the USGS Burrells Ford gauge during daylight hours. Daylight hours will be 30 minutes before official sunrise to 30 minutes after official sunset. Once boating is allowed, it may continue until 30 minutes after official sunset on that same day.
4. Specify that boating opportunities (see 2 and 3 above) will be a condition of the self-registration boating permit.
5. Require boaters to use tandem/single capacity hard boats or tandem/single capacity inflatable boats.
6. Require boaters to start or complete their trip only at specific boater put-ins and takeouts, which will be designated after site-specific NEPA analysis and will be a condition of the self-registration boating permit. In the interim, require boaters to start or complete their trip only at existing trails at the following locations:
   a) Within one-quarter mile downstream of the Green Creek confluence;
   b) Within 500 feet of the Norton Mill Creek confluence;
   c) Within one-quarter mile of Bullpen Bridge;
   d) Within one-quarter mile of Burrells Ford Bridge; and
   e) Within one-quarter mile downstream of the Lick Log Creek confluence.

7. Specify that safety equipment for boaters will be determined at the district level as a condition of the self-registration boating permit.
8. Require backcountry group size limits as follows: maximum 12 people per group on trails, six people per group at designated campsites, except at designated large group campsites; six people per boating group; and four people per angling group. Require a minimum of two craft per boating group.
9. Establish a desired condition where the trail system (including portage trails) minimizes encounters and conflict while being environmentally sustainable and where redundant trails, trails where resource damage cannot be mitigated and trails that exacerbate encounters or conflict will be closed or rerouted. Trails will be designated based on future site-specific NEPA analysis.
10. Allow camping only in designated campsites. Allow campfires only in designated fire rings. Campsites and fire rings will be designated based on future site-specific NEPA analysis. Allow visitors to use existing campsites until site-specific NEPA analysis is complete.
11. Establish a desired condition where campsites accommodate no more than three tents per site, except at designated large, group campsites, are environmentally sustainable and limit encounters and conflict; where redundant campsites, campsites where resource damage cannot be mitigated and campsites that exacerbate encounters or conflict are closed or relocated.
12. Require agency approval for large woody debris (LWD) removal.
13. Adopt the monitoring plan in Appendix G of the EA to help determine whether my decision is producing the desired outcomes and avoiding unintended consequences.
14. Incorporate the use of adaptive management to address any problems revealed through monitoring.

Specific language changes that will be amended into the Nantahala and Pisgah LRMP are documented in Appendix A of this decision notice.

4.0 RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

After reviewing the alternatives in the EA, I have determined that this decision best addresses the following:

1. Provides access and equitable treatment of all users

My decision will provide challenging, whitewater boating opportunities in a solitude setting in the section of the Chattooga WSR that boaters rated highest for creek boating (Chattooga Cliffs, Ellicott Rock and Rock Gorge reaches). Allowing boating from December 1 to April 30 will provide the most opportunities for optimal standard[1] and big water[2] boating because these months, particularly March and April, historically offer the best flows for these types of boating opportunities. In addition, it is easier during the winter months to predict when flows that provide optimal standard boating opportunities will occur. The upper segment of the Chattooga WSR sub-watershed has a relatively small drainage area but

[1] Optimal standard boating ranges start at about 350 to 400 cfs and end about 600 to 650 cfs at the Burrells Ford gauge.
[2] Flows of 650 to 800 cfs at the Burrells Ford gauge provide big water boating.

receives considerable rainfall through the year, often in short but heavy storms. These storms produce a flashy hydrology where flows rise and fall quickly. During the summer season, substantial flow changes can occur within hours, although changes generally occur less rapidly during the winter season. As a result, this decision will provide flexibility for whitewater boaters to try to use days with opportunities for boating. In addition, my decision will likely result in multi-day boating opportunities as long as adequate flows are available.

Current management that does not permit boating in the Nicholson Fields Reach (from near the Lick Log confluence downstream to the Highway 28 bridge) will continue. Therefore, opportunities for year round boat-free, coldwater angling in the Nicholson Fields Reach will remain. In the roughly four-mile Nicholson Fields Reach, the river is wide and trails exist on both sides of the river. This section also includes the Delayed Harvest, a fishing designation that requires catch and release fishing from November to May, which attracts the highest angling use on the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR. Because of the terrain, this reach also provides the least challenging area for whitewater boating and tends to offer less days with opportunities for optimal, standard boating than the other three reaches.

My decision will maintain opportunities for boat-free angling, hiking/backpacking and other non-boating recreation pursuits in the other three reaches (Chattooga Cliffs, Ellicott Rock and Rock Gorge) from May 1 to November 30 each year. During the winter months, when boating is allowed, data shows that existing non-boating use is historically low. Although this use begins to increase in March and April, in these reaches, use is not particularly high for non-boating recreationists. In addition, data indicates that the average number of days with boating opportunities from December 1 to April 30 is 39 using the parameters outlined in section 3.0 Decision, item #3 above. Therefore, boat-free opportunities will be available for the majority of the days even when boating is allowed.

Hiking and backpacking use could occur at the same time as boating. However, these uses are generally lower in winter and early spring when flows that provide opportunities for optimal standard boating opportunities are more frequent. Use levels also tend to be lower for hikers and backpackers during rainy periods or storms that create optimal standard boating opportunities regardless of season, minimizing the chances for interaction with potential boating use. In addition, nearly three-quarters of the system hiking trails are out of view of the river, so contact between hikers/backpackers and boaters will be limited, even if both groups are traveling in the same area.

Finally, the visitor use capacity analysis in the EA indicates that historical use during the winter and early spring is traditionally low. Therefore, setting capacities allows for the addition of a new user group – boaters– without affecting the overall capacities. As a result, allowing boaters to float the upper segment of the Chattooga from December 1 to April 30 using the parameters outlined in section 3.0 Decision, item #3 above will not cause capacities to be reached in the near future.

2. Reduces potential conflict between users

While providing access and equitable treatment of all users, my decision will reduce potential conflict between boaters and existing users by separating them by reach, flows, and season.

Reach: Continuing current management in the Nicholson Fields Reach year round will eliminate potential for conflict associated with boating.

Using season and flows to separate users will mitigate the potential for conflict in the three upper reaches.

Flows: Allowing boating from the time that flows reach 350 cfs or greater at the USGS Burrells Ford gauge during daylight hours will provide optimal standard boating experiences. Data shows that angling opportunities are no longer optimal at the following flows: fly fishing 250 cfs and above; spin fishing 350 cfs and above; and bait angling 450 cfs and above. Although bait anglers may experience optimal opportunities at flows of 350 cfs – 450 cfs, bait angling in the North Carolina reaches of the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR is illegal north of the Bullpen Bridge. In addition, little bait angling occurs in the backcountry in the Ellicott Rock and Rock Gorge reaches where boating will be allowed.

Season: Allowing boating from December 1 to April 30 will provide the most boating opportunities during the season when there will be minimal conflict with other recreation users. Although data shows that traditional uses begin to increase in March and April, use is still lower than in late spring (May), summer and fall, so the impacts of allowing boating on some days during these two months are expected to be low. As stated previously, hiking and backpacking use could occur at the same time as boating. However, these uses are generally lower in winter and early spring when boating opportunities will be more frequent. Use levels also tend to be lower for land-based users during rainy periods or storms that create flows with optimal standard boating opportunities.

Designated boater put-ins and takeouts:

Providing five different put-ins and takeouts where boaters must start and/or end their trip—near the Green Creek, Norton Mill Creek and Lick Log Creek confluences, as well as at the Bullpen and Burrells Ford bridges—will mitigate potential conflict between boaters and existing users on trails. The appropriate district ranger will designate the specific put-in and takeout locations after site-specific NEPA analysis is completed. Like other users, boaters will be encouraged to use system trails to access these points.

3. Maintains opportunities for solitude in the backcountry

Several components of my decision (capacity, parking and group size limits, as well as management actions related to campsites and trails) will maintain or increase opportunities for solitude.

Monitoring will reveal the proportion of backcountry and frontcountry use relative to parking areas. Before use exceeds capacities and the resulting encounter levels, the agency will take the adaptive management approach outlined in Appendix A to control use levels and maintain existing opportunities for solitude.

4. Protects the Recreation ORV

This decision protects the Recreation ORV by expanding recreation opportunities for boating on the entire Chattooga WSR by allowing boating on the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR while maintaining opportunities for existing users.

5. Ensures the physical environment can accommodate use

As indicated in analysis in Chapter 3 of the EA, my decision will protect the river's biology, history, scenery and geology ORVs, as well as protect the river's water quality, preserve the free-flowing condition (as required by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act) and minimize impacts to soils, riparian areas and other biological values (see Finding of No Significant Impact in this document). In addition, it will preserve the wilderness character of the Ellicott Rock Wilderness as required by the Wilderness Act.

6. Recognizes the value of and ensures the continued presence of large woody debris

My decision to allow large woody debris (LWD) removal only with agency approval acknowledges the value of LWD and the ecological process role it plays in providing habitat for aquatic species, particularly the native brook trout.

7. Addresses public concerns about protecting the "highly diverse biological conditions" in the Chattooga Cliffs Reach

My decision will protect the "highly diverse biological conditions" in the Chattooga Cliffs Reach, as well as the other upper reaches. Appropriately located trails and campsites, designated put-ins and takeouts for boaters, as well as terrain and vegetation, will limit where user impacts occur.

8. Addresses public concerns about boating in the tributaries

Continuing current management, which does not allow boating in the tributaries on the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR, will provide important habitat needed for native brook trout restoration. Per the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, both the main stem of the river and the corridor (one-quarter mile on each side of the main stem) are designated as "wild and scenic." While developing alternatives that permit boating above Highway 28, the agency considered extending boating opportunities to the tributaries. However, because of concerns regarding large woody debris, native brook trout restoration, vegetation removal, increased encounter levels, user-created trails as well as enforcement and management issues, this alternative was considered but not developed.

9. Addresses public concerns about commercial boating.

Current management, which does not permit commercial boating on the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR, will be maintained because my decision allows only *non-commercial* boating. No boating group or outfitter has advocated for commercial boating on the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR. In addition, the appeal from American Whitewater, et al. and the subsequent appeal decision from the Washington Office directed the three forests to "conduct the appropriate visitor use capacity analysis, including non-commercial boating use."

5.0 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN THE EA (CHAPTER 2)

5.1 Alternatives Considered in Detail

Alternative 1

This is the no-action alternative and would maintain current management on all three national forests.

Alternative 2

This alternative would increase opportunities for solitude through a permit system and by reducing user-created features such as trails and campsites. Boating would not be permitted on the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR.

Alternative 3

This alternative would provide year-round trout fishing, establish capacities at current use levels, and reduce user-created features. Boating would not be permitted on the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR.

Alternative 8

This alternative would provide year-round trout fishing, establish capacities at current use levels and reduce user-created features. Boating would be permitted on the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR from the Green Creek confluence downstream to the Highway 28 Boat Launch without zone, season or flow restrictions.

Alternative 11

This alternative would provide year-round trout fishing, establish capacities at current use levels and reduce user-created features. Boating would be permitted on the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR from the Green Creek confluence downstream to the Highway 28 Boat Launch with flow restrictions (450 cfs and higher).

Alternative 12

This alternative would provide year-round trout fishing, establish capacities at current use levels and reduce user-created features. Boating would be permitted on the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR from the Green Creek confluence downstream to the Lick Log Creek confluence with alternating seasons and reaches and without flow restrictions.

Alternative 13

This alternative would provide year-round trout fishing, establish capacities at current use levels and reduce user-created features. Boating would be permitted on the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR

from the Greek Creek confluence downstream to Lick Log Creek with season and flow restrictions (350 cfs and higher).

Alternative 13A

This alternative is a slight modification of Alternative 13. All management actions would be the same as Alternative 13 with three exceptions:

1. It would extend the boating season by two months (March and April);
2. It would allow an additional boater put-in at the Norton Mill Creek confluence; and
3. It is more specific about when boating would be allowed. Boating would be allowed from the time that flows reach 350 cfs or greater at the USGS Burrells Ford gauge during daylight hours. Daylight hours will be 30 minutes before official sunrise to 30 minutes after official sunset. Once boating is allowed, it may continue until 30 minutes after official sunset on that same day.

Alternative 14

This alternative would provide year-round, trout fishing, establish capacities at current use levels and reduce user-created features. Boating would be permitted year round on the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR from the Green Creek confluence downstream to the Highway 28 Boat Launch with flow restrictions (350 cfs and higher).

5.2 Alternatives Considered but not Evaluated in Detail

Boating through private land on the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR

The upper portion of the Chattooga Cliffs Reach has private land on both sides of the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR. The landowners claim that public use would constitute trespass. Until decisions about navigability are made for the sections of the river with private land along them, or public access rights on this reach are determined, the U.S. Forest Service considers this section of the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR beyond the scope of this decision.

Boating in the Tributaries above Highway 28

While developing alternatives that would permit boating above Highway 28, the agency considered extending boating opportunities to the tributaries. However, because of concerns regarding large woody debris, native brook trout restoration, vegetation removal, increased encounter levels, user-created trails, as well as enforcement and management issues, this alternative was considered but not developed.

Preliminary Alternative 6

This alternative was eliminated from detailed consideration because Alternative 8 replaced it.

Preliminary Alternative 7

Some components of this alternative were rolled into alternatives 11, 12, 13, 13A and 14. Therefore Alternative 7 became redundant and unnecessary.

Alternative 4

Bait angling is illegal above Bullpen Bridge. Therefore, flows set in Alternative 4 would protect a type of angling that is currently illegal. In addition, elements of Alternative 4 are analyzed in Alternative 11 (the effects are analyzed by reach, season and flows). Using the confluence of Norton Mill Creek as the uppermost put-in was considered but not developed because it was determined that boaters could start floating the river as far north as the Green Creek confluence.

Alternatives 5, 9 and 10

Elements in these three alternatives are analyzed in Alternative 14 (the effects are analyzed by reach, season and flow level). Using the confluence of Norton Mill Creek as the uppermost put-in was considered but not developed because it was determined that boaters could start floating the river as far north as the Green Creek confluence.

Alternative 15

This alternative would allow increased recreation use levels by increasing parking lot sizes and encouraging additional primitive camping. It was not developed because of public input gathered during the Limits Acceptable Change (LAC) process, where there was a general opposition to increased recreation use in the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR Corridor.

6.0 SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The public has shown considerable interest in management of the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR since American Whitewater, et al. appealed the 2004 Sumter Revised LRMP. During the last seven years, the U.S. Forest Service has encouraged and documented public involvement throughout the process (see the project record and the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests website at http://fs.usda.gov/goto/scnfs/upperchattooga for more details). The agency considered public comments from workshops, scoping and EA reviews during environmental analysis. These comments and the agency's response to them also are available in the project record and posted on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests website.

Major public involvement components include:

Table 1 Summary of Public Involvement – All documents related to public involvement can be found in the project record and on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests' website at http://fs.usda.gov/goto/scnfs/upperchattooga.

Date	Number/Type of Involvement	# of people	Topic
Oct. – Dec. 2005	3 public meetings	> 60	Limits of Acceptable Change framework
July 2006	1 public meeting	> 100	USFS discussed ongoing data collection activities. Public provided feedback on proposed capacity and conflict analysis.
July 2006 – June 2007	1 public forum on the USFS website	n/a	While the agency conducted analysis using several elements outlined in the capacity analysis plan, it established a public forum on the Sumter National Forest website that allowed the public to comment further on

Date	Number/Type of Involvement	# of people	Topic
			issues related to the analysis and review the agency analysis as it became available.
June 2007	3 open houses	33- 64	Contractors presented findings from the capacity and conflict analysis at three open houses in SC, NC and GA. Individual stations at each open house allowed attendees to interact with specialists on current management standards for the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR; the agency's path forward and timeframe for alternative development, environmental analysis, public involvement and agency decisions; biophysical data results; social data results; and flow data results.
July 2007	1 public hearing	> 60	56 people provided 153 pages of testimony at this formal hearing to document public responses to capacity analysis findings and suggestions for management.
July 2007	1 public workshop	~ 70	USFS asked the public to identify key impacts and opportunities, as well as brain storm management options for addressing problems.
Aug. 14 – Sept. 13, 2007	30-day scoping period	> 1,200	The public provided more than 1,200 responses to the agency's scoping package that included six preliminary alternatives. Some responses included more than 100 individual comments.
Sept. 29, 2007	1 public meeting		USFS presented and received feedback on a revised set of alternatives (based on comments received during scoping), as well as three new alternatives for a total of nine.
July – Aug. 2008	~45-day comment period (not required)	>3,000	USFS voluntarily provided an EA to the public for comment and received more than 3,000 responses. Comment period was initially 30 days but agency extended it after requests from the public.
Aug. 2009			3 forest supervisors issued decision notices and findings of no significant impact (FONSIs)
Dec. 2009			3 forest supervisors withdrew the decision notices and FONSIs
Dec. 2010	30-day scoping period	~50	USFS reinitiated the NEPA process, asking the public to identify any new information or concerns that should be analyzed. The scoping letter clarified that any comments submitted between 2005 and 2009 would be considered in the new decision-making process.
July – Aug. 2011	~45-day comment period (not required)	~180	USFS voluntarily provided an EA to the public for comment and received approximately 245 comment letters. Comment period was initially 30 days but agency extended it after requests from the public. Comment letters were analyzed using a content analysis process and are summarized in *Summary of Public Comments Received on EA.*

7.0 FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The U.S. Forest Service is currently operating under the November 9, 2000 planning rule (see *Federal Register*, December 18, 2009). According to 36 CFR 219.35 and Appendix B to 219.35, a responsible official may elect to conduct the plan amendment process under the 1982 planning regulations (those regulations in effect before November 9, 2000). With respect to this decision, the two other responsible officials and I elected to follow the 1982 planning regulations.

I have determined that the decision to implement Amendment 22 will not result in a significant change to the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan. I made this determination after consulting 16 U.S.C. 1604(f)(4), 36 CFR 219.10(f) (1982 regulations), FSM 1926.51 – *Changes to the Land Management Plan that are Not Significant* and FSM 1926.52 – *Changes to the Land Management Plan that are Significant*. Based on these planning requirements, in consultation with the two other responsible officials, I have determined that:

- This amendment will not significantly alter the levels of goods and services projected by the forest plan, nor will it prevent the opportunity to achieve those outputs in later years.
- This amendment will not affect the entire land management plan, nor will it affect a large portion of the planning area during the planning period.

The amendment will meet the requirements of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and the Wilderness Act.

The agency completed a Biological Assessment (BA) for all the federally listed species that could be affected by the decision. The analysis discloses that one plant species, *Gymnoderma lineare*, is located in the decision area. The BA determined the decision may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, this species in North Carolina and will have no affect on *Gymnoderma lineare* in Georgia and South Carolina. Periodic monitoring (following the monitoring plan in Appendix G of the EA, which is incorporated into Appendix A of this DN) of the subpopulation along the main stem Chattooga River will determine if impacts are occurring from implementation of this decision. The decision was determined to have no effect on any other federally listed species. The agency received a letter of concurrence from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on December 6, 2011.

The agency completed a Biological Evaluation (BE) for sensitive species that occur in the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR corridor. The findings in the BE made a determination that this decision may impact individuals but is not likely to cause a loss in viability for any of the species on the Sumter, Nantahala and Chattahoochee national forests. No other sensitive species should be impacted by my decision.

The agency received letters from the state historic preservation offices (SHPOs) in NC (December 23, 2011), GA (January 3, 2012), and SC (December 22, 2011) agreeing that no properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places will be affected by this decision.

8.0 BEST AVAILABLE SCIENCE

In consultation with the two other responsible officials, I have considered the best available science in making this decision. The project record demonstrates a thorough review of relevant scientific

information, consideration of responsible opposing views and, where appropriate, the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty and risk.

- Chapter 3 of the EA discusses the effects of each alternative with information from resource specialists including a landscape architect, hydrologist, soil scientist, wildlife biologist, ecologist, archaeologist, fisheries biologist, recreation specialist and a recreation planner/social scientist. These specialists considered current scientific information when preparing or submitting information on effects.
- The agency completed a detailed biophysical survey to document the Chattooga WSR's existing condition. This survey documents various resource impacts and concerns, such as erosion, litter, logjams, water quality, etc. In consultation with the other two responsible officials, I considered the existing condition of the Chattooga WSR in the decision-making process.
- The agency completed annual monitoring reports that document trends in the condition of the Chattooga WSR and the Ellicott Rock Wilderness.
- The agency conducted extensive reviews of literature, management history, available agency information and field studies to collect information on recreation use, impacts and other recreation management issues. *Capacity and Conflict on the Upper Chattooga River: An integrated analysis of 2006-2007 reports*[3] summarizes the findings from these information collection efforts that the agency used to develop alternatives with a mix of techniques to address capacity and potential user conflict.
- The agency considered public comments from workshops, scoping and EA reviews during information collection and environmental analysis. These comments and the agency's response to them are available in the project record and posted on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests' website at http://fs.usda.gov/goto/scnfs/upperchattooga.
- The Reference Section of the EA provides a list of additional information the agency used in this analysis.

9.0 FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have determined that the decision will not have a significant effect on the human environment based on the significance criteria of both context and intensity as defined by the National Environmental Policy Act in 40 CFR 1508.27. This decision, with mitigation measures and monitoring, best meets the Purpose and Need as stated in the Environmental Assessment *Managing Recreation Uses in the Upper Segment of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River Corridor*. I have concluded that an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not necessary.

Context

The physical, biological and social effects are limited to the project area and immediate adjacent areas, which are analyzed in Chapter 3 of the EA. All actions are consistent with the *Land and Resource Management Plan* for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests as amended by this decision, and all environmental effects are within the range disclosed in the EA.

[3] Whittaker D., Shelby, B., 2007. Capacity and Conflict on the Upper Chattooga River. US Forest Service, Columbia, SC. 113 pp.

Intensity

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial.**
   Consideration of the intensity of environmental effects is not biased by beneficial effects of the action. Both adverse and beneficial impacts of my decision are discussed and there are no significant effects (EA, pages 51 to 397, Chapter 3).
2. **The degree to which the proposed action affects health or safety.**
   There will be no significant effects on public health and safety. The EA describes the risks associated with each of the alternatives. Based on likely use levels and information from other rivers of similar difficulty, accidents, injuries and fatalities would likely be low and few would require search and rescue responses (EA, pages 367 to 371,Section 3.6.1 Human Health and Safety (Search and Rescue)).
3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.**
   The analysis identifies no significant impacts to any unique characteristics of the geographical area, including historic or cultural resources (EA, pages 251 to 256, Section 3.2.4 History ORV and SHPO letters in the project record). Based on the analysis in the EA, my decision preserves the wilderness character of Ellicott Rock Wilderness (EA, pages 385 to 397, Section 3.7 Wilderness) and protects the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River's Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs), preserve its free-flowing conditions and protect its water quality (EA, pages 61 to 268, Sections 3.2 Outstanding and Remarkable Values and 3.3 Other River Values). No significant impacts to wetlands are anticipated (EA, pages 297 to 335, Section 3.4.2 Water and Riparian Corridor).
4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.**
   The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be controversial. Controversial as defined here relates to the estimates of effects on the human environment and not public controversy. There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action. (EA, pages 51 to 397, Chapter 3).
5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.**
   There will not be any highly uncertain effects to the human environment that involve unique or unknown risks (EA, pages 51 to 397, Chapter 3).
6. **The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.**
   While this action anticipates making future decisions with regard to the designation of specific boating put-ins and take-outs, the designation of specific camping sites and the designation of specific trails, each of these future decisions will be made only after a site-specific NEPA analysis is conducted. In the interim, users are to use existing trails and campsites. Therefore, this action does not create a precedent for future actions with significant effects, especially since this action has been found to have no significant impacts (EA, pages 51 to 397, Chapter 3). Likewise, although this action anticipates future decisions related to this action, these future decisions will act to further implement the current decision. Therefore, this action is not a representation of a decision in principle about future

considerations. Any future considerations will be contemplated only after a separate NEPA process has been conducted.

7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.**

   There are no significant cumulative effects from this project when analyzed in conjunction with other past, present or reasonably foreseeable projects in the area (EA, pages 51 to 397, Chapter 3).

8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.**

   There are no known significant impacts on any proposed or listed National Register of Historic Places or any loss or destruction of any significant scientific, cultural or historic resources (EA, pages 251 to 256, Section 3.2.4 History ORV and SHPO letters in the project record).

9. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.**

   The agency completed a Biological Assessment (BA) for all the federally listed species that could be affected by this decision. One plant species, *Gymnoderma lineare*, was located in the decision area in North Carolina during the field review. The BA determined the decision may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect *Gymnoderma lineare* in North Carolina and have no affect on this species in Georgia and South Carolina. The BA also determined that there would be "no effect" on any other federally listed species. The letter of concurrence was received from the USFWS on December 6, 2011. The BA and letter of concurrence are available in the project record and posted on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests' website at http://fs.usda.gov/goto/scnfs/upperchattooga (See Section 7.0 Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations in the Decision Notice).

10. **Whether the action threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.**

    The action will not violate federal, state, or local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (see EA, pages 1 to 5, Section 1.2 Need for The Proposed Action, pages 15 to 21, Section 1.8 Outstandingly Remarkable Values, Biological Evaluation and Biological Assessment in the project record, and Section 7.0 Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations in the Decision Notice).

10.0 IMPLEMENTATION AND APPEAL RIGHTS

For this decision, in consultation with the two other responsible officials, I have decided to use the Optional Appeal Procedures Available during the Planning Rule Transition Period available at: http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/applit/includes/PlanAppealProceduresDuringTransition.pdf (see Appendix A to 36 CFR 219.35, *Federal Register*, December 18, 2009).

Appellants must file a written appeal in duplicate that clearly states that it is a Notice of Appeal pursuant to the Optional Appeal Procedures. The appeal also must meet the content requirements of Section 9 of the Optional Appeal Procedures. Appeals must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date the legal notice of this decision is published in the newspaper of record (*Asheville Citizen-Times*).

Appellants must file appeals with the Regional Forester for the USDA Forest Service Southern Region at:

USDA Forest Service
Attn: Appeal Reviewing Officer
1720 Peachtree Road, N.W.
Suite 811N
Atlanta, GA 30309-9102

Appeals may also be faxed to (404) 347-5401 or e-mailed in a common digital format to *appeals-southern-regional-office@fs.fed.us*.The agency must receive hand-delivered appeals within normal business hours of 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday-Friday (closed on weekends and federal holidays). Pursuant to Section 10 of the Optional Appeal Procedures, implementation of this decision will not begin until seven calendar days after the legal notice of this decision is published in the newspaper of record (*Asheville Citizen-Times*). Should any project or activity under this amendment be implemented before an appeal decision can be issued, the appeal reviewing officer will consider written requests to stay implementation of any of those decisions pending completion of the review. To request a stay of implementation, an appellant must file a written request with the appeal reviewing officer. The request must meet the requirements found in Section 10 of the Optional Appeal Procedures.

For additional information concerning this decision or the US Forest Service appeal process, contact Stevin Westcott at the National Forests in North Carolina's Supervisor's Office at (828) 257-4200 or by surface mail to:

Stevin Westcott
USDA Forest Service
National Forests in North Carolina
160 Zillicoa Street, Ste A
Asheville, NC 28801

11.0 SIGNATURE

Diane E Rubiaco

Diane Rubiaco
Acting Forest Supervisor
National Forests in North Carolina

January 31, 2012
Date

Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests
Land and Resource Management Plan

Amendment # 22

January 2012

This amendment manages the mix of recreation opportunities offered on the main stem of the upper segment of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River (WSR) above Highway 28.

The following changes will be made to the Land and Resource Management Plan, Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests:

- **Page III-169.** Dispersed Recreation Management standard 4a is amended to read: An exception to these requirements is in the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River Corridor, above the Highway 28 bridge, where camping is allowed only in designated campsites. (Note: "Designated Campsites" are defined as "Campsites that are planned, designed and maintained to minimize biophysical impacts").

- **Page III-169**. Add under GENERAL DIRECTION for Dispersed Recreation Management:

  - 1a: Provide limited boating opportunities on the upper segment of the Chattooga River.

  Add under STANDARDS:

  Standard a1. Floating on the Chattooga River is not allowed upstream of the Highway 28 bridge except non-commercial boating is allowed on approximately 17 miles of the 21-mile main stem only from December 1 to April 30 from the confluence of Green Creek downstream to the designated take-out within one-quarter mile downstream of the Lick Log confluence by issuance of a self-registration boating permit consistent with 36 C.F.R. § 261.77, with the following conditions:

  A. Boating is allowed from the time that flows reach 350 cfs or greater at the USGS Burrells Ford gauge during daylight hours. Once boating is allowed, it may continue until 30 minutes after official sunset on that same day.

  B. Boaters must use tandem/single-capacity hard boats or tandem/single-capacity inflatable boats;

  C. Boaters must start or complete their trip at specific put ins and take outs at the following locations:

     1. Within one-quarter mile downstream of the Green Creek confluence;
     2. Within 500 feet of the Norton Mill Creek confluence;
     3. Within one-quarter mile of Bullpen Bridge;
     4. Within one-quarter miles of Burrells Ford Bridge; and
     5. Within one-quarter mile downstream of the Lick Log Creek confluence.

D. The self-registration boating permit will:

1. Specify boater put-ins and take-outs and safety equipment for boaters. (Note: "Designated" or "system" is defined as "Planned, designed and maintained by the U.S. Forest Service. "Designated put-in" is defined as "A river access point where boaters launch their craft." "Designated take-out" is defined as "A river access point where boaters take their craft out of the river").
2. Require that boating groups be limited to a maximum group size of six people and a minimum group size of two craft."

Standard a2. – Above the Highway 28 bridge, backcountry group sizes will be limited as follows: maximum 12 people per group on trails; six people per group at designated campsites, except at designated large group campsites; and four people per angling group.

Standard a3. -- Above the Highway 28 bridge, large woody debris removal without agency approval is prohibited.

Standard a4. -- Above the Highway 28 bridge, camping is allowed only in designated campsites. Campfires are allowed only in designated fire rings. Visitors may use existing sites until site-specific NEPA analysis is completed and sites are designated.

Add under GENERAL DIRECTION:

1b: Use the following guidelines in managing the upper Chattooga River. (Note: A "guideline" is defined as "a generally preferred or advisable course of action or level of attainment designed to promote achievement of goals or objectives.")

Guideline 1b.1 – Above the Highway 28 bridge, the visitor capacities in Table 1 should not be exceeded.

Figure 1. Capacities in four frontcountry areas in the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR.

Frontcountry Areas	Groups at One Time[1]	People at One Time
Grimshawes/Sliding Rock Bridge	25	65
Bullpen Road Bridge Area	15	40
Burrells Ford Bridge Area	80	205
Highway 28 Bridge Area	35	85

[1] The number of groups at one time equals the number of designated parking spaces in each frontcountry area. (Note: "Frontcountry" is defined as "An area that lies within one-quarter mile of roads and bridges. These areas offer easy access to the national forest where visitors are more tolerant of interaction with others as long as at-one-time use does not overwhelm the natural setting or create high levels of crowding and congestion.")

Figure 2. Capacities in four backcountry reaches in the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR.

Backcountry Reach	Average Groups per Weekday	Average People per Weekday[2]	Average Groups per Weekend Day	Average People per Weekend Day[2]
Chattooga Cliffs	5	10	10	15
Ellicott Rock	10	35	20	110
Rock Gorge	15	40	30	95
Nicholson Fields	15	40	30	95

[2] Average number of people per group varies by reach. (Note: "Backcountry" is defined as "An area that lies beyond one-quarter mile of roads and bridges. In these areas, visitors are more interested in opportunities that feature solitude, self-reliance, a sense of remoteness and a primitive setting.")

Guideline 1b.2 – Above the Highway 28 bridge, and within the river corridor, recreation users stay on designated trails (Note: "Designated trails" are defined as "Trails that are planned, designed and maintained to minimize biophysical impacts"). Trail system, including portage trails, is designed to minimize encounters and conflict while being environmentally sustainable. Redundant trails, trails where resource damage cannot be mitigated and trails that exacerbate encounters or conflict will be closed or rerouted.

Guideline 1b.3 – Above the Highway 28 bridge, campsites are designed to accommodate no more than three tents per site, except at group designated sites, to limit encounters and conflict and to be environmentally sustainable. Redundant campsites, campsites where resource damage cannot be mitigated, and campsites that exacerbate encounters or conflict, will be closed or relocated.

Page IV-4. Monitoring and Evaluation

Add the following new section:

Monitoring will measure frontcountry use (groups at one time or GAOT) and backcountry use (groups per day or GPD) and correlate them with the average number of vehicles-at-one-time (VAOT) in select parking areas that provide access to the frontcountry and backcountry. Monitoring will focus on peak times of the day during the high-use season (summer), and will distinguish information for weekdays and weekends. These are the most likely days when use may approach capacities that could impact opportunities for solitude in the backcountry. However, monitoring will also include vehicle counts during other moderate use times of the year (winter, spring and fall).

In addition, the agency will use information from monitoring to correlate vehicle counts to proportions of use associated with 1) frontcountry/backcountry recreation; 2) day/overnight recreation; 3) hiking/backpacking/angling/boating use in backcountry reaches and frontcountry areas. Monitoring will also help the agency examine relationships between use and impacts (e.g., river, trail or camp encounters). Monitoring will also show the proportion of different types of users during high-use periods, which may help design permit systems that manage the contributions of different types of use. If use on high-use days is disproportionately one type of user (e.g., day use hikers, anglers, or boaters), permit systems could establish equitable allocations within different use categories to reduce this problem, or possibly target the highest

use groups only. For example, several multi-day western rivers require permits for boating (the highest type of use, with greater demand) but not for backpackers (with much lower use and demand). The issues and considerations in developing effective and publically acceptable permit systems are complex (Whittaker and Shelby, 2008); additional planning and public involvement will be conducted before implementation of a specific system for the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR.

With improved information about use and related impacts, the agency will be able to validate if the prescribed capacities are set at appropriate levels. The agency may measure use by mechanical counters, systematic observations, self-registration programs or surveys. If surveys are conducted, reported trail, river and camp encounters (as well as tolerances for them) will also be measured and correlated with use.

The monitoring described will assess whether existing or new uses are causing resource impacts. Monitoring also will indicate whether capacities or other management actions need to be adjusted.

In addition to the current Land Management Plan Monitoring (LMP) requirements for the Chattooga WSR Corridor and Ellicott Rock Wilderness, additional monitoring questions have been developed to guide the collection of information necessary to ensure that goals, objectives, trends and estimated effects are occurring as anticipated. The monitoring questions below constitute the LMP monitoring decision. Below each question is the monitoring item and general technique that may be used to collect information. The monitoring elements and methods of collection may change and will not be considered a plan level decision.

Page IV-8 In the section of the table under – DFC/Goal 7, add the following new monitoring questions after "Task #22":

DFCs/Goals/Objectives/Directions or Standards	IMPLEMENTATION QUESTIONS
Direction: For Wild and Scenic Rivers, manage to maintain and enhance the wild, scenic, and riparian features of the river and to provide water-oriented opportunities in a natural setting.	Are at-one-time vehicle counts at frontcountry and backcountry parking areas changing? (Task #39) What is the proportion of recreation use by type of visitor in frontcountry areas and backcountry reaches and how is this use related to vehicle counts? (Task #40)
	EFFECTIVENESS QUESTIONS
	How is total daily backcountry use related to the number of encounters? Is the number of encounters affecting opportunities for solitude in the backcountry? How do the number of encounters compare to user tolerances? (Task #41) How are daily frontcountry use levels affecting perceived

	crowding, congestion, or desired experiences in frontcountry areas? (Task #42)

At the end of the Monitoring Task Summary Table, add Tasks #39 through #43

Task No.	MONITORING QUESTION	MONITORING ITEM	METHOD OF COLLECTION
39	Are at-one-time vehicle counts at frontcountry and backcountry parking areas changing?	Vehicles-at-one-time	Direct Survey
40	What is the proportion of recreation use by type of visitor in frontcountry areas and backcountry reaches and how is this use related to vehicle counts?	Groups-at-one-time in the frontcountry, people-at-one-time in the frontcountry, groups per day in the backcountry, people per day in the backcountry, vehicles-at-one-time	Direct Survey, mechanical counters, systematic observations
41	How is total daily backcountry use related to the number of encounters? Is the number of encounters affecting opportunities for solitude in the backcountry? How do the number of encounters compare to user tolerances?	Encounters in the backcountry	Direct Survey, systematic observations
42	How are daily frontcountry use levels affecting perceived crowding, congestion, or desired experiences in frontcountry areas?	Perceptions of crowding and congestion	Direct Survey, systematic observations
43	In the Chattooga River Corridor above Highway 28, are endangered, sensitive, and locally rare plant species or aquatic habitats being affected by: a) Recreation use; b) Additional large woody debris (LWD); or c) Removal of LWD by users?	Endangered, sensitive, and locally rare plant species, aquatic habitats, LWD Populations of the following plant species will be monitored for the first two years to determine their continual presence: • *Chiloscyphus muricatus, Homalia trichomanoides, Bryoxiphium norvegicum, Cephalozia macrostachya* ssp. *australis, Plagiomnium carolinianum*, or *Plagiochilla sullivantii var.*	Direct Survey

Task No.	MONITORING QUESTION	MONITORING ITEM	METHOD OF COLLECTION
		sullivantii; •*Lophocolea appalachiana.* **Specific requirements for Rock Gnome Lichen *(Gymnoderma lineare:*** An annual assessment of the subpopulation along the main stem of the Chattooga River will be completed using a rapid assessment field form. If unacceptable impacts are noted to the subpopulation, corrective measures will be implemented including consultation with the Asheville office of the USFWS. 1. A botanist familiar with rock gnome lichen identification and the exact location along the main stem of the Chattooga River will annually assess the subpopulation. 2. The evaluation will record the presence of any refuse, any visible destruction of the lichen mat, or any other indication on the level of visitation near the subpopulation on the eastern bank of the Chattooga River. 3. Monitoring will include recording data for the *Gymnoderma lineare* rapid assessment field form as a reference metric for assessing any change in population size or vigor. Data recorded will include the temporary plot sizes, an abundance cover class for each plot and an assessment on the vigor/heath for each plot. 4. The USFS will provide maps of any additional located subpopulations to the Asheville field office (USFWS). 5. An annual monitoring report will be supplied to the USFWS Asheville field office as part of the more comprehensive annual	

Task No.	MONITORING QUESTION	MONITORING ITEM	METHOD OF COLLECTION
		threatened and endangered species monitoring report.	

Recreation

Recreation monitoring will focus on at-one-time vehicle counts at parking lots to determine if recreation use is changing. In addition, the proportion of use by type of visitor in frontcountry and backcountry will be estimated and how the use is related to vehicle counts will be determined. Information also will be collected to determine how total daily backcountry use is related to the number of encounters, whether the number of encounters is affecting opportunities for solitude in the backcountry and how the total number of encounters compares to user tolerances. The use levels and social impacts are directly related to the Recreation ORV.

With improved information about use and related impacts, the agency will be able to validate if the prescribed capacities are set at appropriate levels. If monitoring shows that higher use could be allowed and still provide the same levels of opportunities for solitude without degrading the ORVs, the US Forest Service may adjust capacities as appropriate.

Adaptive Management

Direct and indirect limits will be applied to all recreation users based on monitoring. Forest Service Manual 2323.12 indicates a preference for using indirect use limits and management actions to address impact problems before employing direct ones. The initial appeal decision on the Sumter RLRMP (USFS, 2005) also suggests that, although a plan could apply use restrictions (e.g., "disallow or restrict the number of (private and commercial) on-river and in-corridor recreation users, determine the type of recreation use, or dictate the timing of such use"), this "authority should be exercised only with adequate evidence of the need for such restrictions."

In general, management responses to increasing use or impacts will focus on indirect measures first, but direct measures may be used if indirect measures are insufficient (FSM 2354.41a, pp. 48-50). Indirect measures generally attempt to redistribute recreational use by encouraging users to visit lower use segments or times, or by changing infrastructure (e.g., reducing the size of some parking lots) to match capacity goals and cue users to use other areas. Direct measures regulate behavior through restrictions or formal use limit systems (e.g., permits); they can ensure a capacity is met, but also may create a more "heavy-handed" management footprint that restricts individual choice.

If direct measures are needed, monitoring will help identify the specific type of use and encounters that are at issue, and develop appropriate regulations or a permit system that will address the use or impact problem. For example, if monitoring shows that competition for backcountry campsites or camp encounters are the impacts that exceed tolerances, a permit system that targets overnight use will make more sense than an "all user" permit system. Similarly, if high use was focused during a specific season, type of day, or segment, permits could be required for those defined times and locations only (e.g., the Delayed Harvest area on weekends during the Delayed Harvest season).

Results from monitoring vehicle counts will be compared to the 2007 vehicle counts to assess use trends and determine whether estimates are approaching capacities for these locations. If monitoring shows that higher use could be allowed and still provide the same levels of opportunities for solitude without degrading the ORVs, the US Forest Service may adjust capacities as appropriate. If average counts in a month are more than 10% higher than the 2007 average count for the highest use month (indicating an increasing use trend), adaptive management could be triggered.