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Subject: upper Chattooga management plan
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I am writing concerning the so-called "alternative 4" for management of the upper Chattooga. I am very familiar with this section. Disgusted that I was not allowed to see it in the most natural and least damaging way, by paddling, I instead have explored it by rock-hopping and wading. I have 750 photos illustrating every bit of the public miles of the upper Chattooga. Based on that, I pose the following questions.

Which section of the upper Chattooga is the most suitable for paddling by the widest segment of the public?

Which section of the upper Chattooga has the most days per year of sufficient water for paddling?

Which section of the upper Chattooga has the USFS proposed to leave completely closed to paddling?

The answer to all three is the section from Burrells Ford to Highway 28.

The USFS is proposing to continue to keep the section most suitable for paddling closed, apparently only to assuage the feelings of those user groups who have enjoyed privileged access to that section since the 70s.

Meanwhile, paddling, fishing, and hiking have co-existed on Overflow Creek and the West Fork for many years without significant problems. The paddlers are on Overflow when the water is high, and the fishermen and hiker/waders are there when Overflow is low.

The experience on Overflow, and for that matter on the Chauga, the Chattahoochee above Helen, the Jacks and the Conasauga, all show that water levels lead to self-management of use without significant conflict by paddlers, fishermen, and others.

I do not see how the USFS proposed plan can be considered a serious response to the past banning of paddling as long as paddlers are excluded from the section most suitable for them. One of the goals for the USFS should be to increase paddler access, but the proposed plan reeks of tokenism and politics, not a serious attempt to redress a severe imbalance in use.

With regard to the proposed management plan for the uppermost sections, "Chattooga Cliffs," and from Bullpen Bridge to Burrells Ford, the proposed plan is cumbersome and unworkable with regard to permitting and water levels. In general, I find limiting paddling based on water levels to be acceptable, but it should be left to paddlers to read the conditions at the river. If they choose to paddle below allowed levels, they should be ticketed. If the allowed levels are specified intelligently, I do not think there will be a problem.

I also do not agree to limiting paddler use to only the winter months. In my 35 years of SE paddling, there have been a number of years where good water levels

would have allowed paddling the upper Chattooga at certain times. At those times, fishermen and hikers would in most cases have left the river because of high water and heavy rain. No conflict.

Very truly yours

Gary DeBacher