From: Julie Stuart
To: comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us
Subject:
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Dear Forest Service,
I had the lovely experience of hiking the Chattooga River for my birthday last weekend. While on the hike I learned a lot about the current Forest Service plan to open the river for several weeks of whitewater boating during the winter when the river is at it's highest level. Before I went on the hike I was agnostic about the issue--I can see both sides of the argument--the kayakers and rafters want to be able to run the rapids, and the hikers and fisherman who've had the river to themselves relish the solitude and lack of organized groups impacting their enjoyment. Because of the hike, I have a better understanding of the issues involved.

I am siding with GA ForestWatch's position which does not want to see boating on the river and here's a couple of the reasons why:

1. As you know there are a lot of dead and dying hemlocks in the forests of the GA, SC and NC mountains. While eating lunch, we looked up and down the river--about a 100 yard view--and counted 10 that were almost dead and very close to falling across the river. That's one dead hemlock every 10 yards needing removal once it falls and blocks the waterway, essentially requiring the Forest Service to go into the logging business to remove obstacles to boating. A huge job when you think about the length of the river that would be available for boating. Currently, all three states have different rules on dead tree removal which would need some agreement. And as you know, dead trees in the river provide great habitat and ideally should remain there until they decay.

2. There is something to the argument about maintaining peace and solitude--one of the governing uses of this forest--and I find myself conflicted between wanting to get people out into the natural world and being mindful about how much impact we can have on a delicate resource. This area is already highly used and bringing in groups of boaters who have to carry their boats and gear from parking areas for several miles to the river will have a big impact.

3. GA doesn't have enough money or manpower to do adequate enforcement, and while there is a proposal to allow a limit of permits per day to boaters, the Forest Service has not discussed how they would enforce this. Honor system?? Also, these are serious Class III and IV rapids which are not for the inexperienced. If there is an accident or fatality, a rescue operation might indeed impact the forest.

These are several of the key arguments that persuaded me to support the position of GA ForestWatch.

Thanks,
Julie Stuart
Berkeley Lake, GA

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julie@MakingIdeasVisible.com
770 329 4213