From:	corbin12
To:	comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us
Subject:	Draft EA for the Management of Recreation Uses on the Upper Chattooga River
Date:	07/29/2008 11:02 PM

DATE: July 29, 2008

TO: Mr. Jerome Thomas, Forest Supervisor

FROM: M.A. (Alex) Watson, Jr

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RE: Comments on the pre-decisional Environmental
Assessment (draft EA) for the Management of Recreation Uses on the Upper Chattooga

In response to your solicitation for comments on the pre-decisional Environmental Assessment (draft EA) for the Management of Recreation Uses on the Upper Chattooga River I have several comments. I appreciate the opportunity to make these comments because I have a great interest in the management of the Chattooga since I have fished it on and off for over 55 years and since I have been intimately involved in your decision making process as a member of the expert fishing panel and an attendee at numerous public meetings.

1.) Your assessment states “However, as the perceived conflict has escalated, boaters have also developed antipathy toward those who oppose boating, thus creating conflict for boaters as well. …. The conflict from existing users as well as potential users is real and does not exist to this extent on other rivers” I would like to point out that conflict does exist on other rivers. Testimony at public hearings held by the USFS showed that non-boating users (especially with children) had conflicts with boaters which forced them to abandon usage of the lower Chattooga. I personally have written to you and testified at public meetings about the conflicts I have had with boaters while fishing on the Nantahala River, Moccassin Creek, and Holcomb Creek. On the Nantahala fishermen are zoned to the marginal water quality area upstream of the powerhouse while boaters get the best cold trout water below the powerhouse to run rough shod over outnumbered fishermen. Further, if you set the precedence of allowing boating above the Highway 28 bridge on the Chattooga you can bet there will then be conflicts on the Yellowstone River when American Whitewater sues to open that up to boaters. I sincerely believe that the reason you think that conflict “does not exist to this extent on other rivers” is that you have never engaged in a process that enabled public input to the extent you have on the Chattooga.

2.) Your assessment also states “Currently, goal interference, and the resulting face-to-face conflict between existing users and boaters, is mostly “perceived” as there is no on-the-ground mixing of these uses.” Please see **1.)** above which contradicts that statement. Additionally, USFS personnel surveyed Holcomb and Overflow Creeks and found evidence of removal of Large Woody Debris (LWD) aimed at allowing boaters to float through those streams. That is not perception that is fact. It is also fact that LWD is necessary to maintain quality trout water and that boaters routinely remove LWD that presents and obstacle to their boating objectives. I can also state unequivocally that removal of LWD on Holcomb Creek has diminished my own trout fishing experience. During the public meetings held by the USFS boaters, but not during pubic testimony, I personally heard boaters bragging about poaching trips down the Chattooga above the Highway 28 bridge. This behavior, plus the removal of LWD by boaters on nearby streams, plus the absence in your report of a plan for law enforcement adds up to the conclusion that boaters have flaunted the law in the past, will continue to in the future, and will create conflict with non-boaters in the future.

3.) There is a great deal of discussion about encounters in your assessment. What is not said about

encounters is that in any situation an angler, hiker, or camper can get away from each other and find solitude elsewhere on the river. This not true of encounters with boaters because they keep coming down the river and in some instances will stay in one place and go up and down runs being actively fished by someone who may have driven hours and walked miles to fish that run.

4.) I am very disappointed that your pre-decisional analysis has resulted in an alternative that will allow boating above the Highway 28 bridge on the Chattooga. I would have preferred Alternative 1. However, your choice of Alternative 4 was the best and most defensible of the Alternatives allowing boating. I realize that your choice of Alternative 4 is aimed at minimizing the opportunities for conflicts while still allowing boating, but I am concerned that there is no plan for vigorous law enforcement to insure that the boaters actually adhere to Alternative 4 if it is finally chosen. Finally, I am also concerned that by choosing an alternative allowing boating the result will be additional pressure by boaters in the near future to expand boating beyond Alternative 4 on the upper Chattooga.