From: Tony Bebber
To: comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us
Subject: Chattooga River Draft Environmental Assessment Comment
Date: 08/13/2008 10:57 PM

August 13, 2008

Dear Chattooga Planning Team:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Assessment for the Chattooga River. I've been fishing the Chattooga periodically since the mid-1980's and was involved briefly in macroinvertebrate sampling to establish stream health baseline data. I've also had the opportunity to canoe and raft some of the downstream portions of the Chattooga and a number of other rivers where I have seen the results of years of boating. I've taken Boy Scout groups to the Chattooga over the last 10 years to enjoy the camping, hiking, and fishing available there and so that they too will learn the value of such an unusual resource.

The upstream, non-boating portion of the Chattooga is the only true wilderness area in the upstate of South Carolina (and perhaps Georgia). It is one of the few trout streams in South Carolina and as wooly adelgids injure hemlocks in the region, the river and its environment should be protected to the extent possible. It is a place where interaction with others is rare once you are a mile or so from a road, and there are so few of these places left in the Southeast. Introducing further impacts to the upstream, non-boating portion of the Chattooga by allowing boating, even on some limited basis, will certainly degrade the resource over time. I am also concerned that adequate funding is not available to manage and monitor the river corridor, now or in the future, as it deserves to be managed. While I understand the desire of those that want to boat this area, I believe the current zoning is most appropriate for the area.

However, I will reluctantly support Alternative #4 rather than my preference of Alternative #3. But in changing the current zoning, I recommend the US Forest Service implement the following:

1. Prohibit any commercial activity from the area with significant penalties for violators.
2. Move designated parking farther from the river (minimum ¼ mile) and enforce "no parking" near the river.
3. Allocate additional manpower, including at least one full-time river/wilderness manager, to monitor the resource and enforce new restrictions in this upper river corridor.
4. Provide adequate education opportunities, prior to and during implementation of new zoning, so that potential users understand the the changes, requirements, and penalties.
5. Monitor impacts to the resource and implement further restrictions if cumulative impacts or significant violations occur.

I thank the US Forest Service for maintaining the Chattooga River to date and understand that it has been difficult with limited budgets and personnel. The Chattooga River is a resource without equal in the Southeast and it should be protected and managed as such.

Sincerely,
Tony Bebber
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