From: Tom McInnis
To: comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us
Subject: Pre-decisional comments
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I would like to thank the USFS for the opportunity to comment on the pre-decisional Environmental Assessment and the preferred alternative that was released in July. I have been involved with the decision process since the first public meetings on the new ten-year plan began. As a South Carolina resident for 35 years, an angler who has fished the Chattooga for the same period of time, and a member of the Chattooga River Chapter of Trout Unlimited, I have a vested interest in the Chattooga River. The following comments reflect my personal views.

First, as I have stated throughout this process, I feel that limiting boating to the lower sections of the Chattooga River, as has been the policy for over 30 years, has resulted in many benefits to the North Fork of the Chattooga and the Ellicott Rock Wilderness Area in particular. By zoning the river for major user groups, the USFS has protected the excellent trout fishing opportunities that exist in the upper river while allowing most of the river to be accessible for recreational and commercial boaters. To this end, I feel that Alternatives 1 -3 would be preferred. However, Alternative 3 maintains the current zoning while adding needed new management proscriptives for the upper river. Therefore, I am disappointed that Alternative 3 is not the preferred alternative.

Having said that, I feel I can accept and support Alternative 4, with some reservations. Foremost is the need for the USFS to provide the necessary additional resources to manage the plan. Additional personnel will be needed to provide the required oversight and management of the new boating policy. A new flow gauge will need to be installed at the Burrell's Ford Bridge before the new boating policy goes into effect, since the only gauge currently available is located near Clayton GA, too far downstream to be a reliable indicator of flow conditions in the upper Chattooga. The new gauge should allow telemetry of data so the information can be posted on the web as is the data from the Clayton gauge. Handicapped access needs to be provided at Burrell's Ford Bridge once the parking restrictions are introduced. I also feel that if Alternative 4 is selected, that the boating usage be monitored closely for two years and if abuses are evident, that the USFS reserve the right to rescind boating on the upper river at that time.

I believe that all the other alternatives have significant deficiencies. Opening the upper river to boating in other than the manner outlined in Alternative 3 would cause significant impacts on the Outstanding and Remarkable Values of angling and solitude, and also lead to the threat of greater environmental damage from overuse. Therefore I cannot support Alternatives 5 – 8. Alternatives 1 and 2 do not provide the needed management changes to protect the river from further degradation with increasing user demand.

In closing, I commend the USFS in their efforts to preserve the ORV"s of the North Fork of the Chattooga in the face of fierce opposition by the boating community. I feel that the USFS recognizes that the river serves many users. It is also clear that of the many users, only boaters are asking for unrestricted access, regardless of water conditions, time of week or year, or the impact of boating on other users.

I again thank the USFS for listening to all users, and I look forward to this long and arduous process being brought to a satisfactory and equitable conclusion.

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