From: Ashley, David
To: comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us
Subject: Upper Chattooga River EA
Date: 08/12/2008 06:12 PM

Dear Forest Service:

For over 30 years, I have hiked, camped and paddled in the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River corridor. I am old enough to be personally well-acquainted with the people who were responsible for getting the Chattooga declared a Wild and Scenic River. I have paddled the river in every season and at many water levels, somewhere in excess of 300 trips. I have had some of the best days of my life on the Chattooga, and some of the worst, including nearly drowning in Crack in the Rock. Nevertheless, it's still one of the best rivers anywhere.

The current Environmental Assessment regarding recreational management of the Chattooga River is a travesty of the NEPA process. Need I remind you that full disclosure of impacts is the cornerstone of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969? And despite intensive lobbying by special interests, no legitimate study has ever disclosed anything resembling a Significant Impact with the proposal for paddling on the upper sections of the Chattooga. Rather, the alternatives presented essentially continue the total ban on boating the Upper Chattooga. The small window for some boating is so restricted that almost no one will ever get a chance to run the headwaters of the Chattooga legally. It is quite obvious that USFS has presented a very shallow and incomplete alternatives analysis on the basis of no justified facts.

Why have you singled out the paddling community for restrictions? **There is no reason to ban boating** on ANY section of the Chattooga River. The real issue not addressed by USFS is diminution of water quality in the river as a result of private development in the watershed upstream. Forty years of boating on the lower Chattooga and neighboring Overflow Creek has not harmed the environment. The paddling community you seem determined to punish is the most environmentally responsible user group that visits the Chattooga River. I urge you to rescind the current pre-decisional EA and present alternatives based the factual, not the political circumstances surrounding the continued use of this beautiful public resource.

Sincerely,
David M. Ashley
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