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To: comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us
Subject: Pre-decisional comments; hard copy enroute via mail
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August 7, 2008

U. S. Forest Service
Chattooga River Project
4931 Broad River Road
Columbia, SC 29212

Dear Forest Planners,

The Chattooga River Chapter of Trout Unlimited 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. The following comments reflect the unanimous views of the Chattooga River Chapter's Board of Directors.

First, as we have stated throughout this process, we 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, we feel that Alternative 3 provides the best management plan. Alternative 3 maintains the current zoning while adding needed new management proscriptives for the upper river. Therefore, we are disappointed that Alternative 3 is not the preferred alternative.

Having said that, we feel we can accept and support Alternative 4, with some reservations. First there should be some allowance for handicapped parking at Burrell's Ford Bridge. We have several members whose mobility is limited to the point that, while they can still fish from the bank, they would find having to walk the quarter mile from the nearest parking to the river a significant hardship. Second, the USFS will have to provide the additional resources necessary to manage the new boating plan. Third, it is crucial that the proposed flow gauge be installed at Burrell's Ford Bridge before the river is opened to boating, preferably with telemetry capability. The current gauge at US 76 near Clayton is not a reliable indictor of water conditions above Burrell's Ford Bridge. Furthermore, requiring boaters to drive to Burrell's Ford to check the gauge before using the river is unreasonable. With telemetry, the gauge readings can be posted on the web. With these reservations, we feel that Alternative 4 sufficiently protects the environment and the outstanding and remarkable values of trout fishing and solitude.

We feel 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 we 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.

Again, the Chattooga River Chapter of Trout Unlimited thanks you for this opportunity to comment, and we look forward to this long process being brought to a satisfactory and equitable conclusion.

On behalf of the officers and board of the Chattooga River Chapter of Trout Unlimited,

Tom McInnis, Vice-President

Ron Gardzalla, President	Vance Baird
Bill Caruthers, Treasurer	John Garton
Bill Foster, Secretary	Ed Few
Art Shick, NLC Representative	Murray Lee