From: kirk@safeandsoundatl.com
Reply To: kirk@safeandsoundatl.com
To: comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us; akimbell@fs.fed.us
Subject: Upper Chattooga Comments
Date: 08/18/2008 09:33 AM

U.S. Forest Service

Chattooga River Project

4931 Broad River Road

Columbia, SC 29212.

comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us

08/18/2008

RE: Chattooga River Project Comments

Dear Sumter National Forest,

My name is Kirk Baker. I live in the Atlanta Metro area and frequent the north GA mountains and the Chattooga watershed frequently. I am an avid trout fisherman and kayaker.

I offer this input in regards to the current situation over the upper Chattooga River. I feel the river should be open to all outdoor enthusiats equally. To provide preferential treatment to some groups over others is not justifiable or fair. There are many great trout streams in the lower Appalachian Range and the Chattooga is one of them. It also happens to be one of the great whitewater runs in the same area. There are no rivers that can only be boated. The chance of boater/angler encounters is very limited as the run is quite demanding and rainfall dependant. The levels at which the boaters will be on the water is generally a level that anglers will not be out. There will be a rush in the beginning years to the river as it will be recently decriminalized, but that will taper off over time. The FS practice of adding logs to the river, creating strainers, to provide habitat for any nonendangered species is absolutely absurd. It is a practice which increases the chance of a fatal accident for all users of the river whether it be anglers, hikers, swimmers, boaters, etc. Intentionally creating drowning hazards is not something the Forest Service should EVER do.

I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment regarding the recreational management of the Chattooga River. I disagree with your analysis and your proposal. Both treat me and my community of river enthusiasts unfairly and your proposal would not meet my interests. Please consider the following concerns I have regarding this issue:

- The USFS has spent thirteen years searching for a reason to limit paddling on the Chattooga and has found *none*. It is time to open the river to boating.
- The EA is not a user capacity analysis and does not reference one. The AW appeal decision required a user capacity analysis. Where is it?
- No alternative is acceptable because they all include boating bans on the upper Chattooga Cliffs reach and on tributaries – without any justification.
- The EA and preferred alternative are not equitable or protective of the river because they considers boating to be the only management variable, while other larger more impactful uses are not seriously considered for limits.
- The USFS preferred alternative includes a total ban on 2/3 of the upper river, a ban on tributary boating, and allows only 0-6 days of limited boating on the remaining reach – while allowing all other wilderness conforming existing uses in unlimited numbers.. This is not equitable and not acceptable!
- The EA offers no basis for the boating bans and limits

- The EA lacks a full range of alternatives
- The EA is no better or different than the last one, is at least a year late and has wasted millions in tax payer money
- The USFS hired qualified consultants and then ignored their input
- The 450 CFS average daily flow trigger in the preferred alternative is a flawed measure that should be eliminated from any considerations. There is no way a paddler can know this number and will be an administrative burden for the agency.
- Paddlers prefer an alternative similar to Alternative 8 that 1) fully allows boating on the entire Chattooga River below Grimshawes Bridge, 2) allows paddling on tributaries, 3) includes encounter standards based on a real user capacity analysis, 4) will *equitably* limit *total* use only when encounter standards are consistently exceeded, and 5) will do so using all available indirect measures first.
- The public should have the right to float on public Wild and Scenic Rivers regardless of who owns the land along the river.
- All aspects of the “Outstanding Remarkable Values” of Wild and Scenic Rivers should be protected on the entire river, not just in some areas.

Thank you for considering these comments. Please consider conducting a real user capacity analysis and immediately allowing boating in the same numbers, places, and seasons that you allow existing users. Paddling should be allowed in a similar manner to your alternative number 8, except on the *entire* Upper Chattooga River and its tributaries.

Thank you for considering these comments,

Sincerely,

Kirk Baker
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