From: Hickman.Doug
To: comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us
Subject: Upper Chattooga River Management Alternatives
Date: 08/18/2008 12:30 PM

Thanks for the opportunity to comment on the proposed management alternatives for the Upper Chattooga River watershed. As a fly fisherman who has fished the Chattooga for many years, I would prefer Alternative 3 but will support Alternative 4 as a prudent compromise within the context of preserving the backcountry solitude experience that brings me to the Chattooga. I also request that the Forest Service continue to focus on enhancing the proposed management plan to address ongoing concerns over removal of woody debris, trail / campsite maintenance, road access etc. with the primary objectives of (1) protecting the river's current high water quality, (2) maintaining and hopefully improving the esthetics of the backcountry experience, and (3) enhancing fisheries management to maintain and build on what has been accomplished since the early 1980s.

Limited, permitted boating by serious whitewater enthusiasts in designated areas that does not conflict with the times and water conditions I would normally be on the river is an acceptable compromise to me. I have done a fair amount of boating myself over the years (incidentally, I just returned from a week long wilderness canoe trip in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in Minnesota and experienced enough portaging to last a lifetime!). What is not acceptable to me is unlimited, unregulated boating at any time above Hwy 28 because it will disrupt my experience and the experience of many other backcountry trout fishermen, require new facilities and user access that will inevitably degrade water quality and scenic quality, and create a management nightmare for the FS and DNR. For example, there is no way that a casual boater or tuber should attempt to float the Big Bend Falls and Rocky Gorge areas and only highly competent kayakers should even consider attempting them at optimal water levels. Common sense would require that these areas be portaged, which will lead to degraded conditions in and around these areas and a requirement for more rangers to patrol these areas.

The concept of "zoning" has been a successful practice for many years on rivers that have the potential for user conflict. Several notable examples include fly/artificial only or no kill sections on high quality trout streams and float accessible / wade only sections of large western rivers (ex. Madison River). Locally, the Chattahoochee River is a good example of effective zoning (artificals only and boating restrictions in certain parts of the river). I think it is very important that the FS continue to be able to use this management tool to avoid potential conflicts and give all stakeholders an opportunity to have the type of experience they desire. Boating through an area that I am fishing may not degrade the boater's experience, but it sure will degrade mine! Not to mention the prospect of dealing with streams of trash, clothing, broken equipment etc. from casual boaters that underestimate the level of difficulty in some of the backcountry areas of the river.

As a longtime Atlanta resident who is confined to the big city during the week for job reasons, I relish every opportunity I have to come to the Chattooga and "get away from it all". I do not like fishing in crowds and when I come to the Chattooga, I'm looking for solitude and am willing to hike many miles to find it. The Chattooga is one of the few places in the Southeast where I can have a quality fishing experience on a large watershed that is still reasonably accessible for a one day trip. The boaters have access to virtually every other large river system in the Southeast and have many options to enjoy their sport. I only have one option reasonably nearby to pursue a quality large water backcountry experience – the Chattooga River. I strongly encourage the FS to adopt Alternative 4 and put in place all of the necessary management activities that have been identified.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment.

Doug Hickman
Group Vice President
Institutional Asset Services
SunTrust Bank

Mail Code Ga Atl 221
P.O. Box 4655
Atlanta, GA 30302
(404)588-7398 phone
(404)588-8901 fax
doug.hickman@suntrust.com

LEGAL DISCLAIMER
The information transmitted is intended solely for the individual or entity to which it is addressed and may contain confidential and/or privileged material. Any review, retransmission, dissemination or other use of or taking action in reliance upon this information by persons or entities other than the intended recipient is prohibited. If you have received this email in error please contact the sender and delete the material from any computer.

SunTrust and Seeing beyond money are federally registered service marks of SunTrust Banks, Inc.
[ST:XCL]