From: John Pilson
To: comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us
Subject: The Upper Chattooga
Date: 08/18/2008 03:57 PM

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

August 18th, 2008

RE: Chattooga River Project Comments

Dear Sumter National Forest,

I am a whitewater paddler and avid outdoorsman. I live in Asheville and am grateful for all the National and state parklands I can access as a hiker or fisherman or kayaker.

I have followed this controversy now for several years. Further, 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:

I fully agree with the following bullet points:

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.

I strongly believe the ban is illegal and was made to benefit one user group to the detriment of another user group. Further, I see no conflicts between the groups, as whitewater paddlers will not be using the Upper Chattooga when people want to fish there. This idea of conflict in the fishermen's eyes is a red herring.

Thank you for considering these comments,

Sincerely

John Pilson
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Asheville NC 28806