From: Amanda G
To: comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us
Subject: Chattooga River Project Comments
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U.S. Forest Service
Chattooga River Project
4931 Broad River Road
Columbia, SC 29212
comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us

Dear Sumter National Forest:

Thank you for taking the time to consider these comments. I am a whitewater kayaker. I work as a management consultant in Atlanta and also serve as the president of the Atlanta Whitewater Club. I began kayaking on the Chattooga River, section III, seven years ago, and as a result of much time spent in the area, I am very concerned about the future of the wild and scenic area.

I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment that was released, and I participated in two of the all-day Saturday workshops and have submitted my comments during previous review periods. I contributed my time and energy (both times at personal costs to me) with the assumption that all voices would be heard equally and that all parties involved were seeking the preservation of the area. I am disappointed and upset at the alternative that has been presented.

The proposed alternative has been called by many a "de facto ban" and I could not agree more. Further, there is no basis for such a ban. In all of the alternatives, boqting is listed as the only variable. Where is the data from the user impact study? What is the environmental basis for such a ban? The documentation I have read suggests that the boating ban is in place (and will continue to be in place in the future) to protect the river corridor. Boaters are being vilified as huge threats to the environment, and this could not further from the truth and this tactic masks the real environmental dangers. Boaters are one of the lowest-impact groups; fishing is protected in the alternative and even encouraged yet this activity and user group has one of the worst environmental impacts. Not only does this user group walk in the stream bed, disturbing the natural habitat, and create miles and miles of ad hoc trails, but the stocking of non-native species does not encourage the natural Chattooga habitat to thrive and in fact is causing harm to the native species. This stocking should be ceased immediately if we are to protect this area.

In addition, hikers and recreational campers appear to have the largest impact on the environment, yet these groups are also not regulated. I would like to understand why one user group has been essentially banned from a federally protected natural resource, yet high-impact user groups have not even been regulated. There is no evidence that boaters as a group would have any adverse impact on the environment of the area. In fact, boaters as a community care about the rivers that they paddle and take great strides to be good stewards of the land and environment.

The Atlanta Whitewater Club for example, sponsors at least three river clean-up trips each year on local rivers that we consider "home"; the Chattooga is one of those rivers. The trash we pick up usually is not boater trash; it is beer cans, food wrappers, cans of corn, Styrofoam coolers, and articles of clothing (i.e., items that a typical kayaker or canoeist would not be carrying down the river). A lot of this trash gets washed from the shore into the river, where often boaters will pick it up and carry it out during river trips.
There has been much talk during the workshops about user encounters and the idea of "solitude"—that a private citizen should be able to go into the Chattooga corridor for an entire day and not encounter another person. Yet, this assumed "right" is only protected for one user group. Further, it is the job of US Forest Service to protect the land for the enjoyment of all, not to protect the solitude of a few users. This is not a reasonable expectation by any user group—boaters or otherwise.

In closing, I would just like to say there is no basis for this continued illegal ban. If a regulatory mechanism (like a permit system and restricted use based on calendar days, water levels, time or temperature) is put into place, it should be applied equitably, not focused on one group. Why is only one group restricted in this alternative? Opening these waters to private boaters is simply not going to create the "circus" atmosphere that so many so-called environmentalists fear. There are ways to prevent this from happening while allowing equitable use of the land and its resources, such as excluding commercial groups, daily limits on the number of users (hikers, boaters, and anglers), etc.

My sincere hope that the heart-felt opinions and thoughts of many users and potential users is finally heard and no longer ignored, and tax payer's money is no longer wasted. I also hope that future decisions are made rationally and truly seek to protect the area for the enjoyment of ALL groups with low environmental impact. Using the alternatives you have presented, alternative 8 is the only option that accomplishes the goals of protecting the wild and scenic corridor and ensuring its enjoyment by ALL low-impact user groups.

Sincerely,
Amanda L. Gettler
Atlanta, GA