From: Wes Yow
Reply To: gwyow@yahoo.com
To: comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us
Cc: gwyow@yahoo.com
Subject: RE: Chattooga River Project Comments
Date: 08/12/2008 04:07 PM

U.S. Forest Service
Chattooga River Project
4931 Broad River Road
Columbia, SC 29212.
comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us

August 12, 2008

RE: Chattooga River Project Comments

Dear Sumter National Forest,

I am writing to you today to express my concerns regarding the proposed Chattooga management plan. I'll go ahead and explicitly state my beliefs and further explain myself below: I do not support ANY usage restrictions on private boaters anywhere in the Chattooga area. I also do not agree with the structure or conclusions presented as a result of the "objective data" collected during the environmental assessment.

I live in the Greenville, SC area where I work as an engineer in research & development for a major company. Throughout my career I have contributed to various engineering/scientific studies in order to analyze and refine proposals for objectively evaluating problems involving complex systems. Utter objectivity is paramount to assuring the solutions developed are both beneficial and scientifically sound.

I have read through a significant portion of the content in the proposed management plan and I can only say that as a scientist and engineer, I am completely disappointed in both the non-objectivity and lack of scientific discipline in the purported Environmental Assessment that was conducted based on user experiences and area impacts. The Forest Service is an entity tasked with protecting and managing the resources of the Chattooga area for current and future generations. I do not believe that this is in fact being carried out in a true and equal fashion for all user groups. I am also appalled that an entity of the government has allowed itself to be influenced by outside user groups into propagating and continuing bans on specific user groups, namely private boaters without any scientific basis.

The assessment that was completed does not address the concerns of all user groups; in fact it effectively singles out one user group (private boaters) from access for no valid or objective reasoning.

I've been experiencing the wonderful scenery and mystique of the Chattooga River since the late 1990's and I have seen changes in the overall quality of the wilderness area. I am most familiar with the section of river from the Hwy 76 Bridge to the Tugaloo impoundment through both hiking/camping and kayaking. Trash and water quality issues are readily apparent both around and in the river. The trash seen in the area is most often plastic bottles, food wrappers, or containers of one sort or another. These objects can be found around heavily eroded shoreline and/or campsite areas where usage is obviously extreme. It is a disappointment to visit this area and see increasing levels of trash and household/commercial debris deposited throughout the riverbed and adjoining tributaries. Numerous large objects can be seen that were obviously not hand carried to the river corridor (fiberglass tanks for wells, etc). This represents a significant threat
to the long-term viability of the river corridor and to any user's experience in the area.
The following are some summary points regarding the current proposed management alternatives and analysis:

1. The only truly unbiased option for the Chattooga management plan would be for all private boater restrictions to be removed on all sections of the Chattooga.
2. The 450 cfs average daily flow proposal has been analyzed by scientific members of the boating community and shown to be flawed based on the actual flow data used by the Forest Service.
3. The erosion impact of other user groups on area trails and riverbanks has not been addressed; it is merely ignored and allowed to continue unchecked.
4. An honest assessment of the environmental impacts that boaters would have has not been completed. Boating represents one of the least impactful usages of the Chattooga river system.
5. The boating ban is in fact unjustified and not based on sound logic.

I ask that during the evaluation of user comments and proposed management alternatives that one significant thought be remembered: established and educated people in the area like me will continue to work against and challenge these types of biased policies no matter the financial expense or time involved for ourselves. If management organizations can't do their job objectively, then we must step up and be sure that they do. The legal challenges American Whitewater has introduced will continue until the Forest Service completes an adequate and unbiased scientific analysis with properly justified reasons for any usage guidelines that are put into effect.

We all want the Chattooga area to thrive and continue to exist in a pristine state for future generations. We (all user groups) should be working together to preserve this magnificent area and resource instead of being divided by perceived issues. Please keep that in mind when the evaluations are completed.

I offer my thanks in advance for your consideration of my personal views regarding the proposed management plan and boater restrictions. Out of all of this controversy, I am convinced that the Chattooga and all involved user groups can benefit from a sound long-term management plan.

Sincerely,
Wes Yow
13 Renforth Rd
Simpsonville, SC 29681