From: Ben Simms
To: Jerome Thomas
Subject: PROTECT THE UPPER CHATOOGA RIVER
Date: 08/15/2008 11:28 AM

Ben Simms
300 N. Main
Davidson, NC 28036-9404

August 15, 2008

Jerome Thomas
Forest Supervisor

Dear Jerome Thomas:

US Forest Service,

It is shameful that the Upper Chattooga issue has degraded to the point that it has become little more than a fight among different user groups. Taking the position that fishermen, boaters, hikers, campers, and nature enthusiasts are "competing" user groups is somewhat incendiary in itself.

As a member of all these groups, I ask you to concentrate more on the protection of this resource which has shown more and more signs of abuse since my first introduction to it in the late 1960's. When I paddled this section of the river up until it was prohibited, it was definitely challenging but extremely clean and beautiful. The woods I hiked through were likewise also reasonably pristine along the trails but the campsites and holes cut in the vegetation for fishing access were often littered with cans, "TP flowers," and other heavier debris.

Since those earlier days, these conditions have grown worse and the trails are so worn that in places they may as well be paved. Debris has increased to the point where my hiking buddies, the Scouts we often take there, and I seldom return home without a garbage bag full of items such as wheels off beer carts, bottles, cans, tangled fishing lines, cigar and cigarette butts, and unburned food.

Another very large and very responsible group that regularly does trail and riverside cleanup along the Upper Chattooga is one comprised of paddlers. Although we have not been able to paddle this river for three generations, we still understand its value and the importance of maintaining its cleanliness and beauty. To place the blame for any degradation of the UC valley by pointing fingers at the paddling community is terribly misdirected.

Any alternative that is chosen by you to manage this area, rather than depriving anyone of their lawful use of the resource, should instead be one that educates, one that instills respect for the resource, and one that requires responsible use of it.

It is possible for even the lightest of hikers to leave footprints and bruise plants along a trail but it is impossible for a boat to leave a mark on the water oncee it moves on. Furthermore, if allowed to paddle the Upper Chattooga again, I know the canoes could and would carry out much more trash than any individual hiker.

Please support an alternative that will perserve the area and allow my grandchildren to enjoy all aspects of the Chattooga Valley as I have whether they want to hike, canoe, kayak, fish, or just sit and talk to God.

Sincerely,

Ben Simms
864-313-2390