



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Francis Marion &
Sumter National Forests

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File Code: 1920-2

Date: August 14, 2007

Dear Interested Party:

On behalf of the Sumter, Chattahoochee and Nantahala National Forests, I am asking for your comments on alternatives for managing recreation uses on the upper Chattooga River, including the alternative of maintaining the current management direction. In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), we will prepare an Environmental Assessment to determine whether or not there are significant environmental effects that would require an Environmental Impact Statement. I would appreciate your comments on potential environmental effects of the alternatives and on the range of alternatives.

Based on data from the visitor use capacity analysis and on information gathered during a series of public hearings and workshops, I have developed six preliminary alternatives that cover a range of options from maintaining current management to introducing new boating use to implementing restrictions on all users. Enclosed is a table outlining the differences between each alternative.

Please send your comments via e-mail to comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us or via surface mail to John Cleeves at the address above. All submitted comments will become part of the project record and available for public review. In addition, you are invited to attend a workshop on the alternatives that we will convene on September 29, 2007. Time and location information will soon be posted on the Forest web site. In order for your comments to be adequately considered prior to the workshop, please send them in by September 13, 2007.

For more information on this process, please visit our website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms>.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jerome Thomas

JEROME THOMAS

Forest Supervisor

Enclosures



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Alternatives

Throughout this process, the public has expressed agreement on their desire to protect and enhance the outstandingly remarkable values of the Chattooga River (geology, biology, scenery, recreation and history); maintain a sense of solitude away from modern life; offer a remote wilderness experience; preserve the spectacular scenery and setting; and protect the natural resources of the upper section of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River that make this area a special and unique place. In the NEPA process, these goals collectively are called a “desired condition.”

Issues related to how to achieve this desired condition include:

1. Should there be new standards limiting trailheads, trails and/or campsites?
2. Should there be new standards limiting group sizes, encounters between user groups and/or access?
3. Should there be new boating opportunities on the Chattooga River?
4. Should there be new standards limiting group sizes, encounters between user groups and/or access if new boating opportunities are allowed?

Our publics have expressed many different ways of responding to these issues while achieving the desired condition. The following six preliminary alternatives reflect what the Forest Service has heard thus far. Site specific analyses would need to be completed prior to implementing some of the actions presented in these alternatives.

#1	Maintain Current Management
	Standards/Actions
<i>Boating</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Floating on the Chattooga River is not allowed upstream of the Highway 28 bridge.
<i>Group size</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 Within existing wilderness areas the commercial and organized group size is limited to 12.
<i>Trails</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New non-motorized trail construction is allowed to improve existing trail configuration and to improve access to specific locations along streams, lakes, and the riparian corridor. • Motorized and non-motorized trail reconstruction and relocation within the riparian corridor are allowed to reduce impacts to riparian and aquatic resources.
<i>Woody debris</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perennial and intermittent streams are managed in a manner that emphasizes and recruits large woody debris. The desired condition is approximately 200 pieces of large woody debris (LWD) per stream mile. • The removal of large woody debris (pieces greater than 4 feet long and 4 inches in diameter on the small end) is allowed if it poses a risk to water quality, degrades habitat for riparian-dependent species, for recreational access, or when it poses a threat to private property or National Forest infrastructures (i.e. culverts, bridges). The need for removal must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Except in unusual circumstances, woody debris embedded within the channel materials will not be removed.
<i>Campsites:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dispersed camping occurs at least 50 feet from lakes and streams to protect riparian areas, 50 feet from trails and ¼ mile from a road on the Andrew Pickens District. • Mitigate resource damage at existing campsites.

#2	
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary objective is to manage encounters among existing users.
	Standards/Actions
<i>Boating</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No boating above the Highway 28 bridge.
<i>Group Encounters</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more than three encounters per day except within 300 feet of Burrell's Ford Bridge.
<i>Group size</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited to 12.
<i>Trails</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate existing user-created trails except where resource damage can't be mitigated (those trails would be closed). • No new trail construction unless a reroute is necessary to correct existing problems on designated trails. • No new user-created trails.
<i>Woody debris</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance woody debris recruitment.
<i>Campsites: Wilderness & wild segments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate existing campsites except where resource damage can't be mitigated (those campsites would be closed). • Camping in designated campsites only. • No new user-created campsites. • Limit user-created fire rings. • No more than one campsite per ¼ mile of river.
<i>Campsites: Recreation and scenic segments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campsites limited to 50 feet from the river, 50 feet from trails, 200 feet from an occupied campsite and 300 feet from an open public road. • Mitigate resource damage at existing campsites.
<i>Parking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No parking lots inside the Corridor boundary (close existing parking lots if necessary). Lost parking spaces will not be replaced.
<i>User registration</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-registration for all users/visitors (not fees). • Capacity will be monitored. If more than three encounters occur per day, a permitting system will be implemented for all existing users.

#3	
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary objective is to manage biophysical impacts on natural resources by limiting trails, campsites, group size, parking and types of use (prohibition on boating would continue).
	Standards/Actions
<i>Boating</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No boating above the Highway 28 bridge.
<i>Group Size</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited to 12.
<i>Trails</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate existing user-created trails except where resource damage can't be mitigated (those trails would be closed). • No new trail construction unless a reroute is necessary to correct existing problems on designated trails. • No new user-created trails.
<i>Woody debris</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance woody debris recruitment.
<i>Campsites: Wilderness & wild segments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate existing campsites except where resource damage can't be mitigated (those campsites would be closed). • Camping in designated campsites only. • No new user-created campsites. • Limit user-created fire rings.
<i>Campsites: Recreation and scenic segments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campsites limited to 50 feet from the river, 50 feet from trails, 100 feet from an occupied campsite and 300 feet from an open public road. • Mitigate resource damage at existing campsites.
<i>Parking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No net gain in parking capacity.

#4	
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary objectives: To manage biophysical impacts on natural resources and encounters between users by limiting trails, campsites, group size and parking; and to manage encounters between users by establishing zone, season and flow limits on new boating opportunities.
	Standards/Actions
<i>Boating below private property to Bull Pen Road Bridge</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boating limited to single-capacity hard boats and single-capacity inflatable kayaks. • No season or flow restrictions for boating from the existing user created trail stemming from the Chattooga River Trail (approximately 4/10 mile below private land on the west side of the river) to Bull Pen Road Bridge. • Maximum four groups per day (self-registration only until records indicate the maximum number of groups is exceeding four; then permits in advance). • Maximum group size of six people.
<i>Boating from Bull Pen Road Bridge to ¼ mile above Burrells Ford Bridge</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boating limited to single-capacity hard boats and single-capacity inflatable kayaks. • Seasonal and flow restrictions for boating between Bull Pen Road Bridge and ¼ mile above Burrells Ford Bridge <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Allows boating December 1 – March 31 2. Allows boating at flows equivalent to 400 cfs (at Burrells Ford gage) or approximately 2.4 feet (HWY 76 gage) and above only. • Maximum four groups per day (self-registration only until records indicate the maximum number of groups is exceeding four; then permits in advance). • Maximum group size of six people.
<i>Group size</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited to 12.
<i>Woody debris</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited woody debris removal.
<i>Trails</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate existing user-created trails except where resource damage can't be mitigated (those trails would be closed). • No new trail construction unless a reroute is necessary to correct existing problems on designated trails. • No new user-created trails.
<i>Campsites: Wilderness & wild segments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate existing campsites except where resource damage can't be mitigated (those campsites would be closed). • Camping in designated campsites only. • No new user-created campsites. • Limit user-created fire rings.
<i>Campsites: Recreation and scenic segments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campsites limited to 50 feet from the river, 50 feet from trails, 100 feet from an occupied campsite and 300 feet from an open public road. • Mitigate resource damage at existing campsites.
<i>Parking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No net gain in parking capacity.
<i>User registration</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-registration for all users/visitors (not fees).

#5	
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary objectives: To manage biophysical impacts on natural resources and encounters between users by limiting trails, campsites, group size and parking; and to manage encounters between users by establishing zone and flow limits on new boating opportunities.
	Standards/Actions
<i>Boating between Grimshawes Bridge and Lick Log</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At flows equivalent to 350 cfs (at Burrells Ford gage) or approximately 2.3 feet (HWY 76 gage) and above only. • Boating limited to single-capacity hard boats and single-capacity inflatable kayaks. • Maximum four groups per day (self-registration only until records indicate the maximum number of groups is exceeding four; then permits in advance) between Grimshawes and Burrells Ford. • Maximum four groups per day (self-registration only until records indicate the maximum number of groups is exceeding four; then permits in advance) between Burrells Ford and Lick Log Creek. • Maximum group size of six people.
<i>Group size</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited to 12.
<i>Woody debris</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited woody debris removal.
<i>Trails</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate existing user-created trails except where resource damage can't be mitigated (those trails would be closed). • No new trail construction unless a reroute is necessary to correct existing problems on designated trails. • No new user-created trails.
<i>Campsites: Wilderness & wild segments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate existing campsites except where resource damage can't be mitigated (those campsites would be closed). • Camping in designated campsites only. • No new user-created campsites. • Limit user-created fire rings.
<i>Campsites: Recreation and scenic segments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campsites limited to 50 feet from the river, 50 feet from trails, 100 feet from an occupied campsite and 300 feet from an open public road. • Mitigate resource damage at existing campsites.
<i>Parking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No net gain in parking capacity.
<i>User registration</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-registration for all users/visitors (not fees).

#6	
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary objectives: To manage biophysical impacts on natural resources and encounters between users by limiting trails, campsites, group size and parking; and to provide new boating opportunities.
Standards/Actions	
<i>Boating between Grimshawes and Highway 28 Bridges</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boating limited to single-capacity hard boats and single-capacity inflatable kayaks. • Maximum group size of six people.
<i>Group size</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited to 12.
<i>Woody debris</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited woody debris removal.
<i>Trails</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate existing user-created trails except where resource damage can't be mitigated (those trails would be closed). • No new trail construction unless a reroute is necessary to correct existing problems on designated trails. • No new user-created trails.
<i>Campsites: Wilderness & wild segments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate existing campsites except where resource damage can't be mitigated (those campsites would be closed). • Camping in designated campsites only. • No new user-created campsites. • Limit user-created fire rings.
<i>Campsites: Recreation and scenic segments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campsites limited to 50 feet from the river, 50 feet from trails, 100 feet from an occupied campsite and 300 feet from an open public road. • Mitigate resource damage at existing campsites.
<i>Parking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No net gain in parking capacity.
<i>User registration</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-registration for all users/visitors (not fees).

	Standards/Actions	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
<i>Encounters</i>	No more than three per day except within 300 feet of Burrells Ford Bridge.						
<i>Group Size</i>	Limited to 12.						
<i>Boating</i>	No boating above HWY 28						
	Single-capacity hard boats/inflatable kayaks only.						
	Flow restrictions between Grimshawes and Lick Log.						
	No boating adjacent to private property.						
	Below private land to 1/4 mile above Burrells Ford Bridge with some season and flow restrictions.						
	Maximum four groups per day above Burrells Ford Bridge						
	Maximum four groups per day below Burrells Ford Bridge						
	Maximum group size of six people						
<i>Trails</i>	Designate existing user-created trails except where resource damage can't be mitigated.						
	No new trail construction unless a reroute is necessary to correct existing problems on designated trails.						
	No new user-created trails.						
<i>Woody Debris</i>	Enhance woody debris recruitment.						
	Limited woody debris removal.						
<i>Campsites: Wilderness and Wild Segments</i>	Designate existing campsites except where resource damage can't be mitigated						
	Camping in designated campsites only.						
	No more than one campsite per ¼ mile of river.						
	No new user-created campsites.						
<i>Campsites: Recreation and scenic segments</i>	Limit user-created fire rings.						
	Campsites limited to 50 feet from the river, 50 feet from trails, 100 feet from occupied campsites and 300 feet from open public roads.						
	Mitigate resource damage at existing campsites.						
<i>Parking</i>	Campsites limited to 50 feet from the river, 50 feet from trails, 200 feet from an occupied campsite and 300 feet from an open public road.						
	No parking lots inside the Corridor Boundary. Parking spaces will not be replaced.						
<i>User registration</i>	No net gain in parking capacity.						
	Self registration for all users/visitors (not fees). Monitor capacity. If more than three encounters per day occur, a permitting system will be implemented for all users.						

Background

The 57-mile Chattooga Wild and Scenic River (Figure 1) includes lands in three National Forests (the Nantahala in North Carolina, the Chattahoochee in Georgia and the Sumter in South Carolina) and passes through about five miles of the 8,724-acre Ellicott Rock Wilderness. It provides important recreation opportunities, such as high quality fishing, whitewater boating, hiking, swimming, camping and hunting, for visitors to the area. The superiority of these activities has attracted substantial numbers of visitors and use on the river which, in turn, has led to increased concern about visitor impacts.

In 2004, the Sumter revised its Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP or Forest Plan) to address recreation issues in the corridor. As part of that plan, a 1976 decision to allow whitewater boating only on the lower 36 miles of the Chattooga River was retained. American Whitewater appealed this decision; as a result, the Forest Service agreed to reassess that decision as part of broader analysis of visitor capacity issues on the Upper Chattooga as required by the Decision for Appeal.

As part of the analysis, the Forest Service has been examining current desired conditions, goals, objectives, standards and monitoring related to the river in the existing forest plans for the Sumter, Chattahoochee and Nantahala/Pisgah National Forests. Although the scope of the Decision for Appeal is limited to the Upper Chattooga (Figure 2), management of national forest lands in the entire corridor are being considered when addressing use and impact patterns and the acceptability of management actions. If the Forest Service determines that changes need to be made to the current management direction, each of the three national forests listed above will need to amend their existing forest plans. The responsible official will be the Forest Supervisor for each forest plan.

The Forest Service has been following a nine-step process for completing the visitor use capacity analysis. We have completed the first seven steps by employing a modified "Limits of Acceptable Change" planning framework, widely used by the Forest Service and other managing agencies for evaluating visitor use and potential impacts on the environment. This framework organizes the collection and analysis of scientific information and encourages public input. Public input has been solicited through a series of public meetings, open houses, public hearings and workshops held in October, November and December 2005; July 2006; and June and July 2007.

Chattooga Wild and Scenic River Corridor

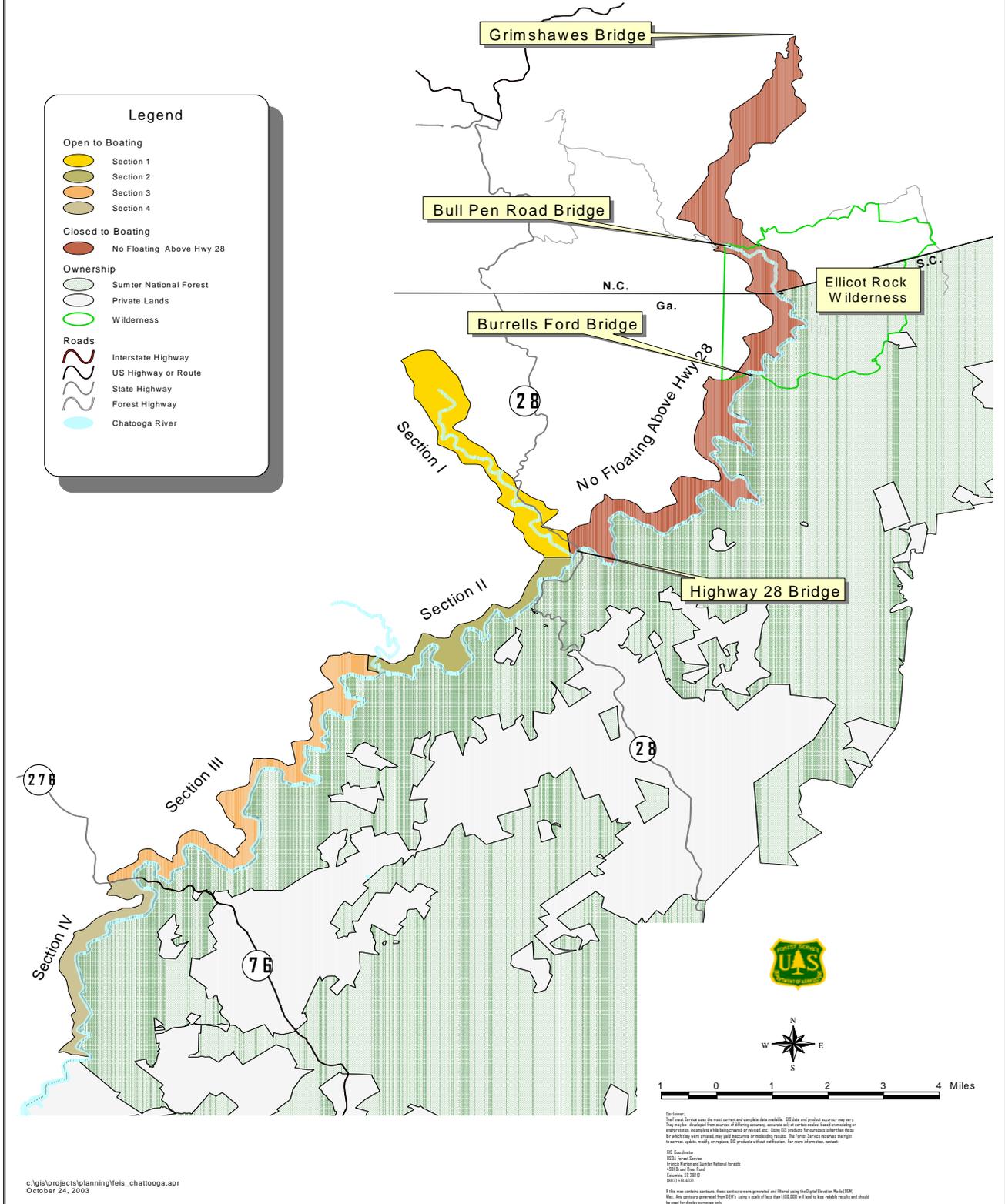


Figure 1. Map of the Chattooga River Corridor, 2007

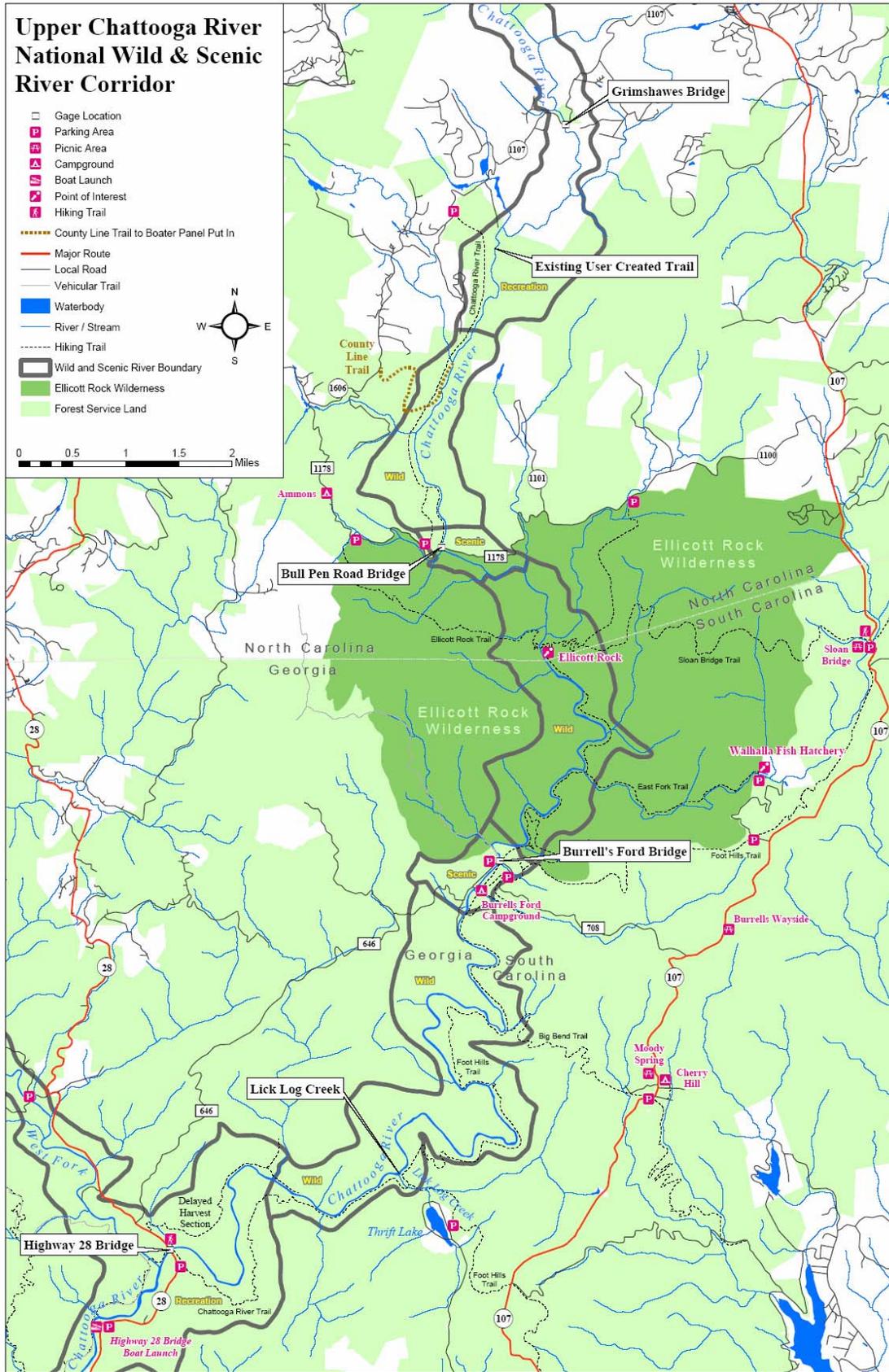


Figure 2. Map of the Upper Chattooga River, 2007