

APPENDIX B. LIMITS OF ACCEPTABLE CHANGE

Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC)

The USDA Forest Service is using a model known as Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) to analyze visitor use capacity on the upper Chattooga River. The LAC model requires deciding what kinds of conditions are acceptable, and then prescribing actions to protect or achieve those conditions. While the name may initially seem to be negative, Limits of Acceptable Change really refers to setting measurable standards for how much human-induced change is acceptable. The LAC model will form the basis of the Visitor Use Capacity Analysis process.

The Visitor Use Capacity Analysis process being implemented on the Upper Chattooga River consists of the following components:

1. Identify concerns, issues and management objectives

This step identifies and documents the issues of concern to be addressed in this process. Stakeholders are identified, issues are introduced, the communication process is set up, goals and constraints are explained, analytical processes presented, and management objectives stated.

2. Describe existing and potential recreation opportunities and desired conditions in the upper Chattooga River corridor

In this step, stakeholders identify the types of recreation uses they would like to see happen on the river and describe desirable conditions for conducting those activities. Responses are rolled up into a matrix that identifies the different types of users and what a good experience would be (social conditions); an understanding of environmental settings, characteristics, and potential impacts (resource conditions); and some initial indications of what it would take to manage for these experiences (managerial conditions).

3. Select measurable indicators, data needs, and data collection techniques

Based on the responses received in step 2 regarding desirable uses and conditions, indicators are then identified for those conditions. Indicators are specific parameters that can be measured and monitored, such as number of encounters per day or number of damaged trees per campsite. Stakeholder input is used to identify potential social and resource indicators and select a few key indicators for data collection. Options for collecting the necessary data may include user surveys, focus groups, user trials, interviews, trip logs, proxy analysis, and other data collection methods. In addition to selecting indicators, stakeholders will have an opportunity to provide recommendations on proposed data collection methods, as well as be involved in collecting the data.

4. Inventory resource/collect data

Based on the indicators and needs identified in the previous step, select feasible resource inventory methods and collect data. In most cases, multiple inventory techniques will be used, and stakeholders can volunteer for limited use monitoring, expert panels, or other appropriate options for gathering information.

5. Set standards for acceptable conditions

Analyze the information collected, synthesize results, and work with stakeholders to set standards for acceptable conditions. Standards define the quality of the experience and protect natural resource conditions. An example of a standard could be "less than 4 encounters with other groups per day in a wilderness."

6. Identify zones where recreation uses are appropriate within standards

Based on the data collected, identify areas within the river corridor where various uses are appropriate within the standards identified. Collect input from stakeholders and identify zones for acceptable recreation uses.

7. Identify management actions for alternatives

Identify realistic management actions associated with potential alternatives. Actions must be feasible to accomplish as well as appropriate to maintain standards. Stakeholders provide input and recommendations on preferred options and management actions to meet standards.

8. Evaluate and select an alternative

This step involves reviewing the sets of alternatives and selecting a “proposed action” that would kick-off the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis. Much of the information collected and organized in the visitor use capacity analysis process could be applied to the NEPA process.

9. Implementation of chosen alternative and monitoring

Implement a management program to achieve the objectives of the selected alternative and to provide periodic, systematic feedback regarding the performance of the management program. A detailed monitoring plan is necessary to provide systematic feedback on the effectiveness of management actions and to identify trends in conditions that may require new actions. New issues, indicators and standards may need to be identified at any point in the process.