From: Mitchell Smiley
To: comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us
Subject: Chattooga River Environmental Assesment
Date: 07/19/2008 12:57 PM

I'm writing you in regards to the Forest Service's selection of Alternative 4 of the Environmental Assessment in the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests. I believe that it is a mistake to open this river only during the winter months and while above flows of 450 cubic feet per second (CFS). I believe that whitewater kayakers and trout fishermen can coexist side by side and there is little reason to assume otherwise. Prime kayaking conditions are after heavy rains and high water flows, prime angling conditions are, conversely, during lower flows and during dry periods.

The Forest Service's reasoning for treating trout groups preferentially remains unclear to me. Why are they treated differently because of their chosen method for enjoying the wilderness of the Chattooga? Kayakers and trout fishermen share many of the same concerns over river access and yet Trout fishermen, in all of the Alternatives proposed by the Forest Service, seem to be given a preferential position over kayakers. Alternative 4 would prohibit kayaking during "levels considered optimal for fishing" and yet there is no mention of those levels which may be optimal for kayakers. In none of the alternatives is there a mention of what would be optimal for kayakers and I feel that this unjustly relegates kayaking to a lesser status than that of trout fishermen.

Selecting Article 4 is almost a de facto ban on kayaking because of the restrictive nature of the policies that would be applied to kayakers who want to paddle even during permitted times of the year under permitted flow levels. Even then Kayakers are restricted in their group size and must register with the forest service in advance to receive a permit. This is unacceptable. Trout Fishermen need only have the required permits, which can be acquired months in advance of trout season, and kayakers would be forced to register with the forest service for some reason. While in the Nantahala permits are also required but flow restrictions are not imposed.

I wish to be on record as being opposed to Alternative 4. I feel that Alternatives 8,9 and 10 are more equitable Alternatives and should be implemented instead of Alternative 4. I am disappointed that the Forest Service is unable to work with American Whitewater and America's paddlers on this issue and that the Forest Service has somehow determined that kayakers are somehow a threat to the wild and scenic nature of the Chattooga river watershed. This is unnecessary and outrageous. Kayakers are stewards of the environment who respect the outdoors and the water they paddle, unfortunately the forest service disagrees for reasons that are beyond me.

Sincerely,

Mitchell Smiley