



**USDA Forest Service – Cherokee National Forest**  
Tellico Ranger District  
Fact Sheet – Gold Collecting



2016

Recreational mineral collecting is a recognized use of National Forest System land. Interest in this activity has grown over the past several years. Certain requirements and restrictions are in place to protect you and the environment.

**Protecting the natural resources:**

Numerous streams in and adjacent to the Tellico Ranger District contain species designated as “deemed in need of management” by the State of Tennessee and/or have Federally or State listed Threatened and Endangered (T&E) species in them.

Virtually all streams in the Tellico Ranger District are tributaries to the Hiwassee River or the Tellico River. Both of these rivers provide T&E “critical habitat” for several aquatic species. Water quality is of the utmost concern.

Monitoring of Coker Creek shows that recreational gold collecting has significantly altered the structure of the macroinvertebrate community; that fine sediment deposits are well outside the normal range for mountain streams and indicate a serious disturbance within the watershed; the score for the number of organisms found on the stream bottom was on the lowest end of the scale and warranted impaired stream status; and elemental mercury is present in the substrate and is often collected in sluices as it is disturbed from sediment.

Through the Clean Water Act and by agreement with the Tennessee Department of Environment & Conservation (TDEC), the Forest Service is working to ensure that streams are protected and water quality standards are met. Actions by the Forest Service and activities in the Cherokee National Forest must be consistent with the rules and standards developed by TDEC.

**The use of mechanized or motorized equipment is prohibited for gold collecting:**

Based on monitoring data and field observations the use of gold collecting dredges and other mechanized Class 2 uses in the Cherokee National Forest are prohibited.

Class 1 (hand panning) uses such as garden trowels, pans, 5 gallon buckets and classifier screens are permitted for gold collecting in designated streams in the Cherokee National Forest.

The following streams are designated as Class 1 hand collecting sites in Cherokee National Forest:

Lyons Creek  
Wildcat Creek

**For more information:**

For designated stream maps and additional information contact:

Tellico Ranger District  
250 Ranger Station Road  
Tellico Plains, TN 37385  
(423) 253-8400