



**Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Forest Service Officials Announce Final Decision on Recreation Uses on the Upper Chattooga

Final alternative allows some new limited boating opportunities on the upper river

(Columbia, SC) August 26, 2009—After considerable analysis and public involvement, US Forest Service officials announced today a final decision on managing recreation uses on the upper Chattooga River and released the Environmental Assessment (EA) entitled *Managing Recreation Uses on the Upper Chattooga*. The final decision reflects Alternative 4 analyzed in the EA.

“A few minor changes were made to the preferred Alternative 4 released in July, 2008,” said Acting Forest Supervisor for the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests Monica Schwalbach. “However, the final decision still provides additional boating opportunities on the main stem Chattooga River above the Highway 28 bridge while continuing to emphasize, protect and enhance optimal, year-round, high-quality trout fishing. This decision minimizes user conflicts and also takes steps to reduce resource damage from existing and future recreation uses.”

Specifically, boating will be allowed from the confluence of Norton Mill Creek in North Carolina to Burrells Ford Bridge in South Carolina (not including the tributaries) between December 1 and March 1 when the river reaches approximate flow levels of 450 cfs or more at the Burrells Ford gauge. These flows are above those considered optimal for fishing and will produce approximately six

(more)

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boatable days in an average year. This stretch of river provides challenging, whitewater boating in a solitude setting and was rated the highest by boaters for creek boating

The Forest Service decision also enhances the scenery Outstandingly Remarkable Value (ORV) by reducing the number and size of campsites and closing or rehabilitating user-created trails and campsites. It recognizes the value of large woody debris for aquatic habitat, prohibiting its removal to accommodate recreation in the upper reaches, and acknowledges the important role of tributaries in the restoration of the native brook trout. Additionally, guidelines are established for encounter limits for all uses, primarily to protect opportunities for solitude now and in the future.

“The purpose of this new management direction is to ensure the continued enjoyment of the upper Chattooga by a variety of recreationists consistent with protecting and enhancing the river’s free flowing conditions, water quality and ORVs as required under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act,” said Schwalbach. “It also preserves the natural conditions, wilderness character, and ‘outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation’ within the Ellicott Rock Wilderness as required by the Wilderness Act.”

The agency intends to hold at least one public workshop on implementing the final decision in the fall. A separate announcement with more detailed information will be released in the near future.

A copy of the Decision Notice and EA will be available on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests’ Web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms> where additional background information can be found.

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