



NATIONAL FORESTS IN NORTH • CAROLINA

USDA FOREST SERVICE, 160A ZILICOA STREET, ASHEVILLE, NC 28801

NEWS • RELEASE

Contact: Terry Seyden, 828-257-4202
3/31/2009

For Immediate Release

U.S. Forest Service Temporarily Closes Upper Tellico OHV Trails System

ASHEVILLE, NCThe US Forest Service announced today a temporary closure of the Upper Tellico OHV trail system while the agency continues to evaluate the trail system's long term future. The Upper Tellico OHV system is currently closed for the winter and was originally scheduled to re-open April 1st. The 39 mile Upper Tellico OHV Trail System is located on the Tusquitee Ranger District, Nantahala National Forest, in Cherokee County, NC.

On February 27, 2009 the Forest Service initiated a 30 day public comment period on an environmental assessment which evaluated six alternatives for long term management of the Upper Tellico OHV trail system. "Our analysis indicates that on-the-ground conditions are worse than we first thought," said National Forests in North Carolina Supervisor Marisue Hilliard. "The EA shows that the Upper Tellico OHV Trail System has extensive damage and contributes unacceptable levels of sediment into the Tellico River and its tributaries. The Forest Service is not meeting its own standards and North Carolina state water quality standards because visible sediment from the OHV trails is reaching the Tellico River and its tributaries in hundreds of locations," Hilliard said.

The preferred alternative identified in the environmental assessment would permanently close the OHV System while keeping over 10 miles of existing Forest system roads in the area open year-round or seasonally, to provide public access for hunting, fishing and other recreation uses. Closed roads and trails would be stabilized and rehabilitated to eliminate future sedimentation into the Tellico River.

-more-

The Forest Service has received over 2,500 comments on the environmental assessment. The comment period closed March 31, and a final decision on long term management of the Upper Tellico OHV trail system is expected by late spring or early summer 2009.

“This temporary closure is necessary because continued OHV use of the trail system without remedying the existing erosion and sedimentation problems would make our current water quality problems even worse” said Candace Wyman, Upper Tellico Project Coordinator. “We understand that this may adversely affect some local businesses and also groups who may have planned trail riding events at Tellico this April. However, our first responsibility has to be to protect the resources,” Wyman said. The temporary closure will remain in effect until a final decision is made on the long term future of the Upper Tellico OHV trail system.

Copies of the environmental assessment, temporary closure order and additional background information on the Upper Tellico OHV Trail System can be found at <http://www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc/nepa/tusquitee/tellico.htm>.

For more information contact Candace Wyman, Upper Tellico Project Coordinator, at 828-257-4816.

###