



File Code: 1900/1950

Date: December 9, 2010

Dear Interested Party:

On behalf of the Sumter, Chattahoochee and Nantahala National Forests, I am asking you to submit any new comments on the management of the mix of recreation uses that allows for boating opportunities on the upper Chattooga Wild and Scenic River. This request re-initiates the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

In August 2009, the three forest supervisors issued decisions selecting Alternative 4 in the Environmental Assessment (EA) titled "Managing Recreation Uses on the Upper Chattooga River." These decisions emphasized year-round, high-quality trout fishing and at the same time provided boating opportunities on the main stem upper Chattooga River from the confluence of Norton Mill Creek in North Carolina to Burrells Ford Bridge between December 1 and March 1 at flow levels of approximately 450 cfs or higher (Burrells Ford gauge). The previously selected alternative also called for limiting overnight camping in the upper Chattooga to designated sites and closing and/or rehabilitating a number of user-created campsites and trails.

As we re-initiate the NEPA process, we will supplement the existing analysis and we will incorporate previously identified issues and analysis. Public comments submitted from 2005 to 2009 will be used as part of the decision-making process and used to establish standing for any potential administrative appeals submitted subsequent to the decisions. Therefore, it will not be necessary for interested individuals to resubmit any previously submitted comments.

We want to identify any new information, such as recently released articles or publications or new concerns that should be incorporated into the analysis or be part of the decision-making process. Specifically, we are asking you to submit any information on proposed management actions that would allow boating opportunities above SC Highway 28, use separation strategies to mitigate conflict, and establish visitor use capacities to manage use during peak-use times of the year. Additionally, the management actions would limit overnight camping to designated campsites and incorporate adaptive management measures that aid in maintaining the desired use levels.



New management direction would be established by amending the three national forests' land and resource management plans. The responsible officials (three forest supervisors) are proposing to establish new management direction for their respective forest plans that would:

- Allow boating opportunities on the main stem Chattooga above SC Highway 28.
- Manage social impacts by using separation strategies including zoning by space (river reach), time (season) and flow levels.
- Manage biophysical impacts to natural resources by limiting trails, campsites, group sizes and parking. User-created trails and campsites that violate current or proposed forest plan standards would be closed. Campsites and fire rings would be designated. Camping would be limited to three tents per campsite, except in designated group campsites.
- Manage large woody debris (LWD) recruitment and retention on the upper Chattooga consistently across all three national forests to assure that no LWD is removed to accommodate recreation within the river or stream banks.
- Protect and enhance the visitors' frontcountry and backcountry<sup>1</sup> experiences by establishing visitor use capacities.
- Protect and enhance solitude and a sense of remoteness in the backcountry by limiting and/or redesigning and relocating trails and campsites, as well as limiting numbers of groups and encounters per day, group sizes and available parking.
- Maintain current use levels and protect natural resources by monitoring use and adopting adaptive management strategies such as indirect measures (e.g. signage or education) and/or direct measures (e.g. limiting parking spaces, permitting or registration).

In December 2009, the three forests withdrew the August 2009 decisions so that additional analysis could be completed. Specifically, the decisions did not place limits on the number of boater groups per day, whereas the analysis in both the Biological Evaluation and Biological Assessment assumed a maximum of four boater groups per boatable day.

Since the decision was withdrawn, the agency has been reviewing all documents to ensure that a thorough analysis has been completed and that all inconsistencies have been removed. As part of this review, the Responsible Officials (the three forest supervisors) are asking you to submit any new information we should consider in our analysis. For more information on the withdrawn decisions, background documents and appeals, please visit our Website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms/sumter/resources/Chattooga.php>.

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<sup>1</sup> Frontcountry is defined as those areas of the Chattooga River within 0.25 miles of four bridges: Grimshawes/Sliding Rock Bridge; Bull Pen Road Bridge; Burrells Ford Bridge; and, Highway 28 Bridge. Backcountry is defined as at least 0.25 miles from roads and bridges and is referred to by stream reaches: Chattooga Cliffs Reach; Ellicott Rock Reach; Rock Gorge Reach; and Nicholson Field Reach.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the Agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents.

To submit any new information, hard copies may be mailed to the Chattooga Planning Team at the address above. Send electronic copies to [comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us). All submitted comments will become part of the project record and available for public review. Please send any new information or additional comments you may have by January 24, 2011.

Sincerely,



PAUL L. BRADLEY  
Forest Supervisor