

News Release



U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Southern Region

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FOREST SERVICE SEEKS NEW INFORMATION ON RECREATION USES ON UPPER CHATTOOGA RIVER

45-day comment period re-initiates National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process

ATLANTA (December 9, 2010) – Forest Service officials today announced that they have re-initiated the NEPA process on recreation uses on the upper Chattooga River by scoping a proposed action. The agency is asking for 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.

“The most important thing we want people to know is that re-initiating the NEPA process does not mean we’re starting over,” said Paul Bradley, forest supervisor for the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests. “Any information submitted to the agency between 2005 and 2009 will be considered in the decision-making process and used to establish standing for appeals. That’s why we’re asking folks to send any new information and not to resubmit any previously made comments.”

“More specifically, we are asking for new information on proposed management actions that would allow for boating opportunities above S.C. Highway 28, use separation strategies to mitigate conflict, and establish visitor use capacities to manage use during peak-use times of the year,” emphasized Bradley. “We’re also seeking any new details on management actions that would limit overnight camping to designated campsites and incorporate adaptive management measures that will help us maintain desired use levels.”

In August 2009, the three forest supervisors in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia 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 while providing boating opportunities on the main stem upper Chattooga River. The agency withdrew those decisions last December when inconsistencies were discovered between the Biological Evaluation/Biological Assessment and the Decision Notices. Additional information can be found at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms/sumter/resources/Chattooga.php>.

“We’ve been busy since the last set of decisions was withdrawn,” said Bradley. “We have been not only reviewing our documents for accuracy, but also conducting additional analysis and considering other information such as recent scientific literature and court rulings.”

Hard copy comments may be mailed to the Chattooga Planning Team, U.S. Forest Service, 4931 Broad River Road, Columbia, S.C. 29212. Electronic comments should be e-mailed to comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us. All submitted comments will become part of the project record and available for public review. The agency is asking that any new information be e-mailed or postmarked no later than January 24, 2011.

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