

Chattooga River Visitor Use Capacity Analysis
Citizens Guide to Public Involvement
June 2007 – January 2008

A. What is collaboration?

Collaboration means different things to different people. As such, the Forest Service asked the Natural Resources Leadership Institute (NRLI) to talk with members of the public associated with the Chattooga River Analysis to understand their perspective on the importance and essential elements of a collaborative process. NRLI provided recommendations for the Forest Service in a comprehensive report that prompted an internal dialogue on how best to define collaboration within the context of the current project. What follows are a series of statements developed by the Forest Service to describe the meaning of collaboration in the current analysis and subsequent decision to determine whether to maintain the current zoning of uses on the upper Chattooga River:

Collaboration is...

a process by which the Forest Service commits to keeping its partners and the public informed of its project activities, to consult with them at major milestones throughout the analysis, and to involve them in such a way that ensures their perspective is reflected and addressed in the decision.

The Forest Service envisions collaboration...

as an opportunity to strengthen and spark partnership *with and between* visitors and users of the river. It is the hope of the Forest Service that collaboration provides a working environment that fosters meaningful dialogue during and beyond the scope of the current analysis and decision.

A public commitment to continued collaboration...

can contribute to the shared protection and management of the natural, physical, and social resources that define the unique and special character of both the upper and lower sections of the Chattooga River.

B. Purpose and Objectives

The overall purpose of the Chattooga River Analysis Public Involvement Plan (PIP) is to use collaboration to:

- **Ensure public understanding of the project, their role and the processes that will be used to make a final decision.**
 - In order to do this effectively, the public involvement plan should:
 - Describe the role of the public and opportunities for participation.
 - Include communication vehicles to clarify or correct any misinformation.

- **Aide the decision-making process to facilitate a fair and credible outcome.**
 In order to do this effectively, the public involvement plan should:
 - Provide adequate information to Forest Service decision-makers that reflects public input to and involvement in the process.
 - Engage the public in a process that helps to resolve user conflict over the river through the development of a range of alternatives.
 - Improve the credibility and leadership capabilities of the Forest Service.

- **Set the stage for future working relationships with the public.**
 In order to do this effectively, the public involvement plan should:
 - Energize the public to work with the Forest Service on management of the river beyond the 2007 deadline.
 - Improve working relationships between the Forest Service, its partners, and user groups.
 - Engage the public to give meaningful input into crafting a proposed action.

The purpose will be achieved through the following objectives:

PURPOSE	OBJECTIVES
<p>Ensure public understanding of the project, their role and the processes that will be used to make a final decision.</p>	1. Improve the quality of dialogue occurring between user groups.
	2. Provide free and full access to information that is legally releasable.
	2. Obtain timely, active, and accurate media coverage.
	3. Provide comprehensive information on the Chattooga River Analysis website.
<p>Aide the decision-making process to facilitate a fair and credible outcome.</p>	4. Increase understanding between user groups.
	1. Increase input into the project that addresses the scope of the decision.
	2. Establish a proposed action that is representative of stakeholder involvement.
	3. Build relationships and two-way communication between line officers and the public.
<p>Set the stage for future working relationships with the public</p>	4. Ensure that the decision and monitoring plan includes and involves stakeholders in the protection of ORVs and the achievement of desired future conditions on the river.
	1. Gain stakeholder support for participation in implementation and monitoring of the decision.
	2. Improve the public's willingness to engage on other projects initiated by the Forest Service.

	3. Strengthen the framework for external dialogue between users along the entire river.
	4. Improve the capacity to manage the river through increased partner resources.
	5. Establish a structure that facilitates an ongoing dialogue between the Forest Service and user groups.

C. Overall Approach

The overall approach describes the activities that the Forest Service will use to achieve the purpose and objectives of the PIP. There are nine scheduled (ten possible) activities that comprise the scope of the plan:

- Activity 1: “Path Forward” Open House
- Activity 2: Citizens Guide to Public Involvement
- Activity 3: Web Postings
- Activity 4: Interagency Collaboration
- Activity 5: Public Hearing: Framing the desired future of the Chattooga
- Activity 6: LAC Workshop: Identifying Standards & Management Actions (Step 5 & 7)
- Activity 7: Project Announcement Letter
- Activity 8: LAC Workshop: Refining Potential Alternatives (Step 8)
- Activity 9: 30-day review and comment on the “pre-decisional” environmental assessment
- Activity 10: Partnership Workshops

These activities and their collaboration goals are described in greater detail below:

I. “Path Forward” Open House

The Forest Service will hold an open house on each of the three Forests that are involved in the Chattooga River analysis. The purpose of the open houses will be to engage the public on the results of data collection and to dialogue about the primary activities that comprise the “path forward” towards a decision on the river. Forest Service personnel and Confluence Research Consulting will be on-site to share information and answer questions about the overall direction of the project.

Collaboration Goal:

Although this public meeting is primarily an information session, meeting participants will have an opportunity to ask questions, express concerns, and provide feedback to Forest Service personnel. Public input will be particularly useful in helping to shape the format of future public involvement activities.

Objectives:

- Present and discuss the results of Phase 1 data collection with Doug Whittaker of Confluence Research Consulting (CRC).
- Review and discuss the overall project plan leading up to the decision, including a timeline for Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) and National Environmental Protect Act (NEPA) activities.

- Review and discuss the Public Involvement Plan and the opportunities for the public to participate in the process.
- Explain the objectives of the July 2007 public workshop and provide guidance on how collaboration will be used to verify standards and refine alternatives for river management.

Participants:

All members of the public are invited to attend the public meeting and provide feedback.

Timeline:

The open houses will be held:

June 18, 2007	Clayton, GA
June 19, 2007	Highlands, NC
June 21, 2007	Walhalla, SC

2. Citizens Guide to Public Involvement

The Forest Service will distribute a written guide to supplement the information presented on public involvement as part of the “Path Forward” open houses. This guide is meant to provide a reference as to how and when the public will be asked to contribute formally and informally to the LAC and NEPA processes.

Collaboration Goal:

The guide is a communication tool to delineate and publicize the agency’s commitment to collaboration. There will be some opportunity to comment on the content of the public involvement activities at the open houses to be held in June.

Objectives:

- Provide a synthesis of the PIP for a broader, external audience.
- Demonstrate the opportunities and mechanisms to provide formal and informal input during the remaining phases of the project.

Participants:

The Forest Service will make the guide available to all interested members of the public via the project website and through direct mailings.

Timeline:

The guide will be made available via the Chattooga River Analysis website immediately prior to the open houses in **June 2007**.

3. Web Postings

The Chattooga River Analysis website is a tool to keep the public informed of the current project status and the information available for analysis. It is located at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms/forest/projects/chatt.shtml>

Collaboration Goal:

The Forest Service aims to be the primary source of information for the public on the project through continued and transparent release of information.

Objectives:

- Provide timely release of information and documents associated with the project as they become available.

Participants:

All members of the public with access to the internet can view the web postings. For those without internet access, any information on the website can also be provided through a direct mailing.

Timeline:

Throughout the duration of the project but, at a minimum as status updates are posted each month.

4. Interagency Coordination

Through personal contact by Forest Service personnel, the agency will engage in continued dialogue and information-sharing with other public entities whose work and activities may be directly affected by the results of the Chattooga River Analysis decision.

Collaboration Goal:

The goal of interagency coordination is to ensure that public agencies are well-informed of the status of the analysis and to consult with them on their primary issues and concerns. Input from public agencies will be used by the Forest Service to help determine the extent of interagency collaboration necessary to implement a decision and to help clarify roles and responsibilities of each.

Objective:

- Review and discuss the status of the project and the products that are being developed in conjunction with the LAC and NEPA processes.

Participants:

The Forest Service will coordinate with members of public agencies who are currently participating in or whose work may otherwise be affected by the Chattooga River Analysis and decision.

Timeline:

This activity will take place throughout the duration of the project, but will be particularly important at key milestones including: 1) prior to the “Path Forward Public Meeting;” 2) once the Forest Service has presented a proposed action and initiated NEPA; 3) at the release of the pre-decisional Environmental Assessment (EA); and 4) in the design of the Partnership Workshop.

5. Public Hearing: Framing the desired future of the Chattooga

The Forest Service will host a public hearing during which time participants will be asked to provide official comment on the desired future of the river and suggestions for management actions within the scope of the decision.

Collaboration Goal:

The public will have an early opportunity to voice their concerns directly to the agency. The Forest Service will analyze and consider comments focused on the “desired future condition” of the river in preparation the collaborative workshop to set standards for river management.

Objectives:

- Provide a vehicle for formal comment to the agency on suggested management actions for the upper Chattooga River.

Participants:

All members of the public are invited to the public hearing.

Timeline:

The public hearing will be held July 10, 2007 in Walhalla, SC.

6. LAC Workshop: Identifying Standards & Management Actions (Steps 5 & 7)

This workshop will center public discussion on developing a list of priority standards (LAC Step 5) and potential management actions (LAC Step 7) that reflect the desired resource and social conditions for the upper Chattooga River.¹ In order to accomplish this, participants will draw heavily on previous work done in public meetings to describe existing and potential recreation opportunities (LAC Step 2), the results of the Phase I data collection efforts (LAC Step 4), and the current management prescription for the river. The outcome of this workshop will be a table that specifies acceptable conditions or standards for the upper Chattooga and realistic management actions for potential alternatives.

Collaboration Goal:

The workshop will provide a forum for participants to work with one another and across user groups to determine standards and management actions for recreational opportunities that are key to defining the quality of the experience as well as protecting the natural resource conditions. The input provided at this workshop will enable the Forest Service to evaluate where proposed management actions may be feasible along the upper river (Step 6) and develop a range of potential alternatives (LAC Step 8) that will later be evaluated by the public.

Objectives:

- Review existing and potential recreational opportunities
- Compare existing conditions with desired conditions
- Provide the public with a forum to revise and propose standards and management actions for the upper Chattooga River

Participants:

All members of the public are invited to attend the workshop.

Timeline:

The “LAC Workshop: Identifying Standards” will be held in July 14, 2007.

¹ Indicators were determined jointly by the public and the Forest Service in November 2005 at a public meeting held during Step 3 of the Limits of Acceptable Change Process.

7. Project Announcement Letter

The Forest Service will initiate the Environmental Assessment (EA) through the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process with the issuance of a project announcement letter (oftentimes termed "scoping notice"). Included in this letter will be a description of the project, a timeframe to complete the EA, one or more specific alternatives that will be evaluated, an invitation to the public to participate in project planning, and a description of upcoming project planning steps. The public will be given 30 days to comment on this scoping notice and will be encouraged to stay involved as opportunities present themselves during the completion of the environmental analysis.

Collaboration Goal:

The project announcement letter is a vehicle for the Forest Service to provide the public with all of the details of the NEPA process and outline the proposed action or specific alternatives the Forest Service will be evaluating in the environmental analysis. The agency will also use this letter to invite comments from the public on any of the known alternatives and/or the process in general and any major public issues that the public feels should be addressed in the environmental analysis. Comments received during this 30 day comment period will greatly aide the agency in issue identification, the design of management alternatives as well as environmental effects analysis.

Objectives:

- Announce the initiation of the Environmental Assessment / NEPA
- Outline the details of the remaining project activities
- Invite public comment on the process, issues, alternatives and potential environmental effects.

Timeline:

The "Project Announcement Letter" will be released in **August 2007**.

8. LAC Workshop: Refining Potential Alternatives (Step 8)

This workshop will be geared toward reviewing a range of potential alternatives. In order to do this, the Forest Service will demonstrate how it applied results from the "Identifying Standards & Management Actions" to develop a range of alternatives. The public will review and analyze these, focusing on modification of management actions that will help the Forests to achieve standards along the river.

Collaboration Goal:

The goal is to have the public work together and across user groups to evaluate the potential alternatives. The Forest Service will use public input to ensure that concerns are understood and addressed. Additionally, public input will help to refine the range of potential alternatives for consideration under NEPA.

Objectives:

- Demonstrate how standards have been applied to potential alternatives
- Verify potential alternatives with the public
- Refine potential alternatives based on feedback

Participants:

All members of the public are invited to attend the workshop.

Timeline:

The “LAC Workshop: Refining Potential Alternatives” will be held September 2007.

9. 30-day notice and comment on the “pre-decisional” environmental assessment (EA)

The Forest Service will solicit formal comments to determine public response and perspective on the “pre-decisional” EA and preferred alternative.

Collaboration Goal:

This activity is meant to assure adequate time and breadth of outreach for solicitation and collection of public comments. These comments will be analyzed and considered before issuing a No Finding / Finding of Significant Impact (FONSI). The Forest Service commits to providing a response to these comments in the final documentation of the EA.

Objectives:

- Provide a vehicle for formal comment to the agency on the pre-decisional EA and preferred alternative.

Participants:

All members of the public are invited to send comments via the Chattooga River Analysis website, email or letter.

Timeline:

The 30-day formal review and comment period for the “pre-decisional” EA is scheduled to begin in **November 2007**.

10. Partnership Workshops

The Forest Service will partner with the public in a workshop to define options for the collaborative management and implementation of the decision. The workshop will focus on describing goals and objectives for collaborative management and subsequent partnership activities to achieve those.

Collaboration Goal:

The public will provide direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions. Public input will shape the level of desired involvement and strategies for mitigating and resolving issues on the river.

Objectives:

- Determine options for sharing responsibility in implementation, monitoring expertise, resources, and accountability for the decision.

Participants:

All members of the public are invited to attend.

Timeline:

The Partnership Workshop will be held in **January 2008**, the month immediately following the decision.

D. Roles and responsibilities

Although a wide variety of groups and people will have some role in ensuring that this collaborative approach to public participation is successful, there are five primary groups whose active involvement in delivering the plan will strengthen its ability to accomplish its purpose and objectives. These groups and their roles and responsibilities in the PIP are:

Forest Service Chattooga River Management Steering Team

- Jerome Thomas, Forest Supervisor – Francis Marion & Sumter NF (SC)
 - Marisue Hilliard, Forest Supervisor – NFs in North Carolina (NC)
 - Paul Bradley, Deputy Forest Supervisor – Chattahoochee-Oconee NF (GA)
 - Ann Christensen, Region 8 Director – Recreation, Wilderness, Heritage
 - Stephanie Johnson, Region 8 Director – Public Affairs
 - Chris Liggett, Region 8 Director – Planning, Appeals, Litigation
1. Give management guidance, support and oversight to the design and implementation of public involvement activities.
 2. Maintain open dialogue and build rapport with key stakeholders through emails, phone calls, or face-to-face meetings throughout the process but particularly at major project / public involvement milestone.
 3. Provide an opportunity for the public to interact with **Regional** and **Forest** leadership by attending the “Path Forward” meeting and Public Hearing on the pre-decisional EA.

Forest Service Chattooga River Core Team

- Michelle Burnett, Public Affairs Officer – Francis Marion & Sumter NF
 - Laura Calandrella, Region 8 Presidential Management Fellow
 - Deb Caffin, Region 8 Wilderness and Dispersed Recreation Specialist
 - John Cleeves, Forest Planner – Francis Marion & Sumter NF (SC)
 - Joe Robles, Outdoor Recreation and Congressionally Mandated Areas Program Manager – Francis Marion & Sumter NF (SC)
 - Tony White, Planning, Engineering, Recreation, Heritage and GIS Staff Officer – Francis Marion & Sumter NF (SC)
 - Roberta Willis, Region 8 Regional Planner
1. Design and implement the public involvement activities ensuring their alignment with the overall project plan and timeline.
 2. Ensure the efficacy of public involvement activities through emails, phone calls, or face-to-face meetings with key stakeholders throughout the process and, in

particular, immediately before or after major project/public involvement milestones.

3. Provide an opportunity for the public to interact with **Chattooga River Analysis project leadership** by attending all public meetings.

Forest Service Public Affairs Staff

- Michelle Burnett, Public Affairs Officer – Francis Marion & Sumter NFs (SC)
 - Karen McKenzie, Public Affairs Officer – Chattahoochee-Oconee NF (GA)
 - Terry Seyden, Public Affairs Officer – NFs in North Carolina (NC)
 - Gail White, Public Affairs Specialist – Francis Marion & Sumter NFs (SC)
1. Ensure open, consistent, and factual communication of the project through:
 - a. News releases
 - b. Media contacts
 - c. Web Postings
 - d. Meeting Results
 2. Facilitate dialogue among line officers and the public by maintaining lists of key stakeholders and the major project milestones when they need to be contacted.
 3. Manage media and public requests by providing public affairs representation at every public meeting.

Forest Service District Rangers

- Greg Borgen, Assistant Ranger – Andrew Pickens RD (SC)
 - Mike Crane, District Ranger – Andrew Pickens RD (SC)
 - Dave Jensen, District Ranger – Tallulah RD (GA)
 - Mike Wilkins, District Ranger – Wayah RD (NC)
1. Work with local partners to identify resources for public meetings, including securing meeting space and possible food sponsors.
 2. Maintain open dialogue and build rapport with key stakeholders through emails, phone calls, or face-to-face meetings throughout the process but particularly at major project / public involvement milestone.
 3. Provide an opportunity for the public to interact with **local leadership** by attending all public meetings with other district staff.

The Public

- All interested and affected members of the public.

1. Understand the role of the public in the remaining steps of the project and actively participate in those public involvement activities which are most appealing.
2. Express issues, concerns and ideas about the project and/or public involvement through personal contact with line officers and participation in the public involvement activities.
3. Participate early and often in public involvement activities. Be open about the possibilities, share your perspective, be willing to listen to others.

E. Schedule

Public Involvement Activities	Limits of Acceptable Change Proposed Timeline										
	LAC Step 4		LAC Steps 5 -7			LAC Step 8 (NEPA)				LAC Step 9	
	May 07	Jun 07	Jul 07	Aug 07	Sep 07	Oct 07	Nov 07	Dec 07	Jan 08	Feb 08	Mar 08
Activity 1: “Path Forward” Public Meeting		x									
Activity 2: Citizens Guide		x									
Activity 3: Web Postings	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Activity 4: Interagency Collaboration			x		x	x		x			
Activity 5: Public Hearing – Framing the desired future condition of the Chattooga		x									
Activity 6: Identifying Standards and Management Actions			x								
Activity 7: Project Announcement Letter				x							
Activity 8: Refining potential alternatives					x						
Activity 9: 30-day review and comment on the “pre-decisional” environmental assessment							x				
Activity 10: Partnership Workshop									x		