



File Code: 1950

Date: July 24, 2013

Dear Interested Citizen:

The Forest Service is proposing to establish access points for boaters on the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River (WSR) within the boundaries of three National Forests (Chattahoochee, Nantahala, and Sumter). We are inviting you to submit comments to help refine the proposed activities disclosed in this letter prior to developing an Environmental Assessment. The actions described in this letter were previously shared with the public as individual project proposals, but will now be re-evaluated in a single Environmental Assessment. If you submitted comments under previous solicitations for these activities you do not need to re-submit those comments at this time. Pursuant to 36 CFR 218.7(a)(2), this proposed project implements the land management plan and is subject to §218 subparts A and B.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Forest Service proposes to construct, designate and maintain trails and river access points to allow boaters to put-in and take-out on the upper segment of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River from December 1 to April 30 at 350 cfs and higher during daylight hours and to facilitate foot access by other forest visitors in a manner that maintains and protects physical, biological, and social resources. Non-motorized trail access and associated put-in and take-out points are proposed at the following locations:

Nantahala Ranger District, Nantahala National Forest

Green Creek

This site would provide access for paddlers wishing to experience the entire upper segment of the Chattooga WSR. A foot trail would be constructed on an old existing road bed that connects the Chattooga Trail to the river. The old road bed intersects the river approximately 700 feet downstream of the confluence of Green Creek and the Chattooga WSR. The trail length would be approximately 0.28 miles. The old road bed would require some construction and minor realignment to produce a sustainable trail. The designated trail would continue to be used for fishing access to the Chattooga WSR. The put-in location would be designated as within 200 feet of the trail and river intersection and would also be an access for other recreation along the river. This trail would also provide an exit for people who have fished upstream towards Greens Creek. Parking at this location can accommodate approximately eight vehicles.



Norton Mill Creek

The proposed County Line Trail (old road bed) was selected as a second location for paddlers wishing to experience the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR. The old road bed would be designated as a 1.2 mile long trail and maintained to access the Chattooga WSR at Norton Mill Creek for recreation use. The trail is currently used by hikers and anglers and was signed and maintained by the Forest Service in the past. The public currently parks on the road shoulders near the gate and they would continue to do so. Parking along this road can accommodate approximately five to eight vehicles. The old road bed connects Whiteside Cove Road (State Route 1106) with the Chattooga Trail, and follows the Chattooga Trail north to a flat area along the river with numerous rocks and eddies that would facilitate put-in. The old road bed is open, relatively free of brush and receives regular use by anglers, hunters and hikers, but would require some reconstruction to produce a sustainable trail. Paddlers would be authorized to put-in along a 300 foot stretch of the Chattooga WSR below Norton Mill Creek.

Bull Pen Bridge

Bull Pen Bridge was selected for paddlers wishing a run through the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR to South Carolina. There is a pull off west of the bridge with a parking capacity of approximately six vehicles.

The existing Upper Bull Pen access is a designated short trail of less than 100 feet that is in a good location and provides easy access along river right (the Macon County side), upstream of Bull Pen Bridge. For boaters that do not wish to put-in and immediately experience a highly technical section of whitewater, the Forest Service would construct a short trail of approximately 100 feet below the bridge to the Lower Bull Pen put-in on river left to get paddlers off Bull Pen Road (Forest Service Road 1128), down the road bank to the river.

Chattooga River Ranger District, Chattahoochee National Forest**Burrell's Ford Bridge**

The Burrell's Ford Bridge access areas would be located on the Georgia side in Rabun County and would be accessible from an existing parking area off the Burrell's Ford Road near the bridge. Parking can safely accommodate up to 12 vehicles.

Presently, there are three user created trails leading from the trailhead at this parking area used to access the Chattooga River. This project would 1) harden the proposed route from the parking area to the river bank with gravel or by using other natural and sustainable materials. This would occur on approximately 200 feet of trail; 2) Decommission two of the undesignated routes by placing large woody debris across the current tread and re-establish native vegetation as needed; 3) Widen the proposed route by removing all non-merchantable woody vegetation within 6 feet of the existing tread and treat the area to

eliminate the spread of non-native invasive plants; 4) Armor and stabilize the river's bank with felled trees and large materials to accommodate the projected volume of boater usage for the area; 5) Remove hazard trees within the project area and place them in the river when possible to improve aquatic conditions; and 6) Add gravel, signs and replace old timbers used as barriers in the parking area.

Andrew Pickens Ranger District, Sumter National Forest

Lick Log

The proposed take-out is located near Mountain Rest, SC and would be accessible from SC State Highways 28 and 107. There are two existing parking areas available that can accommodate six and ten vehicles respectively. The total distance from the parking areas to the take out is approximately one mile.

A new section of trail would be constructed and available for hikers and boaters taking out at Lick Log Creek. The new section of trail would intersect with the Chattooga River Trail, and be approximately 500 feet long. Trail construction would consist of clearing and minor excavation with hand tools.

The proposed trail would be created with minimum ground disturbance using hand tools where practical to build a trail with a sustainable pitch down-hill and cross-slope. Trail construction is not needed down to the shore of the Chattooga. New construction would begin roughly 25 yards away from the water's edge, on the uphill edge of a small plateau. The trail would then rise to the north until it meets the existing Chattooga River Hiking Trail.

During trail construction vegetation would be removed within the trail corridor. Primarily, this would include thinning, limbing or removing rhododendron, mountain-laurel, and trees under 6" in diameter. The trail would be laid out to avoid existing large trees. Some hazard trees may be cut along the new trail as part of the construction process.

Once the trail is in place, 2-3 signs would be installed to help forest visitors find their way from the river to the parking lot. New signs would be modeled after the signs already in use on the existing hiking trail.

Construction activities at all locations would be confined to hand tools as much as practicable. Routine methods to prevent soil movement would be used, and include the use of physical barriers such as water bars and stabilization measures through vegetation.

PURPOSE AND NEED

In January 2012, the Forest Service released three Decision Notices and Findings of No Significant Impact for the Environmental Assessment for Managing Recreation Uses in the Upper Segment of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River Corridor. These decisions selected Alternative 13A to accomplish the following specific purposes and needs for action: (A) Respond to an appeal decision on the Sumter Land and Resource Management Plan; (B) Provide consistent management of the upper segment of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River (WSR) on all three national forests; and (C) Preserve the upper segment of the Chattooga WSR's free flowing condition, protect its water quality and protect and enhance its Outstanding Remarkable Values (ORVs), as well as preserve the wilderness character of the Ellicott Rock Wilderness.

The 2012 EA and Decision Notices are available at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/scnfs/landmanagement/planning/?cid=STELPRDB5253595>.

Current access is at the Green Creek confluence, Norton Mill Creek confluence, Bullpen Bridge, Burrell's Ford Bridge, and Lick Log Creek as described on pages 133-134 of the 2012 Environmental Assessment *Managing Recreation Uses in the Upper Segment of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River Corridor*.

Pursuant to Alternative 13A in the EA (p. 134), put-ins and take-outs, and access routes to and from, will be designated after site-specific NEPA analysis. In addition, on page 5 of both the North Carolina and South Carolina decisions, and page 7 of the Georgia decision, it is stated that "[t]he appropriate District Ranger will designate the specific put-in and takeout locations after site-specific NEPA analysis is completed."

HOW TO COMMENT

Specific written comments as defined by §218.2 should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure that their comments are received in a timely manner.

To establish standing for objection eligibility, the designated opportunity for scoping comments is until August 28, 2013. An additional opportunity to obtain objection eligibility will occur during a 30 day Notice and Comment period at a future date (§218.24). Only those who respond to this request for comments or request additional information will remain on the mailing list for this project in order to reduce mailing costs.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on these proposed actions and will be available for public inspection. 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.

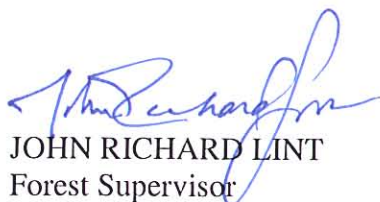
Although we are anticipating separate decisions being issued for each National Forest, we are consolidating mailing addresses for this solicitation. Specific written comments must be submitted to: Chattooga Planning Team, 4931 Broad River Road, Columbia, SC 29212, FAX 803-561-4004, office [(803-561-4000)]. The Responsible Officials from all three National Forests will review all comments. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments must be submitted in a common digital format to: comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us.

An objection period, if required, will follow the regulation found in §218.7. For objection eligibility (§218.5), only those who have submitted timely, specific written comments during any designated opportunity for public comment may file an objection. Issues to be raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after a designated opportunity to comment (§218.8(c)).

Please state "Chattooga River Boating Access" in the subject line when providing electronic comments, or on the envelope when replying by mail.

Additional information on the Chattooga River Boating Access Project is also available on the webpage: http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=42568. If you would like more information or have questions relating to this proposal, please contact Jim Knibbs, NEPA Coordinator, (803) 561-4078.

Sincerely,



JOHN RICHARD LINT
Forest Supervisor

cc: Kristin M Bail, Betty A Mathews