



**Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service, Southern Region
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Forest Service Extends Comment Period on Pre-decisional Environmental Assessment on Recreation Uses on the Upper Chattooga

(Columbia, SC) The US Forest Service announced today it would give the public additional time to comment on the pre-decisional Environmental Assessment (EA) on Recreation Uses on the Upper Chattooga.

“Since we started this process, our number one priority has been public input,” said Jerome Thomas Sumter National Forest supervisor. “Although we were not required to release the pre-decisional EA nor provide a comment period, we did so to give people an opportunity to review the document. Now we have heard from our publics that they need more time and we are granting that request.”

Comments on the pre-decisional EA are now due to the Forest Service by August 18, 2008. This extension will give the public more time to send in comments while still allowing the agency to make a final decision by the end of the year.

“The same stakeholders that have requested this extension are the same ones who want to make sure we come out with a final decision in December,” said Thomas. “With an August 18th due date, we hope to meet their needs while staying the course for a final decision in December.”

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The mission of the USDA Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.

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Thomas also noted that many of the alternatives in the pre-decisional EA are not new; most of them, in one form or another, were shared during public meetings last fall and have been available for public review on the agency's Web site for months. In addition, much of the information in the EA is based on documents the agency has released previously such as the "Capacity and Conflict on the Upper Chattooga" report, the "Upper Chattooga Phase I Data Collection Expert Panel Field Assessment Report" and a variety of Upper Chattooga River Visitor Capacity Data Collection Reports that include information on use estimation, biophysical monitoring, hydrology issues and limited use monitoring.

Comments on the pre-decisional EA, now due to the Forest Service by August 18, 2008, may be e-mailed to comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us or surface mailed to U.S. Forest Service, Chattooga River Project, 4931 Broad River Road, Columbia, SC 29212. A copy of the predecisional EA and a summary of the alternatives is available on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests' Web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms> where additional background information can be found.

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