

Chattooga River Public Comments Nov. 05 - 17, 2005

Posted on Sunday, November 6, 2005 at 12:21 Hours (Server time).

From: David Bender
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523 Greenbriar Dr.
North Augusta, SC
29860

Message Subject: Visitor Capacity Analysis, Upper Chattooga River

Message Contents:

I am against allowing boating of any type on the upper Chattooga River above the Hwy 28 bridge. This is "small" water and a very beautiful area and we need to keep this section free of all boat traffic. I'm all for sharing the river, but paddlers have lots of river (sections 2, 3 & 4) to enjoy their sport.

Please make the right decision on this very important issue.

Regards,
David Bender

Posted on Friday, November 11, 2005 at 9:40 Hours (Server time).

From: Steve Raeber
Email: sraeber@alltel.net

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(enter your mailing address) P O Box 218
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Message Subject: Visitor Capacity Analysis, Upper Chattooga River

Message Contents:

comments)

Please consider maintaining the current situation banning boaters above the Hwy 28 Bridge on the Chattooga River. This is one of the few areas which has remained virtually unspoiled by heavy traffic. As I hiked and fished there yesterday I was awed by the beauty, but by the absence of trash which comes with added traffic. The water does not lend itself to boating much of the year. My concern is not so much with a few responsible white water enthusiasts but with the additional boating,

floating, tubeing which will follow. This is a unique, wilderness area for fly fishermen and hikers. Boaters have the rest of the river. Please maintain the current ban.

Dear Mr. Cleeves,

My family has been vacationing in Highlands, NC since the early 1970's. We enjoy the mountains as a refreshing escape from our everyday lives in Florida.

Dad would take my brothers and I to the Chattooga at the iron bridge on Bull Pen Road, or down to Slide Rock, on a warm summers day. We now take my children to these places. We recently discovered that only a short hike up the Chattooga trail resulted in more secluded swimming spots and an opportunity for the whole family to enjoy the stream and a picnic.

It is our understanding that the Chattooga will now be open to boating, and tubing, and that hiking will no longer be the only way to reach these remote wilderness spots. This is probably considered progress and a direct result of increased demands on the park from all the new summer homes. However, we think that safety of the swimmers should be considered.

While swimming you cannot hear, or see, anyone above a rapid if you are swimming in the pool below (you should try this). The rapids are too loud and too high for either a swimmer or boater to avoid an accident. We have never seen a public park allow boating in a swimming area. Is it not policy for the park service to keep boating and swimmers separated for safety concerns? Liability concerns? Or at least common sense?

We are not against boating; my husband, brothers and Dad enjoy canoeing and rafting on the lower Chattooga. As boaters, they also feel the upper stream size could not accommodate canoes. Also, they think that swimmers would be difficult to see, or avoid, in these narrow sections.

We cannot understand why anyone thinks the stream's width is sufficient to handle both swimmers and boats. We have seen the water level very high and very low but to us the limiting factor is the water temperature. The swimming season is short in the NC mountains, usually between June 1 and September 30. Please keep the boats off the Chattooga during the swimming season so that families can also enjoy the stream.

Sincerely,
Nancy Irvine
Tampa, Fl

Dear John,

Attached is the Farmington River (CT) 2001 report.

It should be noted that the Chattooga headwaters are more narrow than the Farmington, but some of the conclusions and information might be useful. I have canoed the Farmington River in the late 1980s prior to the WSR designation. Also there are more tubers (in the summer) than there are kayakers.

Regarding the User Conflicts page 22-25 of the 2001 Farmington river WSR study.

here are the statistics.

92% of respondents encountered fisherman.

16% of the overall respondents felt "that fisherman greatly diminished their river enjoyment."

therefore, 17% of the people that encountered anglers had a greatly diminished experience. [-1.3 out of -3]

60% of the respondents encountered boaters (canoe or kayaker).

26% of overall respondents reported a "greatly diminished enjoyment" because of boaters.

therefore 45% of the people that encountered boaters had a diminished experience. [-1.8 out of -3]

It also warned & concluded the following.

#1) "It is interesting that crowding led the list of issues users liked least and was the highest rated problem on average. On average, the level of crowding was actually relatively low (3.4 on a 9-point scale). The situation in terms of user conflicts was similar. Conflicts among the different types of visitors were the third greatest problem, noted by respondents, but its levels were also low. High user satisfaction and low levels of problems is a common finding in outdoor recreation research, but this does not mean that management can be complacent. Crowding and conflict are social concerns that should continue to be monitored along the West Branch of the Farmington River, even though a minority of users reports serious social problems.

One reason that problems with user conflicts and related social issues are minor along the West Branch is due to the segregation of the users encouraged by the CT Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) policies and operations. Tubers are concentrated on the lower portions, a well-suited location for that

activity where DEC has allowed the tubing concessionaire to operate. Similarly, the DEC Trout Management Area (TMA) is located several miles up river from the main concentration of tubers. This unofficial "zoning" of the West Branch is particularly effective because it is not imposed on users. Users may freely choose which sections of the river best suit their recreation endeavors even though conditions have been created that draw different users groups to different parts of the river."

[Policy worked for the Chattooga for 30 years. I wonder if the new creeking activity has negatively impacted the the headwater section of the farmington West Fork?]

#2) An earlier user that does not return because of unsatisfied enjoyment may not be included in a conflict study. I think this might be important when looking at the Chattooga. The lower Chattooga no longer has the capacity for fishing and angling during the peak seasons. There, user conflicts are dominated by the heavier users, commercial Vs private boaters. Unfortunalty the original OVR of fishing has been effectively "zoned" from the lower chattoog due to overcrowding from boaters and Forest Service policy.

#3) "There are differences among the major user groups on the West Branch of the Farmington River. Tubers are less sensitive to social problems like litter, evidence of human waste and lack of restrooms along the river than are anglers or boaters. In a number of cases, the anglers proved to be the group that was most sensitive overall. Part of this is probably because anglers are less mobile than the other two groups. Therefore, it is not surprising that people fishing are more concerned with these social problems than tubers who move through the area without focusing as much on the conditions over the corridor."

#4)The same attributes that make the West Branch a successful example of a partnership to conserve a wild and scenic river also make it complex to determine the extent to which the actions of each partner contributes to the experiences and benefits that result from conserving the segment as a whole. Some river benefits result from the existence and high quality of the trout management area, some result from the state forest and state recreation area lands in the corridor, and some come directly from the designation and management of

the segment as a National Wild and Scenic River. In reality, the distinctions across these different areas and jurisdictions are probably not very important to most users. Based on the experiences they seek and benefits they receive, it appears that conserving the river corridor and maintaining the high quality of its resources, regardless of who does it and how it is achieved, are the most important things to users. What wild and scenic designation brings with it is a management plan for the entire 14-mile segment and the existence of Farmington River Coordinating Committee. These help provide the connections that tie the many river areas and programs together to make the conserved river segment more than the sum of its parts in terms of both resources and benefits for users and neighbors.

I Hope you can use the study for kindling when you are done reading it.

Best Regards;
Michael Bamford

Dear John,

1. Who is on the River Advisory Council for the Chattooga WSR? As a riparian landowner, the Rust Family would like to have a delegate on the council.
2. Can we get a copy of the DNR development plan?

Best Regards;
Michael Bamford

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November 17, 2005

Mr. John Cleeves, Project Coordinator
Upper Chattooga LAC Study
USDA Forest Service
4931 Broad River Road
Columbia, SC 29212

Dear John:

Thank you for giving Georgia ForestWatch the opportunity to pose several threshold questions regarding the “Limit of Acceptable Change” study of the Upper Chattooga River.

I trust the USDA Forest Service will seek to answer these before we get too much further along on this study process.

Georgia ForestWatch is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the native eco-systems of Georgia’s Mountain and Piedmont public lands – national forestlands in particular – and to inform the citizens of Georgia about the values of these landscapes.

Our members enjoy the Chattahoochee National Forest, and the Chattooga River, and occasionally visit the Wild and Scenic River corridor for recreation, nature walks and spiritual renewal. We actively and routinely engage in commenting on USDA Forest Service projects as stakeholders in Forest Service management of these public lands, and stand ready to become involved in the LAC study.

Here are our initial questions:

- Can and should the USDA Forest Service proceed with this study when there are several unresolved plan appeals pending regarding the management of the Sumter and Chattahoochee National Forests? Should not these appeals be resolved before proceeding with the boating study, particularly since these appeals, in part, relate to the appropriate management prescriptions for the Rock Gorge area on both forests?
- Who are the members of the project team for this study and are all three affected national forests equally represented on this team?
- As the project team makes decisions about the study topics and the significant issues posed by this study, can these, as well as Forest Service answers to public questions, also be posted on the study website or otherwise distributed to the public and those particularly interested in this process?
- How much is the consultant for this study (Tretatek) being paid and who is paying this fee? (We want to ensure that no private parties are directly or indirectly paying any part of this fee.) What exactly is the consultant’s charge and role in this study?
- What exactly is a “Visitor Capacity Analysis Study,” as opposed to a “Limit of Acceptable Change” study?

- Please clarify whether the purpose of this study is to determine whether **any** floating above the Russell Bridge is within acceptable limits of change, or is it **already** about how many float trips can be allowed on that part of the river. The first question needs to be answered before the second can even be considered. And as far as ForestWatch is concerned, it seems clear that any floating above the bridge on State Route 28 will produce unacceptable change and loss of wild and scenic river values. The Chattooga is supposed to be managed to maintain or enhance the values that caused the river to be designated as wild and scenic in the first place. So talk of trial boat runs does not seem germane to the central issue of the study is supposed to measure. Unless advised differently, it seems the study should be about the suitability of **any** boating, not **how much**
- If, however, test boating runs on the Upper Chattooga ever are deemed necessary to conduct this study, does the USDA Forest Service have qualified personnel (able to run Class V+ rapids) to lead such trips?
- If test boating runs ever are deemed necessary, will the USDA Forest Service countenance removal of any logs, deadfall and strainers? (I hope it does not on the Upper Chattooga, which is still a Wild and Scenic River, where boating is currently not allowed, and might not be allowed after the study is completed, and where large woody debris on the river is generally viewed as a good thing.)
- If test boating runs ever are deemed necessary, will the USDA Forest Service permit such runs by members or affiliates of the American Whitewater organization? Here is the reason for asking this question: While recognizing the Upper Chattooga is closed to boating in its public pronouncements, AW, in the past, appears to have flagrantly solicited and encouraged illegal boating on this part of the river on its “members only” web pages. (See Appendices A and B.) The mindset exhibited in these appendices also suggests the definite possibility of user conflicts between such paddlers and other members of the public who might be trying to enjoy this wild and scenic resource in less aggressive manner at the same time. To say the least, the AW stand regarding the illegal runs colors that group’s ability to take part in an objective LAC study, and reveals a lack of respect for other users, the Forest Service and the law.

Again, we do appreciate the opportunity to be involved in this process and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Joseph Gatins
Tallulah District Leader
Georgia ForestWatch

Joseph Gatins
for Georgia ForestWatch
15 Tower Road

Ellijay, Georgia 30540

CC: District Rangers, Andrew Pickens, Highlands and Tallulah districts
SO, Sumter, Chattahoochee and Nantahala National Forests
Regional Forester
American Whitewater