From:	Chris Occhipinti
To:	comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us
Subject:	Re: Chattooga River Project Comments
Date:	08/13/2008 08:24 PM

Dear Sumter National Forest,

My name is Chris Occhipinti, and I am an avid hiker, angler, whitewater kayaker, and outdoorsman. My wife and I live in Chatham County, North Carolina and frequently travel around the Southeast to paddle this region's outstanding whitewater. The issue of Chattooga river access is of concern to us as kayakers, citizens of the United States, and as stewards of the environment.

I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment (EA) regarding the recreational management of the Chattooga River. I disagree with your analysis and your proposal. Both treat me and my community of river enthusiasts unfairly and your proposal would not meet my interests.

I feel the characterizations of boaters in the EA are unrealistic and that the EA exaggerates the level of conflict that would be present should boating be allowed. As a whitewater kayaker in the Southeast I have met many fellow boaters who appreciate the rare and vital resource that boatable rivers are. We are thankful for the opportunities to commune with nature and challenge ourselves on the river. Although I cannot speak for every boater; I find the community to be helpful, courteous, and environmentally responsible. Knowing this community I cannot support the levels of user conflict that the EA forecasts. The actual predicted level of conflicts is unknown because a user capacity analysis has not been completed and the EA does not reference one. The appeal decision with American Whitewater required a user capacity analysis. We as community would like this mandate honored before a decision to limit boater access is made.

The alternative presented shows a blatant bias of one user group over another and does take into account people who are fall into multiple user groups. I fish; I hike; I backpack; and I kayak. This proposal does not serve my interests as a whole user of the National Forest. Restricting equal opportunity is antithetical to the principles of American society.

The Chattooga River is a national resource, an asset of the people. As such the river should be open to all user groups to recreate in a way that does not degrade the resource. The EA does not provide a sound, quantifiable level of environmental impact that justifies a de facto ban of boaters on the river. Boating

does not degrade the river to any greater degree than other allowed uses. The EA cites "boat marks" on page 124 as a negative impact of allowing whitewater kayaks access. The high impact plastics that kayaks are comprised of today render this point false; look at the nearby Nantahala River in North Carolina. Thousands of kayakers use this river annually and the river does not bear the mentioned "boat marks". Neglected in the EA is the impact of discarded fishing line, lost tackle, and bait containers on the landscape.

Thank you for considering these comments. Please consider conducting a real user capacity analysis and immediately allowing boating in the same numbers, places, and seasons that you allow existing users. Paddling should be allowed in a similar manner to your alternative number 8, except on the *entire* Upper Chattooga River and its tributaries.

Sincerely,
Chris Occhipinti
113 Polks Landing Road
Chapel Hill, NC
27516

Cc: Representative David Price
Senator Elizabeth Dole
Senator Richard Burr

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