From: Marion Smith
To: comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us
Subject: Upper Chattooga River
Date: 07/12/2008 09:59 AM

Dear Mr. Burnett,

I was recently made aware of the Forrest Service's release of its preferred alternatives and recommendations concerning access by boaters to that portion of the Chattooga River above the Highway 28 bridge. Specifically, I understand that the Forrest Service is recommending that that portion of the Chattooga River down stream of County Line Trail Road in North Carolina and upstream of Burrell's Ford Bridge be opened to boaters between December 1 and March 1 when the river's flow is 450 cfs or more. While this is not the proposal that I would have preferred, and I will comment on that later in this e-mail, I do commend the Forrest Service for its creative approach to preserving this lovely wilderness and quality fishery and minimizing potential confrontational contact between boaters and fishermen by limiting boating to periods when few if any fishermen will be on the river. While this approach may not protect this delicate portion of the river's ecology it will at least minimize the number of confrontational events between boaters and fishermen.

First, if the Forrest Service's current proposal is to be implemented I believe that it should have several additional caveats attached to its final provisions. There certainly should be substantial monetary fines associated with any violation of the boater access provisions or the final regulations. For example, for anyone accessing the river before Dec 1 or after March 1 or accessing it when the flow is less than 450 cfs or exceeding the daily limit of 16 boaters should incur a hefty fine and forfeit their boat. Additionally, anyone found abandoning a boat on or near the river or littering should incur a substantial fine. Furthermore, I think that the Forrest Service needs to very precisely define exactly what type and size boats should be permitted on this section of the Chattooga and provide for a significant fine for its violation together with a forfeiture provision. From my observations nothing larger than a kayak could possibly be appropriate on this small body of water. Lastly, in order to insure compliance with the regulations, boating on this portion of the river should be continuously monitored by the Forrest Service.

Next, while my residence has always basically been Atlanta, my grandparents maintained their summer residence in Rabun County from the time of my infancy in the mid 1940s until their deaths in the late 1960s. As a result of this I spent the majority of every summer during my youth in the North Georgia mountains. Additionally, I attended summer camp in Rabun county from 1953 through 1956 at The Athens Y Camp for eight weeks each summer in addition to time with my grandparents. While at AYC we canoed the Chattooga, but downstream of the area in question and only after passing an intense training course and rigorous swimming test. Some of my fondest childhood memories are of fishing for "specs" in the rivers and streams of the Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina mountains with my grandfather. I also owned a second home in Rabun County for a number of years and my wife and I currently have a home in the North Carolina mountains. Thus, I have always been involved in outdoor activities in the

area. Over the years much has changed, some for the good some not. What has changed very little is the Chattooga River above Highway 28 and the Forrest Service should do everything in its power to keep it from changing any more than it already has.

My comments also come from the perspective of a boater. My formal introduction to boating, other than canoeing at AYC, came at age twelve when I attended Camp Seagull on the North Carolina coast. In my fifty year love affair with boating I have been continuously involved in personal education and training about boating and boating safety. I have mostly owned ocean going sail boats but have also owned fishing boats, canoes, runabouts etc and have covered the vast majority of the nation's eastern coastal and off shore waters together with significant Gulf, Caribbean and Atlantic waters. One of the things that I have learned in those fifty years is that very few people operating boats know what they are doing. They do not know the rules of the road, they do not know basic safety principals, and they have no concept of common curtsey. The worst, of course, are the PWCs, next are the young unsupervised water skiers then comes the white water guys.

Years ago when my children were 10 or so, they are now late 30s and early 40s, we used to go swimming in the Chattooga. We were down stream of the Highway 28 bridge near the Highway 76 bridge and there were generally other swimmers there. The boaters coming down from the Bull Sluice shoals would routinely run through swimming children and go through their "macho" exercised so as to endanger the little children. Today I trout fish from as far south the Chattahoochee in Atlanta to North Georgia, western North Carolina, the South Carolina mountains, northwestern North Carolina and northeastern Tennessee in rivers which where fishermen and swimmers must share the water with boaters. Most of the time the boaters are at best a nuisance and frequently they are a menace. I have had them run over my line, nearly hit me, they missed me only because I evaded them, and intentionally interfere with my fishing. I have observed others experience the same treatment. This type of conduct is inevitable on the Chattooga as well and confrontation will occur on this small, narrow waterway.

Please understand that I am in no way generally opposed to various forms of recreation sharing the nation's waterways. I have and do use those waterways in various capacities including fishing, boating, swimming, hiking and otherwise participating with nature. The thrust of my comments is limited to the portion of the Chattooga above Highway 28 which is a small, narrow, pristine and delicate body of water and surrounding environment. Opening this area to boaters can only adversely affect the river and surrounding environment and degrade the quality of the experience of its non-boating users. That degradation will drive away many of present users who will simply go elsewhere rather than cope with the boaters. The loss of non-boating users will have a cascading negative effect as those user's organizations such as TU, Audubon, other national and local interest groups will no longer be concerned with the Chattooga and will direct their efforts and money elsewhere.

There are many areas in the nation's national parks, national forests, parks, monuments etc where fishing is prohibited, hunting is prohibited, camping is prohibited, snowmobiling is prohibited and boating is prohibited along with a host of other prohibited activities in specific locals and all for good reasons. There is no requirement that this particular very small, narrow and delicate piece of water be subjected to aggressive white water boating activities. It will dramatically interfere with any other use which

is simultaneously occurring. The boating activity which is contemplated can not possibly benefit or improve this portion of the Chattooga or preserve it for future generations, and I believe those are part of the National Forrest Service's responsibilities.

Unfortunately, in pushing this issue the way it has, the whitewater boating community is reflecting the worst in contemporary American values. That is be as self-centered and aggressively inconsiderate of and rude to all others to get your own way regardless of how inappropriate.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours truly,

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