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Subject:	Save the Upper Chattooga River Comments
Date:	08/18/2008 09:23 PM

The following comments about saving the Upper Chattooga River were submitted via the Georgia Outdoor Network website at www.georgiaoutdoornetwork.org

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Comments:
To whom it may concern:

I would like to comment on the recently released Upper Chattooga Environmental Assessment and proposed management plan, alternative #4.

It is clear that the Upper Chattooga is under increasing pressure from visitors, and concessions must be made to protect all of its "outstanding and remarkable" qualities. I feel, with alternative #4, the Forest Service has not gone far enough to protect the Upper Chattooga and has restricted boating without justification.

The Forest Service not only needs to conduct a proper impact study of boating in the Upper Chattooga, it must also conduct similar studies on all other user groups. Boating is viewed as the only variable in all management plan alternatives. When in fact, there are larger, more impactful user groups that are not considered for limits and/or restrictions. It's only with quality impact studies that the Forest Service may equitably reduce the impact of all user groups and therefore, protect and restore its natural wonders.

First and foremost, the Forest Service must:

1) Eliminate all road side parking within 1/4 mile of all bridges. Not just create an additional parking area a distance from the bridge.
2) Permanently close user created trails. A few well "designed" and well used trails could be converted to sanctioned Forest Service trails.
3) Establish a fair and equitable permitting system for all Upper Chattooga users. The data collected will help establish future use and limits guidelines.
4) Close the fish hatchery that is responsible for polluting the East Fork of the Chattooga River.
5) Stock only native fish in the river.
6) Restrict or rotate river access to anglers, allowing the stream beds and banks to recuperate from trampling.
7) Restrict or rotate campsite use, allowing areas to recuperate from over use.
8) Ban camping within 1/2 mile of all bridges or roads.
9) Close a couple of bridges and/or roads to create a more remote wilderness corridor.
10) Complete a true user capacity analysis and impact study for all user groups.
11) Allow equitable access to all environmentally friendly user groups based on impact studies.
12) Put the protection and restoration of the environment above all uses and user groups. The "Outstanding and Remarkable" quality of the Upper Chattooga is not artificially created fishing, it is the breathtaking wilderness.

Although it is not a perfect plan, I would support implementation of Alternative 8. It fairly and equitably places all environmentally friendly user groups on the same footing, while establishing a few extra protections to the environment. I would urge the Forest Service to make use of the "adaptive management" approach, in Alternative 8, to further protect the environment in the ways I have outlined above.

Thank You

Kirk Baker