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Subject: Chattooga River Boating Decision
Date: 07/31/2008 09:48 AM

United States Forest Service
Chattooga River Project

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for the opportunity of providing the following comments on your "pre-decision" notice of a preferred alternative regarding permitting of boating on the upper
Chattooga River.

I am a property owner at the upper reach of the Wild and Scenic River Corridor and have been a river observer and user since before the land was in public ownership. I have previously offered comments during your study process.

I urge you to adopt Alternative 1, which maintains the current situation. But, recognizing that this choice may be too restrictive, I recommend Alternative 5.

The second best choice is Alternative 5, which would provide a quality boating experience when the river is flowing at non-fishable flow rates downstream from the Bull Pen Bridge (Steel Bridge), a place where boats may be launched with very little impact on the nearly solid rock banks and the very short trails. Established parking and camping is already available nearby.

Alternative 4, on the other hand, would provide a lesser quality boating experience at higher flows in a reach where the limited access to the river already helps preserve its near pristine character. There are several drawbacks to this choice:

- The impending death of the many giant hemlocks that line the river in this reach will soon result in timber falls (Large woody debris, LWD) that will clog the river for boats for many years to come. Conversely, the deadfalls will likely have a positive result on the fishery.
- The County Line Trail is quite long from Whiteside Cove Road to the river. Very limited parking is available only along the road shoulder and the trailhead.
- The trail traverses an area that is the habitat of a large quantity of Pink Lady Slipper plants that extends from the trailhead all the way to the Chattooga River. The showy plants are particularly abundant along the edge of the trail where the increased sunlight promotes their blooming in the late spring. The boating season, as defined by the higher flows, will likely be at a different time of year when the plants have died back and cannot be seen. Thus the likelihood of their damage or loss from increased foot traffic and new user-created trails and campsites is very high, and cannot easily be prevented.

- The length of the County Line Trail is a limiting factor to boating because of the long portage needed for use, a positive result in my estimation. Although this alternative as currently defined does not appear to involve the nearby Cane Creek Road for access, the opening of this route for vehicles could become a logical "betterment" for boating that would lead to the negative result of introducing new vehicular traffic within the Wild and Scenic River Corridor nearer the river.

Thank you again for the opportunity of providing these comments, which I hope will help influence your final decision. I recommend that you choose Alternative 5 instead of Alternative 4.

Sincerely,

Thomas H. Robertson