From: Randy Wetzel
To: comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us
Subject: Chatooga River
Date: 08/01/2008 02:53 PM

Dear Forest Service Personnel:

Please reconsider the impacts of your recent Environmental Assessment for the upper portion of the Wild and Scenic Chatooga River. Although this river has been closed to boating nearly all of my life and I am not a private landowner along its banks, I think that as an avid outdoorsperson and a long time resident of NC, I can exercise my right to comment upon its use.

Historically, rivers have been considered public property and the Chatooga is no exception, despite its virtual closure to public access over the years due to the power-generating dam located along it. As you well know, the Forest Service tries to treat all potential river users equally and this therefore means that paddle sports (canoeing, kayaking, rafting, etc) should not have less access to the river than other users. It has come to my attention that a strong coalition of private landowners seeks to restrict river access to other users, paddlers of all sorts in particular. This is unjust and uncalled for as peaceful enjoyment of our river resources is demonstrated all over this nation within national parks, national forests, national recreation areas, and along waterways that pass by privately-owned land.

Perhaps a reasonable approach to those concerned about sharing the river, such as fly fishing outfitters, would be to alternate use by days. This schedule works very well for the Forest Service at the Tsali Recreation area in the Nantahala Forest between mountain bikers and equestrians.

I ask that the Forest Service continue to protect equal access to our wild and scenic Chatooga river for ALL of us to enjoy.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

Dr. Randy Wetzel
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