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Subject:	Draft Environmental Assessment
Date:	08/05/2008 05:00 PM

Chattooga Planning Team:

In response to your request for comments regarding the potential environmental effects of the alternatives and especially number 4, the following is submitted for your review.

I would support any one of the first three alternatives with, perhaps, a preference of number 3; therefore, I respectfully request that the U. S. Forest Service choose one of the first three alternatives to implement and enforce above the Hwy 28 Bridge on the Chattooga River. I base my preference on the following review of the boater vs. the upper Chattooga River issue which should not be considered a boater vs. angler matter. I believe that the Whitewater Association will appeal and continue legal action if there is any decision made other than complete and unlimited access to the full 56 miles of the Chattooga River. The legal battle will continue; so, what is the best alternative for all users of the river not a very small minority of boaters.

In reviewing the various alternatives, we should use the understanding that has been gained and stated during the Forest Service's public process – "the public has expressed agreement on their desire to protect and enhance the outstanding remarkable valves of the Chattooga River (geology, biology, scenery, recreation, and history); maintain a sense of solitude away from modern life; offer a remote wilderness experience; preserve the spectacular scenery and setting; and protect the natural resources of the upper section of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River that make this area a special and unique place. In the NEPA process, these goals collectively are called a "desired condition."

I have not heard one reasonable argument nor can I understand how lifting the ban on boating north of the 28 Bridge, even for the limited boating under alternative 4, would enhance or support the "desired condition" as detailed above. The question to answer is how would limited boating opportunities, if that is possible, "preserve the spectacular scenery and setting; and protect the natural resources of the upper section."

The real answer is that boating or floating will never work under a self-regulation system and will unfortunately bring a new part of modern life to the wilderness and diminish the sense of solitude. On the other hand, limiting parking, trailheads, trails, and improving campsites could make a grand improvement to the scenery, setting, and wilderness experience.

The limited resources of the Forest Service certainly could have been better used controlling and enforcing the Current Management Plan or the alternatives two and three; however, the Forest Service has been forced to spend a vast amount of their funds (taxpayer's money) to fight the Whitewater Association. If the Whitewater group is successful in forcing a legal change to the policy that has been in place for 30 years, what group will be next, to demand their legal right to destroy the solitude of the Wild and Scenic River, the four wheelers, horseback riders, dirt bikes riders, or whatever. Not exactly the "desired condition."

Right now, everyone can walk in and enjoy all of the "outstanding remarkable values of the Chattooga River" above the 28 Bridge. Contrast the current situation with the self serving position of the Whitewater group in that they demand more rights than the anglers, hikers, bird watchers, campers, swimmers, photographers, and all others who come to take pleasure in the remote wilderness experience. During the public meetings, it was said only a very small number of paddlers and floaters want to do "Their Thing" but where is the fairness in that demand if it is at the expense of all other users. Especially when you consider that the boaters currently have over two thirds, some 36 miles, of the river for their own use now.

I request you consider that a very limited number of people, with the backing of a large national organization with deep pockets, are trying to force their will on the majority of current and future users of the "upper section of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River a special and unique place." The boaters want to make it specially and uniquely theirs; again, I ask where is the fairness and how will the "desired condition" be maintained?

Even though many users will say and perhaps, rightly so, that alternative 4 is the best compromise. The boating groups will not accept alternative 4 and will continue fight for the full and unlimited access to all of the Chattooga River. I find it quite amazing how many of the boaters from all over the United States as well as other countries want to change the Chattooga River. A place they have never seen nor experienced. Those of us, who

are from South Carolina and have grown-up visiting and loving the river (for me it has been over 45 years), just find it difficult to understand how the Whitewater membership could know what is best for the Wild and Scenic River.

I know the Forest Service leaders are under a great deal of pressure and they have tough decisions to make, but please do not give up the fight and compromise for something less than the status quo. Sure the “Current Management Standards/Actions” could be improved with some new rules to limit parking, trailheads, trails and campsites as well as limiting group sizes and encounters between user groups.

Either alternatives # 2 or 3 could be used to enhance the “desired condition” although alternative # 3 may be more effective when the values of the Chattooga River such as geology, biology, scenery, recreation, and history are considered. Boating has nothing to offer as an enhancement or an improvement to the River’s current environment above the 28 Bridge.

Thank you for your consideration,

William B. Denton
Greer, South Carolina