

Chattooga Wild and Scenic River Final Decision for Managing Recreation Use on the Upper Chattooga



U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Southern Region

The Chattooga River originates in the mountains of western North Carolina and forms a portion of the Georgia/South Carolina border. It runs through three national forests: the Sumter (SC); the Nantahala (NC); and the Chattahoochee (GA).

In April 2005, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Washington Office (WO) issued a decision on an appeal by American Whitewater (AW) of the Sumter National Forest's Land and Resource Management Plan (forest plan). The forest plan, issued in January 2004, continued a 1976 USFS decision to prohibit boating on the upper Chattooga River (approximately 21 miles of the total of 57 miles). In its appeal, AW noted that boating was unfairly excluded and stated that the forest plan should be changed to allow "year-round access for self-guided groups of non-commercial, non-motorized canoeists and kayakers" to float the river.

The WO decision on the appeal directed the USFS Southern Regional Office and the Sumter National Forest to conduct an appropriate visitor use capacity analysis to collect information for reassessing the decision and to involve affected and interested parties.

After two years of analysis and extensive public involvement, USFS officials reviewed eight alternatives considered in detail and selected a preferred alternative (Alternative 4) outlined in the *Pre-Decisional Environmental Assessment on Recreation Uses on the Upper Chattooga River* released in July 2008. During the 45-day comment period, the agency received more than 3,000 individual e-mails and letters. The forests recorded and responded to approximately 600 comments.

After considering public comments, preparing responses to those comments and reviewing the final analysis, the Forest Service has selected Alternative 4. Some minor modifications have been made to Alternative 4 since July 2008: boating is now permitted from the confluence of Norton Mill Creek (instead of County Line Trail) in NC south to Burrells Ford Bridge in SC; no limits on number of boater groups per day; language regarding large woody debris removal has been changed to "Removal of large wood debris to accommodate recreation in the upper reaches is prohibited"; and language closing parking within ¼ mile of Burrells Ford Bridge has been removed from the alternative.

A public implementation workshop will be held in the fall. Specifics regarding that meeting (location, date, time, etc.) will be released at a later date. Boating above Highway 28 may begin December 1, 2009.

The Chattooga River runs 57 miles from North Carolina into Georgia/South Carolina and through the Ellicott Rock Wilderness.

Congress designated the river as Wild and Scenic River in 1974.

The Chattooga River corridor includes 15,432 acres.

Boating has been prohibited on the upper Chattooga since 1976.

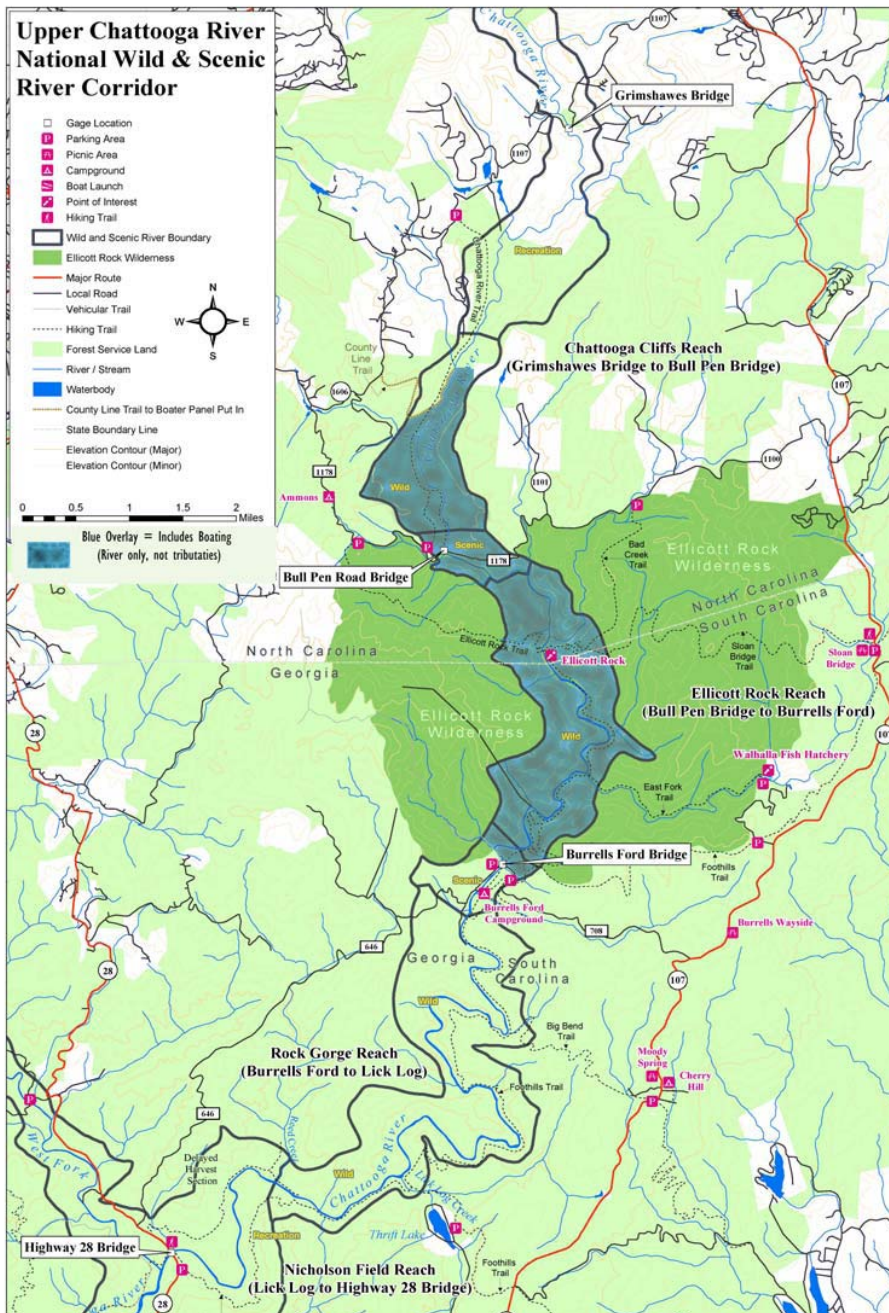
The Decision Notice and EA are available at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms>

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BOATING ZONE: Confluence of Norton Mill Creek (NMC) to Burrells Ford Bridge; [+/-7 miles of boating allowed within 21 miles of river above Highway 28]

BOATING FLOW LEVELS: Approximate flow levels of 450 cfs and above at Burrells Ford gauge.

BOATING SEASON: December 1- March 1.

BOATABLE DAYS: Six in an average year: range zero to 11 depending on prediction method used for implementation.

TYPE OF CRAFT: Single/tandem hardboats and inflatable kayaks.

GROUP SIZE: Boaters maximum six, minimum two; Campers maximum six except in designated group campsites; Trails maximum 12; and Anglers maximum four.

CAMPsites: Designated only.

TRAILS: Reduce, rehabilitate or realign existing user-created trails.

ENCOUNTER LEVELS: Established to maintain current use levels for all users (land and water)

LARGE WOODY DEBRIS: No large woody debris removal to accommodate recreation. Any removal must be authorized by Forest Service

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