

News Release



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For Immediate Release

Public Meeting about Chattooga River Scheduled for October 13

(Columbia, SC, September 19, 2005) – A meeting kicking off a public process to reanalyze recreation use on the upper reaches of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River will be held Thursday, October 13, beginning at 4 p.m. at the Civic Auditorium on State Highway 28 in Walhalla, SC.

The meeting, expected to last about three hours, is the first step in an anticipated two-year process to analyze recreation use on the river above the Highway 28 Bridge, according to USDA Forest Service officials.

“Involving the public in this work is the most important part of this process,” said Jerome Thomas, Supervisor of the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests in South Carolina.

At this first meeting, the public will help the agency design the process it will use to reanalyze recreation use on upper reaches of the river.

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The Chattooga River is the upstate boundary between South Carolina and Georgia, and its headwaters are in North Carolina. Since the mid-1970s – when the Chattooga was designated by the U.S. Congress as a Wild and Scenic River – boating there above Highway 28 has been prohibited.

In January 2004, the Forest Service revised its plan to manage the Sumter National Forest, including the Chattooga River. That plan, signed by the agency's Regional Forester in Atlanta, allowed floating to continue only on portions of the river downstream from the Highway 28 bridge.

Boating organization American Whitewater didn't agree with the portion of the plan focusing on the Chattooga River, and filed an appeal with the Forest Service's Washington Office. In April 2005, the Reviewing Officer for the Chief of the Forest Service decided to send that part of the plan back to the Sumter National Forest for additional work.

While the appeal decision does not direct that the decision be changed, it does direct the forest to conduct additional analysis regarding social and natural resource impacts on the river and to involve affected and interested parties.

The Sumter National Forest will lead the analysis, working with two national forests who share the river: the Chattahoochee National Forest in Georgia, and the National Forests in North Carolina. But the public will be the key to a successful process, Thomas said.

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“We will conduct this work openly and collaboratively with people who care about the river,” he said. “That means the process may change once we get into it, but we’ll work through it together and in the open.”

Until the additional analysis is completed and a revised a Forest Service decision is submitted to Washington, floating on the Chattooga River is not allowed above Highway 28, per the 1985 plan.

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