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NEWS • RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Forest Service Moving Ahead with Chattooga River Visitor Use Capacity Analysis

COLUMBIA, SC..... The U.S. Forest Service reports progress in its Visitor Use Capacity Analysis for the upper portion of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River. A detailed update is now posted on the Forest website:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms/forest/projects/new.shtml>.

This Visitor Use Capacity Analysis was required when the U.S. Forest Service Washington Office remanded a 2004 Sumter National Forest Plan decision maintaining a floating prohibition on the upper 21 miles of the Chattooga River. The current floating prohibition has been in place since 1976, shortly after a 57 mile stretch of the Chattooga River in Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina was designated a federal Wild and Scenic River.

Local national forest personnel have been working with all interested parties over the last year to conduct a visitor use capacity analysis of the full range of existing and potential recreation uses on the upper portion of the Chattooga. Based on the results of this visitor use capacity analysis and subsequent environmental analysis, local Forest Supervisors will then determine whether the current floating prohibition decision should be left in place, revoked or amended.

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Current progress on the Chattooga Visitor Use Capacity Analysis includes:

Expert Panels - Expert panels of boaters and fishermen have been selected and the implementation protocols are in place to conduct reconnaissance trips of the upper Chattooga. Highly experienced boaters and fishermen will work with accompanying researchers to describe angling and whitewater opportunities and develop information about required flows for these activities.

Biophysical Data Collection - Forest Service is assessing current on-the-ground biophysical conditions, focusing on trails, trailheads, campsites, water quality, and littering. The effort will map and record conditions on designated and user created trails and campsites. Water quality and stream bank erosion information will also be collected.

Flow Monitoring - New stream gauges have been installed along the upper Chattooga to better predict stream flows during rain events. This will provide improved recreation-relevant hydrology information for the Upper Chattooga River.

Recreation Use Monitoring - Forest Service staff, with help from public volunteers, will document current use levels in the Chattooga corridor. Vehicle counts at primary access points will be combined with existing use information (from previous studies and creel surveys) to describe current use patterns.

Literature Reviews - Findings will be reviewed from previous studies on capacity-related issues for the Chattooga or other similar rivers. Distinct reviews will examine a history of Chattooga recreation decisions, capacity decisions from other rivers, visitor use/impact relationships, social impact standards, river flow preferences, recreational use trail/site impacts, and recreational use impacts on wildlife.

According to Jerome Thomas, Supervisor of the Francis Marion/ Sumter National Forest, “We look forward to continuing the collaborative efforts with all interested parties during data collection and throughout this analysis. The Forest Service will continue to share information and will strive to keep all of our constituents involved during this effort. We will maintain our website with periodic updates as well as utilize direct mailings to ensure all interested parties know where we are in the analysis process.”

More detailed information and additional updates will be posted as they become available on the Forest Service website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms/forest/projects/new.shtml>.