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NEWS • RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Forest Service to Develop Alternatives for Upper Chattooga River Recreation Use

U.S. Forest Service officials announced today completion of the data collection phase for the Upper Chattooga River visitor use capacity analysis. They also outlined plans for a series of meetings to work with the public to develop and evaluate specific alternatives for management of the Upper Chattooga River.

The upper 21 miles of the Chattooga River in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia above US Highway 28 has been zoned to exclude whitewater boating since 1976, shortly after the river was declared a National Wild and Scenic River. Boating is allowed on the lower 36 miles of the Wild and Scenic River. A decision by the Forest Service in 2004 to continue this zoning was challenged by whitewater boaters. Local Forest Service managers in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia were then directed by their Washington Office to conduct a visitor use capacity analysis and reassess the current zoning of recreation uses on the Upper Chattooga.

“We have concluded that the data collected to date is adequate for us to move ahead with the public to develop specific alternatives for management of the Upper Chattooga,” said Sumter National Forest Supervisor Jerome Thomas, who is the lead responsible official for conducting this analysis. “We have gathered a considerable amount of data on water flows, user preferences and current on-the-ground conditions. The expert panels we conducted in January gave us useful information about boating and fishing potential of the Upper Chattooga,” he said.

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He also noted that many citizens worked with the agency as they collected information for the visitor use capacity analysis. “We now want to continue to work with the public to develop and evaluate specific alternatives,” Thomas said. A final decision the Upper Chattooga is scheduled for December, 2007.

The Forest Service will hold open house meetings in June in Clayton, Ga., Highlands, N.C., and Walhalla, S.C., to share the results of the visitor use capacity analysis and outline how the public can be involved in the development and analysis of alternatives.

On July 10, the Forest Service will also hold a formal hearing to document public comments regarding specific suggestions for managing the Upper River corridor.

This public hearing will be followed by a full-day workshop on Saturday, July 14 where the public will be asked to provide input on proposed standards for all resources along the Upper Chattooga and management actions that might be needed to ensure those standards are met.

“The Forest Service will use the open houses, public hearing and workshop to provide opportunities for the public to help us develop specific alternatives to analyze in an environmental assessment,” Thomas said.

There will be additional opportunities for the public to be involved as the environmental analysis is completed this fall. “We hope this continuing public involvement will help establish areas of common ground among the many interests as the Forest Service moves toward a final decision on future management of the Upper Chattooga River,” Thomas said.

Information about the Upper Chattooga River Capacity Use Analysis is available at the Sumter/ Francis Marion National Forest Website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms/>.

Additional detailed reports documenting the analysis are scheduled to be posted on this site by June 1.

Specific meeting times, dates and locations:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>
<u>Open House Meetings</u>	
Monday, June 18, 5 pm-8 pm,	Rabun County Civic Center HW 76 West (across from Courthouse) Clayton, GA
Tuesday, June 19, 5 pm- 8 pm	Highlands Civic Center 600 North 4 th Street (US HW 64) Highlands NC
Thursday, June 21, 5 pm-8 pm,	St. John's Lutheran Church 301 West Main Street Walhalla SC
<u>Public Hearing</u>	
Tuesday, July 10	St. John's Lutheran Church 301 West Main Street Walhalla SC
<u>Standards Workshop</u>	
Saturday, July 14	St. John's Lutheran Church 301 West Main Street Walhalla SC

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