



# NATIONAL FORESTS IN NORTH • CAROLINA

USDA FOREST SERVICE, 160A ZILICOA STREET, ASHEVILLE, NC 28801

## NEWS • RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

### **PUBLIC MEETING ANNOUNCED FOR CHATTOOGA WILD AND SCENIC RIVER VISITOR USE CAPACITY ANALYSIS**

The USDA Forest Service will hold a public meeting on July 27<sup>th</sup> in Highlands, NC to give an update on the Upper Chattooga River visitor use capacity analysis. The meeting will be from 6 to 8 pm Thursday, July 27<sup>th</sup> at the Highlands Civic Center, 600 North 4<sup>th</sup> Street (US HW 64), Highlands, NC.

According to Francis Marion and Sumter National Forest Supervisor Jerome Thomas, “The purpose of this meeting is to update the public on where we are in process, share information on data collection methods and explain how the public can assist us in this data collection.” Forest Service personnel and independent contractors will present an overview of the data collection methods and then be available at “interest stations” to answer specific questions about data collection methods and how the public can assist.

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Specific topics to be covered at the interest stations include:

1. Review of existing literature on the Chattooga River and studies of similar rivers.
2. Field observations of existing uses and conditions within the upper and lower Chattooga River corridors.
3. Assessments of trail conditions, campsites, litter, and water quality.
4. Collection of information on river flows at all four upper river bridges.
5. Reconnaissance trips down the river at various flow levels with expert panels of boaters, anglers, and researchers.

The three national forests that share the river – the Chattahoochee-Oconee in Georgia, the Francis Marion and Sumter in South Carolina and the National Forests in North Carolina – are working together to conduct this visitor use capacity analysis. The Sumter's Andrew Pickens Ranger District is responsible for the boating/ floating use of the river, and management direction for the Chattooga River was included in the 1985 Sumter Land and Resources Management Plan (LRMP), revised in 2004.

An administrative appeal was filed by American Whitewater in 2004 with Forest Service's Washington Office. The appeal challenged the boating prohibition on the river above Highway 28. The Washington Office of the Forest Service decided to reverse the agency's decision to continue to allow floating only below Highway 28, and directed the Regional Forester to conduct a visitor use capacity analysis to help make a more informed decision about how that section of the river should be managed by the agency.

Until this work is completed and a revised decision is issued, the relevant provisions of the Sumter's 1985 plan remain in effect, including the prohibition on floating above Highway 28. Any floating on the Chattooga River above Highway 28 may only be allowed by Forest Service permits associated with this analysis. Activities allowed during this analysis period are only for data collection purposes, and may or may not be allowed in the agency's final decision.

Three earlier public meetings were held in October, November and December. Information from those meetings was utilized to help determine data collection needs, and will continue to help shape the upcoming analysis work.

For additional information on this project, see the Francis Marion/ Sumter National Forest's website at [www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms).

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