Boating coming to Upper Chattooga

Forest Service opens portion of river for first time since '76

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COLUMBIA — As envisioned by U.S. Forest Service (USFS) officials, the Upper Chattooga River above Highway 28 will remain a mostly undisturbed sanctuary with limited and monitored recreational activities, including boating.

The framework for managing recreation in the Upper Chattooga is contained in USFS officials' final decision announced Wednesday to implement an option published in its Environmental Assessment released a year ago.

Although limited in its scope, the USFS decision marks the first time in 33 years that it will allow boating in the Upper Chattooga.

Monica Schwalbach, acting Forest Supervisor for the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests, said that except for a few minor changes, alternative 4 remained intact.

Specifically, Schwalbach said boating would be limited from Dec. 1 to March 1 on the main stem of the Upper Chattooga from the confluence of Norton Mill Creek in North Carolina to Burrells Ford Bridge in South Carolina. Furthermore, boating would be allowed only on those days when the river reaches approximate flow levels of 450 cfs (cubic feet per second) at the Burrells Ford Bridge gauge.

Schwalbach said those flows are above what is considered optimal for fishing and would produce approximately six "boatable" days in an average year, according to USFS calculations.

Other recreation management highlights under Alternative 4 include:

- Use of single or tandem hardboats or inflatable kayaks
- Regulating boat group size to a maximum of six and minimum of two; limiting campers to a maximum of six except in designated group campsites; a maximum of 12 on trails; and a maximum of four anglers
- Reduce, rehabilitate or realign existing user-created trails
- Protect opportunities for solitude by establishing guidelines for encounter limits for all users
- Allow designated campsites only
- Keep large woody debris undisturbed and any removal must be authorized by the Forest Service.

Schwalbach said the provisions related to limiting boating are intended to emphasize, protect and enhance optimal, year-round trout fishing.

"The purpose of this new management direction is to ensure the continued enjoyment of the Upper Chattooga by a variety of users," Schwalbach said.

The USFS final decision over the managing of recreational uses in the Upper Chattooga had been more than four years in the making after American Whitewater challenged a forest service decision in 2004 to maintain a ban on boating in that 21-mile stretch of the river. The ban had been in effect since 1976.



Special to the Daily Journal/Messenger

In a decision announced Wednesday, the U.S. Forest Service will allow boating on the Upper Chattooga River for the first time in 33 years.