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Chattooga River decision hit by another appeal

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — Another conservation group turned off by a recent decision to open up a 7-mile portion of the Upper Chattooga River to boaters is putting the heat on the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to reverse its ruling.

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Wayne Jenkins
GAFW executive director

Georgia ForestWatch (GAFW) announced it is filing a "vigorous appeal" of the USFS decision and is using the services of a law firm to pursue its cause.

ForestWatch's backlash against the ruling comes on the heels of another administrative appeal by Friends of the Upper Chattooga (FOTUC).

GAFW is adamant in its view that the presence of boaters in that stretch of water would harm a pristine natural resource and spoil the experience of solitude and wilderness available in the area.

Wayne Jenkins, the conservation group's executive director, said the USFS decision hands the Upper Chattooga over to what he calls "an extreme sport." He said the agency's action was unnecessary.

"The (USFS) decision

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CHATTOOGA: Decision

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inevitably would lead to resource damage and user conflict, and forever change the remote, solitary nature of one of the wildest, natural places in the East," Jenkins said in a statement.

The USFS "final decision" Aug. 25 allows non-motorized boats (mostly kayaking and rafting) from Dec. 1 – March 1, and only on those days when the river reaches approximate flow levels of 450 cubic feet per second at the Burrells Ford Bridge gauge.

Unlike the FOTUC appeal, which officials described as an effort to assist the USFS in managing its ruling, GAFW said its goal is to stop boating on the Upper Chattooga completely.

Jenkins said in a telephone interview Tuesday that GAFW would also file a stay of the USFS new management policy on the Upper Chattooga.

"The main difference we have (with FOTUC) is we don't agree with the primary decision of allowing boating at all," Jenkins said.

Interested stakeholders have 45 days from the Aug. 25 ruling to appeal.

GAFW is working with the law firm of Paul, Hastings, Janofsky & Walker to pursue the appeal, but Jenkins said it was too early to say whether the group intends to litigate the issue, although that option appears to be on the table.

The USFS appeal process also allows interveners to participate, which would open the door to groups espousing the boaters' point of view.

It was the lobbying ef-

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forts of American Whitewater, a national non-profit organization that promotes opportunities to "safely use whitewater resources," that put in motion the events that led to the USFS ruling.

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