Chattooga boating decision withdrawn by Forest Service

FOR THE JOURNAL

The U.S. Forest Service has said its decision regarding recreational use of the upper Chattooga River is being withdrawn.

"Effective immediately, the three national forests in South Carolina, Georgia and North Carolina have withdrawn their decisions to allow for additional analysis," said Liz Agpaoa, regional forester for the Forest Service, Southern Region. "Once the analysis is complete, the forests intend to issue three new decisions, probably in early spring."

The decisions, which followed active debate between recreational boating and preservation interests, were announced in August. They would have allowed limited boating on the main stem of the upper Chattooga River.

However, five appeals were filed and a stay was granted by the Forest Service while those appeals were under review. As a result, the status of the river as not allowing boating above the Highway 28 bridge has been in effect.

The Forest Service said rescinding the decision to allow boating is unrelated to the appeals. However, during the appeal process, the Service discovered inconsistencies between the decision documents, according to Paul Bradley, forest supervisor of the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests.

Bradley said none of the appellants raised the inconsistencies in their appeals but that the Forest Service decided to voluntarily withdraw its decision.

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>
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> Regional forester

"Inconsistencies sometimes occur in large documents with multiple authors," Bradley said. "We are taking this step to ensure that the final documents are complete and accurate."