

Chattooga compromise

Forest Service approves winter, spring boating

BY BRETT MCLAUGHLIN
THE JOURNAL

LONG CREEK — Pressured by environmentalists on one side and white-water rafting interests on the other, the U.S. Forest Service opted for a compromise when it comes to boating on the upper reaches of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River.

Tuesday, Forest Service officials said they will allow, for the first time, boating in the winter and early spring between Green Creek in North Carolina and Lick Log Creek in South Carolina.

The current ban on Up-

per Chattooga boating will continue year-round between Lick Log Creek and SC Highway 28, a portion of the river that includes the popular Delayed Harvest, a highly valued trout fishery.

Officials called their decisions "final," and suggested a "don't call us, we'll call you" scenario regarding further input. The tone of Tuesday's announcement appeared to be a clear effort to end what has been years of heated debate and threatened litigation between boating interests and environmentalists.

SEE CHATTOOGA, PAGE A5

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2012

CHATTOOGA: New visitor

FROM PAGE A1

"The other forest supervisors and I hope today's decisions will bring closure to the differences many folks have had over how this precious, valuable resource should be managed," said Paul Bradley, forest supervisor for the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests in South Carolina. "We'll be seeking public input on implementation in the near future.

"When we're ready for ad-

ditional input, we'll make an announcement. We are hopeful this will provide an opportunity to bring everyone together with a common goal of protecting the Chattooga River for enjoyment by future generations," he added. "Our decisions protect a variety of existing, high-quality recreation experiences, offer new whitewater boating opportunities and use season, reach and flow restrictions to minimize potential conflict between the two," Bradley explained. "Boaters will

THE JOURNAL A5

capacities will be established

be able to float in the winter and early spring in areas and at a time when high flows are most available and predictable, and when traditional use is low."

"Allowing boating in the Nicholson Fields would introduce unacceptable levels of conflict," Bradley said. "And that's something we've worked extremely hard to avoid."

Tuesday's decisions also involve actions aimed at protecting the upper segment of river for future generations.

New visitor capacities will be established to maintain "existing opportunities for solitude." The current prohibition on commercial boating and boating in the tributaries on the upper segment will also be retained; large wood debris removal will be banned without agency approval; and some trails and campsites will be redesigned, relocated or closed.

Bradley said the Forest Service expects to open the boating area by mid-March.

"Now that we've made our decisions, we have some work to do before boaters can float the upper river like printing boater permits, installing permit boxes, finalizing supervisors' orders," Bradley said.

Information related to managing recreation uses in the upper segment of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River can be found at <http://fs.usda.gov/sc-nfs>.