Coalition vows to watch over Upper Chattooga River

Group seeks to ensure new Forest Service boating rules are followed

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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SENECA — A group that lobbied unsuccessfully to bar recreational boating from the Upper Chattooga now wants to make sure its voice is heard when it comes to regulating water activities on the north stretch of the scenic waters.

The Friends of the Upper Chattooga (FOTUC), an alliance of residents from the Carolinas and Georgia who would like to protect the river's wild and scenic attractiveness, said it has filed an administrative appeal of the U.S. Forest Service's (USFS) decision to open the upper river to canoes and kayaks.

Beginning Dec. 1 and through March 1, the Forest Service's decision allows boating on the upper Chattooga during higher flows.

FOTUC members say the purpose of the appeal would be to assist the USFS in managing their ruling "in a way that protects, preserves and enhances solitude and wilderness" on the Upper Chattooga for present and future generations.

According to FOTUC, the proper monitoring and enforcement of boating activities on

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the North Fork sector of the river is critical in maintaining the spirit and letter of the USFS decision.

The group said its administrative appeal is not to contest the agency's decision, but rather to support and strengthen it.

Butch Clay of Mountain Rest, a member of FOTUC, has lived 25 years near the North Fork of the river off Highway 28.

A private school teacher, Clay said FOTUC wants to firm up the language in the regulations that could be "manipulated by a smart litigator."

Clay said long-standing rules limiting human access to foot travel did much to create a public recreation resource unlike any other in the region featuring a mountain wilderness with a "wild and scenic river flowing through its heart." He said the new rules change could threaten that wilderness.

"We will closely monitor the agency's enforcement of these new rules ..." Clay said.

The decision marked the first time in 33 years that boating would be allowed on the Upper Chattooga.

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FILE PHOTO

The Friends of the Upper Chattooga group has filed a limited appeal in hopes of having some input into monitoring revised use of the wild and scenic river.