# Comment sought on Chattooga access

## Plan calls for allowing paddlers on upper segment of the river

**By Karen Chávez**
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In the continuation of a decades-old saga over rights to a particularly beautiful, wild stretch of river, public comment is now open on the environmental analysis on designating boater access trails to the Upper Chattooga Wild and Scenic River.

U.S. Forest Service officials released the analysis Monday as part of implementing the 2012 decisions on managing recreation on the upper segment of the Chattooga River.

The analysis refers to the five proposed trails on national forests in South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia as "boater trails," which kayaker and river access advocate Kevin Colburn says is strange.

"These are multi-use trails, not just paddler trails. Their non-paddling use (for activities such as hiking and fishing) likely far exceeds their use by paddlers," Colburn said. "Paddlers would rather put and take out at the existing bridges than carry their boats on these trails, but the Forest Service's paddling bans make the trails necessary for us to experience the river."

Colburn said a positive outcome of the user capacity analysis is that trails will be built in a more sustainable fashion.

"We appreciate everyone's continued interest and contributions as we work through some of the complexities of the 2012 decision," Michael Wilkins, Nantahala district ranger, said in a statement.

"We look forward to receiving input from folks in the next 30 days about this next step in management of this special resource."

View the environmental assessment at go.usa.gov/v3R9.

The Chattooga River begins near Cashiers and flows through portions of Georgia and South Carolina. In March 2012, a Forest Service decision approved non-motorized boating to start on the Upper Chattooga for the first time since 1976, only during periods of high water flow, from Dec. 1-April 30.

That decision has been challenged on behalf of Georgia Forest Watch, the Sierra Club and Wilderness Watch over a variety of environmental concerns, including soil erosion, trail damage and an expected inundation of boaters.

In the environmental analysis released Monday, the Forest Service proposes constructing and designating hiking trails and establishing boater access sites at the following locations:

Greens Creek trail, construct 0.28 miles with access at the Greens Creek trail and Chattooga intersection;

County Line trail designation of 1.2 miles of an old road bed with access just downstream of Norton Mill Creek; Bullpen Bridge; Burrells Ford Bridge; and

Lick Log Creek (takeout only).

Other non-motorized recreation also would be able to use the trails and access locations.

The environmental analysis shows that last year only eight groups ran the river on seven days, down from the first year when paddling was allowed, which saw boating use on 17 days, spread across three sections of river.

"We feel that these very low numbers of paddling visitors more than justifies eliminating the strange seasonal, flow, and reach closures the Forest Service currently maintains on the river," said Colburn, who is also national stewardship director for American Whitewater, a nonprofit based in Asheville.

"Paddling amounts to a very small amount of low-impact use. That's what we've said all along, and that's what's been confirmed in this EA."

Rangers for three districts (Andrew Pickens in South Carolina, the Chattooga River in Georgia, and the Nantahala in North Carolina) will issue separate decisions, but all written comments must be submitted to: Chattooga Planning Team, 4931 Broad River Road, Columbia, S.C. 29212.

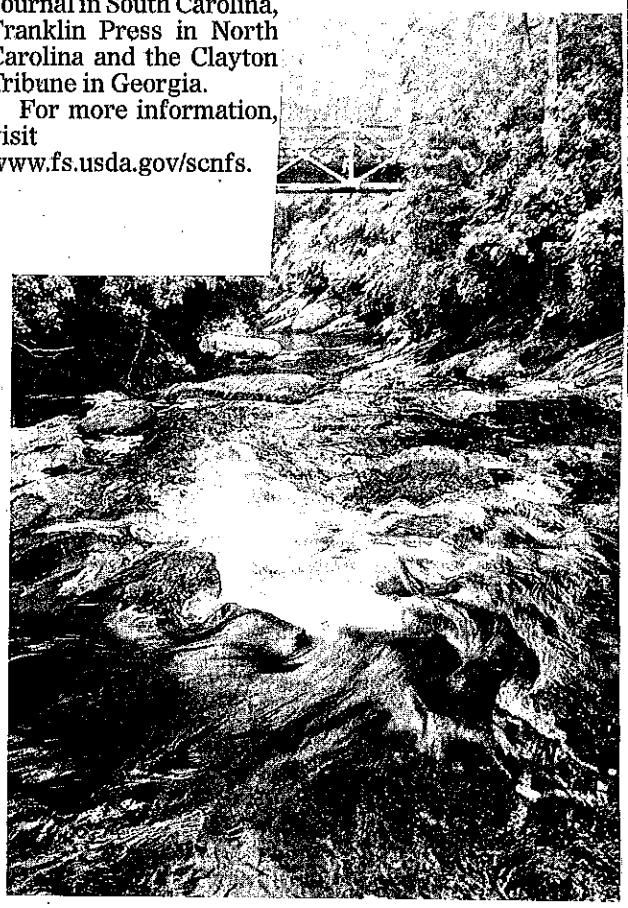
Email comments to comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us.

The comment period ends 30 days following the date of publication of the legal notice in the Seneca Journal in South Carolina, Franklin Press in North Carolina and the Clayton Tribune in Georgia.

For more information, visit www.fs.usda.gov/scnfs.

### COMMENTS WELCOME

» The environmental analysis is at go.usa.gov/v3R9.
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CITIZEN-TIMES PHOTO

**The upper Chatooga River flows under the "Old Iron Bridge" on Bull Pen Road.**