Groups appeal allowing boating on Chattooga

Environmentalists fear damage to areas

Staff report

A coalition of environmental groups has appealed a U.S. Forest Service decision to open the upper portion of the Chattooga River to boating enthusiasts.

Georgia ForestWatch, the Georgia chapter of the Sierra Club, and Wilderness Watch, represented by Greenfire Law, appealed after the Forest Service announced that boating enthusiasts, such as paddlers, kayakers and whitewater rafters, will be allowed to use a section of the river for the first time in more than 30 years.

"The Forest Service's decision favors narrow recreational interests at the expense of irreparable damage to fragile and rare wild areas that belong to everyone," said Rachel Doughty, lead attorney for Greenfire Law.

"None of this damage is necessary because boaters have plenty of options elsewhere to recreate. It is a very poorly thought-through plan. For example, boaters are encouraged to find and create their own put-ins and take-outs along miles of delicate river bank during high water events when erosion is most likely."

The Forest Service decision allows boating enthusiasts to float on the once-limited section of the river with a permit and when water flows "are high enough."

Despite the Forest Service announcement, a group of paddlers who for the past three years have pushed a lawsuit against the government will continue to fight for greater usage, their attorney, Nathan Galbreath, told GreenvilleOnline.com on Thursday.

The river, featured in the classic 1972 film, "Deliverance," begins in the Nantahala Forest in North Carolina and passes through Oconee County and helps form a border between South Carolina and Georgia.