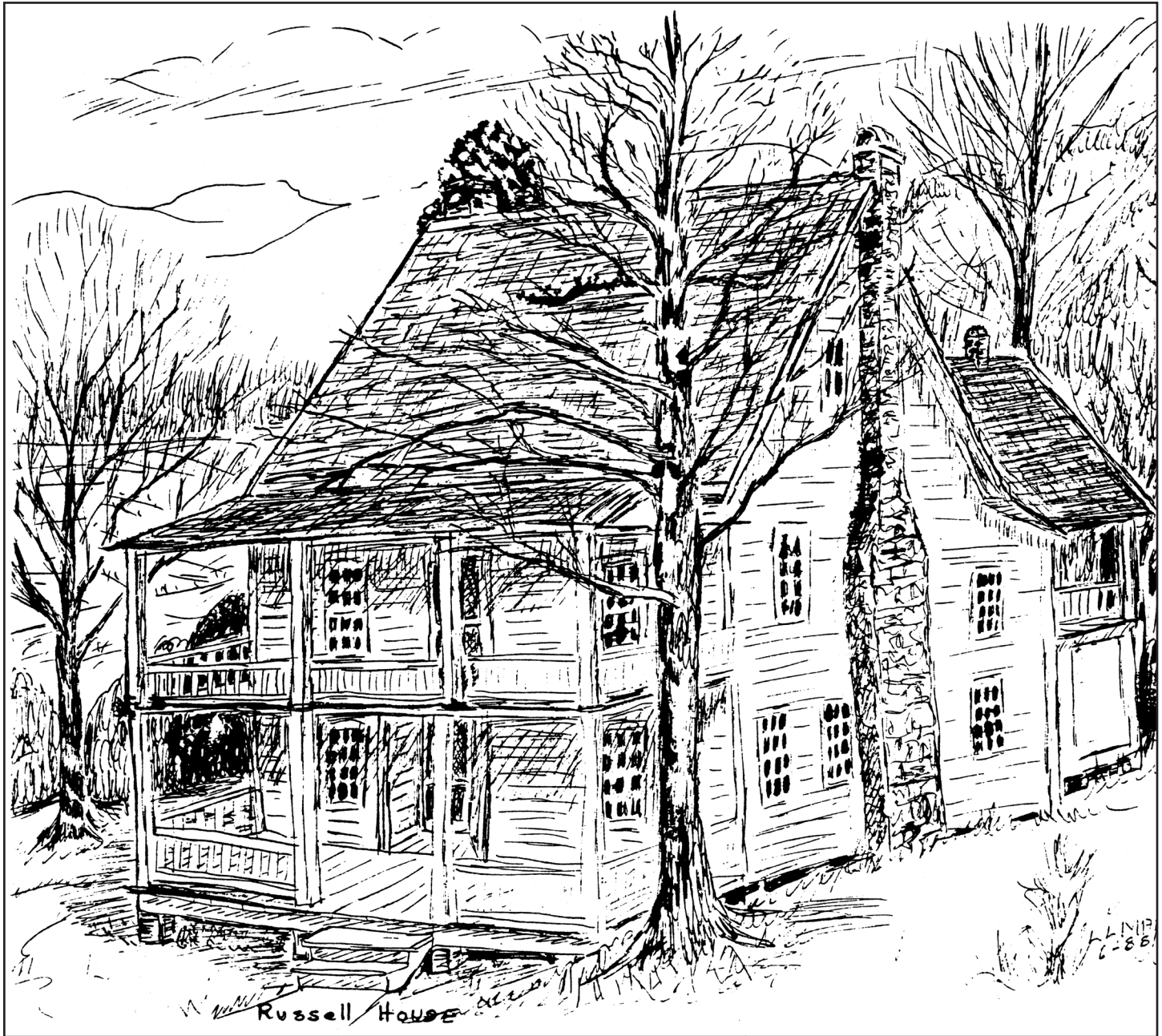




Chattooga Quarterly

Fall ♦♦♦ 2009



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Director's Page

Buzz Williams

For a while now, I have been contemplating writing an opinion piece about the Forest Service's management of our national forests in the Chattooga River watershed. So, recently while scanning a variety of emails from national "information wonk" organizations, I saw one about a poll that ranks federal agencies according to employee "satisfaction and commitment" that prompted me to conduct further investigation. This interest in the satisfaction and commitment of Forest Service employees, who oversee the management of about 68% of the Chattooga River watershed, seemed to be a good place to start in validating my theory that the Forest Service is a demoralized and ineffective federal agency.

The report I am referring to is called "The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government," which is a product of a joint project of the Partnership for Public Service and American University's Institute for the Study of Public Policy. The poll of employees working for 216 federal agencies ranked agencies according to employee satisfaction and commitment, and included such categories as skills, leadership effectiveness, teamwork, mission match, etc. The bad news is that the Forest Service ranked 206th out of the 216 agencies studied. The good news is that the Forest Service ranked 4 spots above the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

This study matches my own experience in over 30 years of monitoring the Forest Service—inside and out. My conclusion is that the Forest Service, an agency that once prided itself as a leader in the field of conservation with an unmatched esprit de corps among federal land management agencies, has sunk to an all time low. In this and subsequent *Chattooga Quarterly*s, we take a look at some examples that illustrate the point. This may seem odd for an organization that has as one of its goals to work with the Forest Service to restore the ecological integrity of the Chattooga River watershed. But after decades of trying to work with the Forest Service, sometimes successfully but mostly not, I have decided that exposing the magnitude of Forest Service incompetence is necessary to inspire the radical reform that the agency needs before it can be, once again, an effective land management agency. We also intend to take a look at why the Forest Service has fallen to such a state, and what will be the steps in restoring the agency to its leadership role in the field of conservation.

First, here are a few examples of Forest Service incompetence: 1) We, along with every other conservation organization in the Southern Blue Ridge Ecoregion, argued for more than 20 years

that Forest Service policy aimed at clear-cutting native forests to accommodate reforestation with loblolly pine—a lowland species that has never existed naturally in our mountains—was detrimental to biological diversity. Ironically, the Forest Service has totally reversed its position. Today many timber sales are being justified by the agency to eliminate loblolly pine plantations to restore biological diversity; 2) We argued for at least 15 years that planting wildlife openings with non-native species such as autumn olive would result in displacement of valuable native species. But they kept doing it anyway, even when their parent organization, the Department of Agriculture, listed *eliagnus* (autumn olive) as one of the top 10 most invasive species in the United States; 3) We fought for decades to prevent the Forest Service from building so many roads into roadless backcountry. Today, the Forest Service road system, that is 8 times larger in terms of miles than the U. S. Interstate Highway System, is in such disrepair that the backlog of road maintenance is in the billions of dollars; and, 4) The Forest Service spends nearly one-half of its budget fighting wildfires, even though science tells us that fire-fighting to protect private homes is largely ineffective. Studies show that actions such as clearing brush and flammable materials around homes and installing fire-proof roofs are much more effective. In addition, we now know conclusively that wildfire is an essential component of many ecosystems, yet the Forest Service still attempts to put out almost every

wildfire that starts on public land, putting fire fighters at risk and suppressing a natural component of the ecosystem—all at tax payers' expense. In other words, Smokey the Bear was dead wrong telling generations of kids that all forest fires are bad.

The evidence is overwhelming; something has gone terribly wrong with the Forest Service at every level from the Washington Office down to local ranger districts. I have a book entitled *The Forest Ranger. A Study In Administrative Behavior*, by Herbert Kaufman, written in 1960. In this book the author presents the Forest Service as "an outstanding example of cooperation between field officers and administrative planners." However, the author warns that there is a very real danger that might threaten the effectiveness of the agency if local rangers are "captured" by local influence. He was partially right. Today, not only have local rangers been captured by local influence but so have Forest Service Officers, who at every level have become pawns to powerful special interests.

This *Chattooga Quarterly* includes an exploration of why the Forest Service has fallen so far short of its mission to "Care For the Land and Serve the People." We hope you will help in advocating for the reform needed to restore the Forest Service to its rightful place as a leader in the field of conservation.

My conclusion is that the Forest Service, an agency that once prided itself as a leader in the field of conservation with an unmatched esprit de corps among federal land management agencies, has sunk to an all time low.

Coyotes *The New Top Dog in the South*

Justin Raines

I don't know how long they crouched there in the tangled shadows beyond the tulip poplars and darkening pines, flanking us like a silent fog, waiting for the perfect time to strike. When the first one cut loose, it was an unvanquished yell of pure wilderness tearing through the dusk. My first thought was that we were under attack by the tormented ghosts of a thousand Cherokee warriors returning to avenge some ancient transgression. I dropped my beer in terror, and the dogs leapt barking to their feet. Wearing only boxer shorts and a beard of beer foam I found myself unprepared for battle, but my fearless hound Duane was already off the porch and charging into the black woods to face the attackers. I could hear him baying and breaking through the brush behind the cabin. Things began to make sense. I scrambled inside looking for my boots and the shotgun. The yips and screams were closing in on Duane, whose bark had changed to defensive tones. Soon they would be upon him. I had to act fast. The Remington was loaded with dove shot, not quite enough gun for predators running through thick cover after sunset, but it was flash and bang I was after and even birdshot has plenty of that. I stepped to the edge of the porch and rocked a pair of warning blasts into the woodpile. Instantly the howling ceased, and I could hear them snapping away through the laurels. Duane soon returned, exhausted but unharmed. The coyotes were gone; their lunatic ruckus replaced by the soft trill of October's evening crickets.

It wasn't my first dance with *Canis latrans*, but I'd never seen them act so aggressively before. While living in the Rocky Mountains, I spent many nights in tents listening to coyote calls echo across the valley. It seemed a natural part of a fine Western evening scene. On the rare occasion when I managed to spot one of the beasts, it was always running fast in the opposite direction, its ear tips bouncing barely visible above the sage until disappearing completely like gray smoke into the mountains. The same creature responsible for the unabashed midnight howl parties could also be elusive as a leprechaun during the daytime. I was fascinated. Of all the animals I encountered out West, the

coyote quickly became one of my favorites. Something about its defiant attitude and sly, clever behavior impressed me.

After moving into the old cabin near Mountain Rest, I was glad to hear coyotes screaming in the pasture at night. They enhanced the rustic and untamed feel of the place, making it feel more Western and frontierish. But as they began to act more and more aggressively toward my dogs, I was soon left wondering if South Carolina coyotes were the same shy creatures I'd seen out West. After the third encounter when they crept so close to me and my dogs before unleashing a barrage of howls, I became convinced that it was an intentional attack designed to provoke my dog. I'd heard that in some instances, coyotes



With legendary adaptability, the coyote (Canis latrans) is at home in nearly any environment.

had been known to lure domestic pets away from their homes before surrounding and killing them. Could that have been Duane's fate if I hadn't stepped in with the shotgun? I had to learn more. Had coyotes always lived in South Carolina, or were they migrants from another place? How was their population doing in an ecosystem largely devoid of apex predators such as wolves and cougars, an ecosystem where the coyote finds itself at or near the top of the food chain? It was time to do a little research and learn more about the drifting howls in the night.

I was surprised to find that coyotes are actually pretty small. "A big coyote would be 40 pounds," said Tom Swaynham, Regional Wildlife Coordinator with the South Carolina Department of Resources. "A huge coyote would be 50 pounds."

So much for the 75-pound wolfhounds I had envisioned. They also tend to travel alone or in small groups rather than packs. "Coyotes do not pack up in general," Swaynham said. "There are usually 3 to 4 to a group with a female and offspring. What you're hearing are solitary coyotes or family groups calling to each other."

But what about them sneaking up on us and antagonizing Duane? In rare cases, coyotes have been known to take livestock, especially calves and lambs. In suburban neighborhoods,

Coyotes *The New Top Dog in the South*

they are also notorious for taking small pets. They seem to be especially fond of cats, but Swaynham said an attack on a 65-pound hound such as Duane, was an “uncommon experience.” “Coyotes are cowards,” he said. “They will sometimes take small dogs, but they’re not going to go after anything that might hurt them.”

It seemed more and more likely that the incidents with Duane had more to do with territory than anything else. The coyotes were probably just defending their back yard. But was a South Carolina coyote the same critter as a Wyoming coyote? Some science indicates that there may be as many as 16 separate subspecies, but so far, there hasn’t been any conclusive evidence to indicate that coyotes differ greatly in different parts of their range. “Nobody has done that work, but they’re not genetically distinct,” said Swaynham.

It seems that the coyote heard in a Georgia cornfield is pretty similar to the one seen in Yellowstone National Park. Coyotes originated in North America before expanding their range to include Canada, Alaska, Central and South America. They can now be found in every state except Hawaii. They are native to the American West, and are relatively new arrivals to states east of the Mississippi.

“They have gradually migrated all the way here from the western United States,” Swaynham said. “They first showed up in Oconee County about 20 years ago. There was an open niche here that wasn’t occupied.” Swaynham meant the missing link left when wild populations of Red wolves and Mountain lions were reduced to near extinction. Other than Black bears, there were no other large predators to compete with coyotes for food and territory once they arrived, and they quickly established themselves in the ecosystem.

In the wild, a coyote’s diet consists mostly of small mammals, but they also feed with the season and it’s not uncommon to find coyote scat packed full of persimmon seeds, apple skins and wild plums. “Most food habit studies have shown rodents and rabbits as their primary prey, but they’re very opportunistic,” Swaynham said. So opportunistic, in fact, that many major metropolitan areas including Chicago and Los Angeles are home to thousands of coyotes who make their home on city streets, feeding on human food and garbage.

There’s no question that ecosystems need predators, and coyotes are fulfilling a vital natural balance, but not everyone has welcomed them to the South with open arms. Many sportsmen see coyotes as a nuisance responsible for declines in deer and turkey populations, but Swaynham said he has not seen any evidence that coyote predation upon fawns and chicks has been significant enough to make a dent in Whitetail deer and wild turkey numbers. “We have not documented any major impacts,” Swaynham said. “Coyotes are another predator in the system. Whether that will be enough to lower [Whitetail deer and turkey]

populations, we don’t know. We don’t think so.”

Now that the coyotes are in the South to stay, their population seems to be evening out. “Our best guess is the population is more or less stable, but even an established population will go up and down, but we don’t see them expanding in numbers,” Swaynham said. Coyotes have few if any natural predators in the South. They are susceptible to disease, especially canine heartworms, which seems to be a limiting factor in coyote populations.

Interbreeding between coyotes and dogs is possible, with the resulting offspring called a “coydog.” They are usually born sterile or with limited fertility. Cases of interbreeding usually occur when coyotes first arrive in an area when mates of the same species are scarce. Most evidence suggests that once a coyote population is established, incidents of dog-coyote interbreeding are rare, as canines tend to breed within their species whenever possible in the wild.

Coyotes can also interbreed with wolves, and the possibility of coyote hybridization may have had a dissuading effect on Red wolf reintroduction efforts in coastal North Carolina and the Southern Appalachians. In a 1997 report on the status of the Red wolf, Gary Henry, Red Wolf Recovery Coordinator with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, stated that interactions between coyotes and Red wolves threatened the purity of a wolf population, especially in the early stages before the core population is established. “The assumption made is that if a large enough Red wolf population can be established the core area, this population will remain pure because animals dispersing across this core will find Red wolves for mates,” Henry wrote. “However, dispersing animals outside the core area are vulnerable to interbreeding with other *Canis* because of the lack of conspecifics. This has probably always occurred on the periphery of *Canis* populations but was unrecognized until application of recent molecular biology techniques.” In short, it seems that there have probably always been isolated cases of interbreeding between coyotes and dogs and wolves but they tend to be rare and occur when more mates are of another species. If given the opportunity, however, coyotes will mate with coyotes, wolves with wolves and dogs with dogs. That is why populations remain distinct in places where all species live among each other.

There was something in the darker reaches of my imagination that breathed a small sigh of disappointment as the research made it less and less likely a marauding band of coydogs roamed the woods behind my home, but the more I learned, the more intrigued I became with *Canis latrans*. For me, the coyote is a symbol of tenacity. It is an animal at home in nearly any environment. Its adaptability is legendary. There are many lessons to be learned from its resourcefulness and resilience. While some see the coyote as a Southern invader, and others welcome the cunning canine to the ecosystem, it seems that one thing is for sure—the coyote is in the South to stay.

Bull Sluice: “The Rock Wall”

Buzz Williams

The year was 1979, and I was a societal refugee working as a raft guide on the Chattooga River. I had spent 8 years ducking in and out of college after graduating from high school in the late sixties, simultaneously trying to avoid going to Vietnam and seeking respite from the propaganda my Forestry professors were trying to force into my unwilling brain at Clemson University. The only place where I found peace was up on the Chattooga River, which I had discovered pre-*Deliverance*, when the river and the surrounding national forests were still quiet and undiscovered. Throughout the next decade of confusion and uncertainty in my personal life, the beauty and solitude of the Chattooga River watershed helped me cut through the Gordian Knot of life's mysteries, and by the late 1970s I had found a permanent home. We were a tight community then, us “river rats” as the locals liked to call us, made up of crazy paddlers on the cutting edge of a budding new sport, social misfits, trust fund rich kids, several Vietnam vets, and a few normal people. For a while it was life in the “Elysian Fields” or forest as it was, on the banks of an enchanted river. That was about to change.

We should have known it was coming. Our line of work, after all, had been spawned by the flood of people who flocked to

the Chattooga River after James Dickey's novel *Deliverance* brought notoriety to the river, where the movie by the same name was filmed in 1972. Then, in 1974, when the Chattooga River was designated as one of the first National Wild & Scenic Rivers, the number of people drawn to the Chattooga increased dramatically, from a few hundred to tens of thousands. The Forest Service, the agency charged by congress with keeping the Chattooga “wild and scenic,” began implementing the “Chattooga River Management Plan” in the late 1970s. The Forest Service, which often defined its job as the agency that would keep people from “loving the Chattooga to death,” soon was to become the agency that would try to “manage” the Chattooga to death. This became apparent to our little community when one day, as we all sat around unwinding after a day on the river, someone said, “I heard that the Forest Service is planning to build bleachers at Bull Sluice.” No one believed the absurdity, but to the disbelief of all, further inquiry proved that indeed there was a real proposal behind the rumor. I volunteered to find out what was up.

A meeting was arranged for September 10th at Bull Sluice Rapid where the proposed “bleachers” were to be built. Two of us had been designated by our peers to meet with the Andrew Pickens District Ranger on the appointed day. We met at the



The trail to Bull Sluice ends on the boulders at river's edge, seen here at high water (about 6.5') this past September.

photo by Peter McIntosh

Bull Sluice: “The Rock Wall”

new 100-car parking lot that had just been completed on the South Carolina side of the river at the Highway 76 bridge that crossed the Chattooga between Long Creek, South Carolina, and Clayton, Georgia. The ranger invited us to walk down the asphalt trail leading from the parking lot to the beach just above the bridge, that had been designated by the Forest Service as the official put-in point for whitewater boating below the bridge. About half way down was a new trail following the contour leading to Bull Sluice Rapid about ¼ mile upstream.

We had all accepted this parking lot, toilet facility and trail as the alternative to the out-of-control situation that had developed after the Chattooga was “discovered,” when hundreds of people would sometimes show up on big holiday weekends to hike up to “the Bull” and watch a continuous parade of boaters of all skill levels run the big rapid (the spectacle was just short of what it must have been like to witness the sacrificing of Christians to the lions in ancient Rome). The parking situation on these big weekends was atrocious, with cars parked all along the highway and barely off the road. Human feces and toilet paper littered the old woods road that led to the Bull. So, we had reluctantly accepted the new facility, albeit with reservations about its size. One hundred parking spaces had seemed a bit excessive.

The ranger explained as we walked up the new trail to Bull Sluice that he felt it was the obligation of the Forest Service to not only provide a place for people to view the rapid, but that they should also encourage more people to have this experience and, in addition, it must be a “safe” experience. Once we reached the terminus of the trail, which ended on the bedrock leading down to the car-sized boulder beside the “big eddy” between the first and second drops of the rapid, the ranger pointed out what we were beginning to comprehend as the real reason for the so-called bleachers. He clarified that in fact, the plan did not call for bleachers but for a plan to move huge, truck-sized boulders around to form a crescent-shaped flat spot between the vertical rock precipice on the land side and the river, thus providing a safe viewing area. He called it a “rock retaining wall” (see conceptual drawing, p. 8). He explained how important it would be to accommodate the handicapped and the elderly by constructing a stairway and railing down to the viewing area. It was quite a performance (I could almost hear the soft violin music playing in his head). As he continued his rap, the words laced throughout his canned speech such as “Tort claims,” “attractive nuisance,” “legal safeguards,” and “potential injury” telegraphed his true reasons for the rock retaining wall. The truth probably had more to do with cobbling together a plan to protect the Forest Service from a lawsuit for mindlessly building a trail from a 100-car parking lot that terminated almost into a dangerous class IV rapid.

We explained to the ranger that our position was that they should have thought about all these problems before they built the trail. We recommended that they obliterate the trail and

use the old woods road below, that terminated below the rapid, thus eliminating the “attractive nuisance.” The meeting ended in frustration on both sides. Later, when the Forest Service issued their final decision notice to proceed with the project, we found out the “official” impression we had made on the ranger at that first meeting. In Appendix B of this document appeared a report the ranger had sent to the forest supervisor in Columbia, in which he quoted us as having said, “We can’t go along with being more of a service to the public and leave it as it is.” The report also concluded that we felt there was “...no obligation to try to meet the needs of the elderly who are unable to clammer [assume he meant clamber] around on the existing rugged terrain.” This strange, twisted interpretation of our feelings should have foretold what we were up against.

Five days later, my intuitive nature got the best of me and I called an old college friend who practiced law in Greenville, S. C. He agreed to make a telephone call to the forest supervisor expressing our concerns in a more formal manner, and yet another meeting was scheduled for October 9th. The meeting was on a crisp fall day that fell on a Tuesday. Four of us showed up at the appointed time at 6:00 p.m. sharp and ready for—hopefully—a more receptive audience. Instead, we got the same speech from the same ranger and, in typical Forest Service fashion, had to endure a dog-and-pony show by the forest architect from Columbia.

Presented with nothing more than leftovers of the same old hash, we presented a petition that we had been circulating signed by about 80 members of the community that requested that the Forest Service halt all development at the terminus of the trail, based on Wild & Scenic Rivers Act’s management directives that state “Development within the boundaries of the Chattooga River must not detract from, or destroy, the natural beauty that makes this river different from other rivers.” We were beginning to learn how to speak the language.

We spent the next the next couple of weeks getting more signatures on our petition and soliciting endorsements from local paddling clubs, environmental organizations and sympathetic individuals, with much success. Of interest and worth noting was a remark the ranger had made at the second meeting. It seems that he had contacted the top brass from the Sierra Club and had given them a “show-me tour” of the project, and had gotten them to sign off on the project. Consequently, we knew that we’d have to step up the campaign to a higher level to win this fight.

One of greatest problems at this point was the fact that the boating/rafting season was coming to an end, and we were all seasonal workers. I like many others would be leaving soon to find another winter job. Many of us headed either north or west to find work as ski resorts. I would be leaving in December for a job in West Virginia running a small ski shop where I would

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be teaching cross country skiing. We knew that in our absence, the Forest Service would be working diligently to push forward with the trail terminus project. There were some encouraging signs though, that our opposition was having some effect. On October 26th, three executives from the rafting company that I worked for returned from the end of the season meeting with the Forest Service and reported that the ranger had spoken to them about our opposition to the project in tones that indicated that he seemed like “a beaten man.”

West Virginia was blessed with an abundant snow fall that winter and although almost completely distracted by skiing, I did find time to make a trip to Washington, D. C., to seek help from the American Rivers Conservation Council, and found an ally at the national level. I also visited with my delegate to the U. S. House of Representatives, receiving what I should have expected: a promise to help and a beautiful color copy of a book about the U. S. Capitol.

I managed to stay informed about happenings back home, with regular reports from a raft guide buddy who was toughing it out back in Long Creek and watching the Forest Service like a hawk. I learned through this reconnaissance that the ranger had screwed things up so badly with the “Rock Wall Project” that the Forest Service had resorted to a tactic often used (as I have now seen many times): they promoted him. The ranger who had hatched up the project was now at a desk job as the forest recreational officer in the forest supervisor’s office in Columbia. A new ranger had been installed as the district ranger. As we would soon learn, this new ranger would be a worthy opponent.

I returned to Long Creek in March 1980, and we immediately scheduled a meeting with the new ranger to get an update. It went nowhere. They were working full tilt on an environmental assessment, which is required by law to involve the public while pushing the project through. Another meeting was held on May 1st, to once again plead our case based the evidence of growing opposition. Again we were rebuffed, and lectured for our implacable resistance.

We decided to conduct our own biological evaluation, and found several species of plants on a state list of sensitive species. We discovered a population of a beautiful little wildflower called

“gay wings” (because the flower looks remarkably like a bird in flight) that had been obliterated by the new trail. We also made another key discovery. After carefully reading the development plan for the Chattooga River, which classifies the various sections of the river according to whether they are “wild,” “scenic,” or “recreational,” we found that Bull Sluice was located in a “wild” section of river. Those sections of the river classified as “wild” have guidelines that are much more stringent than either “scenic” or “recreational.” These management directives clearly state that there should be no modification of the bedrock of the river. It also directed the Forest Service to “preserve the river and its immediate environment in a natural, wild, and primitive condition essentially unaltered by the effects of man.” Our attorney agreed that this would likely be the winning card in our argument.



We discovered a population of a beautiful little wildflower called “gay wings” (Polygala paucifolia) that had been obliterated by the new trail.

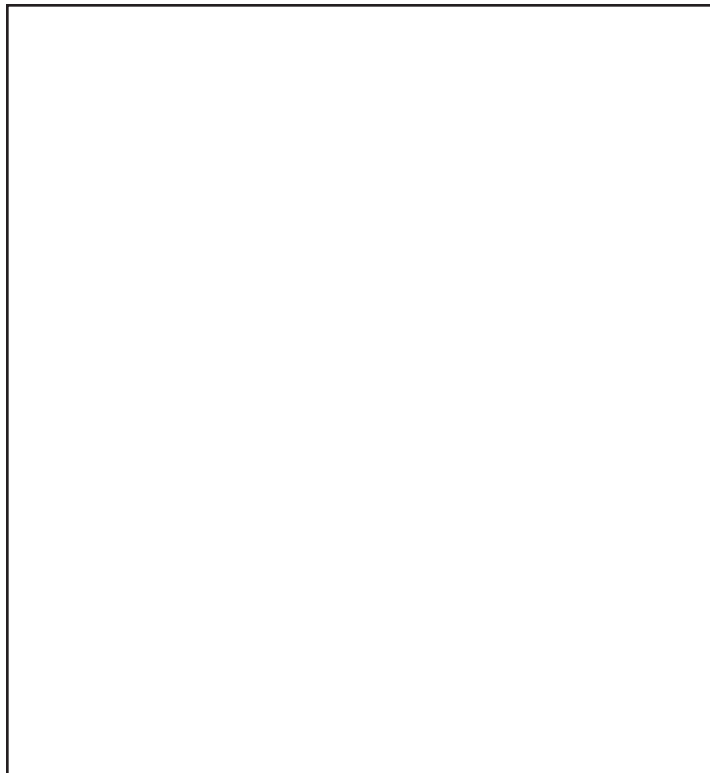
Our fight with the Forest Service was entering a new and more serious plane. Then something happened to lighten things up a bit. On June 23rd, the Forest Service scheduled a “compliance trip” with our rafting company. The outpost manager thought it would be appropriate to put them in my raft that day to “keep them safe.” As I recall, the water level was about 1.9 feet on the Highway 76 gauge. We called that “flip level” because at a rapid called 7-Foot Falls, you had better be on your “A game,” with the river pushing hard against the rock wall on the left below the falls and often causing the raft to flip against the wall. Forward speed, the right

angle, and a perfect line were essential to avoid disaster. For some reason I wound up with a leaky, slow raft that day. On the approach to 7-Foot, I could see the guides with safety ropes below on full alert as we made our sluggish descent down the falls. We slammed against the wall, the left tube rode high on the wall, the right tube dipped and a perfect flip sent everyone flying headlong into the current. Our ranger was the first to surface, right beside me in the water. His eyes wide with fright, and he spouted like a whale. His perfect comb-over flowed like a mane from one side of his helmet. I pulled myself onto the over-turned raft, and directed everyone to hang on to the raft as they threw us a safety rope and pulled us to shore. The trip leader shot me a glance and tried hard to hide a wry smile as I jumped to the sand beach beside him and hauled in the raft. To this day no one believes that it was not revenge—it was the slack raft! That’s my story and I’m sticking to it.

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The incident wasn't funny for long. Two days later, we were notified that the environmental assessment had been completed and was available for the public, and to come by the ranger station to pick up a copy. To no one's surprise, they had chosen to move forward with the “preferred alternative” to build the rock retaining wall at Bull Sluice Rapid. We were also given a letter addressed to all “whitewater permittees” (licensed rafting companies) inviting us to a “show me” trip at Bull Sluice on July 7th, to clear up any “misunderstanding” about the project. I passed the letter around that night and when it got back to me, written across it was “this means war!”

About 50 people showed up at 7 p.m. on Monday night at Bull Sluice for the Forest Service's presentation. Most were raft guides, but there were also people from the local community. The Forest Service had obviously considered the opposition to be just a group of raft guides, but the opposition was clearly a matter of public concern for everyone who cared about the Chattooga River. Yet the fact that the Forest Service had addressed the invitation to “whitewater permittees” was beginning to cause some problems. After all, it was the Forest Service that issued permits to the outfitters, and 2 of the 3 outfitters that are allowed to operate on the Chattooga were beginning to worry that their guides who were involved with the fight to stop the Forest Service from proceeding with the Bull Sluice project might be threatening their relationship with the agency. One owner of an outfitter permit actually issued an edict to his guides that they might be fired if they caused trouble. He was quoted as saying that “There are plenty of people waiting in line for your jobs. Guides are dime a dozen.” Anyway, it didn't stop anyone from showing up. Nearly 100% of those present expressed strong opposition the proposal. The Forest Service didn't do themselves any favors, and my notes record that many people present felt they came across as being unorganized. By this time, the same old condescending lecture about how they were only serving the public was getting very old. It seems the Forest Service was simply blind to the fact that we were the public. A few of us lingered after the meeting, deciding that we needed to get formally organized.



The Forest Service's conceptual plan for building an “irregular rock wall platform” at Bull Sluice called for moving and adding boulders, grading level areas, and securing a viewing platform into the bedrock.

The next day I went to the headquarters of the Andrew Pickens Ranger District and requested that the Forest Service provide us with the regulations outlining our rights to appeal their decision. A meeting was held the next night, and we all decided to call ourselves the “Friends of the Chattooga.” We assigned a committee to write an appeal, and drafted a press release. A few days later, the local headline read “‘Friends’ Oppose Chattooga Changes.” The article began, “Long Creek—A battle is brewing over the Chattooga River, the first since Hollywood simulated clash between a group of weekend rafters and local hillbillies.”

Now that we were engaged in a formal appeals process, things happened according to set time lines. On July 14th we filed an appeal of the decision to build a rock wall terminus at Bull Sluice Rapid, and requested that the regional forester in Atlanta grant a stay of action. The Forest Service formally acknowledged our appeal on the 17th. On the 28th, we filed a copy of additional reasons for our appeal. On the 31st, much to our surprise, we received a letter from the regional forester that said “I hereby grant your request for stay of Forest Supervisor Eng's decision to construct a terminus on Bull Sluice Trail. No construction will be done and the stay will remain in effect until ten days after I have made a decision on the merits of your appeal.” Now, with another 30 years of experience dealing with the Forest Service it makes sense. They have lawyers in Atlanta, which as far as I can tell is the only reason for the regional office to exist. Somebody down there evidently concluded that they better negotiate if we were poised to “kick their butt” legally.

On August 6th, we received a letter from the forest supervisor inviting us to come to Columbia to “exchange ideas and consider possible alternatives.” He stated further that after the meeting, he would review his decision and that the regional forester's stay would remain in place for ten days after he made a decision based on the merits of our appeal. They were beginning to crack at all levels.

On August 11th I received a letter from the deputy regional

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forester in Atlanta that stated “I am pleased that you and Don are getting together to solve this problem.” Clearly, the regional office wanted this one settled. Our meeting with the supervisor was scheduled for August 25th. Three of us drove to Columbia expecting the best. We were in for a surprise. We joked on the elevator riding up to the level where the supervisor occupied an office overlooking the state capitol. We were received with a scowl, as he ushered us into his office like an elementary principal charged with disciplining 3 unruly students. His face glowed red as he brow-beat us for obstinately blocking a project that, in his opinion, was in the best interest of the public. His language was filled with expletives as he vented his anger. We were shocked.

Of the 3 of us I was by far the most hot-headed, but as spokesman I struggled to keep from overreacting. The only alternative was to walk out, but not before telling the supervisor in short terms that we had full intentions to stop the project.

I would sure like to know what transpired between the supervisor and the regional office regarding our meeting, but all that’s known is that 2 days later, we received a letter from the forest supervisor informing us that he had reviewed his decision to construct a terminus to the Bull Sluice trail, and had decided not to build the rock retaining barrier, flight of steps and hand rail, or use cement at the landing. However, to save face no doubt, he retained the right to remove hazardous roots and to place river gravel and natural stone at the base of the “bluff” to provide safer footing. My guess is that the supervisor had gambled that strong intimidation would have caused us to back down, but when that didn’t work, the regional office directed him to compromise. In other words—the principal got the spanking.

The official notice of the new decision did not arrive until sometime in September. Although the new decision did drop the most egregious actions, it did contain some curious “weasel words” that were of further concern. For example, the new decision mentioned some trail work that might involve the use of a come-along to move rock at the trail tread. It was unclear where this work would be done. Was it in the “wild” section of the river, in the same place we had concerns? How big were these rocks, and did this amount to just another way of creating a retaining wall? On September 29th I called the forest supervisor, and he was very vague. As a result, we appealed his new decision and requested a stay of action. This was to make the Forest Service aware that we wanted to know their precise intentions. We had come too far to risk getting the wool pulled over our eyes with agency “weasel words.”

If the forest supervisor was angered by our opposition to his first decision, this time he must have blown his stack. The supervisor received our new appeal on October 6th and forwarded it to the regional forester. He informed us that we

had 15 days to give supporting reasons. On October 16th, the regional office denied our request for a stay. They had obviously decided to let us fight it out with Forest Supervisor Eng.

The forest supervisor, bolstered by our failure to get a stay, pulled out all the stops. On the 24th, I got called on the carpet by the president of my rafting company. He told me that he’d had a personal telephone call from the forest supervisor, and challenged me to defend our opposition to the project. I told him that our appeal was on behalf of those of us who were acting as private individuals, which had nothing to do with the company. After explaining our position, he simply shook his head and walked away. If my fellow guides were willing to put it all on the line, so was I. Although I never knew exactly what the forest supervisor had said to him to cause him to question my involvement, I suspect it had more to do with an implied threat to relations with the agency that issued one of the most coveted outfitting permits in the Eastern U. S. It was clear that his intent was to put pressure on me, through my boss. This taught me a very valuable lesson: watch your back.

The next day we filed the supplementary reasons for our appeal, which essentially laid out our concerns that the proposed action still posed a threat to a “wild” section of a national wild and scenic river, given the vague nature of the proposal. On October 30th, we received a copy of the supervisor’s reply to the regional forester concerning the status of our appeal. In the reply, the Supervisor Eng stated that he did not wish to amend his decision of August 29th. However, the letter did contain details of his intentions, clearly aimed at allaying our concerns. In it he stated that any work involved with the project would only be for trail improvements.

I called the supervisor the next day and arranged for a meeting on site. He agreed to meet us the next day. We met him at Bull Sluice that Friday, along with the district ranger and the forest engineer. They were clearly ready to settle, and reaffirmed that they had no intentions of altering the bedrock at the Bull, or to do anything outside of standard trail maintenance unless some unforeseen safety problem should arise. On counsel from our attorney, who had us well-briefed on our legal options, we agreed to back off, but reserved the right to challenge any future actions.

This concluded the fight to stop the Forest Service from implementing one of the most ill-conceived, illegal, and just plain stupid projects in the history of the management of the Chattooga River. Since then, there have been many more proposals just as ill-conceived. Some we have stopped, and some we haven’t. But every time we’ve won, it has been because of people with the best interest and love of the river at heart.

Next time, “Forest Green & the Supervisor’s Demise.” Don’t miss it!

“Pickin’ For the Park” *Saturday, December 5th*

“PICKIN’ FOR THE PARK” CONCERT BENEFIT FOR THE STEKOA CREEK PARK PROJECT

Saturday, December 5th starting at 6 p.m., at the [redacted] concert hall
(located just off Hwy. 441 S. in Clayton)

Bring the family, join the fun, and support the Stekoa Creek Park Project!

Come hear music performed by [redacted], [redacted] [redacted], [redacted] [redacted], and [redacted] [redacted]. Also see a [redacted] [redacted] [redacted]. And be prepared to bid on some great [redacted]. [redacted] will be there, too, serving a buffet supper of [redacted]!

The Foxfire Boys, a Rabun County favorite bluegrass band, will entertain us with their unique arrangements of gospel, traditional and bluegrass tunes. The Foxfire Boys have been playing together for over 30 years. It all started back in 1980, when 6 boys—Dean English, Wayne Gipson, Mike Hamilton, Filmer Kilby, Stephen McCall and Tom Nixon—were brought together by the musical program for the local Foxfire Fund, a successful educational project that combined experience-based learning with cultural preservation work. Their interest and love of the cultural music of the Appalachian region, combined with dedication and hard work, has produced a fine-tuned group of musicians that have delighted audiences far and wide. Come and hear this talented group of musicians that Rabun County is proud to call its own.

Mountain Hoodoo is Steve and Lisa McAdams, who will add to the mix a blend of Appalachian, traditional & folk music. Steve and Lisa have been making music together for almost 10 years. They stay busy playing at local restaurants, events and festivals. You can count on learning a bit of Appalachian history when Lisa performs her favorite mountain ballads.

Brad Barrett, local musician and solo artist, will perform a variety of southern rock and country hits. Brad’s rich vocal style, full guitar style and total stage command truly make him a complete one-man show.

Carmel Ridge will perform a repertoire gleaned from everything from old-timey country to bluegrass style music. The band features local musicians Hank Belew, John Oliver, Frank Alexander, Jim Turpin, and R.J. Spencer. Also, Dale Oliver, John’s wife, never goes anywhere without her buck-dancing taps! Be prepared for a fine buck-dancing performance that’s sure to get folks hopping!



[redacted] is one of the talented local groups playing at the [redacted] on December 5th.

THE STEKOA CREEK PARK PROJECT

The City of Clayton and the Chattooga Conservancy have teamed up in a ground-breaking effort to restore a short section of Stekoa Creek. This exciting new project will also result in establishing a new city park on a 2.9-acre strip of land in between state highway 441 and Stekoa Creek, just north of downtown Clayton. The United Community Bank of Clayton donated the property for the park site, and the Chattooga Conservancy is developing the city park project in cooperation with the City of Clayton. The landscape plan for the Stekoa Creek Park includes a nature trail, picnic tables, benches, handicap access, playground equipment, and landscaping with native plants. When complete, the new park will be a wonderful, new place to enjoy in Rabun County!

Watershed Update

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On July 13th, 2009, the Andrew Pickens Ranger District in the South Carolina portion of the Chattooga River watershed issued a “scoping notice” soliciting comments on a Forest Service proposal to authorize a permit for the Oconee Heritage Center (in Walhalla, SC) to establish a “Southern Appalachian Farmstead living history interpretive site on 20 acres of national forest lands at the existing Russell Farm Historic Site on Highway 28.” This site is adjacent to Chattooga Old Town (Cherokee Indian archaeological site) where Highway 28 crosses the Chattooga River into Georgia. The stated purpose for the project is to “preserve and interpret historic rural lifeways associated with Southern Appalachian culture” during a period of time between 1875-1925.

The “proposed actions” include: 1) stabilize, restore, and maintain the buildings on the original Russell House Site that is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places; 2) relocate 12 additional historic buildings that have been donated to the Oconee Heritage Center on an adjacent 15 acres, to recreate a period historic landscape including an heirloom garden, a field for growing corn and sorghum, and pasture for farm animals; 3) relocate an old school building to serve as a caretaker’s residence; 4) construct a 30-car parking lot; 5) install public “pit” toilets; and, 6) relocate buildings for a gift shop, office, and visitors center. Events that are proposed to be scheduled on the site include festivals, music gatherings, quilting bees, barn raisings, molasses-making, and farm demonstrations.

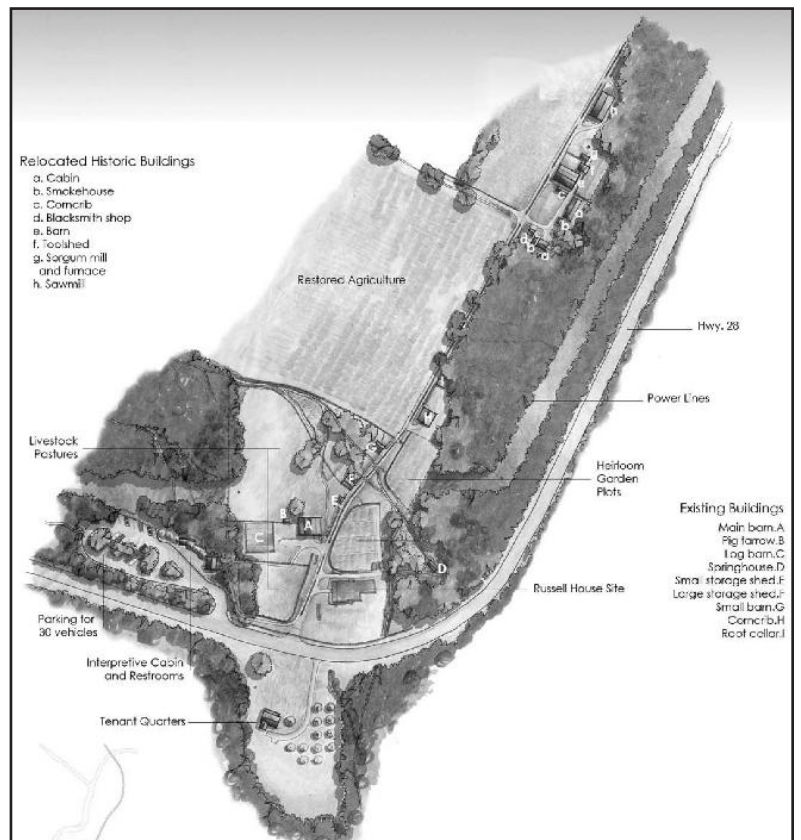
The Chattooga Conservancy is opposed to issuing a permit for the “Southern Appalachian Farmstead” proposal for numerous reasons, as follows. The Russell House was burned to the ground by an arsonist in 1988, and since then the Forest Service has failed to maintain the site such that all of the buildings with historic value have either rotted or are in a state of disrepair. Since the destruction of the Russell House, the site has been evaluated by a blue ribbon panel that recommended that the site be removed from the National Historic Register. We concur, with the opinion that the historic site is too far gone to be restored. However, the Forest Service and the Oconee Heritage Center refuse to move forward with taking the site off of the historic register, perhaps in order to make their proposal for developing the area more attractive to funders. Consequently, the restrictions for what can be done on a historic site prohibit anything other than restoring the area to its original condition. As a result, the proposed development activities must occur outside of the original 5-acre historic site.

Because of these restrictions, the “farmstead” proposal requests use of an adjacent 15 acres of public land

to use for all of the buildings, new parking lot, gift shop, etc. However, this “replica” site goes far beyond the idea of restoring the National Register site, and also goes well beyond the scope of establishing a living farmstead. The visitor’s center, 30-car parking lot, gift shop, festivals, etc., are simply not compatible with activities adjacent to a Wild and Scenic River corridor, and this development would not be appropriate for an area so close to the Chattooga River.

Lastly, the farmstead site as it is proposed is really not for a true living farmstead; instead, it appears to be for a demonstration site to attract tourists. The farm animals would not be used to work the fields, and the “caretaker” would be a night watchman, not a self-sufficient farmer. However, if the Russell House were removed from the National Historic Register, there might be an alternative for establishing a true living farmstead, without duplicitous efforts to establish a tourist destination site per se. *As is, the current “Southern Appalachian Farmstead” proposal simply doesn’t fit the bill for activities that would be true to the original use of the Russell House site, nor is it compatible with the guidance for managing areas next to the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River Corridor.*

In the coming months, the Forest Service intends to release a “pre-decisional environmental assessment” that we expect



The proposed development plan for the Russell House site includes moving 12 buildings there, installing a visitor’s center and gift shop, and constructing a 30-car parking lot—all right next to the Wild & Scenic River Corridor.

Watershed Update

will support going ahead with their “Southern Appalachian Farmstead” development proposal. This could forever change the peaceful landscape at the Russell House site. Stay tuned.

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The Chattooga Conservancy filed a notice of appeal on October 17th of the decision by the Forest Supervisors of the Sumter, Nantahala and Chattahoochee National Forests to amend their respective Forest Plans to allow implementation of Alternative 4 of the Environmental Assessment for the Management of Recreation Uses on the Upper Chattooga River. The Chattooga Conservancy takes extreme exception to the Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for these Forest Plan amendments, which were announced in August 2009.

We assert that this decision to create a new access trail and a parking lot between Whiteside Cove Road and Norton Mill Creek in the Chattooga’s North Carolina headwaters will result in irreparable harm to the natural environment in sensitive areas in the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River Corridor, specifically in the Chattooga Cliffs reach in the extreme headwaters of the Chattooga above Bull Pen Bridge. Comments to the Forest Service by Jim Costa, the Director of the Highlands Biological Station, and Bob Gale, ecologist with the Western North Carolina Alliance, and the research conducted in the Chattooga Cliffs area by Chick Gaddy, a biologist who studied the Chattooga Cliffs extensively in the 1980’s, all document the extreme sensitivity of the unique biological diversity found in the Chattooga Cliffs reach.

We firmly believe that this decision will also result in irreparable harm to the social experience for those recreational users in this section of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River Corridor who seek solitude and peace in one of the last remaining wild places along the river, which would—if decision goes forward—be penetrated by rehabilitating the County Line Road (an old logging road) to allow a new whitewater boating access point, as well as an entrance for the inevitable proliferation of user-created trails.

Conversely, we believe that the decision to exclude all boating below Burrells Ford to the Highway 28 Bridge is unfair, and inconsistent with the decision to allow restricted boating in the reaches of the National Wild and Scenic River Corridor and Ellicott Rock Wilderness from Norton Mill Creek to the Burrells Ford Bridge. We assert that boating should be allowed year round from Bull Pen Bridge all the way to the Highway 28 Bridge, with the same water level restriction as proposed by the decision that limits boating to above 450 cubic feet per second on the Burrells Ford gauge, which would protect a “high quality fishing experience” in this whole section of river if additional restrictions were implemented to limit the number of groups per day to 4 consisting of no more than 6 boaters per group.

We also assert that the Forest Service’s entire 4½ year process, beginning with the Chief of the Forest Service’s decision to require local forests to revisit the decision to ban boating in the headwaters in 2005, has been fraught with bias, unconscionable inconsistencies, is an unjustifiable waste of tax payers money, culminating in multiple violations of federal law, specifically including the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Wilderness Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Administrative Procedures Act, and a host of misinterpretations of various federal regulations including the Forest Service Handbook and the Forest Service Manual, that are promulgated for the implementation of these laws. To read the Chattooga Conservancy’s Notice of Appeal in its entirety, visit www.chattoogariver.org

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Starting the first week of July, the Stekoa Creek water sampling program moved to the area around the confluence of Stekoa Creek and the Chattooga River (about mid-way down “Section IV”), to obtain a contemporary record of data showing the impact of Stekoa on the Chattooga’s water quality. Samples were gathered at the Chattooga/Stekoa confluence, and a few sites upstream/downstream. Test results were expected to show that the negative effects of Stekoa Creek periodically cause the river’s water quality to exceed standards set for recreational contact. This is expected to occur primarily in conjunction with rain events, when the chronic inflow and infiltration problems with Clayton’s sewage collection system are greatest. Local weather was quite dry during most of the July-August season, and correspondingly, the fecal coliform counts for most of the Chattooga water samples collected were acceptable—with 2 exceptions, including a high reading in excess of 1,000 fc/100ml that occurred after a moderate rain event (over 200 fc/100ml is considered unsafe for contact).

In September, the Stekoa sampling program moved back to sites around Clayton. Since then, and often after rain events, numerous high fecal coliform readings have been recorded with some extraordinarily high fecal counts, like one at 37,000 fc/100ml! All water test results have been shared with city officials, to keep the issue of repairing and replacing Clayton’s sewage collection infrastructure at the forefront of their awareness and civic responsibilities.

At the Clayton City Council’s October ’09 meeting, council members voted to redirect (away from the doubtful Black’s Creek water project) over \$1 million of the city’s SPLOST funds to address sewage and water infrastructure problems. There is no doubt that the Stekoa Creek water sampling program can be credited with helping bring about this new action. It’s hopeful that the GA State Legislature will approve the city council’s initiative, and substantial on-the-ground progress to improve Stekoa Creek’s water quality can begin in earnest.

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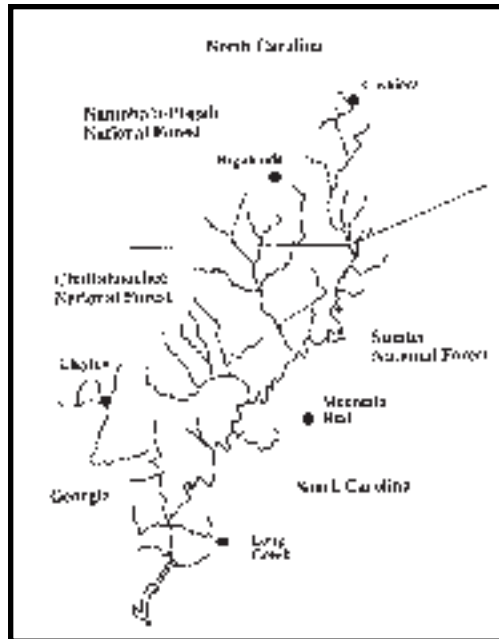
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Mission:

To protect, promote and restore the natural ecological integrity of the Chattooga River watershed ecosystems; to ensure the viability of native species in harmony with the need for a healthy human environment; and, to educate and empower communities to practice good stewardship on public and private lands.



Goals:

Monitor the U.S. Forest Service's management of public forest lands in the watershed, and work cooperatively to develop a sound ecosystem initiative for the watershed

Promote public choice based on credible scientific information

Protect remaining old growth and roadless areas

Promote public land acquisition by the Forest Service in the watershed

Promote sustainable communities

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