

Editorial

"User Conflict" is the bureaucratic term applied by the Forest Service when one group of Forest visitors infringes on the use of the forest by other users.

It was used 30 years ago when fishermen and whitewater enthusiasts were both in the same pool on the Chattooga River — the Deliverance River — on the Georgia-South Carolina border, and in conflict.

That conflict may return.

I am and have for a long time been both a whitewater boater and a fisherman.

I understand the joy of standing at the end of an emerald pool, waiting in an odd mix of being simultaneously intense and reverent, reading the water and the environment, watching for a fish to move, to present a target. Waiting for the moment to act, to execute the right cast at the right time to the right place and to have the cast alight on the polished and lively surface. To present the lure deftly and

skillfully enough to fool a wise and wily eye; that is our prayer and quest as we shoot the line ahead.

We call it fishing, but it is actually a test. And we do love to be tested. First at this pool, and then move along up to the next test, the next fresh, undisturbed pool. It is these quiet and very personal tests that we enjoy and re-live fondly over and over.

As a whitewater boater, I revel in the race, the sometimes soft, sometimes clawing embrace of the river. I have ventured alone down long stretches, but more often than not, I have boated in groups, chatting, challenging each other as well as the river, celebrating each boater's success, or failure as the case may be. We move downstream a long, accordion-like slinky of boaters mimicking the grace, the speed and power and pure fun of a band of river otters, playful, irreverent and audacious.

Both the fishing and the boating are challenging. But they are clearly incompatible endeavors. And fishing suffers the greater disruption when boaters and anglers occupy the same space at the same time.

Now comes a new plan to operate the southeastern National Forests.

Boaters — canoeists, kayakers, rafters — want to use the Chattooga River above the Hwy 28 bridge. They are mounting a strong and well-orchestrated letter-writing campaign to sway the planners to open water that has for the past 30 years been closed to such use.

The reason for the closure 30 years ago was exactly to address just such user conflicts. In a compromise during that planning cycle, boaters got use of the best of the big water downstream of Hwy 28 while anglers were able to use the shallower and colder wadable water upstream of that bridge.

It has been a good solution for years. Now the boaters want more.

The Forest Service is obligated to consider many issues as it goes about planning how best to permit access to the land and water it controls. It is then mandated to state its position and to solicit public comment on the issues. Then the Forest Service expects to digest the comments, adjust their plan if need be, and then operate the forest according to the plan for 10 to 15 years, and then review again.

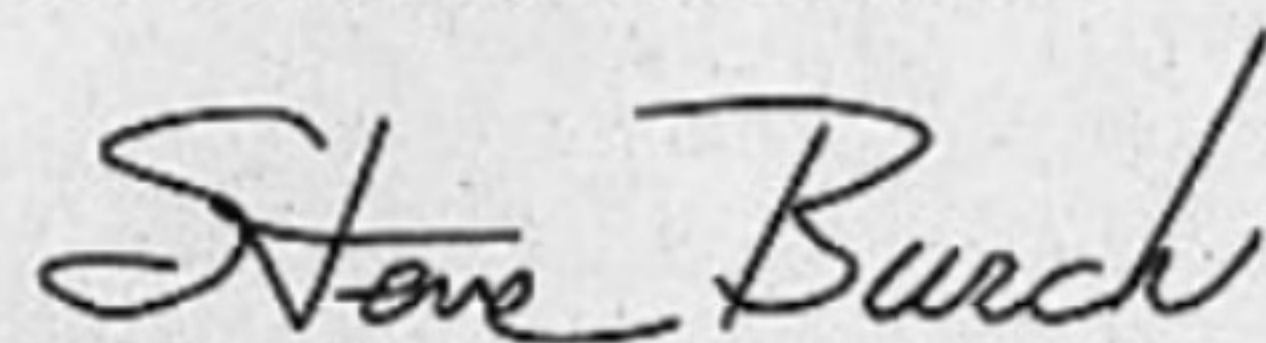
It is because of this public comment factor that I ask for your help. The Chattooga needs to remain boatless above Hwy 28. Unlike the Chattahoochee, the Nantahala, and the Ocoee with their carnival atmospheres and constant parade of brightly-colored boats, the Chattooga is a cathedral; special, serene, remote, wild, and natural. For anglers like me it is simply a special place. For boaters like me it is simply another place.

To share it is to diminish it.

Whether you are a trout fisherman or not, I ask that you respond to the Forest Service's call for comments — Uncle Sam wants to hear from you! And sportsmen need to support one another on an increasingly broad and cooperative front. Please write to:

Sumter National Forest
Content Analysis Team
PO Box 221150
Salt Lake City, Utah 84122
email: sumter@fs.fed.us

In your own words, please express your views. If you are a part of a group that will comment, then please also send under separate cover your own personal letter. Individual participation is critical and half the battle is showing up. It is time we all started to count for something. I appreciate your help.



GEORGIA OUTDOOR NEWS

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