



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Andrew Pickens
Ranger District

112 Andrew Pickens Circle
Mountain Rest, SC 29664
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File Code: 1920

Date: July 16, 2001

Interested Public

I would like to receive your comments on the attached proposed amendment to the *Sumter National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan*. The purpose and need for the proposal as well as supporting information are enclosed for your review. Comments are requested following procedures in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Comments will be used to identify issues. An issue can be thought of as a problem or concern that would result if the action were implemented as planned. An environmental assessment will be prepared. The Responsible Official is the Forest Supervisor for the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests.

Comments must be submitted to this office and postmarked by August 16, 2001. Include the following information:

1. Your name, address, and (if possible) telephone number;
2. The title of the document(s) on which you are commenting (this document is Recreational Boating Use on the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River - Amendment # 14); and,
3. The specific facts or comments along with supporting reasons that you believe the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision.

Please mail your comments to: District Ranger, 112 Andrew Pickens Circle, Mountain Rest, South Carolina, 29664 or you may email your comments to chattoogariver@yahoo.com.

A decision will be made on this proposal under provisions of 36 CFR 217 dealing with Forest Plan Amendments. Although not required, an Environmental Assessment identifying the preferred alternative will be made available for public review and comment prior to making a final decision. If you provide comments on this proposal you will receive a copy of the Environmental Assessment once completed. If you do not wish to comment but would like to receive a copy, please notify this office by mail or phone.

Comments received in response to this request, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and available for public inspection. Confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances.

Sincerely,

/s/Michael B. Crane
MICHAEL B. CRANE
District Ranger



BACKGROUND

Congress designated 57 miles of the Chattooga River as a component of the National Wild and Scenic River System on May 10, 1974. The river and its immediate surroundings offer many recreational uses including boating, fishing, swimming, floating, hiking, horseback riding, and sightseeing in remote settings. Recreational boating (including kayaking, canoeing, and rafting) has been a very popular use of the river and includes both commercially guided and self-guided users.

The Chattooga River is divided into four sections. (Please refer to the attached map.) Section I is the West Fork of the Chattooga River in Georgia ending at the main river channel. Section II begins at the confluence of the West Fork and the main river channel and ends at Earl's Ford. Section III begins at Earl's Ford and ends at the Highway 76 bridge. Section IV begins at the Highway 76 bridge and ends at Lake Tugaloo.

Commercially Guided Boaters

The recreating public continues to ask for a diversity of experiences, settings, and opportunities on the National Forests. Many are capable of total self-sufficiency, but those selecting an outfitter want help. They may not be able to do it on their own, or want an introduction to such experiences to help them get started. They may not have the skill and equipment to be successful in remote and challenging environments or they may wish to devote full time to a specific activity such as hunting, fishing, photography, or viewing scenery. But the public lands belong to them, just as much as they belong to the residents living at the mouths of the rivers and canyons. From their visits to the wild lands they get the same benefits as those living with the wild lands at their back door. Without someone to outfit them, the Forest Service would be unable to meet this public demand.

The Forest Service works closely with river outfitters to provide high quality, safe, and responsible visitor services for those wanting the guided experiences. Guided boating is defined here as any boating use where one individual or group receives payment for guiding, instructing, or otherwise transporting any other individual or group on the river through the use of boats.

Self-Guided Boaters

Self-guided boaters, sometimes referred to as private boaters, are another very important component of boating use on the river. Self-guided boating is defined here as any and all boating use on the river that does not meet the criteria consistent with "guided boating." This includes those who may be using rented equipment.

Self-guided boaters are those who have developed the necessary skills and who are able to provide or obtain for themselves the equipment and transportation necessary to be successful in meeting the challenges presented by the river. Self-guided boaters have

appreciated the ability to make their trek to the river with short notice, being able to respond to changing water levels throughout the year.

LAND AND RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN

The existing *Sumter National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (Forest Plan) gives direction and authority for managing the Sumter National Forest. Currently, this Forest Plan is undergoing revision. The revision process, begun in August 1996, will set broad, landscape level direction for all three Districts on the Forest for the next 10 to 15 years. It will likely take at least another 2-3 years to complete the revision.

Any Decision made associated with this proposed Forest Plan amendment will result in permanent modifications to the current Forest Plan. However, these and all other land management goals, objectives, and direction would be further subject to **change** during the revision process.

The Sumter National Forest is made up of three administrative units or districts, the Andrew Pickens, Enoree, and Long Cane Ranger Districts. The Chattooga River is part of the Andrew Pickens Ranger District. The Appendices to this letter contains current Forest Plan direction concerning boating on the Chattooga River. It also contains information on data collected regarding boating uses on the river since 1990.

These actions are being proposed at this time because:

- Public meetings and comments have demonstrated a significant level of interest in the issues surrounding river management.
- Proposing and analyzing these actions separately from the more broad scale Forest Plan Revision for the Sumter National Forest will allow a more focused consideration of the issues and alternatives.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSAL

The current 1985 Forest Plan contains the following inadequacies with respect to boating on the Chattooga River:

1. The Forest Plan established daily limits for both guided and self-guided boating. While guided use is enforced through the administration of special-use permits, those limits associated with self-guided boaters have never been enforced. Current use exceeds Forest Plan allocations for self-guided boaters on some days – primarily in Section IV and on weekends during high-use seasons (See Graph D-2 in Appendix D). Most people have commented that these current use levels and experiences are acceptable. It is generally accepted that some of the current Forest Plan allocations are low, and that there is room for an increase in self-guided boater use on some days. The existing Forest Plan needs to be changed to accommodate existing self-guided boater demand.
2. Increased flexibility is needed within existing use allocations to enable river outfitters to effectively and economically provide the services sought by the guided public. Without these, customer service could suffer. Examples include

the flexibility to experience the river in a variety of crafts at all water levels as is already enjoyed by the self-guided public and to accommodate various trip sizes under existing daily use limits.

3. The Forest Plan allows only one permit for the shuttling of self-guided boaters to and from the river. This situation does not allow for competition that generally facilitates better service to the public. The Forest Plan should be changed to authorize a minimum of two shuttle permits.

RECREATIONAL BOATING USE ON THE CHATTOOGA WILD AND SCENIC RIVER

PROPOSED AMENDMENT #14

The amendment will be analyzed and decided separately from the Forest Plan revision efforts. The decision to be made will be whether or not to allow these proposed changes to the management of recreational boating on the Chattooga River, or whether some modifications to the proposal are needed to respond to public issues.

Self-Guided Boating

The proposed amendment would:

1. In Section III, establish year-round allocations for self-guided use at all water levels at 175 people per weekend day and at 125 people per weekday, holidays included. Hourly capacities would be dropped (boaters and groups per hour). See Table B-1 in Appendix B to see how this would compare to current allocations.
2. In Section IV, increase year-round allocations for self-guided use at all water levels to 160 people per weekend day and to 75 people per weekday, holidays included. Hourly capacities would be dropped (boaters and groups per hour). See Table B-2 in Appendix B to see how this would compare to current allocations.
3. Establish a procedure for the enforcement of self-guided use allocations in Sections III and IV should use increase substantially in the future.

Specifically, in Section III between April 1 and August 30, should daily self-guided use ever reach 175 people per weekend day for 20 weekend days (roughly half of the time), reservations would be required for self-guided boaters (including shuttled boaters) on Section III on weekends during those months beginning the following year. Similarly, should daily self-guided use ever reach 125 people per weekday for 50 weekdays (roughly half of the time), reservations would be required for self-guided boaters (including shuttled boaters) on Section III on weekdays during those months beginning the following year.

Since 1996, self-guided use between April 1 and August 31 in Section III has reached 175 people per weekend day for an average of 4 days/year and 125 people per weekday for an average of 0 days/year.

In Section IV between April 1 and August 30, should daily self-guided use ever reach 160 people per weekend day for 20 weekend days (roughly half of the time), reservations would be required for self-guided boaters (including shuttled boaters) on Section IV on weekends during those months beginning the following year. Similarly, should daily self-guided use ever reach 75 people per weekday for 50 weekdays (roughly half of the time), reservations would be required for self-guided boaters (including shuttled boaters) on Section IV on weekdays during those months beginning the following year.

Since 1996, self-guided use between April 1 and August 31 in Section IV has reached 160 people per weekend day for an average of 2 days/year and 75 people per weekday for an average of 4 days/year.

Whatever reservation system is used, the goal is for them to be made on a first come-first served basis and be available on a same day basis—if possible—to allow boaters to respond to changing water conditions that can occur daily. A fee would be required for each reservation.

4. Allow more than one shuttle permit.

Guided Boating

The proposed amendment would:

1. Change the definition of rafts to include other craft such as inflatable kayaks.
2. On inflatable raft trips at water levels at or above approximately 1 foot at the Highway 76 gauge, allow the use of up to 12 craft on 3 trips per day.
3. Allow inflatable raft trips in Sections III and IV to be moved to Sections I or II.
4. On Section III inflatable raft trips at low water levels (below approximately one foot at the Highway 76 gauge), allow the use of up to twelve craft.
5. Allow inflatable raft trips to exceed 30 clients, as long as each trip does not exceed 40 total and as long as the total number of clients served per section and per day does not exceed the current daily limits for clients.
6. Allow the use of up to two inflatable kayaks on guided hardboat trips (previously referred to as clinics).

7. Allow a guided hardboat trip in Section IV in the place of a scheduled Section IV guided inflatable trip.

APPENDIX A

CURRENT FOREST PLAN DIRECTION FOR GUIDED BOATING USE

Inflatable Raft Trips

The following tables summarize the current Forest Plan Direction pertaining to guided raft and instructional clinic use on the Chattooga River. *Low* water levels are defined as those below approximately one foot on the Highway 76 gauge, *moderate* levels are from approximately 1 - 2.5 feet, *high* levels are from approximately 2.5 - 3 feet, and *very high* levels are those above approximately 3 feet.

TABLE A - 1 CURRENT GUIDED RAFTING ALLOCATIONS SECTION III					
Water Levels	Capacity Permitted	May – September		October - April	
		Weekdays	Weekends*	Weekdays	Weekends*
Low	Trips/day	0	0	0	0
	People/day+	0	0	0	0
Moderate	Trips/day	7	4	7	4
	People/day+	280	160	280	160
High	Trips/day	7	4	7	4
	People/day+	280	160	280	160
Very High Denominator indicates portion of trips allowed from Hwy 28 to Earl's or Sandy Ford	Trips/day	13/3	8/3	13/3	9/3
	People/day+	520	320	520	360

* Includes Holidays

+ Includes Guides

TABLE A - 2
CURRENT GUIDED RAFTING ALLOCATIONS
SECTION IV

Water Levels	Capacity Permitted	May – September		October - April	
		Weekdays	Weekends*	Weekdays	Weekends*
Low <small>Denominator indicates portion of trips allowed in Five Falls</small>	Trips/day	9/6	8/4	9/6	9/5
	People/day+	360	320	360	360
Moderate	Trips/day	6	4	6	5
	People/day+	240	160	240	200
High <small>These trips may put in at Thrift's Ferry</small>	Trips/day	6	4	6	5
	People/day+	240	160	240	200
Very High	Trips/day	0	0	0	0
	People/day+	0	0	0	0

* Includes Holidays

+ Includes Guides

- ❑ Allocations for guided, inflatable raft trips are currently limited to Sections II, III, and IV of the river only.
- ❑ A raft is defined as capable of holding 4-6 people, over 4 feet wide, and not including the inflatable kayaks.
- ❑ Guided, inflatable raft trips are limited to 40 people per trip consisting of no more than 30 paying guests per trip.
- ❑ No more than seven client-carrying rafts are allowed on guided, inflatable raft trips.
- ❑ Some Section III trips are permitted to take out at Woodall Shoals, which is approximately 2 miles below the Highway 76 bridge.
- ❑ In the past we have referred to the two different kinds of commercial use permits on the Chattooga as rafting permits and instructional permits or “clinics.” Because both the rafting and the instructional clinics involve some level of instruction and guiding, we are now referring to commercial raft use as guided inflatable use, and instructional clinics as guided hardboat trips. We believe these definitions better reflect what these trips really are.

Instructional Canoe/Kayak (Hardboat) Clinics

Instructional clinics are for the training of individuals in white water skills associated with hardboats, primarily on short river segments. They are not intended as guided float trips employing rafts.

TABLE A - 3 CURRENT CLINIC USE ALLOCATIONS			
Day of the Week	Capacity Permitted	River Section	
		I/II	III
Weekdays	Trips/week	20	28
	Trips/day	6	7
Weekends	Trips/day	2	

No more than five clinic permits (canoe and kayak) are currently permitted, and;

- Clinics are restricted to the portions of river above the Highway 76 Bridge (sections I, II, and III).
- A limited number of clinics may be authorized by the operating plan to use the one or two person inflatable crafts (inflatable canoe/kayak). These are only permitted on weekdays and above Sandy Ford. Their use can only be a percentage of the entire trip, as they are intended to provide a training opportunity for some members of the clinic who lack the skill to safely handle a hard shell canoe or kayak. However these are not to become float trips dominated by inflatables.
- Total number of clinics by all companies combined cannot exceed two clinics per section/day on weekend days.
- Clinics are restricted to no more than 24 people per trip and no more than 12 craft.

APPENDIX B

CURRENT FOREST PLAN DIRECTION FOR SELF-GUIDED BOATING USE

TABLE B - 1 CURRENT SELF-GUIDED BOATING USE ALLOCATIONS SECTION III						
Capacity Permitted	May 1 – Sept 30		Mar 20 – Apr 30, Oct 1 – Oct 31		Nov 1 – Mar 19	
	Weekdays	Weekends	Weekdays	Weekends	Weekdays	Weekends
Boaters/day	125	175	100	135	60	60
Boaters/hour	40	50	30	40	30	30
Groups/hour	4	6	3	4	3	3

TABLE B - 2 CURRENT SELF-GUIDED BOATING USE ALLOCATIONS SECTION IV						
Capacity Permitted	May 1 – Sept 30		Mar 20 – Apr 30, Oct 1 – Oct 31		Nov 1 – Mar 19	
	Weekdays	Weekends	Weekdays	Weekends	Weekdays	Weekends
Boaters/day	50	80	50	60	40	40
Boaters/hour	20	30	20	20	20	20
Groups/hour	3	4	3	3	2	2

- ☐ Self-guided boaters are asked, but not required, to limit group size to no more than 12 boats per group.
- ☐ Self-guided boaters are limited to no more than 24 boaters per trip.

Shuttle of Self-Guided Boaters

A single, long-term shuttle service is allowed to meet the needs of the public desiring the transportation of themselves and/or equipment to and/or from river access locations.

APPENDIX C

CURRENT FOREST PLAN DIRECTION FOR BOTH GUIDED AND SELF-GUIDED BOATING USE

Self-Guided And Guided Raft Allocations Compared

Tables C-1 and C-2 show the maximum number of boaters allowed for both guided raft and self-guided boaters in Sections III and IV respectively at different times of the year and at various water levels. Once again, *low* water levels are defined as those below approximately one foot on the Highway 76 gauge, *moderate* levels are from approximately 1 - 2.5 feet, *high* levels are from approximately 2.5 - 3 feet, and *very high* levels are those above approximately 3 feet.

TABLE C - 1 CURRENT DAILY ALLOCATION MAXIMUMS GUIDED RAFTING AND SELF-GUIDED BOATING Section III People per day					
Water Levels	Capacity Permitted	May – September		October - April	
		Weekdays	Weekends*	Weekdays	Weekends*
Low	Guided+	0	0	0	0
	Self-Guided	125	175	100	135
Moderate	Guided+	280	160	280	160
	Self-Guided	125	175	100	135
High	Guided+	280	160	280	160
	Self-Guided	125	175	100	135
Very High	Guided+	520	320	520	360
	Self-Guided	125	175	100	135

* Includes Holidays

+ Includes Guides

TABLE C - 2 CURRENT DAILY ALLOCATION MAXIMUMS GUIDED RAFTING AND SELF-GUIDED BOATING Section IV People per day					
Water Levels	Capacity Permitted	May – September		October - April	
		Weekdays	Weekends*	Weekdays	Weekends*
Low	Guided+	360	320	360	360
	Self-Guided	50	80	50	60
Moderate	Guided+	240	160	240	200
	Self-Guided	50	80	50	60
High	Guided+	240	160	240	200
	Self-Guided	50	80	50	60
Very High	Guided+	0	0	0	0
	Self-Guided	50	80	50	60

* Includes Holidays

+ Includes Guides

Table C-3 shows the maximum number of boaters allowed for both guided raft and self-guided boaters in Sections III and IV combined at different times of the year and at various water levels.

TABLE C - 3 CURRENT DAILY ALLOCATION MAXIMUMS GUIDED RAFTING AND SELF-GUIDED BOATING (Sections III and IV Combined) People per day					
Water Levels	Capacity Permitted	May – September		October - April	
		Weekdays	Weekends*	Weekdays	Weekends*
Low	Guided+	360	320	360	360
	Self-Guided	175	255	150	195
Moderate	Guided+	520	320	520	360
	Self-Guided	175	255	150	195
High	Guided+	520	320	520	360
	Self-Guided	175	255	150	195
Very High	Guided+	520	320	520	360
	Self-Guided	175	255	150	195

* Includes Holidays

+ Includes Guides

APPENDIX D

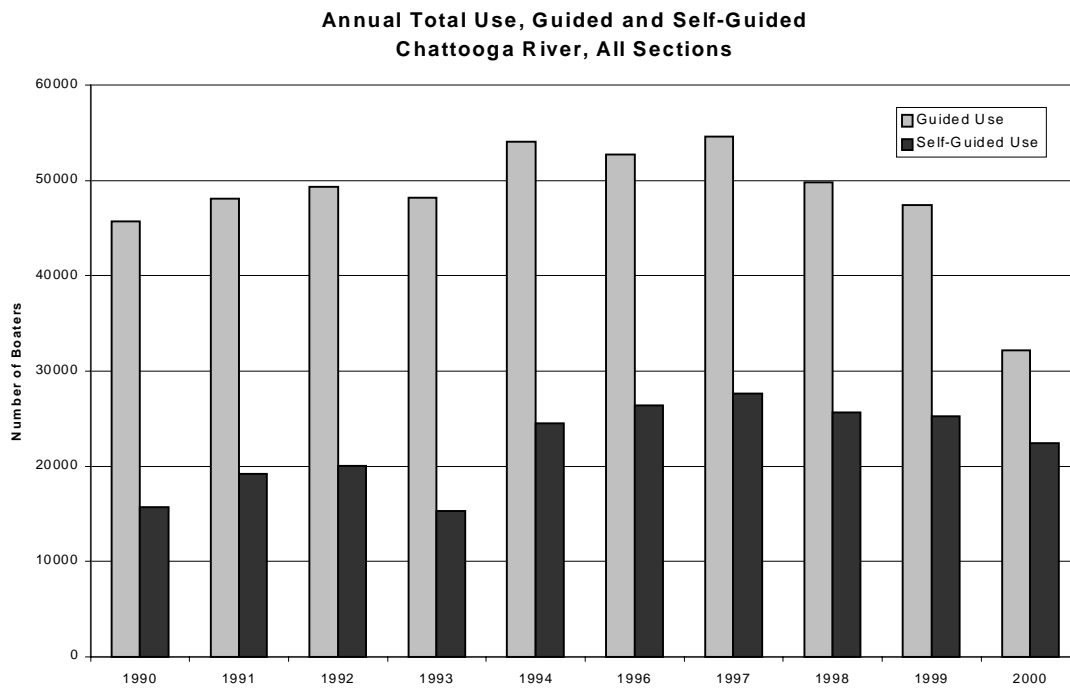
USE DATA

Data collected from the self-registration permit system and through the administration of the Outfitter/Guide permits shows the following about boating uses on the river since 1990. The data for 1995 is not available.

Annual Total Use, Self-Guided and Guided Raft

Graph D-1 shows the annual totals for all self-guided boaters and guided boaters on all sections of the river combined since 1990.

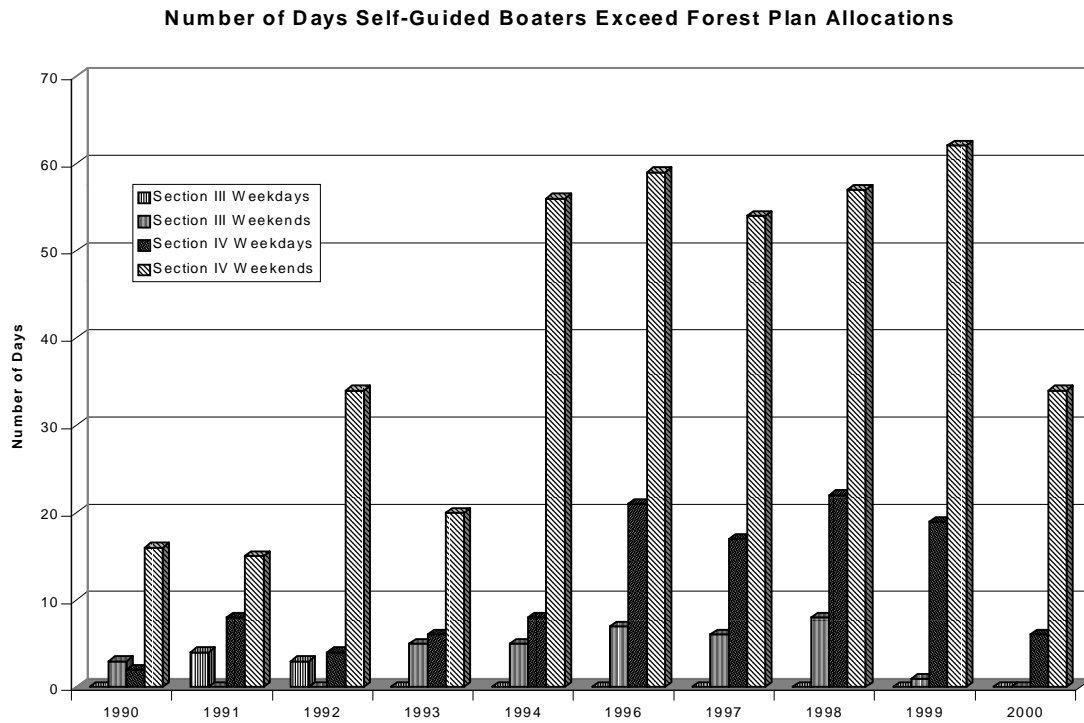
Graph D-1



Self-Guided Use Has Exceeded 1985 Forest Plan Allocations

Graph D-2 shows the total number of days that self-guided use has exceeded the maximum daily allocations identified in the 1985 Forest Plan for Sections III and IV since 1990.

Graph D-2

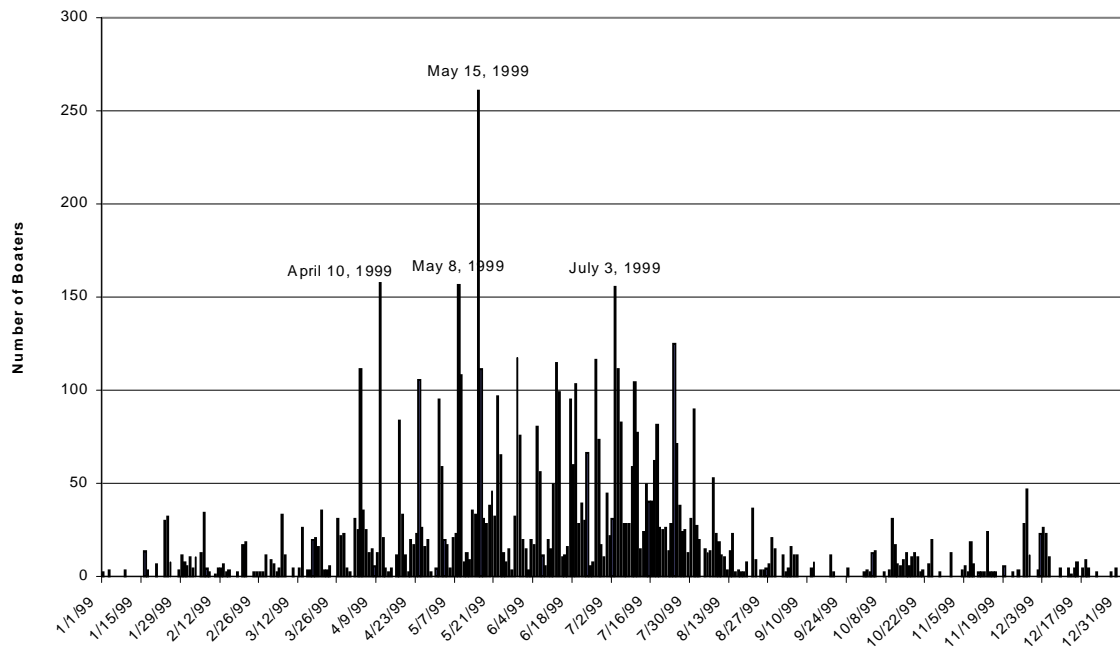


Distribution of Self-Guided Boater Use, 1999

Graphs D-3 and D-4 show the daily totals for self-guided boaters in Sections III and IV respectively during the year 1999.

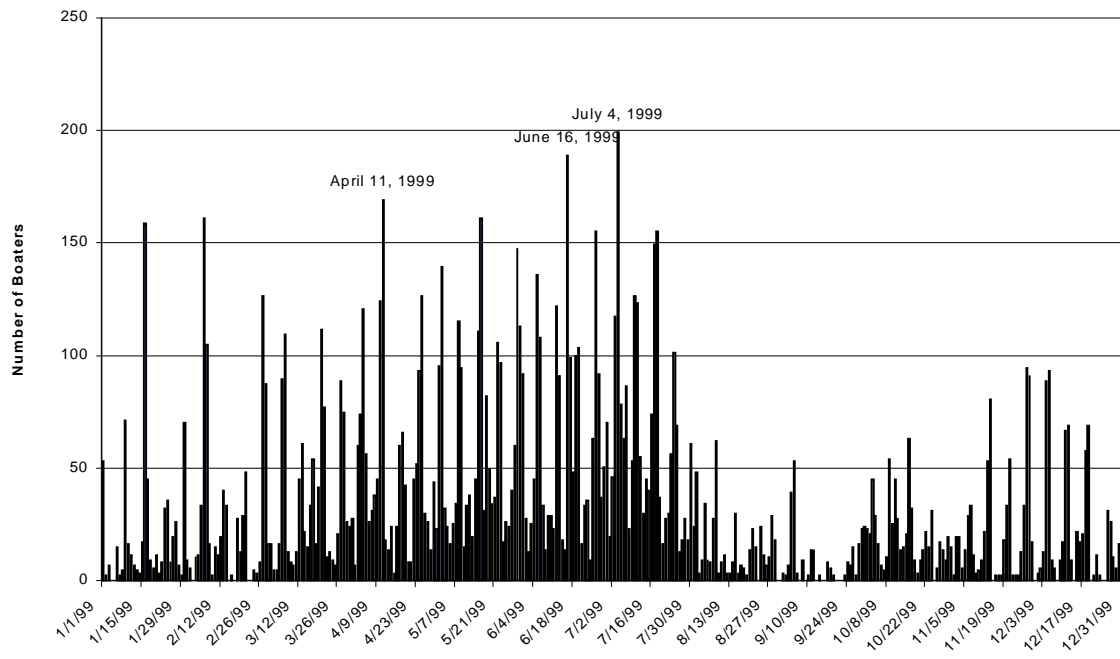
Graph D-3

**Self-Guided Boaters in Section III of Chattooga River
1999**



Graph D-4

**Self-Guided Boaters in Section IV of Chattooga River
1999**

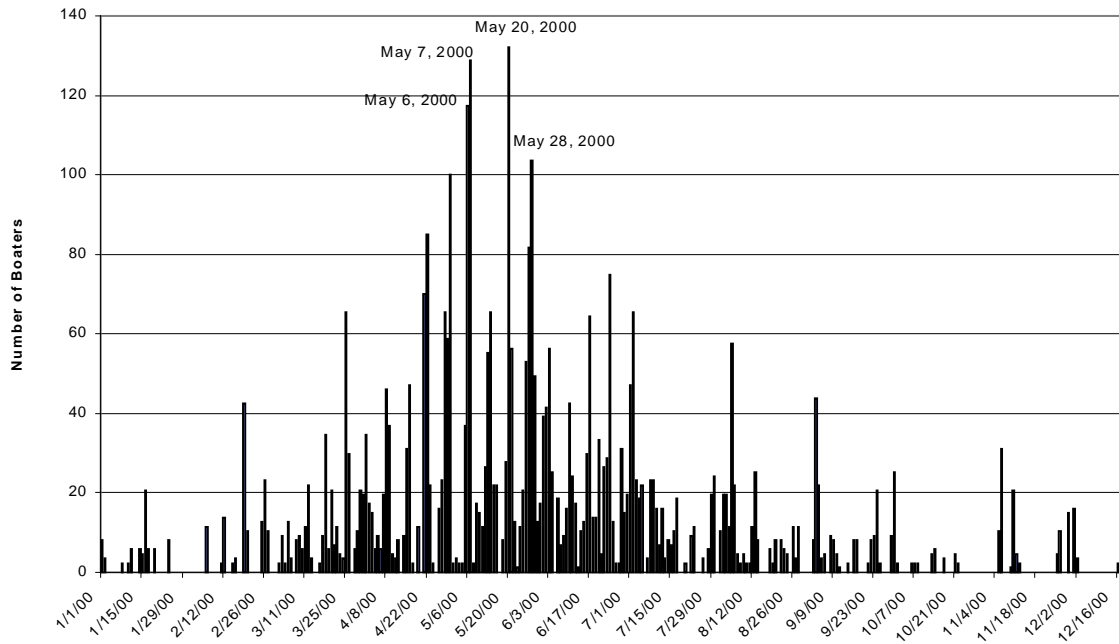


Distribution of Self-Guided Boater Use, 2000

Graphs D-5 and D-6 show the daily totals for self-guided boaters in Sections III and IV respectively during the year 2000.

Graph D-5

**Self-Guided Boaters in Section III of Chattooga River
2000**



Graph D-6

**Self-Guided Boaters in Section IV of Chattooga River
2000**

