



Meeting Minutes

8/23/02 Meeting of the Sumter Forest Plan Revision Team with American Whitewater (AW) Representatives

Date Issued: September 16, 2002, reissued with corrections October 16, 2002

Attendance:

Tony White	USFS
John Cleeves	USFS
Robbin Cooper	USFS
Bill Hansen	USFS
Joe Robles	USFS
Mike Crane	USFS
Don Kinser	American Whitewater
Kevin Colburn	American Whitewater
Charlene Thompson	American Whitewater

Copies:

All Attending	
Jerome Thomas	USFS
Jason Robertson	AW

Prepared by:

Don Kinser	AW
Kevin Colburn	AW

The meeting convened at 11:00 AM in the USFS' Columbia SC offices. The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:00 PM. The meeting covered the following information and discussion:

- 1. Introductions:** The entire planning team reports to Tony White. John Cleeves leads the overall planning team effort. John Cleeves, Robbin Cooper and Bill Hansen are core planning team members. Joe Robles, Robin Cooper and Mike Crane are members of the river planning team subcommittee.

Kevin Colburn is a fulltime AW staff member based in Asheville, NC. Don Kinser is a volunteer regional coordinator for AW focused on the Chattooga River Watershed. He is the key contact person regarding issues surrounding the Chattooga river. Charlene Thompson is a volunteer regional coordinator who lives in Columbia and is also involved in AW's Chattooga advocacy efforts. Correspondence with AW regarding the Sumter plan should be directed to both Don Kinser and Kevin Colburn.

- 2. Agenda Set (see attached)**

3. **History of the Access Closure Above Highway 28.** Don Kinser had recently spent a great deal of time reading the results of a FOIA request that AW made of the USFS and shared the results of that research with the group. He began by saying that “It is a mystery how it happened” referring to the closure of the river above Highway 28. He then laid out the following timeline based on specific documents received from the USFS:

1968 – Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is enacted and recommends the Chattooga for consideration as a designated river under the act.

1970 – A document is published by the USFS that requests that the Chattooga be designated as a Wild and Scenic River. This document clearly envisions boating above Highway 28.

1971 – The Wild and Scenic Study Report for the Chattooga is published. The Report proposes access sites and portage trails for paddling above Highway 28.

1974 - Congress officially designates the Chattooga a Wild and Scenic River. The first management plan for the river is published which suggests that boating above Highway 28 should be “discouraged.”

1975 – 15 drownings on the Chattooga during the past few years, none of which were above Highway 28 lead to increased regulation and enforcement in 1976.

1976 – The first district-wide river management plan is published, which prohibited boating above Highway 28.

1980’s – Commercial boating interests lobby heavily for changes on lower river. Justification for closure of headwaters somehow changes from safety concerns to the provision for quality fishing. No record of any public interest or involvement regarding boating access above Highway 28.

1990’s – USFS begins meeting with private boaters, issue of access above Highway 28 first brought forward by AW in 1995.

Discussion - The group then openly discussed Don’s presentation. No one in the room had any further information about how the Study Plan recommendations were considered or about how the Management Plan decisions were made other than what information appears in the documentation. AW also pointed out that this is the only stretch of river in any USFS lands in the country where boating is prohibited.

Mike Crane noted that the 1985 Forest Plan complied with NEPA requirements and that the river closure was part of the 1985 Plan. AW pointed out that the issue of boating in the headwaters was never analyzed in the 1985 Plan EIS.

Don and Kevin responded that this was likely because (i) the USFS’ enforcement effort was not a significant issue for the few boaters that wanted to access the

headwaters, (ii) creek-boating had yet to rise in popularity and creek-boating equipment was still being developed and (iii) the paddling community was loosely organized and not paying attention at the time.

AW asked about the enforcement of the boating ban and how many citations had been written over the years. Mike Crane stated that he did not know the number of citations that have been written.

Mike Crane and John Cleaves then made the point that despite the uncertain origin of the boating ban and lack of public comment at the time (1976), the 1985 plan legally embedded it in the forest plan and that is now the baseline for future analysis.

We discussed water quality on Stekoa Creek. This issue will need to be addressed with the Tallulah District since the entire Stekoa watershed lies within that district. Mike Crane suggested we contact Dave Jensen, the Tallulah District Ranger.

4. **AW's Future Desired Condition:** Kevin and Don stated simply that AW wants the ability to paddle the Chattooga River above Highway 28 as soon as possible regardless of water level. We expect a fair NEPA analysis of the boating ban and feel confident there is no justification to the current closure. AW no longer supports any rule for access that is dependent on the US 76 gauge reading. This is unnecessary since use will be self-regulating and runnable flows are dependent on where the rain falls as well as the level at US 76. AW expressed their desire for little or no capital improvements to the access points and their expectation of generally low use levels on the upper reaches of the river.
5. **Moving Forward:** The group then discussed how the Agency would address AW's request during the forest plan revision process.

AW stated their desire to see the "Rolling Alternative" modified to include boating above Highway 28 because this will become the "Proposed Alternative" in the pending EIS for the forest plan. The USFS stated they were uncomfortable changing the "Rolling Alternative" and assured AW they would analyze lifting the ban on boating above Highway 28 in another alternative within the EIS.

They assured AW that such an alternative would be given equal consideration and analysis as the "Rolling Alternative". AW accepted that this was a positive step.

AW then offered their assistance as whitewater recreation experts by providing trip reports from boaters familiar with the headwaters and other information on potential use such as access points, reference streams, useable flow ranges and user numbers. Issues such as hazards, camping, and human waste issues were also briefly discussed.

An anticipated timeline was presented by the USFS for the forest plan revision process and how it will move forward:

September 2002 – USFS will send AW a letter requesting specific information regarding paddling above Highway 28 and AW responds.

October 2002 – USFS internally releases the Draft EIS.

January 2003 – Draft EIS is released to the public with an alternative that proposes lifting the ban on boating above Highway 28.

Spring 2003 – 120-day comment period on the Draft EIS.

January 2004 – Record of Decision published.

Spring 2004 – Appeals process possible, and boating could begin.

6. **Amendment 14:** We briefly discussed the upcoming decision regarding Amendment 14 to the existing forest plan. AW expressed their concern regarding a number of issues in Amendment 14 including (i) the proposed increase in shuttle permits and the agency's facilitation of a rental industry on the river, (ii) reservations systems for private or self guided boaters, (iii) increased commercialization of the river, (iv) the fact that shuttled "ducky" rental customers should count against the commercial use allocations and (v) if crowding on the river becomes a problem then the restrictions and reductions in use should come out of commercial or guided user allocations which far exceed private or self guided use.

The Agency indicated a decision notice had been signed and would be published within the next few weeks or so and the final decision reflects several changes that responded to public input during the comment periods. The final decision was basically alternative 4 (the "preferred alternative") with the following changes: (i) no more than 2 shuttle permits would be authorized, (ii) Holiday would be treated like weekend days for self guided user allocations, (iii) self guided use would have to hit trigger levels for 2 consecutive years rather than a single year before a reservation system would be implemented, and (iv) shuttled self guided use could not exceed 30% of the total self guided user allocation.

AW acknowledged that favorable alterations have been made, but feels there are still some areas that require further consideration.

7. **Wrapping Up:** American Whitewater thanked the USFS planning team for agreeing to analyze the boating ban on the headwaters of the Chattooga for the first time since its enactment over 25 years ago. The USFS thanked AW for coming to the meeting and both groups left with assignments to move the process forward in a collaborative fashion.

If there are any corrections or additions to these minutes please notify Don Kinser in writing within a reasonable period of time.



Discussions on Chattooga River Management and headwaters boating access.

Meeting date and time: August 23, 2002 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM

Meeting Location:

**USFS Office
4931 Broad River Road
Columbia, South Carolina 29212-3530**

Invited: John Cleeves, USFS
Mike Crane, USFS
Robin Cooper, USFS
Joe Robles, USFS
Kevin Colburn, AW Eastern Access Associate,
Don Kinser, AW Regional Coordinator
Charlene Thompson, AW Regional Coordinator

----- Agenda Topics -----

Review agency's management history leading to river closure above Highway 28. This review will help us all look at the problem in a similar context and understand the history of the river closure.	11:00 – 11:45
AW to present thier future desired condition for the river above Highway 28	11:45 – noon
Break for lunch	Noon - 1:00 PM
Discuss areas where AW can help with analysis	1:00 – 1:30
Discuss other important river management issues including Amendment 14.	1:30 – 2:00

Other Information
