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Mr. Doug Adams  
Rabun Chapter Trout Unlimited  
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Dear Mr. Adams and Tightlines Readers,

Across the country, AW and boaters collaborate with Trout Unlimited and the angling community on protecting and restoring headwater streams. We share interests, funding, public comments, podiums, courtroom benches, and an undeniably deep and wonderful love of rivers. Our missions are nearly identical. Yet, on the Chattooga we appear to differ.

By participating in the Friends of the Chattooga you have, perhaps unknowingly, joined a group of people with interests counter to our collective interests as river recreationists – and river conservationists. They are advocating for management actions that will adversely impact anglers as much as boaters.

They are advocating that the public has no right to boat, fish, wade, swim, or otherwise enjoy Wild and Scenic Rivers as they flow through private lands. The WSR Act gives the USFS the ability and mandate to protect the recreational, scenic, and ecological values of the uppermost 1.7 miles of the Chattooga – yet they want that section to remain off limits and unprotected. Surely that is not what you want. The USFS cannot even set foot on that “protected” stretch of river, let alone manage it. Can’t we work together to truly protect that reach?

North Carolina law supports the right of the public to fish, wade, and paddle in any river that is capable of being paddled in a kayak – yet they want the law interpreted in a way that eliminates those rights on headwater streams. Do you want to lose access to so many streams? Can’t we share a commitment to strong navigability laws that protect our rights to float and fish?

By opposing our efforts to be allowed on the upper Chattooga, you are advocating that the USFS can ban a wilderness compliant use with no basis: an admitted violation of the Wilderness Act and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. If they can do this to paddlers, they can do it to anglers. Do you really feel that these Acts should be violated or changed? Can’t we agree that wilderness compliant uses should not be limited unless there is a documented justification for limits? Surely you would rather have the river open to all than to have time or seasonal restrictions on angling.

Can you imagine your reaction if a study of fishing on a portion of a river was undertaken while no fishing was allowed there? Imagine a study that tried to predict the number and types of fish and the quality of fishing on one stretch of a river based solely on studies of fish in another river somewhere distant from the one under study.

You are stating publicly that boating and angling cannot coexist on the same streams at the same times. How can we not both lose if this belief is accepted by the USFS? Which rivers will you give up, which sections of the Chattooga, which months on the headwaters? Can't we agree that we can share rivers, and that the rivers need all the stewards they can get?

We have seen our interests, actions, and proposals misconstrued in Tightlines and in other advocacy efforts. We are not sure why this is the case, but we would like to respond to a few things that may help you see our interests more clearly.

1. We are not requesting commercial use on the Headwaters and none is likely to occur, since there is no interest in it from the outfitters who operate on the river and a separate permitting process could easily deny any requests.
2. Tubing use will presumably not occur on the Chattooga Headwaters, since the USFS will be consistent in its requirements for suitable whitewater craft – which is OK with us.
3. We are asking for “unlimited paddling” because that must be the starting point for management of wilderness compliant uses prior to any documented impacts, and because we are certain no impacts will occur. Indeed, all other rivers in the region are managed for “unlimited non-commercial paddling” and all other uses on the Headwater are “unlimited.” We support limits on rivers when justified and applied equitably, and the same may be true on the Chattooga upon completion of the capacity analysis
4. Use by boaters on all rivers similar to the Headwaters is very low, and we expect the same to be true on the Headwaters. We are literally talking about a few small groups running the river on the few days when flow conditions are optimal. The vast majority of days there will be no use by paddlers.
5. The Wilderness Act explicitly supports the use of kayaks, canoes, and rafts in Wilderness Areas. As Aldo Leopold wrote in “Wilderness” from A Sand County Almanac in 1949, *“Wilderness Areas are first of all a series of sanctuaries for the primitive arts of wilderness travel, especially canoeing and packing.”* Many anglers share our love of floating Wilderness Rivers, and both our uses are integral parts of the Wilderness experience.
6. Kayaks, canoes, and rafts belong on Wild and Scenic Rivers. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act specifically requires agencies to protect and enhance recreational uses recognized as valuable during the designation process. Paddling was formally recognized by congress as a public value associated with the upper Chattooga (as was angling).

7. Our lawsuit is neither the result of impatience or irresponsibility. We could have filed immediately after the Secretary's decision, which wrongly reverted to a prior floating ban, but we did not. Paddlers waited to file their suit until the USFS announced that they would continue to discriminate against paddlers throughout the study period.

Maintaining the ban undercuts the validity of the study and all chances for sound future management. Litigation was the paddlers' last resort. The lawsuit is needed to remedy a current illegal situation, and form the basis for a fair user capacity analysis and future management.

8. Lets be clear, the river is not zoned for 2/3 boating use and 1/3 non-boating use. Anglers, hikers, swimmers, and other backcountry users can access and enjoy the entire Wild and Scenic Chattooga River. Only boaters are restricted. An unjustified ban on boating is not zoning – it is illegal and discriminatory management.

9. The boating ban has not “worked”. The illegal ban has denied a generation of Americans their right to enjoy and experience floating the Wild and Scenic upper Chattooga River, including the section flowing through a designated Wilderness Area set aside for uses like paddling. The ban has fractured the recreational and environmental community, and diverted massive resources away from environmental initiatives on the Chattooga. The ban has accomplished nothing but negative things. It has not worked and is not working today.

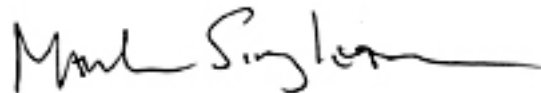
10. Our lawsuit will not short-circuit the User Capacity Analysis, it will strengthen it. Only with all appropriate uses present and with the same levels of restrictions can a capacity analysis fulfill the functions expected of the analysis. An illegal baseline for the analysis can only lead to future successful challenges to the USFS record. We don't want to be fighting this issue for the next decade; we want a good study we can all trust. We didn't ask for it, but we support the User Capacity Analysis as a potential great leap forward in the management of the Chattooga.

We are asking only for responsible, legal, and nationally consistent river management. This is good for anglers, paddlers, and all Americans that love rivers. AW and TU gave a talk together at a National Park Service Conference 2 years ago, the thesis of which was: “when anglers and boaters collaborate the river wins, when we conflict the river loses.” This is certainly the case on the Chattooga.

Sincerely,



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