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Title: Executive Director

Comments:

The Chattooga Conservancy respectfully submits these comments concerning project 40GAOA REC-081202-22-2 AP Chattooga River Corridor Master Planning on the USFS proposed list of deferred maintenance projects for FY 2022.

The Chattooga Conservancy is a non-profit conservation organization working 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. The Chattooga Conservancy has been active since 1994, and has an organizational interest in the proper and lawful management of public lands within the Chattooga River watershed, including the Sumter, Nantahala and Chattahoochee National Forests. We represent approximately 600 total members that support the Chattooga Conservancy's work, and our members, staff, and board members participate in a wide range of activities within the Chattooga River corridor and the surrounding national forest lands. Our members seek solitude, forested scenery, old growth stands, clean water, and opportunities for hiking, fishing, horseback riding, paddling, rafting, and photographing experiences within the Chattooga River corridor.

We are requesting that the Andrew Pickens (AP) Ranger District include the Chattooga Conservancy as a partner in their Chattooga River Corridor Master Planning effort. Our work in the watershed through the last 26+ years has provided us with detailed knowledge of the river corridor, its current and historical management, and the many challenges associated with recreation and public access. We have successfully worked in partnership with the AP District on other collaborative projects, including the ongoing Native River Cane Restoration Project near the Russell Bridge in Mountain Rest, SC. As the only organization dedicated solely to protecting the Chattooga River watershed, representing hundreds of citizens with vested interest in the management of the river corridor and surrounding national forests, we are well-positioned to provide valuable input in the development of this plan on behalf of our members. We would welcome the opportunity to partner with the AP District on this project.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the USFS's proposed list of deferred maintenance projects for FY 2022. We look forward to continued dialogue about the AP Chattooga River Corridor Master Planning project.