

News Release



Changes for the Cohutta Wilderness

USDA Forest Service
Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest



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Armuchee-Cohutta Ranger District
Chattahoochee National Forest
3941 Highway 76
Chatsworth, GA

Release: Immediate
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The U.S. Forest Service in Chatsworth is announcing big changes for the Cohutta Wilderness. The Cohutta Wilderness is a wilderness loved to death. The largest National Forest wilderness in the southeast is also one of the most heavily visited ones in the nation. "Overuse from visitors is causing resource impacts that are threatening the very qualities that made this area worthy of wilderness designation," said Larry Thomas, Wilderness Manager for the Armuchee-Cohutta Ranger District. "Changes in the management of the Cohutta are necessary to reverse this trend to preserve the wilderness environment and provide future generations with the enjoyment of a true wilderness experience."

A new wilderness management plan was developed using a process called the "Limits of Acceptable Change" (LAC). "Through this process we have first determined what are desired natural and social conditions and then have identified actions to correct unacceptable conditions," stated Thomas. A citizen-led task force was formed from a diverse group of wilderness users representing a range of values and opinions from hunters and fishers to backpackers and equestrians. "These volunteers worked through the year-long LAC planning process. Based on their recommendations, actions to limit use are being applied to reduce human impacts on the natural resources and restore the wilderness environment," added Thomas.

An example of limitations on use would be the number of people allowed in a group. Sometime in the near future, there will be a regulation that groups can be no larger than 12 hikers or 8 equestrians. Also, camping only in designated campsites along the Jacks and Conasauga rivers will become part of the new wilderness management plan. Other limitations will include how close campsites can be to streams, size of campsites, and only allowing one fire ring per campsite.

In the most pristine areas of the wilderness away from any trails, limitations on use are even more restrictive. In the future, permits may be required for individuals and groups, not to regulate numbers but to educate visitors and keep track of them. "These are just a few of the changes planned for the way we take care of the Cohutta Wilderness," stated Thomas.

The area around Beech Bottoms and the Jacks River Falls will see the most significant limitations on use due to the large amount of resource damage people cause. Beginning June 1, 2006, new regulations in place for this area include:

1. Day-use only is allowed. Overnight camping is prohibited within the Jacks River Falls area except at designated campsites in the Beech Bottom area which can be used from November 1

thru March 31. [View a vicinity map with a link to a local site map.](#)

2. There is a total campfire ban.
3. Alcoholic beverages are prohibited to reduce the severe amount of littering.

"Before your next visit to the Cohutta Wilderness, learn the rules that apply to the area you plan to visit and then use new ways of experiencing the wilderness. Practice "Leave No Trace" techniques," stated Thomas.

All the details of implementing the new wilderness plan are available from the Forest Service office at 3941 Highway 76 in Chatsworth. You may call 706-695-6736 or stop by Monday thru Friday from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm. You may also visit our web site, www.fs.fed.us/conf/ to learn more about these changes as well as any other information about the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.

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