Mark Singleton
American Whitewater
PO BOX 1540
Cullowhee, NC 28723

RE: Access to Catoosa Wildlife Management Area

Mr. Singleton,

 I am writing to inform you of the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency’s recent decisions regarding public access to Catoosa Wildlife Management Area. I believe that this decision will affect many recreational paddlers and, as Director of American Whitewater, I am hopeful that you will help me get the message out to those who are impacted.

 Catoosa Wildlife Management Area is a large tract of land owned by the State of Tennessee, under the jurisdiction of the TWRA. TWRA obtained control of the land in the 1950’s and has managed the area for wildlife since that time. The management and maintenance efforts at Catoosa have historically been funded by hunters and anglers through license purchases and associated federal funding. Catoosa is one of the largest and most popular WMAs in the state. It has long been a focus area for TWRA for wildlife restoration including whitetail deer and wild turkey.

 It has recently come to my attention that, in addition to incredible wildlife and hunting opportunities, Catoosa contains a truly special place for whitewater paddlers. I am aware that Daddy’s Creek is considered one of the top whitewater streams in the nation and a sought after destination for whitewater enthusiasts from all over the country. My understanding is the only convenient access to Daddy’s Creek is within the boundaries of Catoosa WMA and that access to the area has historically been limited.

 TWRA would like to provide more access to Daddy’s Creek for paddlers, while balancing those interests with the interests of hunters and TWRA’s interest in maintaining the area and enhancing wildlife populations and habitat. This leads me to our recent decision regarding public access to Catoosa. Effective immediately, Catoosa will be kept open to paddlers during daylight hours throughout the year except for a winter closure period. This change will provide significantly more access for paddlers throughout the months of November, December, March, and April. The winter closure period, which closes the area to all public access, runs from February 1 thru the last Friday in March. The winter closure period allows for a wildlife rest period along with annual maintenance on the area and wild hog trapping efforts. No overnight parking is permitted anywhere on Catoosa WMA.

 There is one caveat to the winter closure period. The TWRA understands the importance and popularity of Daddy’s Creek Go Fast Day. We attempted to work with the paddling community to schedule this event during the winter closure this year. Unfortunately, the weather did not cooperate and the flows were either too high or too low to have the event. It is our intention and commitment to work with the organizers of this event to allow limited special access during the winter closure to provide the maximum opportunity for this event to be successful.

 We are confident that this new approach will allow us to balance the interests of all of the potential user groups at Catoosa WMA. While I hope there are no issues or conflicts between user groups, I believe there are a few things that would help ensure that there are not. I realize your ability to run Daddy’s Creek is rainfall dependent and there are limited opportunities when conditions are right. However, I feel that it would be wise to avoid scheduling large paddling events on big game hunt days, particularly the opening days and weekends. These are times when a large number of hunters will be on the area and the potential for user conflict is the highest. To the extent possible, carpooling to the access point would be helpful to reduce vehicle traffic through the area. This limits any potential disruption of hunters and helps reduce road maintenance costs. By avoiding potential conflicts, I am hopeful that we will curtail any complaints and ensure that we are able to maintain this increased access for all user groups permanently.

 I appreciate your help in getting this message out. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any service whatsoever.

Sincerely,

Chris Richardson

Assistant Director

Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency