



"DeLoach, Joe"

03/05/2009 03:36 PM

To Terry Bowerman <tbowerman@fs.fed.us>,
"tspeaks@fs.fed.us" <tspeaks@fs.fed.us>,
"sshaw@fs.fed.us" <sshaw@fs.fed.us>

cc Morgan Sommerville <[REDACTED]>

bcc

Subject Land Exchange Comments - Unicoi County

[REDACTED]
March 5, 2009

Terry Bowerman, District Ranger
USDA Forest Service, Nolichucky/Unaka Ranger District
4900 Asheville Highway
Greeneville, TN 37743

Cherokee National Forest
Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37312

Dear Terry, Tom, and Susan,

Thanks for the invitation to participate in the February 19 public meeting in Erwin concerning the proposed land swap involving the Rocky Fork Tract. It is a happy moment for mountain land conservation to see this tract preserved. I know that our friends in the Carolina Mountain Club are eager to relocate the Appalachian Trail onto this tract.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the tracts proposed for the land swap. The two near Unicoi will have no bearing on the Appalachian Trail. The Martin Creek tract is visible from a switchback about ¼ mile west of TN Highway 395 leading from Rock Creek Recreation Area to Indian Grave Gap and also from a point about ½ mile Trail north of the Curley Maple Gap Shelter. However, unless the boundaries of that tract are enlarged such that it extends further up Martin Creek, we believe that the impact to the Appalachian Trail will be minimal. We do wish to be informed please of any proposals to enlarge or change the boundaries of the Martin Creek tract.

We have had some concern about the precedent this land swap sets and that future, similar requests may involve lands that would impact the Appalachian Trail. We're also sure this will not be an easy process for the Forest Service to manage. It would have seemed much simpler to have excluded at least part of the Lower Higgins Creek drainage within Rocky Fork from The Conservation Fund's purchase, or to offer that rather than National Forest land for private development. Some of my friends who are waterfall aficionados speak of the pretty but difficult to access waterfalls up Lower Higgins Creek, and maybe those and the habitat they provide render that area more important for preservation than the tracts proposed to be swapped. We do not feel strongly enough about this to oppose the swap, and with the amount of publicity that has been provided we suspect that is the path that will be followed. We wish the Forest Service the best of luck in guiding this process to a conclusion which will facilitate the greater good of preserving Rocky Fork.

Thanks once again for the opportunity to participate in the management of the

Cherokee National Forest, and for your wise management of the Appalachian Trail.

Best Regards,

Joe DeLoach, A. T. Committee Chair
Tennessee Eastman Hiking & Canoeing Club

Copy to Morgan Sommerville, Appalachian Trail Conservancy



Picture (Device Independent Bitmap) 1.jpg

David R
Ferguson/R8/USDAFS
03/09/2009 09:21 AM

To Susan Shaw/R8/USDAFS@FSNOTES
cc
bcc
Subject Fw: Concern RE: Martin's Creek for TCF

Hi Susan, here is another comment from a concerned Unicoi County resident.

Dave

----- Forwarded by David R Ferguson/R8/USDAFS on 03/09/2009 09:18 AM -----



"Robin Cooper"

<[REDACTED]>

03/06/2009 04:17 PM

To <drferguson@fs.fed.us>
cc
Subject Concern RE: Martin's Creek for TCF

My husband and I, and the families in the Martin's Ck area have several concerns that Martin's Creek, if swapped to TCF, will be a poorly conceived arrangement.

If the goal is for development, without adequate assessment of the soils and no immediate future availability of sewer or water lines, the land would be too expensive. The land is so rocky and steep in places that there would be little-to-no chance for putting in septic systems - legally.

We have experienced firsthand of the bitter disappointment brought on by the land swap that affected our most enjoyable local riding spot - Little Mountain in Sciota. It was lost to those of us with riding interests to this type of development.

We are strongly aware of the wildlife that are part of the scenery and thrill at the sight of them in our backyard. Martin's Creek is their main source of water for that 200 acres.

We do not want to see that area lost to development, which is what seems TCF is intent to do.

We will uphold the "value of the visual quality" of our mountains in our backdoor and wish to promote the trail systems throughout the area to share with the public. But we do not wish to sacrifice our forest cover for the "Golden Latitude" seekers. This area must be maintained as a vital, visual ecosystem, like Cades Cove in the Smokies, until we can learn to blend-build and cloak our housing structures into the scenery. NOW THAT IS A VALUABLE GOAL for the VALLEY BEAUTIFUL!

Thanks you for your time!

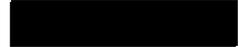
Robin Cooper

Water Pollution - JC

Andrea Csergei /R8/USDAFS

03/11/2009 07:50 AM

To



cc David R Ferguson/R8/USDAFS@FSNOTES, Susan Shaw/R8/USDAFS@FSNOTES

bcc

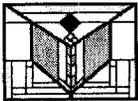
Subject Fw: (OC): (OC): Land Acquisition

Dear Mr. Collins: We have received your email regarding land acquisitions made by the Forest Service in Unicoi County, TN. I have forwarded your message to Mr. Dave Ferguson, our Realty Specialist on the Cherokee National Forest. I realize this is a topic relevant to the residents of Unicoi County.

Mr. Ferguson will be contacting you to discuss this. However, if I can be of any assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Andrea Csergei
Regional Realty Specialist
1720 Peachtree Road, NW
Atlanta, GA 30309
404-347-7310

----- Forwarded by Andrea Csergei/R8/USDAFS on 03/10/2009 11:31 AM -----



Kim Berns/WO/USDAFS

03/10/2009 10:54 AM

To Andrea Csergei/R8/USDAFS@FSNOTES

cc

Subject Fw: (OC): (OC): Land Acquisition

Another inquiry from the FS website.

Kim M. Berns
National Program Leader, Land Adjustments
USDA Forest Service, Washington D.C.
202.205.1047 ofc
202.306.7154 cell
202.205.1604 fax

----- Forwarded by Kim Berns/WO/USDAFS on 03/10/2009 10:54 AM -----

Mailroom WO

Sent by: Nadine Gaddy

03/10/2009 10:21 AM

To Kim Berns/WO/USDAFS@FSNOTES

cc

Subject Re: (OC): (OC): Land Acquisition

olga alvarado



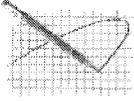
olga alvarado

03/09/2009 08:52 AM

To: Mailroom WO@FSNOTES

cc:

Subject: (OC): (OC): Land Acquisition



<[REDACTED]>

03/05/2009 01:37 PM

Please respond to

[REDACTED]

To: info@fs.fed.us

cc:

Subject: (OC): Land Acquisition

Below is the result of your feedback form. It was submitted on:
Thursday, March 5th, 2009 at 1:37pm.

From: Roger R. Collins <[REDACTED]>
subject: Land Acquisition
comment: Where in your Mission Statement does continuous land acquisition
is one of your goals?.. Where do you get the authority to use our tax dollars
for this purpose? I live in Unicoi County, TN and the Feds already own between
50-60% of real estate creating serious revenue issues for this tiny county.

----- Submission Details -----

Remote Address: [REDACTED]

HTTP User Agent: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



"Morgan Sommerville"

[Redacted]

03/05/2009 04:18 PM

To "Tom Speaks" <tspeaks@fs.fed.us>, "Terry Bowerman" <tbowerman@fs.fed.us>, "Susan Shaw" <sshaw@fs.fed.us>

cc

bcc

Subject Rocky Fork Land Exchange Proposal



APPALACHIAN TRAIL
CONSERVANCY

Join the Journey™

Tom Speaks, Terry Bowerman
Cherokee National Forest
Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37312

Dear Tom and Terry:

This is the response of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) to your request for comments concerning the proposed land exchange in Unicoi County, TN, regarding portions of the Rocky Fork tract owned by The Conservation Fund and proposed Cherokee NF lands, i.e. the Martins Creek, Stone Mountain and Irishman Branch tracts.

ATC is committed to the successful acquisition of the entire Rocky Fork tract by the Cherokee National Forest and State of Tennessee so that all of this superlative property will be in public ownership. As part of the Rocky Fork acquisition process, ATC has also pledged ongoing work with Unicoi County representatives to help them successfully enhance economic development. One way we are doing this is by working with Unicoi County leaders to plan to market federal land in their county, and the A.T. and the Rocky Fork tract, specifically, as desirable destinations for visitors to the county. We are also aware that Unicoi County favors the proposed exchange as a means to derive additional tax revenues through potential private development of the Martins Creek, Stone Mountain and Irishman Branch tracts. ATC certainly sees the value of increasing tax revenues for Unicoi County in helping the County meet obligations such as new school construction.

There appears to be no significant impact to the Appalachian National Scenic Trail from conversion of the Stone Mountain and Irishman Branch tracts to private property, as these tracts are not in the A.T. prescription area or visible from the A.T. The proposed Martins Creek exchange tract is visible from several points along the A.T. with the northern, uppermost portion of Johnson Rock Ridge, i.e. the southwest corner of the proposed Martins Creek exchange tract, the most visible from the A.T.; the southwest corner of the proposed Martins Creek exchange tract touches, but does not appear to be part of, the A.T. Prescription area. Ideally, the portions of the proposed Martins Creek exchange tract on top of Johnson Rock Ridge would be excluded from the exchange due to its visibility from the A.T. but it appears this would result in a difficult to manage "cherry stem" of Cherokee NF land defeating one purpose of the potential exchange, i.e. to improve management efficiency of CNF lands.

ATC will continue to work with all parties to the Rocky Fork acquisition to achieve win/win economic benefits for local governments while getting all of Rocky Fork into public ownership as rapidly as possible. We appreciate your continued assurance of appropriate stewardship of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and look forward to working with you to resolve this exchange proposal.

Sincerely,

Morgan Sommerville

Regional Director
for GA, NC, and TN
Appalachian Trail Conservancy

[REDACTED]

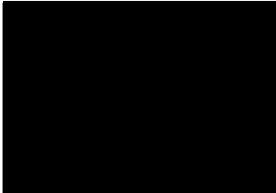
The Appalachian Trail Conservancy is a volunteer-based organization dedicated to the preservation and management of the natural, scenic, historic, and cultural resources associated with the Appalachian National Scenic Trail in order to provide primitive outdoor-recreation and educational opportunities for Trail visitors. To become a member, volunteer, or learn more, please visit us at [REDACTED]

TN Residents, We Need Your Help!

We need 1000 paid applications ASAP to launch the TN A.T. License Plate. Be a charter subscriber, get first dibs on vanity plates and get a free one-year ATC membership to boot! Go to [REDACTED] to see the plate and apply. Thank you!

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest
Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal

Terry L. Smith



I am providing these comments based upon my research and personal opinions about the proposed land exchange in Unicoi County, Tennessee.

I will preface these comments with the fact that I am a retired employee of the USDA Forest Service and a resident of Unicoi County, Tennessee. My residence is located on [REDACTED] between the Stone Mountain and Irishman Branch Tracts proposed for exchange.

I am currently opposed to the exchange for the following reasons.

1. I am a frequent (almost daily) user of the Sciota Rifle Range. This range:
 - Is located on the Irishman Branch Tract.
 - Is one of four rifle ranges located in the seven county area of the northern division of the Cherokee National Forest.
 - Is heavily used, because of its location to Erwin, Kingsport and Johnson City, Tennessee.
 - Receives an average of fifty visitors per day for an annual use of approximately twenty thousand visitors. I believe this to be a conservative estimate, based upon my personal observations.

If this range were to be closed, a replacement range would probably not be built. The closure of this range would result in the transfer of visitor use to the Jacobs Creek and Pond Mountain Rifle Ranges. These rifle ranges are currently operating at capacity and as such could not sustain increased use without significant modification and improvement.

Additionally, agency policy regarding land exchanges should exclude the exchange of this tract, because of the developed recreation facility located on the tract.

2. The purpose of this proposed exchange is to provide Unicoi County with land suitable for development as a replacement for those lands removed from county tax rolls in the event of government acquisition of the Rocky Fork Tract. I do not believe that the lands in the Martins Creek, Stone Mountain and Irishman Branch Tracts are suitable for development. The topography of these tracts consists of steep, rocky ridges and drainages that average fifty percent, or more of slope. I'm sure that these tracts contain a small portion of sites suitable for development. However they are limited and would require a significant monetary outlay in planning and the development of infrastructure. The recovery of infrastructure outlay would probably take many years as a result of the modest gains these sites would produce in property tax. Additionally, the transfer of these tracts would fragment the continuous federal ownership of these slopes and ridge tops.

3. Public records show that New Forestry LLC acquired the Unicoi County portion of the Rocky Fork Tract in January of 1999 for the purchase price of \$16,500,000.00. New Forestry LLC held the property for approximately ten years and sold the tract to The Conservation Fund in December of 2008 for \$22,980,435.00, which was approximately one hundred and forty percent of their initial investment.

Unicoi County received the following tax revenues for the Rocky Fork Tract for the preceding five years.

2004 - \$49,332.00

2005 - \$49,332.00

2006 - \$49,332.00

2007 - \$114,148.00 (231% of the 2004-2006 tax.)

2008 - \$126,178.00 (256% of the 2004-2006 tax.)

The 2007 tax increase generated controversy with the previous owners and interest by the local media. The tax increase was levied by the tax assessor's office after developers and the government expressed interest in the tract. The owners appealed the tax increase to the local board, I believe without success.

Paul Berry, Unicoi County Trustee, estimated that Unicoi County received a total of about six million dollars in property tax revenue for the 2008 tax year. This does not include other revenue generated by sales tax, gas tax and other revenue sources.

The 2008 property tax of \$126,178.00 received for the Rocky Fork Tract would represent about two percent (2%) of total property tax revenues. The 2006 property tax of \$49,332.00 for the same tract would represent eight tenths of one percent (0.8%) of total property tax revenues.

Some Unicoi County officials would prefer that the Rocky Fork Tract remain in private ownership with plans for future residential development. One official was quoted as saying that the tract had the potential to generate seven million dollars in additional tax revenues. This optimistic revenue projection was dependent upon a proposed exclusive mountain top gated community, populated by retirees in vacation homes with private roads and security that placed little demand on local schools, law enforcement and the road department. Developers at one time expressed interest in the area, but decided against the venture.

Financial events occurring since the proposed acquisition of the Rocky Fork Tract have left the possibility for future development of this tract in doubt. The reduction of real estate values, investment capital and financial lending have reduced the potential for development of either the Rocky Fork Tract, or the proposed exchange tracts for the foreseeable future. While real estate values in East Tennessee have been somewhat insulated from the national real estate down turn, there is currently little to no market for homes in the high end of the market spectrum.

In reality, approximately twenty percent of the Rocky Fork Tract could be developed, which is located on the interior mountain top of the tract. The remaining eighty percent of the tract contains extremely steep slopes, which would be unsuitable for development.

4. I do not believe that the proposed land exchange meets the agency established criteria for land exchanges. The tracts proposed for exchange:
- Are not small parcels intermingled with private land.
 - There is no demonstrated greater public need in state, county, city or other federal agency ownership.
 - Are not isolated from other National Forest System lands.
 - Are not under special use authorizations, or occupied by substantial structural improvements.
 - Are located adjacent to private lands, however there is no demonstrated need to convert timbered forest land to residential, or commercial development.
 - Do not have inefficient boundary configurations.
 - Are inside and adjacent to communities, but are not chiefly valuable for non-national forest purposes.

I would like to clarify that I am not against the government acquisition of the Rocky Fork Tract. I believe that the USDA Forest Service has missed several opportunities to acquire the property at substantially lower cost in the past twenty years. I do realize that the agency did not possess funds necessary for the acquisition and that obtaining appropriations for land acquisitions is a cumbersome process. I would prefer that the USDA Forest Service seek appropriations to acquire the entire Rocky Fork Tract. I do oppose acquiring the Rocky Fork Tract by exchanging other federally owned lands.

Several Unicoi County officials and some of the citizenry are opposed to an increase in federal land ownership. It is commonly cited that the federal government owns half of Unicoi County, which contributes to a reduced tax base and reduced county services. Most of the federally owned land in Unicoi County would not be suitable for development because of topography, drainage and soil conditions. In fact, were these lands in private ownership, they would probably be subject to greenbelt tax provisions, which would generate little more in tax revenues, would be subject to less stringent regulations and management practices and would most likely provide little to no public access, or use.

The federally owned lands in Unicoi County do present, enhanced recreation and tourism opportunities, which provide difficult to quantify financial incentives to small business and county tax coffers. These lands also provide protection to local watersheds, wildlife populations and wildlife habitat. In contrast, these lands place few, if any demands on the local government, which would tax their financial resources.

Finally, I believe the large percentage of federal land ownership in Unicoi County has been a significant contributing factor that has allowed the county to receive federal impact dollars and federal grants for public improvements.

Thank you,

/s/ Terry L. Smith

Terry L. Smith

To: Cherokee National Forest

From: Josh Kelly

Re: Proposed Rocky Fork Land Exchange

Dear Cherokee National Forest,

First, I would like to express my support for the acquisition of the Rocky Fork Tract by Cherokee National Forest. Rocky Fork is a keystone piece of the landscape in the Southern Blue Ridge offering high quality water, wildlife, and recreation resources. WildLaw will support Cherokee National Forest in obtaining the remainder of the Rocky Fork Tract in whatever ways we can. In saying that, the proposed land exchange is not the ideal vehicle for Forest Service acquisition of Rocky Fork. Obtaining the balance of funds for Rocky Fork through the LWCF and retaining all public land in Unicoi County would be the ideal scenario in this case.

There are several issues with the proposed land exchange with which we at WildLaw are not comfortable. The three tracts proposed for exchange do not fit the normal criteria for Forest Service land exchanges: they are relatively large for an Eastern National Forest, ranging in size from 200 to over 700 acres; they are contiguous with other Forest Service lands of even larger acreage; they have existing access for public use and management; and these tracts benefit the public because of the resources they offer and protect.

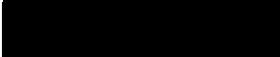
Two of the three tracts proposed for exchange, those at Little Mountain and Irishman Branch, contain substantial acreages of xeric pine communities. Pitch, Virginia, and Table Mountain pines are present in these communities exhibiting the propensity of these sites to burn. It may not be in the public good to allow ridges such as these to enter private ownership and be developed because of the fire risk they pose. If managed by the Forest Service, these sites could be prescribed burned to enhance the characteristics of the dry natural communities there and reduce the risk of a catastrophic wildfire. If turned into a private development, houses would be built in areas of very high fire risk.

Another concern is that all three tracts could have substantial resources from the standpoint of human history and rare species. Thorough surveys of all exchanged properties would be a necessity to comply with NEPA for the land exchange and those surveys will be expensive and could detract from other management and land acquisition needs on Cherokee National Forest.

If a land exchange is the only way to accomplish the acquisition of Rocky Fork, I encourage Cherokee National Forest to explore an alternative that would exchange numerous small tracts around Erwin and Unicoi for Rocky Fork rather than the three large tracts currently proposed. Taking smaller chunks out of the edge of the forest would be preferable from a conservation standpoint since Island Biogeography Theory instructs us that large islands can support more species than small islands. In this case the islands are Cherokee National Forest ownership. The large tracts at Little Mountain and Irishman Branch dramatically reduce the size of those islands and their benefits to wildlife.

Thanks for considering these and other comments when weighing the proposed land exchange. In this case, the opinions of a few vocal proponents of the exchange should not be allowed to trump the true public interest: an increase in public land through the acquisition of Rocky Fork. If WildLaw can be of assistance in the effort to acquire Rocky Fork, with or without a land exchange, please contact us.

Sincerely,


Josh Kelly



03/05/2009 08:32 PM

Please respond to



To: comments-southern-chokeee-unaka@fs.fed.us
cc: comments-southern-chokeee@fs.fed.us
Subject: Rocky Forky land exchange proposal

February 5, 2009

Cherokee National Forest
Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37312

Attn. Mr. Dave Ferguson

Dear Mr. Ferguson and Ranger Bowerman

Re: Rocky Fork possible land exchange

Please accept these comments on behalf of Cherokee Forest Voices. We wish to be informed of any scoping, EA, the NEPA process including decisions and we will comment at each available opportunity.

I attended the recent meeting regarding the proposed land exchange involving the Rock Fork Tract. The details of this proposed land exchange are not at all clear to the public. Information about the meeting was sent but no maps until the night of the meeting. The map information should have been made available to the interested public with the notice of the meeting letter. I also believe the public should have had more time to prepare substantive comments. Another public meeting to discuss this detailed proposal should also be held if the process goes to scoping.

On very rare occasions, a land exchange in which the USFS trades national forest lands for publicly owned lands can be justified I'm not sure this is the case until further review is taken. It is highly unusual for the Conservation fund to be in the development business. It seems to go against what they stand for. The proposal we saw at the meeting, I'm not sure any one but Senator Alexander, Representative Roe and the Unicoi County and towns government officials and maybe a few businesses had any say in what land was chosen for the exchange. The public notice was short I received my letter less that one full week before the meeting was to take place. Were notices put in the local paper, on the radio approx 60 people seems a small turnout of the public so maybe they did not know about the proposal.

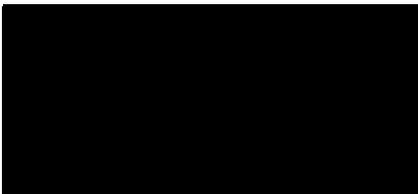
Exchanging some small tracts along the peripheral boundary of the CNF at low elevation in the Erwin-Unicoi area may or may not be justified, but without efforts being made to reach adjoining landowners and every citizen of Unicoi the majority of the public may be left out of the discussion.

The best use of the Cherokee National Forest Mountains is to protect our drinking water that has no price. Unicoi County is beautiful, that small town and country feeling where family, heritage and crafts, such as the beautiful Blue Ridge pottery I treasure, and the people are friendly is an important draw to the area. I also appreciate that Unicoi County offers great opportunity for recreation, whether picnicking, hiking, biking, camping, sightseeing, horseback riding, fishing, walking trails and other things and all these should be promoted more, because they bring money to the county.

A very personal opinion of my own I can't count the people who have mentioned the great opportunities for day or week use of recreation opportunities but have said I would not live in Unicoi County because Nuclear Fuels Inc. being in the county scare them. Whether this threat is real or just perceived the choices the government officials have made on what industry they have allowed in the county certainly has an undeniable effect on who may choose to make there home in Unicoi County.

Sincerely,

Catherine Murray
Cherokee Forest Voices



Ray Payne

March 9, 2009

Cherokee National Forest
Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37312

Attn. Mr. Dave Ferguson

Dear Mr. Ferguson:

I was unable to attend the meeting regarding the proposed land exchange involving the Rock Fork Tract, and so do not have as much information as I would like to have regarding this issue. But, I have very recently received some information from persons who attended the meeting including maps. I also have a 1985 copy of the Cherokee National Forest Northern Districts map, and am well aware of where the Rocky Fork tract is. Several years ago I day hiked and backpacked in this general area of the CNF, near Erwin and also a short distance to the northeast. I'm also somewhat familiar with the history of the ownership of this tract for last 25 years or so. In addition, I have also driven several of the backroads in this general area of the CNF.

I have been involved in Cherokee NF issues and Great Smoky Mountain National Park issues since the 1960s.

The details of this proposed land exchange are not at all clear to me. Based on the information that I have, Unicoi County wants a part of the Rocky Fork Tract and/or a part of the CNF adjacent to the Rocky Fork Tract. Stated candidly, I'm opposed to the USFS giving up any of the Rocky Fork Tract or any of the current CNF land adjacent to the Rocky Fork Tract. On very rare occasions, a land exchange in which the USFS trades national forest lands for publicly owned lands can be justified. This is not one of those occasions.

The CNF officials should prepare a detailed proposal including maps which describe in detail and show exactly which lands would be included in the proposed exchange. This information should be made available to the interested public (which includes me) with a reasonable length of time for the public to prepare substantive comments. Another public meeting to discuss this detailed proposal should also be held.

Exchanging some small tracts along the peripheral boundary of the CNF at low elevation in the Erwin-Unicoi area may or may not be justified, but without a detailed proposal as suggested above, an intelligent decision cannot be made on this issue.

Sincerely,



Ray Payne

Craig L. Tober


March 9, 2009

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest
Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee St
Cleveland, TN 37312

I attended a meeting on February 19, 2009 in Erwin, TN concerning a proposed land exchange in Unicoi County, TN. I am very alarmed to find that the proposed area to become private land in the Scioto Road area would be within 500 feet of my property line. I have several areas of concern about the suitability of this area for such a purpose and the consequences of the suggested exchange.

1. Water

The majority of the proposed exchange acreage is located in the Scioto Road tracts - the Stone Mountain tract of 660 acres and the Irishman Branch tract of 798 acres with a total of 1458 acres. These two tracts comprise 87% of the total exchange area. Ridge tops, with a combined length of 3.5 – 4 miles, run the length of the Scioto Road tracts. Many creeks and waterways flow down these ridges and empty into three creeks: Scioto Creek, Buffalo Creek and Irishman Branch. Development will result in the loss of many trees which in turn will result in a more rapid flow of rain water down the slopes. Even the best construction practices will place these streams in jeopardy of erosion; Scioto Creek will be most affected with the runoff water from 2 of the 4 slopes. If these areas become private land, there is no control over what a developer can do and how he will do it. Even if the Conservation Fund hand-picks an environmentally sensitive owner, a second or third sale in the future could result in a very different approach to this property. At present, there is a subdivision a few miles up the road that is stalled because of a 3-way lawsuit between the developer, the very first home owner and the county. Such set backs often get people to think about selling out – to anybody.

It rains in the Scioto area with a very similar pattern as in the Rocky Fork area. The slope, vegetation, and soil type are similar. It seems to me that the same arguments made about Rocky Fork and its “water resources”, “world-class opportunities”, and “pristine watershed” apply as well to the Scioto area.

I think the Scioto area should receive as much respect for its water resources as Rocky Fork. It’s not a matter of “more strategic” or “less strategic” – ALL our water and waterways are important.

2. Infrastructure

Infrastructure such as roads, drinking water and sewer are needed for residential development. These services depend upon public funds for their construction. Already it is thought that the water distribution system on Scioto Road needs upgrades to handle present development in the area. Road improvements and traffic controls in the proposed development area would need to be performed.

Improvements to utilities will put a significant strain on these systems in this area. This is a small county, reserve funds for expansion are not extensive.

3. Rifle Range

If both the Stone Mountain tract and the Irishman Branch tract were viewed as a whole, it appears that the existing US Forest Service (USFS) Rifle Range is nearly in the center of these tracts. The rifle range has been very active during the thirty years I have lived on Scioto Road. I have heard firearms of many sorts - even automatic weapons - discharging many rounds into the earthen bank. There is a problem with what to do with all the bullets (lead) casings, and other hazardous materials left behind. Can all this be simply covered over or does it need to be treated as a hazardous waste site? Does the material need to be removed? What is the protocol for abandoning a rifle range so that it can be sold to the private sector? Can it be sold in "as is" condition?

Of course, the USFS could keep the rifle range, with an appropriate buffer area, and sell the rest of the property around the range area. However, this will leave the question of noise unresolved during the hours of operation - dawn to dusk -, seven days a week. This would be a deterrent to people looking for a quiet home in the country. Also, the possibility of stray bullets striking a home in the area could become a liability for the USFS.

4. The Developer(s)

From the get-go at Rocky Fork the question of who the developer might be has been shrouded in mystery. There were many questions about who they were, what they wanted to do, what their track record was and how reliable they would be. These questions also abound for the sites presently proposed.

As things now stand, if the USFS sells these lands the Forest Service has nothing further to say about what goes on there. The land can be sold 2, 3, or 4 times or split into small parcels - all without controls, regulations, rules or restrictions.

5. USFS Long-range Legacy

In the past, the Forest Service's mission has been to hold and maintain the lands it has in the public trust. This land exchange is more like an abandonment of public lands - for sale to the highest bidder. If the result of all this is not positive, the Forest Service's reputation will forever suffer for having botched the job.

6. Project Scale

This exchange plan in the Scioto area involves 1400 acres, 3 ½ - 4 miles of ridge top and ridge slopes draining into 3 small creeks. The land area to be exchanged is many times larger than the village of Unicoi and it is nearly equal to the area of central Erwin. So, what is the potential influx of population that the USFS is making possible? The houses presently along Scioto Road are on about half acre lots. Does that mean 2800 houses are possible? One acre lots would mean approximately 1400 homes. I doubt a developer would go for anything more generous than 2 acre lots. That would mean 700 houses.

The point is that I think this project is too large for this part of Unicoi County. Potentially too many people in one spot! Roads in and out could not handle this influx, the infrastructure in this town and in the county would be overwhelmed, the Unicoi elementary school would be overcrowded, and governing structures may not be up to the task.

The present economic situation should give everyone cause to caution. This exchange may not be the solution to County's property tax problems, it may only complicate matters.

Sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

Craig Tober

USDA Forest Service Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal Comment Form

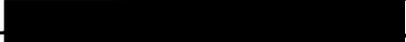
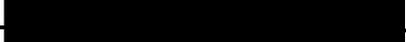
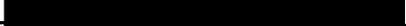
Name: W. J. "Bill" Gaines
Street Address: [REDACTED]
City, State, Zip: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]

I "Strongly Favor" the proposed land swap of federal lands on Sciota Rd and in the Martins Creek area for the lands owned by the Conservation Fund at Rocky Fork. I was initially opposed to the acquisition of the Rocky Fork property, but moderated my opposition after Senator [REDACTED] indicated he would work to facilitate a land swap to lessen the impact of more Unicoi land rendered non-taxable by Forest Service acquisition. Over my thirty-six year career as a Unicoi County Official, I pointed out at every government level, the impact so much non-taxable Forest Service land ownership in Unicoi County had on our tax base. It would not be so much of a problem, if the federal government actually paid what they owe in Impact Aid funding to our school system. Current federal law supports an annual payment of approximately \$7,000,000. Our government chooses to pay what it chooses and ignore the requirements of the law, so we only receive a little under \$200,000 per year. As a result our educational system suffers, and no one seems to care. Because of so little available land and the terrain here in our mountainous community, it is difficult to recruit industry or develop a commercial base to support our county. Our young people leave to find employment, and we are left with an aging populace little able to pay the taxes needed to support our local government functions. The federal government already owned approximately one-half of Unicoi County's land area, and removing another 6,800 acres from the tax books is not going to help. When you take out other local, state, and exempted properties Unicoi County is only able to tax roughly 35-40% of its land area, which is largely mountainous and populated with modest family dwellings you can easily see the problem. Tax exempt federal land ownership not only robs us of the tax revenue, it robs us of the potential for development and the tax dollars that would provide. It is only right, that a land swap could be expedited to offset part of this impact. The tracts selected are poised for development because they are in already populated areas with existing infrastructure. The Conservation Fund has done a wonderful job in crafting this proposal. The lands are far away from the view shed of the Appalachian Trail and would not provide any significant detriment to Forest Service ownership and operation. It is a fair trade. The Forest Service guidelines for land swaps as detailed at the recent public meeting seem so unwieldy, convoluted, involved, and difficult that it appears they are designed to thwart any attempt at a land swap. I can tell you that failure to do everything within your power to facilitate a land swap would constitute a fraudulent breach of trust. We have trusted our elected and government officials to do the right thing, and they have offered their support for this end, and frankly, we expect you to come through. We realize the process is time consuming, but we have already waited for decades. Time is up. Someone needs to care more for the people in this county, especially the children in our schools, than for acquiring more land that will just sit there, and being unwilling to offer anything to help. We are holding our Senators, Representatives, local & state government officials and the agencies of our government accountable for paying close attention to this process to see that it is not abandoned or thwarted and that it produces a fair result for the citizens of Unicoi County.

[REDACTED]

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: Steve White
Street Address: 
City, State, Zip: 
Phone: 

I want to go on record in support of the concept of a land exchange for Unicoi County. The economic impact of the removal of the land at Rocky Fork from our tax base is heavy. This would help offset the impact. This would help Unicoi County!



Mail comments to the following address:
Please Return by March 6, 2009
Cherokee National Forest
Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37312
###

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest
Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: *Star Meris*
Street Address: [REDACTED]
City, State, Zip: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]

This concerns the *Irish Branch Tract + Stone Mtn. Tract*
- Will there be restrictions on how areas are
developed -

5-10 acre lots -?

Green Building Practices -?

No ridge top developing -?

Ridges along "scenic" RT #107 be left alone -?

*Any development should blend with environment
in area.*

*We moved out of the Nashville area because of
the RAMPANT overdevelopment of the hills and
land. These developers & politicians who allowed
this, should be jailed. I wrote to the Tennessean
about this, a number of times, yet I feel →*

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That our major newspapers are being blackmailed by the real-estate companies (this includes the Johnson City Press). It is a simple statement - If you run that article, we'll pull our ads out. We need to take care of our lands and the forest systems. This area is the last remaining sub-tropical rainforest on the eastern seaboard. We need to protect it, by who owns it and what area is allowed to be used for public or private enterprises.

About the Rocky Fork area - I do not want to see it become ruined by the tourist industry, like Gatlinburg has. It could stay "rustic" and citizens who truly love the woods, can be its patrons!

We are at a crisis point on this planet. Over population of the human species is the number 1 threat. We need to have strict immigration policies in this country. And show other countries why having 2-3 children is so much better for the Quality experience of their lives and all life.

High cities are dinosauric creations - they take too much from the land and give back nothing except pollution to the people & the land. All cities need boundaries and stop the assembly line production of subdivisions. OK in off the podium.

THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN HIGHLANDS CONSERVANCY



March 4, 2009

USDA Forest Service - Cherokee National Forest
Attn. Susan Shaw - Land Exchange Comments
2800 North Ocoee Street
Cleveland TN 37312

RE: Rocky Fork Unicoi County - Land Exchange Proposal

Dear Ms. Shaw:

The Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy strongly supports the proposal of The Conservation Fund for a land exchange in Unicoi County. Our organization has sought public ownership of Rocky Fork for more than twenty years. Our most recent effort to conserve the property began in 2006, in partnership with The Conservation Fund and The Appalachian Trail Conservancy.

From our first conversation with community leaders in Unicoi County in 2006, they made clear their concern about loss of potential property tax revenue from public ownership of Rocky Fork, in light of intense unmet capital needs in the County. Acquiring the 6,000 acres of Rocky Fork in Unicoi County will tip the percentage of federally owned land in the County above 50%. There was initially opposition by some leaders in the County to public acquisition of Rocky Fork, based on their concern for a source of tax revenue to meet public needs in the County, including building a new school that is mandated by law.

We listened to community leaders, and knew we needed to help meet their needs if Rocky Fork were to be protected. In order to raise federal and state dollars necessary to purchase the property, we clearly need local community leaders on board. They initially encouraged us to seek protection of only a portion of Rocky Fork, and allow other portions to be developed to generate tax revenue for the County. However, that scenario was unacceptable because it would threaten the outstanding conservation values of Rocky Fork.

The current land exchange proposal is an attempt to balance simultaneously important interests of meeting community needs in Unicoi County with the urgent need to acquire Rocky Fork for the public. The Conservation Fund has worked with the Forest Service, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and our organization to identify land that is appropriate for exchange insofar as it is close to community centers, populated areas and infrastructure, does not contain significant natural, recreational or cultural resources, and has development potential. We urge you to approve the proposal and begin the exchange process, and thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Respectfully,



Carl Silverstein
Executive Director

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest
Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: [REDACTED]
Street Address: [REDACTED]
City, State, Zip: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]

TO WHOM THIS MAY CONCERN:

AS A PROPERTY OWNER THAT WOULD
BE AFFECTED BY THIS TRADE OF LAND, I
HEREBY VOTE NO ON AGENDA. THESE PEOPLE
NEED TO USE THEIR OWN LAND ALREADY
DEEDED TO DO THEIR DEVELOPMENT. TO
DO THIS SHOULD DEPEND ON ALL PARTIES
OWING PROPERTY AROUND THIS AREA.
AGAIN I STRONGLY OBJECT TO THIS
AGENDA ~~AND~~ AND ITS OBJECTIVE

Mail comments to the following address:
Please Return by March 6, 2009
Cherokee National Forest
Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37312
###



USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: Marcella Peterson
Street Address: [REDACTED]
City, State, Zip: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]

DEAR Sirs,

I Support the idea of

a land exchange for Unicoi
County. The removal of the land
at Rocky Fork from our TAX BASE
would have a heavy impact.

The Federal Government ownership
has placed a huge burden on
the TAXPAYERS of our County.

Mail comments to the following address:

Please Return by March 6, 2009

Cherokee National Forest

Attn: Land Exchange Comments

2800 N. Ocoee Street

Cleveland, TN 37312

###

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: _____
Street Address: _____
City, State, Zip: _____
Phone: _____

Dear Sirs,

Ownership by the Federal Government has created an unfair situation and burden on Unicoi County taxpayers. Please let it be known and on record that I am in support of the land exchange concept for Unicoi County. Our tax base is very heavy due to the economic impact of the Removal of the land at Rocky Fork - We should get something in exchange!

Mail comments to the following address:

Please Return by March 6, 2009

Cherokee National Forest

Attn: Land Exchange Comments

2800 N. Ocoee Street

Cleveland, TN 37312

###

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: _____
Street Address: _____
City, State, Zip: _____
Phone: _____

It is without reservation that I believe the people of Unicoi County deserve the tax revenue from this proposal. In an already very weak economy the loss of revenue from this parcel of land would further reduce an already economic hardship on the citizens of Unicoi County. The citizens of Unicoi County are hard working good citizens who desperately need the tax revenue income for a variety of good projects this money could provide. Please consider the people of this area in this current proposal.

Sincerely,

Mail comments to the following address:
Please Return by March 6, 2009
Cherokee National Forest
Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37312

###

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name _____
Street Address: _____
City, State, Zip: _____
Phone: _____

*I want it to go on Record I support the Land Exchange in
Unicoi County*

Mail comments to the following address:
Please Return by March 6, 2009
Cherokee National Forest
Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37312

###

Cherokee National Forest
ATTN. Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN. 37312

Name James L. Ameigh

Street Address

City State Zip

Phone

I AM opposed to the
Land swap.

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest
Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: Gaye T. Norman
Street Address: [REDACTED]
City, State, Zip: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]

Dear Sir,

I would like to object to the land swap as proposed -
We are trying to preserve Rocky Fork as a natural setting
for wildlife and recreation - and are just moving the problem
to another area -

I live across [REDACTED] from the area proposed -
We already wildlife trying to cross the road - to get to areas
they have been in forever - we are finally getting deer,
wild turkey and other game back - so are we going to
displace them again ??

If the land swap is necessary - could smaller areas
in several locations be a possibility? Maybe over the
whole county?

My objection is for displacing wildlife - Again and
again and again - Where do they go?
Thank you for every consideration -

Sincerely,
[REDACTED]

Mail comments to the following address:
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Cherokee National Forest
Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37312
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USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: BRIAN ROVIRA
Street Address: [REDACTED]
City, State, Zip: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]

We live on [REDACTED] in Unicoi and, except for a small privately owned strip of land, we abut the Cherokee National Forest.

Depending on density of development, a recipe for ecological disaster could be in the making since there is currently no sewer treatment plants to deal with the potential amount of sewerage generated by development, be it commercial or residential. Everyone could be on septic systems which, as noted around Lake Tahoe in CA/NV to severely degrade the lake, will degrade our streams and lakes.

According to your map, the proposed boundaries would not have a buffer zone between it and current privately owned property which could adversely affect property values. I agree, the county tax base would increase tremendously with full development but would necessitate upgrading roads, utilities, schools etc. at considerable cost.

Once the land is sold by TCF, control will be in the hands of our local politicians and developers more interested in taxes and profit than other more mundane considerations. Therefore, in it's present proposed state, I am against the swap, sale and development of the Stone Mountain parcel.

Mail comments to the following address:

Please Return by March 6, 2009

Cherokee National Forest

Attn: Land Exchange Comments

2800 N. Ocoee Street

Cleveland, TN 37312

###

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: FOSTER LEVY
Street Address: [REDACTED]
City, State, Zip: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]

First statements that the public was consulted are blatantly false & misleading - a few select individuals may have been consulted, but there were no open meetings for the purpose of discussing tracts to exchange. In fact, the tracts were kept secret until the meeting time on Feb 19th. Also, landowners adjoining Irishman Branch were not consulted.

My primary objection is with taking two tracts in North Unicoi that together provide a broad corridor for wildlife migration from Little & Stone Mtns. to points south through Unaka Mtn. - with the Stone & Irishman Br. Tracts, this broad corridor is reduced to a narrow zone through Limestone Cove. Moreover, it isolates forest lands on Little Mtn. In short, loss of these two tracts together vastly reduce connectivity of forest lands in N. Unicoi. The problem outlined above is further exacerbated by the complete lack of fit of the Irishman Br. Tract to the "Criteria to Convey". The FS Mps. stated that these criteria identify tracts that "don't have or have lost the forest character" (quote from Dave Ferguson - Feb 19th) - none of the criteria listed are satisfied - the sole reason for inclusion was its "developable" character. Thus, the I.B. Tract fails to meet the stated criteria for lands to exchange.

Mail comments to the following address:

Please Return by March 6, 2009

Cherokee National Forest

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2800 N. Ocoee Street

Cleveland, TN 37312

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The contiguous character of the Stone & I.B. tracts with forest/CFU land that adjoins, is evidenced by a recent FS goal of developing a Scioto area management plan - that is, an attempt to treat CFU lands on Little & Stone Mtns as a single management unit - obviously, this is because Little & Stone Mtns have contiguous forest from Rt 107 to Rt 362 and after crossing those roads, they connect with forest lands, thus, at the very least, I.B. is a horrible choice + the N+S.

Taken together, the St. Mtn & I.B. tracts ~~are~~ relegated north Union to a "sacrifice zone". Statements that responsible & green development could occur ~~and~~ ^{are} not credible - not so long ago the FS exchanged a tract on the west side of Scioto's south end & forest was replaced by housing development in which virtually every tree on the developed land was cut. The same would occur with these tracts.

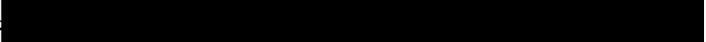
Biologically, the I.B. tract is valuable - more so with the loss of the previously exchanged Scioto tract across from the shooting range. Near the Scioto road is a lowland area that supports rich lowland forest. This forest has the county's & area's best & only viable population of *Magnolia tripetala* - many were lost with the prior exchange & development. Interspersed wetlands support a population of a newly described species of *Plethodon* salamander (see Talley).

For water quality, protecting I.B. is important because it feeds into a high quality trout stream, N. Indian Creek. Also, I.B. is subject to flooding - a major problem ^{that} destroyed portions of the road & banks not long ago. Intensive development or loss of forest would severely compound the flood problem & degrade water quality.

From a recreation standpoint, loss of the I.B. tract would leave residents of N. Union County without access to Stone Mtns from the south end. With already increased development in N. Union Co., public lands & access are needed to maintain recreation opportunities - there is no justification for taking 1000 acres from here & none from S. Union where the Rocky Fork tract was added. - A very poorly conceived choice of lands that highlight TCF's disregard for resident interests, & conservation values.

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: Elaine Walker
Street Address: 
City, State, Zip: 
Phone: 

1. Irishmen's Branch does not appear to fit any of the criteria for federal land to be conveyed: it is not being conveyed to federal, city, county, state or other federal agency, nor is it adjacent to a community. Irishman's Branch (the creek) has flooded badly several times in the past 15 years. More development is likely to make run-off worse.

2. The Public meeting on Land Exchange was held Feb. 19, and was the first public announcement of the ^{3 properties involved} proposed exchange. Why is the deadline for comments March 6 - that is significantly less than a 30 day comment period.

3. What other private groups were involved in discussions with the Forest Service to designate proposed lands for exchange? The Nature Conservancy and Unicoi County & City officials were involved.

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Cleveland, TN 37312

But what other groups were involved: Other conservation groups & special interest groups (H-wheeler, horse etc.)

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: Donna J. Howell
Street Address: _____
City, State, Zip: _____
Phone: _____

2-27-09

Dear Sirs:

I want to go on record in support of the concept of a land exchange for Unicoi County. The economic impact of the removal of the land at Rocky Fork from our tax base is heavy.

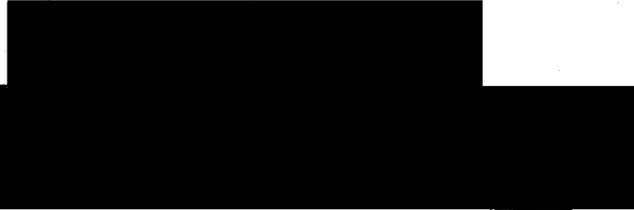
There is very little privately owned land left in our county for development. The Federal Government ownership has placed an unfair burden on the taxpayers of Unicoi County.

Mail comments to the following address:
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Cleveland, TN 37312
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USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name:
Street Address:
City, State, Zip:
Phone:



Dear Sirs -

I want to go on record to support of the concept of a land exchange for Unicoi County. The economic impact of the removal of the land at Rock Fork from our tax base is heavy. There is very little privately owned land left in our county for development. The Federal Government ownership has placed an unfair burden on the taxpayers of Unicoi County.

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USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest
Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: D. Walters
Street Address: [REDACTED]
City, State, Zip: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]

Mail comments to the following address:
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Cleveland, TN 37312
###

DAVID J. WALTERS, D.C.

To whom it may concern:

I am opposed to any land swap. I have grouse, Turkey hunters and hikers all of these Properties.

The Left side of Sclatha tract was clear cut 25 years ago and is now extremely biodiverse and habitat enhanced due to the clearcutting. The Rifle Range on the ^(R) side of Sclatha is heavily used. Irishman's Branch never seems to dry up and is also heavily used and enjoyed. The Right side of Montins creek is also utilized a lot more than people realize.

The loss of recreational use and value would permanently harm the community.

Our community leaders wanted a Nuclear centrifuge to be located where the present wall next sits.

I know of NO ONE personally with the exception of our (leaders/Dictators)! that want to lose the use of OUR lands.

Thank you

DAVID J. WALTERS, D.C.

RE: The Conservation Fund Land Exchange
Proposals.

Gentlemen, Ladies

I have conducted an
informal poll of my Patients and
have found NONE of them in favor
of a Land exchange of any kind,
now or in the future.

Mr Games, Bowman, Miller ~~Do~~ NOT
Represent the will of the people.
Please, Please, Please, Don't go forward
with the Process! Thanks.



March 6, 2009

Terry Bowerman
Nolichucky / Unaka District Ranger
4900 Asheville HWY SR70
Greeneville, TN 37743

Re: Possible Lands Exchange(s) of Cherokee National Forest land in Unicoi County

Dear Mr. Bowerman:

Please accept these comments regarding the possible land exchange of Cherokee National Forest tracts in Unicoi County on behalf of the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition and The Wilderness Society.

The Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition (SAFC) is a regional non-profit organization whose mission is to protect and restore the wildlands, waters, native forests and ecosystems of the Southern Appalachian landscape.

The Wilderness Society ("TWS"), founded in 1935, works to protect America's wilderness and wildlife and to develop a nationwide network of wild lands through public education, scientific analysis and advocacy.

First of all SAFC and TWS have been vocal and enthusiastic supporters of Rocky Fork acquisition for years and unequivocally support acquisition of the additional portions of the Rocky Fork Tract by the Cherokee National Forest. The Rocky Fork lands are of extremely high conservation importance, and

seeing that they go into permanent management that safeguards these conservation values is a top priority. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the possible exchange of existing CNF tracts in Unicoi County with The Conservation Fund (TCF) to move this process forward. The comments below are meant to explore critical conservation issues and examine the opportunities for exchanges to have significantly positive conservation impacts and contribute to smarter economic growth in Unicoi County. They are not meant to suggest that any and every opportunity to facilitate Rocky Fork lands being acquired by the Forest Service should not be explored and carefully analyzed.

National Forest lands face increasing threats of habitat degradation, loss of wildlife corridors and connectivity, and expansion of the wildland-urban interface from development around and adjacent to these public lands. The 2007 USFS study “National Forests on the Edge”¹ documents this trend and the conservation implications of this growth. The numerous negative implications include degradation of wildlife and fish habitat, impacts on water quality and hydrology, multiplying entry points for the encroachment of invasive plant species, loss of open space, limitations to recreation access and management, and impacts on fire management and boundary management. The Southeast and Southern Appalachians are particularly hard hit by this trend because of the fragmented ownership patterns and the high rate of development in the region. It is clear from maps and examples used in the “National Forests on the Edge” study, that this should be a major planning consideration in the Southern Appalachians and in areas around the Cherokee National Forest.

Indeed, the acquisition of the Rocky Fork Tract by the Forest Service would be a major accomplishment in reversing this trend. However, in designing a solution for Rocky Fork care should be taken to assure that where exchanges occur the result should be an increase in the wilderness values or the ecological integrity of the public land estate and/or better management by the federal government of the public lands for their conservation values.

¹ Stein, Susan M.; Alig, Ralph J.; White, Eric M.; Comas, Sara J.; Carr, Mary; Eley, Mike; Elverum, Kelly; O'Donnell, Mike; Theobald, David M.; Cordell, Ken; Haber, Jonathan; Beauvais, Theodore W. 2007. National Forests on the Edge: Development Pressures on America's National Forests and Grasslands. Gen. Tech. Rep. PNWGTR-728. Portland, OR: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station. 26 p.

Our main concern with the tracts that are being considered for exchange is the fact that they are within areas of consolidated Forest Service ownership. These are not tracts that are isolated or surrounded by development at this point. Instead, they are in areas of Forest Service ownership that extend inward toward wildland areas for some distance, include areas of low road density, and would tend to expand development deeper into the wildland urban interface. This is particularly striking in the case of the Stone Mountain Tract. The possible exchange tract currently has no roads, contains several presumably high quality tributary streams feeding into Scioto Creek, and leads progressively toward less developed and impacted lands. In fact the proposed boundary could allow development within The Wilderness Society identified Stone Mountain "Mountain Treasure Area" and less than 1,000 feet from the Stone Mountain USFS identified Inventoried Roadless Area.

There seems to be good potential to achieve a land exchange based on the principles we articulate below that would clearly result in improved wilderness values, ecological integrity and/or manageability that could simultaneously increase the potential for smart expansion of Erwin and Unicoi. This would make economic opportunities available while honoring these communities' intimate relationship with public lands.

We would suggest refining or identifying alternative exchange parcels with several principles in mind to emphasize:

- Small tracts to optimize both the potential for community expansion while also addressing needs of national forest management. There are likely smaller tracts that are currently difficult to manage from the Forest Service standpoint (because of access and close proximity to development) that would be excellent candidates for new development.
- Isolated tracts as well as ownership projections and corners of national forest lands that have some of these same characteristics, with the goal of making FS boundaries more logical and manageable while providing opportunities for new development close to existing development.
- Tracts that use natural boundaries that better define and consolidate national forest ownership and management while also better defining development areas.
- Tracts where new development potential could be expanded while conservation impacts are minimal. This would include tracts where impacts to open space, water and hydrology, wildlife habitat and corridors and other conservation values are minimized and are instead confined to

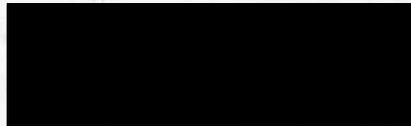
expansion of already developed areas, with an eye toward segregating these different lands through topography and visual isolation.

- Tracts that don't encourage development on steep slopes, on mountain tops, close to streams or adjacent to lands with critical wilderness characteristics.

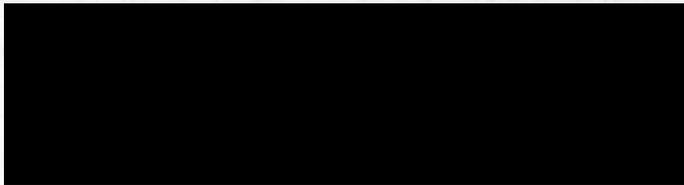
Again we would like to reiterate our strong support for Forest Service acquisition of Rocky Fork. We encourage the pursuit of creative land exchanges and stand ready to work to refine possible exchange options so that they optimize protection and conservation management of national forest system lands around Erwin and Unicoi.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Hugh Irwin, Program Director; Conservation Planner
Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition



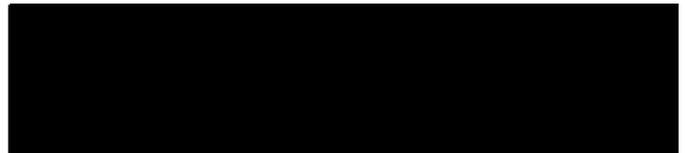
Frances A. Hunt, Director Eastern National Forest Protection
The Wilderness Society



Attachment # 3
USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest
Land Exchange
Comment Form

Name: David Smith
Street Address: [REDACTED]
City, State, Zip: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]

I support whatever practices must be
employed to obtain a conservation
outcome for Rocky Fork.



Mail comments to the following address:
Cherokee National Forest
Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37312

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest
Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: CHRIS HATCHER
Street Address: _____
City, State, Zip: _____
Phone: _____

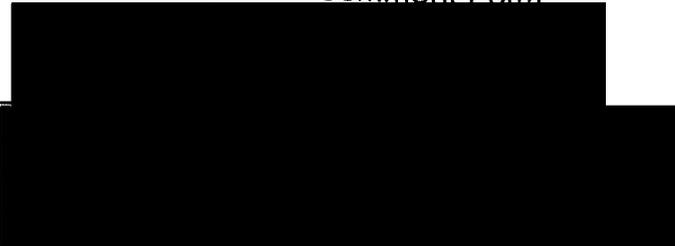
I totally support the proposed land swap in Unicoi County. With our current tax base being limited by the amount of land owned by the U.S. Govt., it seems like an alternative solution that should not be passed up.

Mail comments to the following address:
Please Return by March 6, 2009
Cherokee National Forest
Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37312
###

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name:
Street Address:
City, State, Zip:
Phone:



Dear Sirs:

I want to go on record in support of the concept of a land exchange for Unicoi County. The economic impact of the removal of the land at Rocky Fork from the tax base is heavy. There is very little privately owned land left in the county for development. The Federal Government ownership has placed an unfair burden on the taxpayers of Unicoi County.

Mail comments to the following address:

Please Return by March 6, 2009

Cherokee National Forest

Attn: Land Exchange Comments

2800 N. Ocoee Street

Cleveland, TN 37312

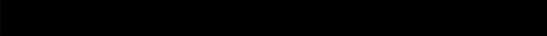
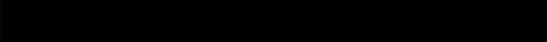
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Attachment # 3
USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest
Land Exchange
Comment Form

RECEIVED

FEB 05 2009

JOHNSON CITY ENVIRONMENTAL
ASSISTANCE CENTER

Name: Thomas Isaacs / Karen Isaacs
Street Address: 
City, State, Zip: 
Phone: 

We desire that there be no exchange of land in the Scioto Road area. This area is already over developed and will only become worse if an exchange occurs.

Please continue acquiring the Rocky Fork land as funds become available and turn this area into a National Recreation Area similar to Mt. Rogers. This designation would draw many tourists, especially if it is opened up to multiple uses excluding motorized. This increase in tourism would offset any tax loss to Unicoi County. Unicoi County officials

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Cleveland, TN 37312

need to look to Damascus, Virginia to see what an asset outdoor recreation can be to a community. ###

Feb. 24, 2009

Cherokee National Forest
2800 N. Ocoee St.
Cleveland, TN 37312

Re: Land Exchange Comments

To Whom it May Concern:

We are writing this letter in **OPPOSITION** of the exchange of property of federal land from the Rocky Fork Conservatory to the proposal of exchange for land in the Sciota area of Unicoi County.

Our family was one of the first generations to settle this land (of which we have proof) and at one time owned much of the land above the Sciota rifle range. Many of my siblings, including myself were actually born there. It was peaceful and serene. But for years we had to fight the local and state governments to keep out the public dumping grounds, proposed prisons and many other negative things for the once neglected part of the county. For many years we had the rights to the springs off federal land to provide our only source of water, which was continually an illegal dumping grounds for unwanted refuse and the water eventually became contaminated. The forestry service refused to put the gate below the present location so as to preserve this precious resource. Many families had to haul water in a modern day society. The Sciota area didn't become popular until our commissioners fought to have public water installed, and eventually the gas utility followed as well as cable TV service. For years we did without the amenities that others had in the county. Now we feel that we can still do without all the added (speeding) traffic and loss of wildlife habitat that will infringe on our rights as property owners. Additional revenues for the county should not have to come as our expense as natives to this pristine area. In today's economy I'm sure there are plenty of wealthy people (from out of state) that would love to live and develop the area in Rocky Fork.

Again, please be advised that we are in **OPPOSITION** to the exchange of land in the Sciota area of Unicoi County.

Sincerely,


Thomas and Debra Britt


USDA Forest Service Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal Comment Form

Name: _____
 Street Address: _____
 City, State, Zip: _____
 Phone: _____

I am totally in support of a land swap as an effort to supplement Unicoi County's tax base and development. I think that this is a very fair and honorable way to help the County in two ways; to preserve Rocky Fork for all of the public and for future generations and to offer land for sale. I thank everyone for all their efforts in making these plans possible. A state park will put us on the tourism destination maps.

Mail comments to the following address
 Please Return by March 6, 2009
 Cherokee National Forest
 Attn: Land Exchange Comments
 2800 N. Ocoee Street
 Cleveland, TN 37312

###

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest
Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name:
Street Address:
City, State, Zip:
Phone:

[Redacted Name]
[Redacted Street Address]
[Redacted City, State, Zip]
[Redacted Phone]

*I support the Land Swap
in Unicoi Co.
Consider as many parcels
as possible to increase our
Tax base.*

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Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37312
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USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest
Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: Francis's Garden Rd
Street Address _____
City, State, Zip _____
Phone _____

Concerns:

- Type of Development - will there be Restrictions - (No Trailers, etc.)
- Impact on Roads and Schools - additional children and cars - how would county/city pay to upgrade schools and roads
- Concerned about value of my property that adjoins this proposed land exchange.

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Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37312
###

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: [redacted]
Street Address: [redacted]
City, State, Zip: [redacted]
Phone: [redacted]

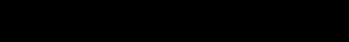
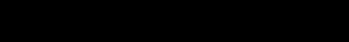
I am for swapping Forest Service
land for land in Rocky Fork.
we need more land for our tax
base. I am interested in other
tracts also being proposed so
that this will be equitable
and also in case any fall off
the list because of any of
the reasons that were cited
at the meetings.

Thanks

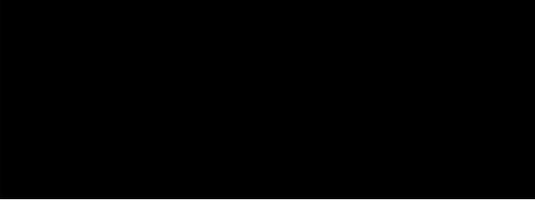
M [redacted] to the following address:
Please Return by March 6, 2009
Cherokee National Forest
Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37312
###

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: John Morrison
Street Address: 
City, State, Zip: 
Phone: 

The proposal needs to be changed to redraw the boundaries so that the public access road is included in the new FS Rocky Fork property; this is so that the FS and the public have road access without encumbering the undecided area for possible purchase by TN (and management by TWRA which shuts-out horses and other uses to the benefit of hunters).



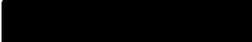
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Cherokee National Forest
Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37312
###

Pam Soulier Weiler


February 25, 2009

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing this letter regarding the Land Exchange Proposal, in Unicoi County, TN.

My property borders that of the  Tract. I have lived on this property since 1967. It was first owned by my parents, now I'm the owner.

Over the years, the Forestry Service has done different types of work on this tract. Once in the early 70's, after some work, the creek jumped it's bank and ran through the garage, causing damage to our property.

I fear that if and when the timber is cut, my property would be subject to more flooding and damage as a direct result.

The land itself has a difficult terrain. Steep grades would make building almost impossible. As far as "easy" access to utilities, my water meter isn't even on my property, this thanks to the Johnson City Utility System.

I'm also concerned about the animals that habitat this area; they too will suffer as they will be displaced. These include, but are not limited to: rattle snakes, copper heads, wolves, deer, black bear, raccoons, porcupines, red foxes, skunks and bobcats.

I believe that there are other areas that would be better for a land exchange than the Irishman's Branch Tract.

Respectfully,


Pam Soulier Weiler

USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: Tinker Rovira
Street Address: [REDACTED]
City, State, Zip: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]

Each year more and more areas of open space/wild life habitat are lost world wide. Each year more people recognize the value of this loss. Are there no other possibilities?

I realize that in our present economy funds for purchase of privately owned property are very scarce, but are there no other alternatives to development of presently protected National Forest lands?

I fully supported the conservation of Rocky Fork, but was dismayed to learn that land which once belonged to my ancestors, land where my grandparents sought food and fuel, where my mother played as a child, will now become developed in the interest of potential property taxes.

I have recently returned to this area after living in the West for many years, lastly Nevada, near Reno. I saw there how land swaps could preserve pristine areas of Northern Nevada, but I also saw the sprawl and development of the swapped lands in Southern Nevada; the total devastation of a once beautiful, viable ecosystem.

Mr. Boner quoted Theodore Roosevelt - foresight is the most crucial element of using and conserving the Country's natural resources. He spoke of the economic benefits of public lands. How then does it add to the character of this community to foster development and sprawl in areas that now provide public recreation and wildlife habitat?

I oppose the proposed land swap, in particular the Stone Mountain tract.

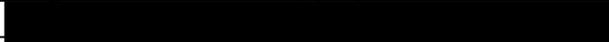
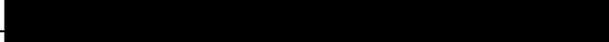
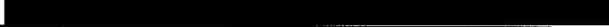
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Cleveland, TN 37312

Thank you.

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USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest

Rocky Fork Unicoi County
The Conservation Fund Land Exchange Proposal
Comment Form

Name: Deuce Dyer
Street Address: 
City, State, Zip: 
Phone: 

I am in support of exchanging select tracts of Forest Service land to gain more acreage at Rocky Fork, particularly ^① tracts that are ~~are~~ very isolated from other FS-owned lands and that are small acreages and ^② tracts that are near heavily populated or industrial areas.

In general, I would encourage you to establish limits for developing near/on ridgelines.

For the particular tracts that have been proposed:

① MARTIN CREEK TRACT: Exclude the ridgeline and seen area of Johnson Rock Ridge, as seen from the A.T. This ridge lies within 3/4-mile of the A.T.

② STONE MOUNTAIN TRACT: Open the southeast side of ALL of Little Mountain for development, keeping the ridgeline and the northwest side in Federal ownership to viewshed from I. 26. protect the

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Cleveland, TN 37312

Thanks for the opportunity to comment.
