



File Code: 1620

Date: April 28, 2010

Dear Interested Citizen,

The Forest Service is preparing an environmental analysis for a proposed land exchange submitted December 1, 2009 by The Conservation Fund (TCF). The proposed exchange is a modification of an earlier land exchange proposal presented by TCF in February 2009. TCF is proposing to exchange portions of the Rocky Fork Tract for certain tracts of land in the Cherokee National Forest in Unicoi County as a method of a partial conveyance.

The original TCF land exchange proposal was presented at public meetings in February, March and May 2009 to present the proposal and to seek public input. This proposal consisted of exchanging portions of the Rocky Fork Tract for three tracts of national forest land in Unicoi County. The proposed tracts were Martin Creek (209 acres), Little Mountain (previously referred to as Stone Mtn. - 660 acres), and Irishman Branch (798 acres).

Combined over 100 people attended these meetings. In addition, TCF and Forest Service representatives met with various groups, and Erwin City, Town of Unicoi and Unicoi County officials, adjacent landowners, and other interested citizens seeking input. A total of 78 written and oral comments were received. Copies of these comments, the presentations from the meetings, location maps, and a transcript of one of the meetings have been posted on the following website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/cherokee/lands/>

After considering public comment and a careful review of the proposal the Forest Service will begin a resource analysis of two of the three tracts in the proposal. Based on public input the Forest Service determined that it was not in the best interest of the public to exchange the Irishman Branch Tract. Therefore, this tract will no longer be considered in the land exchange process. The Martin Creek and Little Mountain tracts will be the only parcels considered in this proposal.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

In 2008, the Conservation Fund acquired approximately 7,800 acres and the Forest Service acquired 2,200 acres of the approximately 10,000 acre Rocky Fork tract. The Rocky Fork tract is one of the few remaining large expanses of intact forest land that lies adjacent to both the Cherokee & Pisgah National Forests. The Forest Service is interested in acquiring more of the Rocky Fork Tract and recently acquired an additional 2,849 acres in 2009 and 2010.



The Conservation Fund approached the Forest Service about considering a land exchange as a method of partial conveyance and in an effort to enhance economic development and to place additional land back into the county tax base by offering it for private ownership if acquired through exchange.

PROPOSED ACTION

The next step in this process is to disseminate TCF's revised land exchange proposal to officially start compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The revised land exchange proposal consists of dropping the Irishman's Branch tract (see vicinity map) but continuing with the Stone Mountain (Mtn) and Martin Creek tracts (see maps A & B). For clarification, the Forest Service is changing the name of the Stone Mtn. tract to the Little Mtn. tract since this tract is actually part of Little Mtn. and not Stone Mtn.

You are again being asked for assistance with identifying issues and concerns with this revised land exchange proposal. The following have been developed after reviewing the comments received in 2009:

- The Proposed Action (Alternative B) consists of the 660 acres Little Mtn. Tract (previously Stone Mtn.) and 209 acre Martin Creek Tract (see Maps A & B).
- Alternative A - consists of the 660 acres Little Mtn., 209 acre Martin Creek Tracts and two additional isolated tracts; the 12 acre Mill Creek Road and 17 acre Spivey Mtn. Road tracts (see Maps A, B, & C).
- Alternative C – no action

The Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (2004) (RLRMP) identifies Forestwide Direction in the form of goals, objectives, and standards.

GOAL 53: National Forest System lands are consolidated to improve management effectiveness and enhance public benefits.

FW-127: LAND ADJUSTMENT - LAND ACQUISITIONS WILL BE GUIDED BY THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA

Land conveyances will be guided by the following criteria:

1. Lands inside or adjacent to communities or intensively developed private land, and chiefly valuable for non-NFS purposes.
2. Parcels that will serve a greater public need in state, county, city, or other Federal agency ownership.
3. Inaccessible parcels isolated from other NFS lands. Parcels intermingled with private lands.
4. Parcels within major blocks of private land, the use of which is substantially for non-NFS purpose.

5. Parcels having boundaries or portions of boundaries, with inefficient configurations (projecting necks or long, narrow strips of land, etc.) support more logical and efficient management.

DECISION TO BE MADE

Following review of public comments and the environmental analysis, a decision will be made on whether the Cherokee National Forest should implement the proposed land exchange, one of the alternatives, an alternative suggested through this scoping process, or no action.

YOUR INPUT IS REQUESTED

To assist in determining issues and environmental effects associated with the proposal and the alternatives, the Forest Service is seeking comments regarding this revised proposed land exchange. You are invited to respond verbally or in writing until June 11, 2010. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment and received by that date will be used in the environmental analysis process and will be considered part of the public record on this project and will be available for public inspection.

Comments should be sent to:

Stephanie Medlin, Forest NEPA Coordinator
Cherokee National Forest
2800 Ocoee Street N.
Cleveland, TN 37312
telephone (423) 476-9700
fax (423) 339-8650

Additional information may be obtained at this address. Oral or hand-delivered comments (attachment # 2) must be received within our normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Comments may be mailed electronically to: comments-southern-chokeee@fs.fed.us. Please identify the project name "TCF Revised Land Exchange" in the subject line when providing electronic comments.

We are considering having another public meeting to field questions and comments in late May or early June 2010. We would go over all the alternatives, provide a brief history of Rocky Fork, explain the next step in regards to the NEPA process and the Exchange Process, provide a question and answer period; and then an opportunity for you to provide your input/concerns/thoughts about the land exchange in Unicoi County.

A location has not been selected. We would like to get an RSVP from you by May 12, 2010. If you return the attached form # 1 this will give us an idea of how many folks would like to attend the meeting.

We look forward to hearing from you and to your participation. If you have any question about this issue please contact me at 423-638-4109 or Susan Shaw at 423-476-9700.

Sincerely,

/s/ Terry S. Bowerman
TERRY S. BOWERMAN
District Ranger

Enclosures

Attachment # 1

The Conservation Fund Revised Land Exchange Proposal Public Meeting

___ Yes I am interested in attending this meeting.

___ No I am NOT interested in attending this meeting.

Return by May 12, 2010

-----Fold Here-----

Return Address:

Postage

Stephanie Medlin, Forest NEPA Coordinator,
Cherokee National Forest,
2800 Ocoee Street N.,
Cleveland, TN 37312

Attachment # 2
USDA Forest Service
Cherokee National Forest
Revised Land Exchange
Return by June 11, 2010
Comment Form

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

Mail comments to the following address:
Cherokee National Forest
Attn: Land Exchange Comments
2800 N. Ocoee Street
Cleveland, TN 37312
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Vicinity Map Unicoi County Possible Exchange Areas

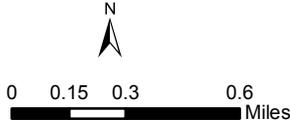
Cherokee National Forest Ownership
and Plan Prescriptions

04/2010

-  Possible Exchange Areas
-  Remove from Consideration
-  Private Land

Cherokee NF Lands - Plan Prescriptions

-  7.D - Concentrated Recreation Zone
-  7.E.2 - Dispersed Recreation Area with Vegetation Management
-  12.B - Remote Backcountry Recreation NonMotorized



Background maps used courtesy of
National Geographic Trails Illustrated

**Little Mtn. Tract
approx 660 ac**

7.E.2

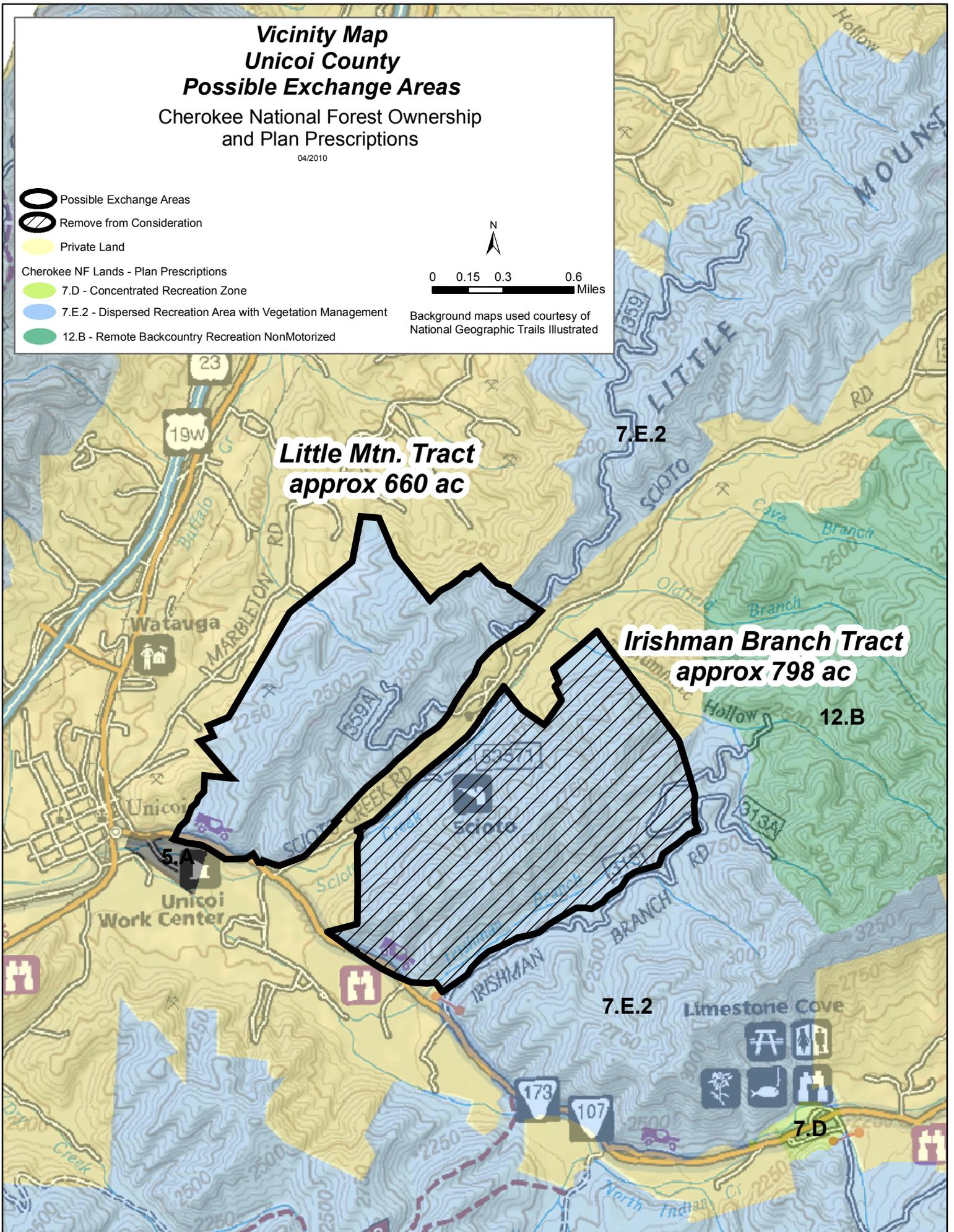
**Irishman Branch Tract
approx 798 ac**

12.B

7.E.2

Limestone Cove

7.D



Map A

Unicoi County

Cherokee National Forest

Possible Exchange Areas

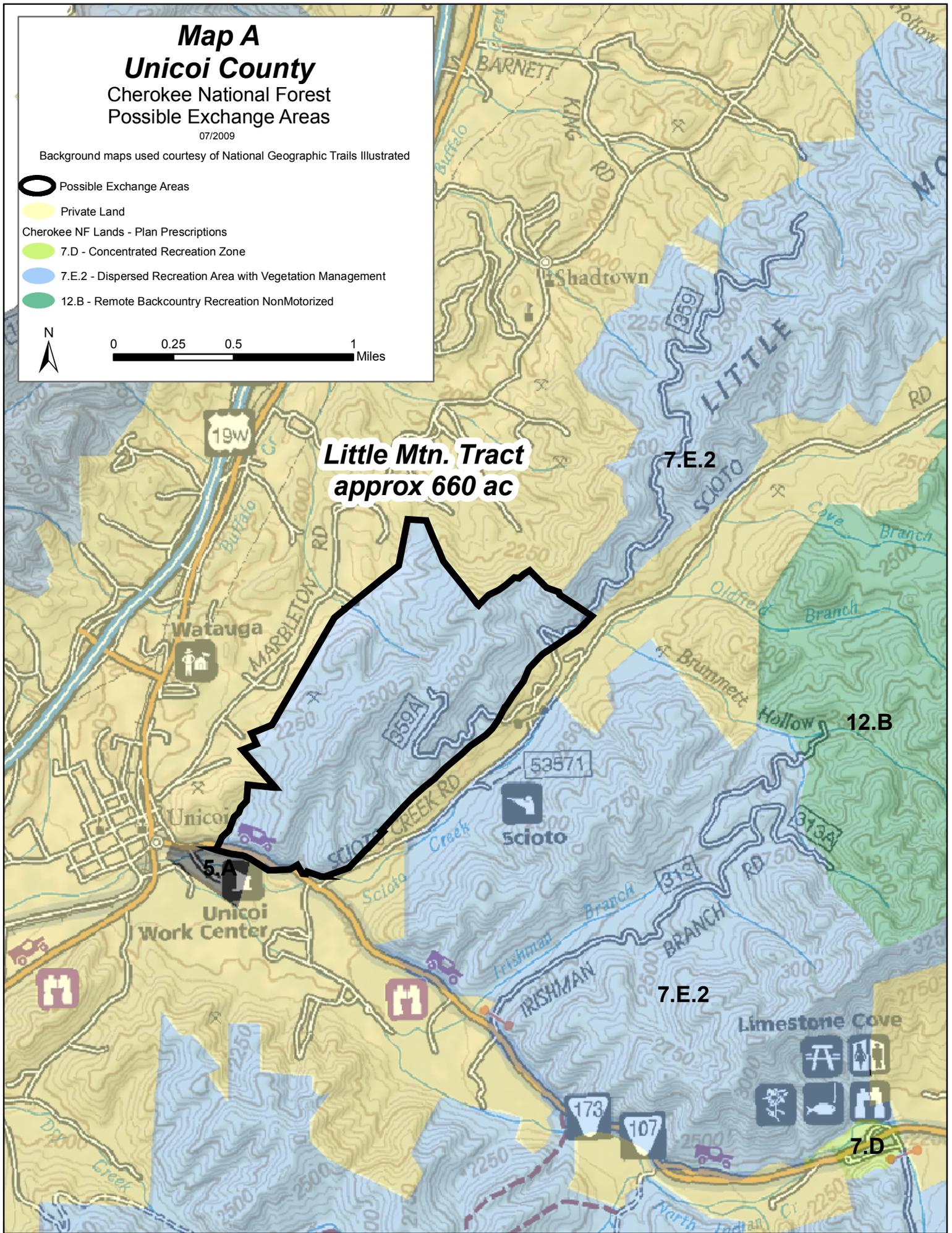
07/2009

Background maps used courtesy of National Geographic Trails Illustrated

-  Possible Exchange Areas
-  Private Land
- Cherokee NF Lands - Plan Prescriptions
 -  7.D - Concentrated Recreation Zone
 -  7.E.2 - Dispersed Recreation Area with Vegetation Management
 -  12.B - Remote Backcountry Recreation NonMotorized



0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles



Little Mtn. Tract
approx 660 ac

7.E.2

12.B

7.E.2

7.D

Map B

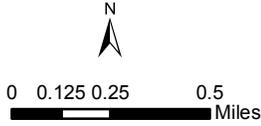
Unicoi County

Cherokee National Forest

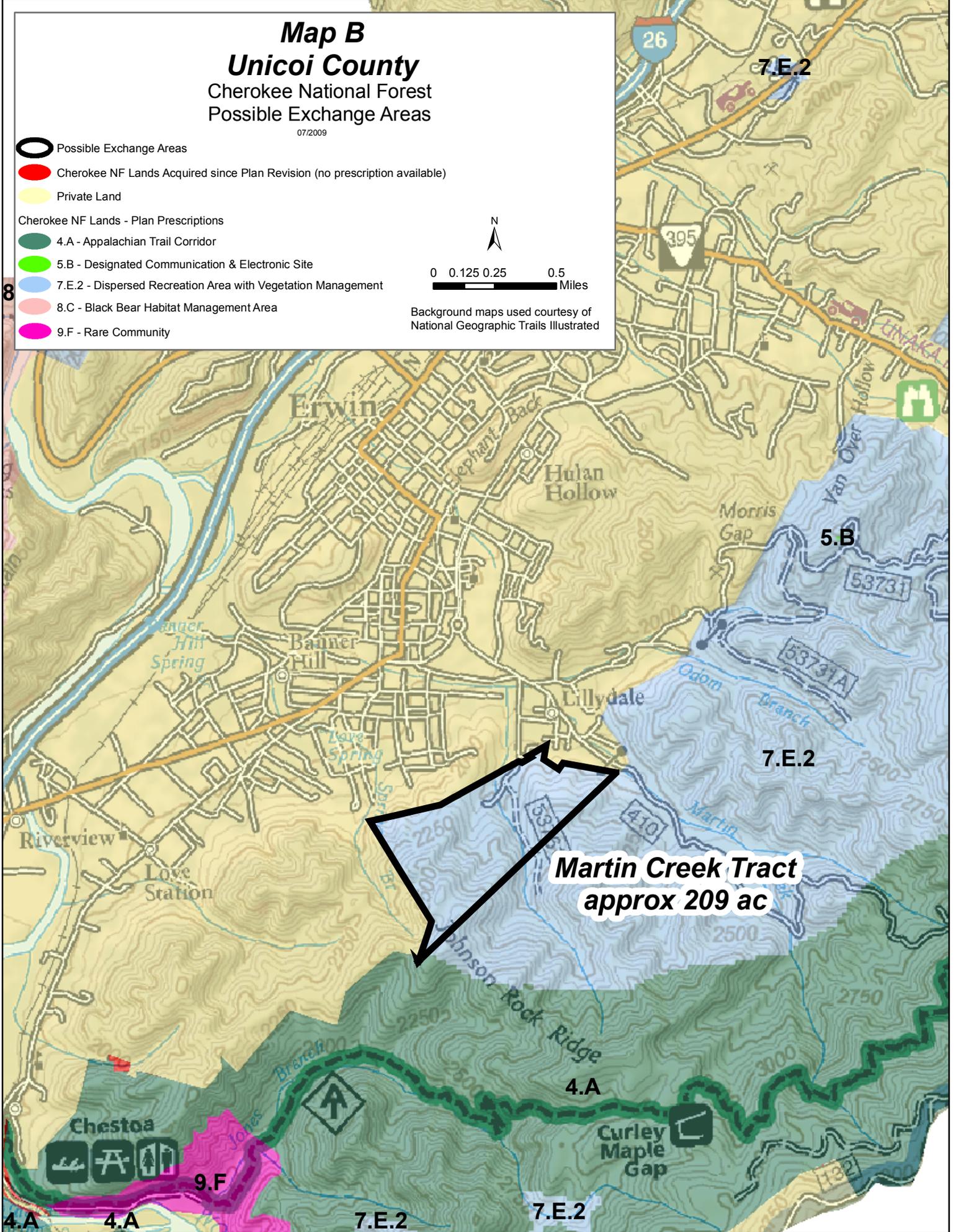
Possible Exchange Areas

07/2009

-  Possible Exchange Areas
-  Cherokee NF Lands Acquired since Plan Revision (no prescription available)
-  Private Land
- Cherokee NF Lands - Plan Prescriptions
 -  4.A - Appalachian Trail Corridor
 -  5.B - Designated Communication & Electronic Site
 -  7.E.2 - Dispersed Recreation Area with Vegetation Management
 -  8.C - Black Bear Habitat Management Area
 -  9.F - Rare Community



Background maps used courtesy of National Geographic Trails Illustrated



Map C

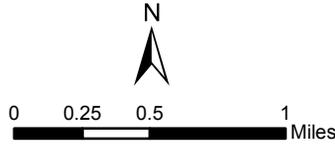
Unicoi County

Cherokee National Forest

Possible Exchange Areas

07/2009

-  Possible Exchange Areas
 -  Private Land
 -  Cherokee NF Lands Acquired since Plan Revision (no prescription available)
 -  Conserv. Fund Ownership - Future USFS Ownership
- Cherokee NF Lands - Plan Prescriptions
-  2.B.2 - Recommended Scenic River
 -  4.A - Appalachian Trail Corridor
 -  7.E.2 - Dispersed Recreation Area with Vegetation Management
 -  8.C - Black Bear Habitat Management Area
 -  9.F - Rare Community
 -  12.A - Remote Backcountry Recreation, Few Open Roads



Background maps used
courtesy of National
Geographic Trails Illustrated

