



Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests
U.S. Department of Agriculture
U.S. Forest Service, Southern Region
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May 10, 2012 (FMS 1209)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**US FOREST SERVICE SEEKS COMMENTS ON REVISED PROPOSAL TO
ESTABLISH SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN FARMSTEAD IN OCONEE COUNTY**

(Mountain Rest, S.C.) U.S. Forest Service officials are seeking comments on an environmental assessment released today *Establishing a Southern Appalachian Farmstead in the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River Corridor*.

“Alternative 2 is the proposed action, and our preferred alternative, that would allow the Oconee Heritage Center (OHC) to establish a Southern Appalachian Farmstead (SAF) at the existing Russell Farm Historic Site,” said Paul Bradley, forest supervisor for the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests and deciding official. “Our analysis shows the OHC’s proposal would provide an excellent historic interpretive, education and recreation experience for our visitors, as well as quality heritage learning and tourism opportunities for the local communities.”

Specifically, in response to an application from the OHC Board of Directors for a special use permit, the U.S. Forest Service is proposing to restore the Russell Farm, a site on the National Register of Historic Places, as a functioning farm designed and operated to interpret various aspects of rural Southern Appalachian culture between 1875 and 1925. The restoration would replicate the sights and sounds of this era and encourage visitors to learn about the area’s history and relationship to the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River.

“The Oconee Heritage Center Board of Directors and staff are excited to reach this step in the permitting process. We look forward to a productive partnership with the U.S. Forest Service to preserve an important piece of Oconee County heritage and to bring our agricultural heritage to life,” said Leslie White, Oconee Heritage Center Director/Curator.

As a working farm, the proposed SAF would demonstrate and interpret equipment, tools and farming techniques as well as activities from the historic era, such as candle making, growing crops and blacksmithing. Visitors would be able to see and experience life from this era through these demonstrations or related events that may feature Appalachian music, quilting bees, barn raisings, cooking sorghum and farming and lumbering.

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The mission of the USDA Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.

2-2-2-2 US FOREST SERVICE SEEKS COMMENTS ON REVISED PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN FARMSTEAD IN OCONEE COUNTY

In addition, two historic cabins will be relocated from another site – one will serve as an interpretive center, the second will be interpreted as a typical rural Southern Appalachian farmhouse. A third new, replica home will be constructed as the caretaker residence to provide security and maintenance at the site. The preferred alternative proposes to relocate fewer historic buildings to the Russell Farm site than the original proposal scoped by the agency and commented on by the public in 2009. After this initial scoping/comment period, the OHC Board of Directors changed its permit request, which the U.S. Forest Service accepted.

Before a final decision is made, the public may review the analysis and submit specific comments about the proposal for the forest supervisor's consideration. A copy of the EA can be found on the Sumter National Forest's website at <http://fs.usda.gov/scnfs>.

Comments must be postmarked within 30 days beginning the day following publication of the official notice in the paper of record, *The State*, Columbia, South Carolina which is expected in the next few days.

Comments should be sent to:

District Ranger
Andrew Pickens Ranger District Office
112 Andrew Pickens Circle
Mountain Rest, South Carolina 29664
Telephone: (864) 638-9568
FAX: (864) 638-2659

Comments may be e-mailed in a common digital format to comments-southern-francismarion-sumter@fs.fed.us.

For more information on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests, please visit <http://fs.usda.gov/scnfs>.

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