

File Code: 1950
Date: October 12, 2018

Dear Forest Stakeholder:

You are receiving this letter because you requested to be notified of such proposals or because you may own property immediately adjacent to National Forest lands where this activity is being proposed. We are seeking your input and encourage you to participate by providing comments and suggestions on this proposal.

The USDA-Forest Service is beginning an environmental analysis process for a proposed Target Range project located in the Blue Ridge Ranger District (BRRD) of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests (CONF) in Union County, Georgia. This analysis will include consideration of factors like public safety, potential noise from gunfire, heritage resource sites, and threatened or endangered plant and animal species.

The proposed project is an activity implementing a land management plan and is subject to pre-decisional objection process at 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B.

Project Proposal Description

The proposed action consists of authorizing Union County Government to construct a target range on National Forest lands. Union County Government will be the primary permit holder and will assume the responsibility of funding, maintenance and operation. However, the Union County Gun Club will be in charge of the day to day operation of the target range.

The proposed site for this project is located off Highway 180 between mile markers 18 and 19 on Land lot 212, District 16, Section 1 south of FS Road 292 and consists of approximately 15 acres of National Forest land. The proposal consists of construction of a pole barn type structure, vaulted toilets, earthen backstops, road reconstruction and a parking lot (attached map). If merchantable timber is to be removed, trees will be identified and designated for removal by Forest Service personnel.

Due to the scope of this project and concerns related to lead abatement, noise abatement and potential effects on soil and water, biological, recreational and scenic resources, the proposal appears to fall into a category of action that will require documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. The proposed year of implementation is 2020.

Purpose and Need for the project

The Forest Plan includes direction to provide a variety of recreation opportunities, including target ranges. Goal 31 of the Forest Plan of Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests directs us to *“Provide a spectrum of high quality, nature-based recreation settings and opportunities that reflect the unique or exceptional resources of the Forest and the interests of the recreating*



public on an environmentally sustainable, financially sound, and operationally effective basis. Adapt management of recreation facilities and opportunities as needed to shift limited resources to those opportunities.” The Forest Plan provides direction to recognize and respond to emerging recreation trends and uses within the Forest recreation niche by periodic assessments (Objective 31.1). Demand for a target range in Union County is gauged to be high, based upon grassroots interest in the Union County Gun Club, use at similar sites, and the numerous and diverse contacts requesting information on the locations of target ranges on the Forest.

The purpose and need of the proposal is to provide a safe, environmentally sound and secure target shooting facility to serve the community of Union County, Georgia, and the surrounding area. An environmental analysis responds to this need by developing and evaluating alternatives related to the proposed action and analyzing and disclosing the effects to the environment associated with each alternative.

Authorization of target range facilities is consistent with Forest Service policy (FSM 2335.4) when the use is consistent with Forest Plan standards and guidelines and when the authorization would enhance Forest management (by improving public safety, providing recreational opportunities or consolidating dispersed target shooting). Policy also directs the Forest to enter into agreements with state governments, local governments or private organizations to provide for cost-sharing for target range design, construction, operation and maintenance, with title to the target range improvements remaining with the government.

Public Meeting

The Union County will hold an open-house public scoping meeting which will include a presentation of the project and a forum for asking question and commenting on the project. The meeting will be as follows:

- *Wednesday October 24, 2018 at 6:00 p.m. at the Union County Fine Arts Center located at 926 Panther Overlook, Blairsville, GA.*

You are invited to attend this meeting. Agency representatives will be available to talk about the project and the Environmental Analysis process, and to answer questions. In addition, written comments will be accepted at the public meeting.

How to Submit Your Comments

Specific written comments as defined by §218.2 should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure that their comments are received in a timely manner. While comments will be accepted any time during the process, **to establish standing for objection eligibility, scoping comments must be received by November 13, 2018.**

Comments received in response to this notice, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on these proposed actions and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the agency with the ability to

provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents or standing for administrative review (§218.24). Only those who respond to this request for comments will remain on the mailing list for this project.

The responsible official for this project is the Chattahoochee-Oconee Forest Supervisor.

Submit electronic comments at the Union County Target Range Project webpage: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=54559> by selecting the “**Comment on Project**” link in the “**Get Connected**” group at the right hand side of the project webpage. Please state “Union County Target Range Project” in the subject line when providing electronic comments, or on the envelope when replying by mail; attachments may be in the following formats: plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc, .docx), or portable document format (.pdf).

Specific written comments may also be submitted by mail to: Andrew L. Baker, District Ranger, ATTN: Nelson Gonzalez-Süllow and/or Jerome Bennett, Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, 1755 Cleveland Highway, Gainesville, GA 30501, or by fax: 770-297-3011. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 9:00 am to 12:00, 1:00 to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

An objection period, if required, will follow the regulation found in §218.7. For objection eligibility (§218.5), only those who have submitted timely, specific written comments during any designated opportunity for public comment may file an objection. Issues to be raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after a designated opportunity to comment (§218.8(c)).

Additional information regarding this project can be obtained from Nelson E. Gonzalez-Sullow, Forest Environmental Coordinator, (770) 297-3000, and/or Jerome Bennett, Special Use Coordinator, email: comments-blueridge@fs.fed.us

Thank you for your interest in the management of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.

Sincerely,

/s/Andrew Baker
ANDREW BAKER
District Ranger

cc: Andrew L Baker, Jerome Bennett, Nelson Gonzalez-Süllow