



File Code: 1950/5430

Date: December 6, 2007

Dear Forest Stakeholder:

I am asking for your consideration and comments on this proposal. The Rabun County Board of Commissioners, the Rabun County Board of Education, and Mr. Larry Cooper (hereafter referred to as the proponents) have proposed a land exchange with the United States Forest Service (USFS) that involves private property in Jasper, Putnam, Rabun, White and Whitfield Counties of Georgia and National Forest System lands in Rabun County. This land exchange will be known as the Multi Party Exchange.

The United States of America would convey approximately 323 +/- acres of land to the exchange proponents and would receive approximately 759 +/- acres of land that would become part of the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests (refer to attached maps). It is important to emphasize in describing the following proposal that land exchanges are based on the appraised value of the tracts being considered for exchange and rarely result in an acre for acre exchange. The total value of the non-Federal tracts is equalized with the total value of the Federal tracts, without regard for acreage. If the appraised values of the non-Federal and Federal tracts are not equal, then cash (up to 25% of the value of the Federal tracts) is used to equalize the exchange.

The land exchange process is considered an invaluable tool for the USFS to address land and resource management needs. Consolidation of public ownership by land exchange improves management efficiency and results in long-term monetary savings. In summary, this proposed land exchange would meet several resource management needs identified for the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests. The proposed land exchange would provide new administrative sites on the Chattahoochee National Forest that are more centrally located and would provide for more efficient management of the Conasauga Ranger District (Tract C-2331 – refer to tract descriptions below) and the Chattooga River Ranger District (Tract C-2331e). The acquisition of an interior tract (C-2331a) on Yonah Mountain would improve the ability of the USFS to protect scenery values and acquire a critical inholding at this site. Tract C-2331d is located along the Cliff Creek riparian corridor and would address USFS goals for acquiring lands within the Chattooga River watershed.

Acquisition of the tracts in Jasper and Putnam Counties (Tracts U-2331b, U-2331c, and U-2331f) would provide several benefits for the Oconee National Forest, including additional protection of the watershed of Cedar Creek (designated as an Outstandingly Remarkable Stream), the addition of potential Red-Cockaded Woodpecker habitat, and the addition of lands considered to have productive potential. The acquisition of interior private tracts (including one within the Cedar Creek Wildlife Management Area) would improve management and reduce the amount of property boundary maintenance required.



Conveyance of the proposed Federal tracts to the proponents would relinquish Federal lands that are considered better suited for ownership by other entities than for National Forest purposes. Tract C-2330 surrounds the closed Rabun County landfill, and conveying this tract would facilitate EPD closure requirements and allow for more efficient monitoring and mitigation of this site by the County. The conveyance of Tracts C-2330a and C-2230b would allow the Rabun County Board of Education to provide for future school system expansion and needs. The remaining three tracts (C-2330c,d,e) represent small parcels of land that, due primarily to size and location, are considered inefficient for continued management by the USFS.

In the proposal, the proponents would convey seven non-Federal tracts of approximately 759 +/- acres to the USA. The tracts are identified as follows:

1. **C-2331** – A tract of approximately 12-15 acres, lying adjacent to the south bypass in the city of Dalton in Whitfield County, Georgia. The exact number of acres and tract description will be determined by a new survey of the tract.
2. **C-2331a** – A tract containing approximately 19.512 acres, as depicted on a plat of survey (identified as Tract 3) dated January 14, 2002, prepared by Rochester & Associated, Inc., and recorded in Plat Book 51, Pages 119-121 in the Office of the Clerk of Superior Court of White County, Georgia. This tract is located within the Tesnatee Creek watershed and is in Land Lots 153 and 154 of Land District 3 in White County, Georgia.
3. **U-2331b** – A tract containing approximately 282 acres located within the Big Cedar Creek watershed in Land Lots 167, 168, and 185 of the 369th District G.M. of Putnam County, Georgia.
4. **U-2331c** – A tract containing approximately 106.68 acres, and described according to a plat prepared by Georgia Kraft Company, dated June 11, 1962, and recorded in Plat Book 8, Page 222, Clerks Office, Jasper Superior Court. This tract is located within the White Creek watershed in Land Lot 129 of Land District 12 in Jasper County, Georgia.
5. **C-2331d** – A tract containing approximately 48.94 acres located within the Cliff Creek watershed in Land Lot 20 of Land District 4 in Rabun County, Georgia. The exact acreage and tract description will be determined by a new survey of the tract.
6. **C-2331e** – A tract containing approximately 39.5 acres located within the Tallulah River watershed in Land Lot 10 of Land District 4 in Rabun County, Georgia. The exact acreage and tract description will be determined by a new survey of the tract.
7. **U-2331f** – A tract containing approximately 250+/- acres located within the Glady Creek watershed of the GMD 375 in the Reid Road area of Putnam County, Georgia. The exact acreage and tract description will be determined by a new survey of the tract.

In the proposal, the U.S. Forest Service would convey six Federal tracts of approximately 323 +/- acres to the proponents. These tracts are identified as follows:

1. **C-2330** – A 70-acre portion of Tract S-303-I, which was purchased in 1913 from Himmelberger-Harrison Lumber Company. Located within the Tiger Creek watershed in Land Lot 17 of Land District 5 in Rabun County, Georgia.
2. **C-2330a** – A 100-acre portion (on the south side of East Boggs Mountain Road) of Tract N-1347, which was purchased in 1937 from Frank Eastman. Located within the Tiger Creek watershed in Land Lot 18 of Land District 5 in Rabun County, Georgia.
3. **C-2330b** – A 137-acre portion (on the north side of East Boggs Mtn. Road) of Tract N-1347. Located within the watersheds of Stekoa and Tiger Creeks in Land Lot 18 of Land District 5 in Rabun County, Georgia.
4. **C-2330c** – A 12+/- acre portion of Tract N-1347 lying to the west of U.S. Highway 441. Located within the Tiger Creek watershed in Land Lot 18 of Land District 5 in Rabun County, Georgia.
5. **C-2330d** – A 3.4+/- acre portion of Tract N-1043 lying to the west of U.S. Highway 441. Located within the Tiger Creek watershed in Land Lot 8 of Land District 5 in Rabun County, Georgia.
6. **C-2330e** – A 1.0 acre portion of Tract S-303-I, purchased in 1913 from Himmelberger-Harrison Lumber Company. Located within the Tiger Creek watershed in Land Lot 27 of Land District 5 in Rabun County, Georgia.

The acquisition of the non-Federal tracts and disposal of the Federal tracts as proposed are in agreement with the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forest's Land Management Plan. The land exchange as proposed is also consistent with the applicable goals, objectives, and standards of the Plan as follows:

Goal 81 – Maintain a proactive program of land acquisition through exchanges and purchases. Land will be acquired primarily to meet resource management needs while following the Land Ownership Adjustment Plan with an overall goal of consolidation (Plan, p. 2-68).

- Objective 81.3 – Obtain 50 percent of available inholdings on the Forest within 15 years of Plan implementation (Plan, p. 2-69).
- Objective 81.5 – Obtain additional lands along rivers to facilitate nature-based recreational uses, as well to provide habitat for aquatic biota...(Plan, p. 2-69).

Goal 82 – Divest those properties through land exchange that are isolated, impacted by urban influence, and generally not conducive to National Forest management and therefore more suitable in private ownership (Plan, p. 2-69).

Standard FW-227 – The following priorities are considered applicable for the non-Federal land acquisitions proposed:

- Lands needed for the protection of Federally-listed endangered or threatened wildlife, fish or plant species and their habitat (Plan, p. 2-69).
- Environmentally sensitive lands such as rare communities and wetlands (Plan, p. 2-69).
- Lands needed to protect riparian ecosystems and associated coldwater fisheries (Plan, p. 2-69).
- Lands that increase access for recreational opportunities, both developed and dispersed, and protect aesthetic scenery values (Plan, p. 2-69).
- Lands needed for administrative sites (Plan, p. 2-70).
- Lands permitting consolidation for more efficient management (Plan, p. 2-70).
- Lands with high productive potential (Plan, p. 2-70).

Standard FW-228 – The following criteria are considered applicable to the Federal lands proposed for conveyance:

- Lands inside or adjacent to communities or intensively developed private land and more valuable for non-National Forest System purposes (Plan, p. 2-70).
- Tracts that will serve a greater public need in state, county, city, or other Federal agency ownership (Plan, p. 2-70).
- Parcels having boundaries or portions of boundaries with inefficient configurations (projecting necks or long, narrow strips of land, portions of land lots, etc.) and that support more logical and efficient management in private ownership (Plan, p. 2-70).

The Code of Federal Regulations (Title 36, Section 254.3) contains specific requirements for consideration of a proposed land exchange, including a determination that this land exchange would be in the public interest. The factors to consider for making a determination of public interest include the opportunity to achieve better management of Federal lands and resources, to meet the needs of State and local residents and their economies, and to secure important objectives, including, but not limited to, protection of fish and wildlife habitats, watersheds, aesthetic values, enhancement of recreation opportunities and public access, consolidation of lands, for more logical and efficient management and development, fulfillment of public needs, and implementation of the Plan Goals, Objectives, and Standards previously listed.

To aid us in making this determination, I would like to hear from you regarding this proposal before making my decision. The proposal is a starting point for discussion and analysis and no decision has been made. Responses from the local community, interested individuals and groups, other government agencies, and Forest Service employees are needed to help determine the extent of analysis so we meet the intent of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The proposed action is expected to require preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) document. This determination, however, will not be finalized until after consideration of your comments and concerns.

Responses should contain relevant facts or comments along with supporting reasons that we would then consider in reaching a final decision on this proposal. Comments received, including names, become part of the public record and are available for public review. To be assured of having your comments considered in our decision process, all comments must be postmarked or

delivered within 45 days of the date of this letter. This will help ensure a complete and thorough analysis of the proposal. Send your written comments to: Multi Party Exchange, Blaine Boydston, Lands Specialist, at the address provided on the letterhead. You may also comment by phone at 706-754-6221, ext 104, by e-mail to bboydstun@fs.fed.us, or in person at any Forest Service office of the Chattahoochee-Oconee. Please note that you will be sent further correspondence on this proposal **only** if you comment on it or if you request further correspondence on it.

Thank you for your consideration and involvement.

Sincerely,

/s/ *George M. Bain*

GEORGE M. BAIN
Forest Supervisor

Enclosures: 6 maps