



File Code: 1950-1/2720-2

Date: July 13, 2009

NEPA Mailing List

Dear Interested Persons:

The Andrew Pickens Ranger District of the Sumter National Forest in Oconee County, South Carolina has received an application from the Board of Directors for the Oconee Heritage Center in Walhalla, South Carolina to establish a Southern Appalachian Farmstead living history interpretive site on 20 acres of national forest lands at the existing Russell Farm Historic Site on Highway 28 near the Chattooga River. The purpose and context of this proposal is to preserve and interpret historic rural lifeways (ways of life) associated with Southern Appalachian culture that was present in South Carolina, Georgia and North Carolina from 1875-1925.

The Russell Farmstead

The Russell Farmstead is located in Oconee County on Highway 28 near the Chattooga River (see Appendix A). The Forest Service purchased this 187-acre tract in 1970. Originally, the Russell Farmstead consisted of agricultural fields, gardens, pastures, a large two-story frame house and at least 12 outbuildings. Fire destroyed the main house, two outbuildings and a privy on May 14, 1988.

When five acres of the farmstead were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988, the house, outbuildings and site itself were recognized for three areas of significance dating from 1867-1921: transportation, architecture and agriculture. For transportation, the site was recognized for its role as a stage stop and inn. The house and outbuildings were recognized in the area of agriculture as representative of the diverse aspects of buildings on a small turn-of-the-century Appalachian farmstead. The main house and individual outbuildings were considered significant examples of vernacular architecture. The remaining buildings serve as interesting examples of early rural architecture, but the loss of four buildings to fire and the advanced deterioration of the remaining structures has resulted in adverse impacts to the site. Portions of the original agricultural fields have been mowed each year to provide open habitats for wildlife.

Proposed Action

Based on the application from the Board of Directors for the Oconee Heritage Center, I am proposing to authorize the establishment of a Southern Appalachian Farmstead living history interpretive site on 20 acres of national forest lands at the existing Russell Farm Historic Site on Highway 28 near the Chattooga River.



This proposal includes the following actions (see Appendix B):

- Stabilization, restoration, maintenance and interpretation of the buildings and grounds on the five-acre Russell Farmstead National Historic Register Site;
- Placement and interpretation of up to 12 additional relocated historic buildings and partial reestablishment of the historic landscapes on an additional 15 acres of the Russell Farmstead. This includes original locations and operations of stagecoach and other roadbeds, fence lines, gardens, agricultural crops (e.g. corn, sorghum) and pastures with traditional farm animals;
- Use of an additional relocated historic building (Cleveland School) as living quarters for a full-time tenant to provide on-site presence and security. This structure would be located on the south side of Highway 28 where a mobile home existed prior to public ownership;
- Construction of a 30-vehicle parking lot;
- Installation of public restroom facilities (modern, pit-type toilets);
- Use of an additional relocated historic building as an interpretive center, office and gift shop;
- Limited use of Forest Service-approved herbicides (as may be required primarily in some of the initial phases of land clearing) and insecticides (as may be required with the presence of farm animals);
- Replace existing stream crossings with foot bridges. Some additional ditching or drainage structures are also needed;
- Living history interpretive events and programs;
- Fundraising through donations and sales; and
- Relocation of existing power line to Highway 28 corridor.

The national forest lands being considered in this proposal are located within Management Prescription 2.A.3, Designated Recreational River Segments, Chattooga River. These areas are managed to emphasize the protection and enhancement of the outstandingly remarkable values that led to the river's designation and provide for a wide range of recreational opportunities. Desired conditions for these lands may allow for man-made facilities that provide for visitor safety and comfort including parking areas, trails, signs, restrooms and roads.

Purpose and Need

The area known as the Russell Farm Historic Site is an important landmark in Oconee County. However, due to lack of sufficient maintenance, the portion of the Russell Farm that was placed on the National Register of Historic Places has been deteriorating since a fire destroyed the main house and two outbuildings. Grasses, weeds, shrubs, trees and vines have grown over what used to be lawns, gardens and pastures. Buildings have been weathering, falling down, and vandalized. This proposal would reverse that trend by stabilizing, restoring and maintaining the buildings and grounds. The presence of a full-time tenant would improve security and reduce the potential for vandalism in the future.

In addition, the Southern Appalachian Farmstead would be a functioning farm designed and operated for the purpose of interpreting various aspects of rural Southern Appalachian culture. The historical context of the farm would be defined between 1875 and 1925; therefore, the site would be restored visually to what one would have seen in the late 19th or early 20th century. The site would also promote heritage tourism and serve as a welcome center for visitors entering the South Carolina upstate, offering information to visitors about recreational and other opportunities in the area and on the national forest.

The primary goal of the project would be public education about heritage resources such as Southern Appalachian history, architecture, agriculture, historic preservation techniques, environmental conservation and the mission of the U.S. Forest Service. Not only would structures be preserved (houses, cabins, corn cribs, smokehouses) but also equipment, tools and techniques would be interpreted. This would be a working farm in the sense that activities would include those from actual life during the given time period. Activities may include making candles, growing crops, blacksmithing and many others. Visitors will not only be able to see how the farm looked, but also experience it. Events would include small festivals, Appalachian music gatherings, quilting bees, barn raisings, cooking sorghum, and farming and lumbering demonstrations.

The consideration of this application is consistent with and supports the following goals and objectives for the Sumter National Forest:

- Goal 31 - Manage areas with special paleontological, cultural, or heritage characteristics to maintain or restore those characteristics (RLRMP, 2-28).
- Goal 31 - Meet the demand for quality heritage learning and tourism opportunities. Realize the potential of heritage sites on the national forest to draw heritage tourism partners to benefit both the heritage assets and public programs (RLRMP, 2-28).

Special-Use Permit Authorities

This project, if allowed, would be authorized and administered using a special-use permit; specifically, a Granger-Thye permit would likely be used. This type of permit (Section 7 of the Granger-Thye Act, 16 U.S.C. 580d) authorizes the occupation and use of improvements on national forest lands.

Public Meeting

A public meeting is scheduled for **August 31, 2009**. Those interested in finding out more about this proposal and how they might provide more informed written comments are invited to attend. The meeting will be held at the Oconee Heritage Center located behind the Bantam Chef at 123 Brown Square Drive in downtown Walhalla, South Carolina from 4:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m.

Environmental Analysis and Public Comment

I am interested in hearing about any concerns you might have with these proposed actions. The Forest Service will be preparing an environmental assessment (EA) that will disclose environmental and social impacts of these proposed actions. The analysis in that EA will be used to make a final decision on whether to allow these actions on national forest lands and, if so, under what conditions. I invite you to submit written comments to me about this proposal. This request for comments satisfies our legal requirement for the 30-day Notice and Comment period (36 CFR 215.3 and 215.5).

In accordance with 36 CFR 215.6(a) (3), individuals or organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the following information:

- Name and address;
- Title of the Proposed Action (“Southern Appalachian Farmstead”);
- Specific comments on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision; and
- Your signature or other means of identification verification. For organizations, a signature or other means of identification verification must be provided for the individual authorized to represent your organization.

Comments should refer to the “Southern Appalachian Farmstead Proposal”. Comments can also be faxed to the number listed above or e-mailed to comments-southern-francismarion-sumter-andrewpickens@fs.fed.us. Additional information may be obtained at the address and telephone number below.

Comments must be postmarked or received by **September 4, 2009** and sent to:

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

Sincerely,

MICHAEL B. CRANE
District Ranger

Attachments (Appendices A and B)

