



File Code: 1950/2710

Date: October 22, 2019

Dear Forest Stakeholder:

I am requesting comments on the following applications for special use permits using National Forest System (NFS) lands of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest administered by the Chattooga River Ranger District, as follows:

- ❖ An applicant doing business as Adventures in Horseback, LLC, is requesting authorization to use the following National Forest areas for outfitter/guided horse riding and camping:
 - Area 1 – the Coleman River/Upper Hightower area, including the use of Forest Service (FS) system roads 32, 32C, 32D, 54, 54A, 54B, 198 and 437.
 - Area 2 – the Wildcat Creek/Dicks Creek area, including the use of FS roads 26-1, 164, 164A, 164C, 165 and 675.
 - Area 3 – the Oakley Mountain/Raper Creek area, including the use of FS roads 24, 27, 161, 376, 376A and 410.
 - Area 4 – the Shirley Grove/Bear Gap/Low Gap area, including the use of FS roads 2 and 76, and old access roads, including Buck Mountain and Granny Camp/Shirley Grove.
 - Area 5 – the Honeystand/Black Mountain area, including the use of FS roads 173, 181, 182, 184, 187, 214, 220 and 278.

These areas are located in Habersham, Rabun, and Stephens Counties in Georgia. The type of rides that would be offered would range from out-and-back or loop rides of one or two hours, to “point to point” rides that could involve two or more days of riding and camping. The rides would use a combination of FS system roads and old woods roads in each of the five areas, with the use rotated among the five areas. A typical ride would involve one to four clients with two guides. Camping would be in dispersed (undeveloped) sites or within developed campgrounds.

- ❖ An applicant doing business as Walking in the Woods is requesting authorization to use the Bartram Trail (the Georgia section in Rabun County) for outfitter/guided hiking and camping trips. Access to the Bartram Trail would primarily be via FS system roads, including Hale Ridge (FS 7), Tuckaluge (FS 153), Walnut Fork (FS 155), Dan Gap (FS 155E), and Sarah’s Creek (FS 156), along with State and County roads and highways. A typical trip would involve six clients and one guide for two or three day outings. Existing dispersed camping sites along the trail with established fire rings would be used.
- ❖ An applicant doing business as Daniel’s Discovery Tours Shady Creek Expeditions is requesting authorization to use National Forest lands for a variety of outfitter and guided uses, including hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, mountain bike riding, and waterfall hikes. Proposed trails to be used for hiking would include the Bartram Trail, the Chattooga River Trail, Rabun Bald Trail, and Three Forks Trail. Dispersed camping would be done in the Burrells Ford and Reed Creek areas, the Warwoman Wildlife Management Area (WMA), the upper Chattahoochee River area, and along the trails requested for hiking. Fishing would be along the Chattooga River, West Fork, Hoods Creek, and Warwoman Creek. Guided hunting



for individuals would be done in conjunction with feral hog and small game hunting seasons within the Warwoman WMA. Mountain biking for individuals and small groups would use the Stonewall and White Twister Trails. The waterfall hikes would use Angel/Panther Falls, Holcomb/Ammons Creek Falls, Dicks Creek Falls, and Minnehaha Falls, and would involve small groups and typically only one vehicle. Various FS roads and State and County roads and highways would be used to access the requested locations. All of the requested locations are within Rabun County, with the exception of the upper Chattahoochee River area which is in White County, Georgia.

I would like to hear from you regarding these proposals before a decision is made on each proposal. If approved, an outfitting and guiding permit would be issued by the Forest Supervisor, typically with a beginning term of two years and an option to extend the term for up to eight additional years if the permittee performs acceptably for the first two years. Permittees would be required to have liability insurance, be properly certified or licensed if required for the specific type of activity, and the required permit fees (based on actual use and revenue reported) would be assessed.

The proposals appear to conform to a category of actions that may be excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. This determination, however, will not be finalized until after consideration of your comments and concerns. An analysis is currently being conducted by Forest Service personnel for these permit requests, including an assessment of the possible environmental effects of the proposed actions on NFS lands, as well as impacts to other users of the trails, roads and sites requested.

To have your comments considered in our decision process, we would appreciate receiving your comments by November 22, 2019. Please send your written comments to the Responsible Official (District Ranger) at 9975 Hwy. 441 South, Lakemont, GA, 30552. You may also comment by phone at (706) 754-6221, by fax to (706) 754-1021, or you may hand deliver your comments during normal business hours from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (office closed from 12:00 to 1:00 each day) Monday thru Friday, excluding federal holidays. You may also submit electronic comments to SM.FS.chattooga@usda.gov using a format such as an email message, portable document format (.pdf), plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf) or Word document (.doc or .docx).

Please note that you will be sent further correspondence on the proposed actions *only* if you comment on them or if you request further correspondence in your reply. Comments received, including names and addresses of those who respond, will become part of the public record and will be available for public review.

In general, the special use process involves a careful review of each application received to determine how the request would affect NFS lands and the public's use of these lands. Special use applications must be consistent with Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and special orders that apply to the National Forests. Each application is closely examined to determine whether a proposal is an appropriate use of NFS lands and whether the proposal is dependent upon NFS lands. Applications must also be consistent with the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, including all objectives and standards for management of the lands where a proposed special use is located.

This letter is being sent to organizations and individuals who have previously participated or been interested in our project proposals, specific areas, or specific uses of the Forest. This letter assumes that you have some familiarity with the planning process as conducted by the Forest Service in

accordance with NEPA. If you are receiving this letter and are unsure of the context or how to participate, please contact us. For more information about the specific proposals or our planning process, please contact Blaine Boydstun at 9975 Highway 441 South, Lakemont, GA, 30552, by telephone at (706) 754-6221, etc. 104, or by email to bboydstun@fs.fed.us.

Management of the National Forest is a public trust and is best conducted with broad participation. Thank you for your interest and involvement.

Sincerely,

RYAN W. FOOTE
District Ranger