

DECISION MEMO
DISPOSAL OF THE TOCCOA WORK CENTER COMPLEX

USDA Forest Service
Chattahoochee Oconee National Forests

Blue Ridge Ranger District, Administrative Site Conveyance
Forest Service Facilities Realignment and Enhancement Act of 2005
Fannin County, Georgia
USA Tracts #C-1766 & C-2346

Description of Decision

I have decided to sell a single parcel of federally owned land and associated building structures that are located on the Blue Ridge Ranger District. The site is located approximately two miles east of Blue Ridge, Georgia and was formally utilized as the Toccoa Ranger District work center. The work center site is no longer needed due to facility and personnel consolidation.

The property to be sold measures 38.5 acres, and is situated in the Eighth District of Section 2 in Fannin County in the State of Georgia, on the southwest side of Blue Ridge Lake, approximately 1/2 mile south of the Blue Ridge Lake dam. The property fronts along Old US Highway 76. The work center site was transferred to the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) from the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) by Presidential Executive Order in 1964. For purposes of this conveyance, the site is identified as U.S. Government Tract C-2346.

This land and building sale is authorized pursuant to the *Forest Service Facilities Realignment and Enhancement Act of 2005* (FSFREA). The FSFREA authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to sell designated surplus improvements and administrative site land parcels that do not exceed 40 acres in size. The building improvements on site consist of an equipment storage building, a shop, office, and an oil/paint house. The following table gives the square footage and construction date for each building:

Building Name	Category	Sq. Ft.	Date Built
Equipment Storage Building	Storage	4830	1964
Shop & Office Building	Office	2252	1964
Oil & Paint House	Storage	336	1964

The documents that transferred administration of the property from TVA to the USFS provided for a reversionary interest in favor of TVA. Neither federal agency wishes to own and maintain the premises anymore. Neither agency has a future need for the property. In order to sell the

property without this encumbrance, the reversion will be transferred to an unencumbered 11.61 acre parcel that fronts along Blue Ridge Lake. The intent of this transfer is to improve TVA's position by placing their current interest onto a lakefront property where electric power generation can be better and more suitably accomplished in the management of this reservoir.

The divestiture of land will also create a need to update the *Land and Resource Management Plan* (Forest Plan) for the Chattahoochee Oconee National Forests. This will be an administrative, non-significant amendment which will document a reduction of approximately 38.5 acres in the acreage within Management Prescription 5.A (Administrative Sites) and in the Forest acreage total as a whole per Table 3-1 in the Forest Plan (pgs 3-3 and 3-4).

Purpose of Decision

The Forest Plan for the Chattahoochee Oconee National Forests states the primary emphasis for the management of administrative sites, including work centers, is to provide facilities that effectively and safely serve the public and accommodate the Agency's work force (Forest Plan, pg. 3-99). An assessment of this emphasis led to the decision to divest this particular work center by FSFREA because it would be physically and financially inefficient to continue operations and maintenance activities. The assessment took into account the location of the work center, the overall efficiency for management as an administrative site, and the suitability of this facility for the workforce. The assessment included the specific facilities at the work center, their existing condition, and any maintenance needs (per guidance of Goal 80, Forest Plan, page 2-67).

The decision to convey the National Forest System lands on which the Toccoa Work Center is located was also guided by other direction in the Forest Plan. Forestwide Standard 228 (Forest Plan, pg. 2-70) provides the following criteria which applied to this decision, including:

- Lands inside or adjacent to communities and more valuable for non-National Forest System purposes,
- Tracts that will serve a greater public need in state, county, city or other Federal agency ownership, and
- Parcels having boundaries or portions of boundaries with inefficient configurations and that support more logical and efficient management in private ownership.

The site is identified in the Forest's *Facility Master Plan* as being no longer needed for agency administrative purposes. This plan also says the facilities and site are in the process of being disposed of through a land sale or exchange. Use of the proceeds of the sale shall be available to the Secretary for the acquisition, construction, or improvement of needed administrative facilities and associated land in connection with the Chattahoochee Oconee National Forest and to the extent possible the acquisition of land and interests in land in the State of Georgia.

FSFREA authorizes this Agency to sell certain real property either by competitive or direct sale. A GSA auction sale method is expected to result in the Federal Government receiving the largest return for the property.

An auction sale and transfer of TVA's reversion to lakefront acreage also aligns with policy that governs TVA's retention, disposal, and planning of their real property interests for multipurpose management of reservoir lands.

Scoping and Public Involvement

The ongoing consolidation of Ranger District offices and facilities on the Forest has involved various forms of public involvement and sharing of information.

Public notification for this specific project was preceded by an internal review of the Forest Plan and consultations with various Forest Service resource specialists. In February/2011, a scoping letter describing the proposal and soliciting comments was mailed to approximately 70 individuals, organizations, and agencies that have shown an interest in National Forest actions. The letter was also posted on the website for the Chattahoochee Oconee National Forests. The scoping letter included a description of the proposed actions and a request for any issues or concerns. All interested parties were invited to comment in person, by telephone, email, or regular mail.

A total of eight responses were received. Six were email responses and two individuals responded with a phone call. All eight responses indicated opposition to the workcenter parcel being sold (to Fannin County). Several of the individuals that responded were adjacent property owners who do not want to see this property sold. Other responses were similar in that the people wanted to see the property left in public ownership and utilized as a park and for recreational use. (Georgia Forest Watch was the only group that responded to the scoping letter) They felt as if the property had a strategic location for the management of the National Forest and that a portion of the Blue Ridge Ranger District would be neglected in the future if the workcenter site were sold.

The Forest's response to these concerns is that FSFREA allows the Agency to sell these designated administrative sites and associated land. Current budget shortfalls do not allow for maintenance of unused building structures and the building and land improvements on this site are deteriorating. The buildings will eventually become a liability if they are not maintained. This sale will also result in efficiency and cost savings due to the elimination of property lines and boundary corners.

A Public Notice of Proposed Realty Action for a Competitive Sale was published February 10, 2014. Comments about this action were invited and none were received.

REASON FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION:

I have determined that this decision meets the intent of Forest Service handbook 1909.15, Chapter 32.12, and Category #7 ("the sale or exchange of land or interest in land and resources where the resulting land uses remain essentially the same"). No extraordinary circumstances exist that might cause the action to have significant effects, and therefore the action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment.

An interdisciplinary team of specialists including a botanist, soil scientist, archeologist, wildlife biologist, environmental engineer, surveyor, review appraiser, and realty specialist provided review, documentation and reports on their findings. The summary of the findings of no extraordinary circumstances is as follows:

- No new ground disturbance will be required for this land sale. A wetlands and floodplains survey was conducted on the site in January of 2007. (Survey report in project file)
- No rare plant occurrences were located on the old Toccoa workcenter site and surrounding property.
- In accordance with Stipulation V.B.1 of the Southern Region Programmatic Agreement and the Memorandum of Understanding with the Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), an archeological evaluation of the sites was conducted by The Forest Service in 2008, in consultation with the Georgia SHPO. The survey concluded that the project will have no effect on archaeological resources. (project file)
- In accordance with FSM 2672.4, a Biological Evaluation was prepared in 2007 and 2008 to evaluate the effects of the proposed conveyance on Proposed, Endangered, Threatened, and Sensitive species (PETS). It was concluded that the proposed conveyance of this tract would not affect any federally listed species. (project file)
- A phase 1 environmental site assessment was completed on the tract. The report states that it is possible that asbestos and lead-based paint is present within the buildings due to the age of the structures. It is also possible that lead may be present in the drinking water due to the age of the plumbing. Underground Storage Tanks were removed from this site in 1988. It is possible that petroleum products may be present in the soil in certain areas. These findings will be disclosed as part of the sale process.
- The administrative site is not compliant with the American Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.
- A Minerals Potential Report for USA Tract C-2346 was completed by the Forest Geologist, including a certified technical review, in November/2011. The conclusions of the study revealed that the mineral estate for this property is considered to have low potential for the occurrence of gold, sand, gravel, and aggregate. The tract is considered to have no potential for the occurrence of copper sulfides and Goethite. It was the geologist's recommendation that the mineral estate be included with the surface estate when this tract is sold.
- The Forest Land Surveyor completed the Land Description Reviews in March/2011.

This project is consistent with current management direction, including standards and land allocations of the Forest Plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, based on the following findings:

1. The facilities and land are allocated to Management Area 5.A (Administrative Sites) in the Forest Plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.
2. As required by the National Forest Management Act, this project is consistent with management direction and meets all applicable standards found in the Forest Plan.
3. The workcenter property will be sold for not less than the minimum bid of \$450,000. Market values for both tracts involved in this decision were derived from agency approved appraisals that were completed in compliance with Federal standards and Forest Service policy.
4. No new ground disturbance will be required for this transaction.
5. The proposal is consistent with Forest Facility Master Plan.

Public Interest Determination:

I have determined that the public interest will be well served by sale of this property. There will be no need for reservations or restrictions in the conveyance to protect the public interest.

I have considered the following factors in making this determination:

- Disposal of this unneeded administrative site property will achieve better management of Federal lands and resources.
- Sale of the property is consistent with the Forest Resource Management plan and the Facility Master Plan.

Decision:

I have decided to complete this land sale as proposed to convey the Toccoa work center, containing 38.5 acres and to have the proceeds of the sale be available to the Secretary as outlined in FSFREA. The property will be conveyed subject to easements of existing roads, highways, and public utilities. There are no other outstanding rights or reservations and no special use permits or other written or verbal agreements attached to this property. Property to be removed from the sale area prior to finalization of the sale includes all contents within the structures previously described and all stored materials on the grounds of the site.

I have also decided to transfer TVA's reversionary interest in the Toccoa work center to USA Tract C-1766 in order to facilitate and protect the federal government's management of this reservoir. Also, I will have an administrative non-significant amendment which will document a reduction of approximately 38.5 acres in the acreage within Management Prescription 5.A (Administrative Sites) and in the Forest acreage total as a whole per Table 3-1 in the Forest Plan (pg. 3-3 and 3-4) See Exhibit A in this document

Administrative review or Appeal Opportunities:

Changes in Forest Service policy regarding categorical exclusions. On January 17, 2014, the President signed into law the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014, Section 431 of which directs that the 1992 and 2012 legislation establishing the post-decisional appeals process found in 36 CFR 215 and the pre-decisional objection process found in 36 CFR 218 shall not apply to "any project or activity implementing a land and resource management plan ... that is categorically excluded ... under the National Environmental Policy Act."

On February 7, 2014, the President signed into law the Agricultural Act of 2014, Section 8006 of which repealed the Appeal Reform Act. The implementing regulation for the Appeal Reform Act was found in 36 CFR 215. The Agricultural Act of 2014 also directs that the pre-decisional objection process established in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012 shall not be applicable to categorically excluded projects or activities.

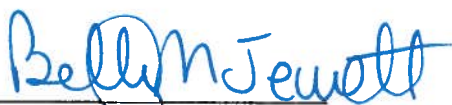
As a result of these two acts the Forest Service will no longer offer notice, comment, and appeal opportunities pursuant to 36 CFR 215 for categorically excluded projects.

These legislative changes and the new direction issued by the chief do not limit the public's ability to comment on Forest Service projects and activities. For categorically excluded projects, the Forest Service will continue to offer public involvement opportunity as per 36 CFR 220. For proposed projects documented in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement, the Forest Service will continue to provide notice, comment, and pre-decisional objections as per 36 CFR 218.

Implementation: The implementation of this project may begin immediately.

Contact Person: For additional information concerning the sale of the Toccoa work center, and transfer of a reversion to USA Tract C-1766, contact Al Foster, 1755 Cleveland Highway, Gainesville, GA, 30501, telephone (770) 297-3062, or altonfoster@fs.fed.us

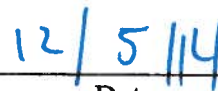
RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL



BETTY M. JEWETT

Forest Supervisor

Chattahoochee Oconee National Forest



Date

Exhibit A

Chattahoochee-Oconee Land and Resource Management Plan

Amendment No. 3

Effective December 2014

POSTING NOTICE:

There are two pages with this posting notice:

- Page 3-3 and page 3-4 should replace these existing pages.

EXPLANATION:

The analysis to substantiate this acreage change is found in the Disposal of the Toccoa Work Center Complex Decision Memo.

This amendment is an administrative, non-significant amendment to the Chattahoochee-Oconee Forest Plan, which document a reduction of approximately 38.5 acres (from 163 acres to 125 acres) in the acreage within Management Prescription 5.A (Administrative Sites) and in the Forest acreage total as a whole per Table 3-1 in the Forest Plan (page 3-3 and page 3-4).

Table 3- 1. Management Prescription Acreage

MRx	MRx Title	Chattahoochee Acres	Oconee Acres	Total Acres
0.B	Custodial Management - Small, Isolated Land Areas (to be disposed of or exchanged)	1,929	142	2,071
1.A	Designated Wilderness Areas	117,436	0	117,436
1.B	Recommended Wilderness Study Areas	8,094	0	8,094
2.A.1	Designated Wild River Segments	5,998	0	5,998
2.A.2	Designated Scenic River Segments	468	0	468
2.A.3	Designated Recreational River Segments	1,551	0	1,551
2.B.1	Recommended Wild River Segments	2,120	0	2,570
2.B.2	Recommended Scenic River Segments	524	4,854	5,378
2.B.3	Recommended Recreational River Segments	423	0	423
3.A	National Scenic Area	7,122	0	7,122
3.B	Experimental Forests	0	9,364	9,597
3.C	National Recreation Areas	23,660	0	23,647
3.D	Proposed National Recreation Areas	2,029	0	2,030
4.A	Appalachian National Scenic Trail Corridor	16,655	0	16,868
4.B.1	Murder Creek Research Natural Area	0	1,005	1,005
4.D	Botanical - Zoological Areas	3,363	1,215	4,578
4.E.1	Cultural/Heritage Areas	191	111	302
4.F	Scenic Areas	18,129	0	21,125
4.F.1	Scenic and Wildlife Management Areas	18,426	0	19,876
4.F.2	Regional Forester Designated Scenic Areas (Pre-1985)	4,797	0	4,725
4.H	Forest-Designated Outstandingly Remarkable Streams	17,868	4,730	22,598
4.I	Natural Areas - Few Open Roads	17,943	0	17,903
5.A	<i>Administrative Sites</i>	125	102	227
5.B	Communication Sites	48	0	48
5.D	Military-Use Areas (Camp Merrill)	144	0	144
6.B	Areas Managed to Restore or Maintain Old-Growth Characteristics	28,059	1,617	29,676

Table continued next page

Table 3- 1. Management Prescription Acreage

MRx	MRx Title	Chattahoochee Acres	Oconee Acres	Total Acres
6.D	Core Areas of Old-Growth surrounded by Areas with Extended Forest Rotations	598	0	598
7.A	Scenic Byway Corridor	12,431	0	2,037
7.B	Scenic Corridors and Sensitive Viewsheds	16,586	0	16,992
7.E.1	Dispersed Recreation Areas	74,277	0	75,262
7.E.2	Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management	24,455	8,383	30,838
8.A.1	Mix of Successional Forest Habitats	68,323	0	68,323
8.A.2	Forest Interior, Mid- to late- Successional Forest Habitats	23,693	0	26,730
8.D	Red-cockaded Woodpecker Habitat	0	31,438	31,412
8.D.1	Red-cockaded Woodpecker Sub-habitat Management Areas	0	15,670	15,848
8.E.3	High-Elevation, Early Successional Habitat	6,604	0	6,875
9.A.1	Source Water Protection Watersheds	9,325	0	10,127
9.A.3	Watershed Restoration Areas	17,854	0	17,767
9.F	Rare Communities	505	593	1,098
9.H	Management, Maintenance, and Restoration of Plant Associations to Their Ecological Potential	172,718	35,006	207,724
11	Riparian Corridors	N/A	N/A	N/A
12.A	Remote Backcountry Recreation – Few Open Roads	28,261	0	28,256
Totals		750,731	115,215	865,946