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Mack Mason, who serves as an adviser to the group. throughout the project. "I cannot believe how well the Forest Service has worked with us so far," said Paris. "We know that they had some encouragement from Washington, but they've also

done a good job. "They've worked with us great. We're staying on schedule. Everything I'm hearing from them is positive - I haven't heard one thing negative."

Gun Club President Paul Clark gave a status update on the USFS project timeline, which is currently in the Environmental Analysis phase.

Clark detailed an October 2018 sound study that yielded good results for the range, as well as two live-fire tests that were conducted in November and December 2018 respectively.

Due to the government shutdown in December and January, an official analysis of the live-fire tests had been delayed and so was unavailable to members in the March 7 meeting.

Based on impressions from local participants in those live-fire tests, however, the results are expected to be positive for the potential target range, which would be situated about 1.1 miles away from the nearest home and 1.5 miles away from part of the Appalachian Trail.

Members also received welcome news from Congressman Collins' field representative last Thursday.

"I spoke with (the U.S. Forest Service) last week, where there haven't been any kind of hurdles or hang-ups or anything



Union County Gun Club members filled the Haralson Memorial Civic Center for the club's March 7 Annual Meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Gun Club discusses target range progress in March 7 Annual Meeting

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Union County Sheriff Mack Mason speaking in the March 7 Annual Meeting of the Union County Gun Club.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Members of the Union County Gun Club gathered for their Annual Meeting on Thursday, March 7, inside the Haralson Memorial Civic Center.

And though there weren't any major updates on the proposed Union County Target Range, members learned in the meeting that the U.S. Forest Service is about halfway through its vetting process for the project off of Georgia 180 between mile markers 18 and 19.

The 2019 Annual Meeting took place two days shy of the one-year anniversary of the initial meeting with

Joyce White and others at the proposed range site on March 9, 2018.

That 2018 meeting served as a milestone of sorts for the Gun Club, as Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris' office soon after made the application for the target range to kickstart the project with the Forest Service.

And the club, which began in July 2017, is hopeful that the USFS process will wrap up by late summer 2019, at which point members will receive the go-ahead to start building the range.

"We knew this wouldn't be an overnight thing, and we told y'all that, and you've stuck with us, and I thank you for it," said Union County Sheriff

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Forest Supervisor Betty Jewett, Georgia Director for USDA Rural Development

to really be seriously concerned about," said McDonald. "I am under the impression, speaking with them, that archaeology should be coming to a close here soon."

"There was the proposition that they could find an arrowhead or something, and then this whole thing would be derailed. Well, they've not found anything of significance to my knowledge, at least within the last week or so, and they should be wrapping that up here pretty quickly."

Jim Marchman is the Community Center Director for the county, and he is serving as the county's liaison for everything associated with the target range.

Marchman met with Forest Service officials on Friday, March 8, to learn the latest information concerning the target range project timeline, though the particulars of that meeting were not available at press time.

Also in the 2019 Annual Meeting, members learned that the club had been able to raise nearly \$26,000 so far, which will help the club cover costs associated with the target range should the project be approved later in the year.

Members also approved a bylaw change to move the "drop dead" date for membership renewals from March 1 to March 31.

Carol Rosenqvist of the Georgia Sport Shooting Association, which serves as the state affiliate of the National Rifle Association, also spoke in the meeting, relating that she will once again serve as GSSA president.

"We're hoping to get a youth camp started during the summer over in Augusta, possibly a weekend for the youth," said Rosenqvist, looking ahead. "Also, we do continue to do the Women On Target Program, which is an NRA class now. So, any woman attending gets an actual certificate from the NRA."

"We have two dates set up so far, one on May 5 and one Aug. 4. Those dates are on Sundays, however, I'm starting the class at 12 p.m. So, anybody who goes to church in the morning, if they want to come on out, they're more than welcome to."

The club held its last annual meeting in November, when members voted to move annual meetings to March.

Of course, Gun Club

members are eager to get a range in place for residents to practice shooting.

Historically, gun owners have had to either shoot on their own property or travel to another community to shoot at a non-local range.

Even local law enforcement must rely on private property owners donating the use of their land for important shooting practice, as the state requires peace officers to requalify with duty weapons annually.

All that could change later this year, after the Forest Service completes its extensive environmental testing phase, subsequent administrative review period, and final decision-making process, potentially by the end of summer 2019.

The eventual range will be situated upon a 14-acre piece of land off Georgia 180, and it will feature a 200-yard rifle range, a shorter pistol range, and a clubhouse that the Gun Club Board feels confident will be able to accommodate 4-H BB and Air Rifle teams.

For regular updates on the club, including U.S. Forest Service progress, check out UnionCountyGunClub.org.