

THE NORTH GEORGIA NEWS

# Forest Service to review new gun range permit application

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Assistant Editor

Calls for a new gun range have continued to increase since the founding of the Union County Gun Club in July 2017, prompting state and federal officials to pay attention.

Union County Sheriff Mack Mason recently contacted Joyce White, Georgia Director for USDA Rural Development, about next steps toward developing a range.

Sheriff Mason advises the Union County Gun Club, which has grown to more than 300 members, and the club's board has identified a 14-acre piece of U.S. Forest Service land off Georgia 180 near Blairsville that seems perfect for a range.

After speaking with the sheriff, White — whose two bosses are U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue, formerly the governor of Georgia, and President Donald Trump — coordinated a meeting



Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Union County Sheriff Mack Mason on a walkthrough of the proposed future site of the Union County Gun Club Shooting Range, with Georgia Director for USDA Rural Development Joyce White and Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Supervisor Betty Jewett.

at the proposed site of the range on Friday, March 9. The meeting allowed club members to share ideas with a diverse group

of individuals from the federal, state and local levels, including Forest Supervisor Betty Jewett, who oversees the Chattahoochee-Oconee

National Forests.

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Photo by Shawn Jarrard  
Col. Eddie Henderson of Georgia DNR with Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris on USFS land off Georgia 180.

the fate of the range, and gun club members were encouraged Friday when Jewett said she saw the need for adding a range in the area.

"I am enthusiastic about the meeting of the gun club and with the sheriff, and I think we are on the road to the right decision," said Supervisor Jewett. "It's a great old wildlife opening.

"It would be too pre-decisional for me to say it's a great site (for a range) without having dug a little deeper into it, because this is the first time I've been out here to this and considered it as a shooting range."

"So, it's a little soon, but I like the energy that's here, and I like the thought that the gun club and the county have tried to put into this site."

Next steps for the potential range include the making of an initial permit application, which will be done through the county to ease the process, as Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris wants to help the project get off the ground.

Once the application is accepted, the property must undergo a series of assessments for environmental, historical and other potential impacts, as well as a public comment process.

After that second phase is completed and if the range is approved, the county would then lease the property to the gun club for management and maintenance.

The application process should take roughly a month, during which time Supervisor Jewett will examine the legal ins and outs of the proposed range and its potential uses, though the subsequent environmental assessments phase will likely take three years or more to

complete.

"It was a very good meeting," said Paris. "I think the frustrating part is that we realize it's going to take probably a couple of years to get this done, but the positive part is, I think they're going to work with us in every way they can to make it happen."

Sheriff Mason was similarly heartened after the meeting, saying that he is thankful for the spirit of teamwork embodying the gun range effort.

"It sounds like they're going to be very cooperative and going to assist us in any way that they can," said Sheriff Mason of the Forest Service.

Others involved in the meeting were Steverson Moffat, acting District Ranger for the Blue Ridge Ranger District; Joel Katz and David McDonald of U.S. Congressman Doug Collins' office; Andrew Turnage of Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp's office; and Col Eddie Henderson of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

Local turnout for the meeting included Sheriff Mason; Commissioner Paris and County Manager Larry Garrett from Union County Government; and Paul Clark, Joan Moody, Gene Cooley and Charlie Azzarello of the Union County Gun Club Board.

A key aspect of the Union County range would be its ability to accommodate rifle shooting at 200-plus yards, pistols and potentially shotguns.

Club members would have regular access to the range, with limited hours for the public, and local peace officers from the Union County Sheriff's Office and Blairsville Police Department would have a home to train for firearms

requalification.

Furthermore, the club would consider opening the range to students on the Union County 4-H Shotgun and BB Gun Teams, which would be particularly helpful since development of the 4-H shooting range came to a halt last year.

Following the meeting on Friday, Supervisor Jewett and Ranger Moffat went to check out the Chatuge Gun Club range just a handful of miles down the road in neighboring Towns County.

The Chatuge Gun Club has had a special use permit through the Forest Service since 1981, and Jewett said she will be considering whether or not it makes sense to physically expand the range on Owl Creek Road to accommodate more people.

Members of the Chatuge Gun Club number more than 800, and the range sits on approximately eight acres of USFS land.

# Forest Service to review new gun



Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Supervisor Betty Jewett going over the process of establishing a range on Forest Service land with Union County Gun Club members.

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Assistant Editor

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After speaking with the sheriff, White — whose two bosses are U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue, formerly the governor of Georgia, and President Donald Trump — coordinated a meeting at the proposed site of the range on Friday, March 9.

The meeting allowed club members to share ideas with a diverse group of individuals from the federal, state and local levels, including Forest Supervisor Betty Jewett, who oversees the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.

Ultimately, USFS Supervisor Jewett will decide the fate of the range, and gun club members were encouraged Friday when Jewett said she saw the need for adding a range in the area.

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A diverse meeting of the minds from federal, state and local officials on Friday, March 9.