

Gun Club to offer Target Range update in March 10 meeting

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After two and a half years of behind-the-scenes work on behalf of local residents, the public Target Range championed by the Union County Gun Club is finally on the verge of becoming a reality.

Union County Government has been awarded a lease on a 15-acre parcel of Forest Service land.

Gun Club leadership will hold the club's annual meeting on Tuesday, March 10, at 6 p.m. at the Haralson Memorial Civic Center on Wellborn Street in Blairsville.

In the meeting, the Gun Club Board will update members and the public on the Target Range and next steps.

"We're going to discuss



where we are now and what we are expecting to happen before we are able to start breaking ground," Club President Paul Clark said. "Once we get that taken care of, we're going to open it up for questions.

"We'll hand out postcards and have (guests) write questions, and then we'll field those questions. After

the meeting, we're going to hold a (roughly 45-minute) preliminary safety orientation meeting for those who would like to stay.

"At the conclusion of that orientation, those that are present and are members will get a colored ID badge to indicate that they have

See Gun Club, Page 2A

Gun Club...from Page 1A

already been through the safety orientation briefing.

"Also, this is a good time for paying your dues to keep up with those who have joined from the very beginning and want to keep their status as being part of the original membership."

The \$35 in membership dues for charter members are due in March. For new members, there is a one-time initiation fee of \$100, and dues will be \$70 for the year now that it's definite that the gun range is going to become a reality, Clark said.

Charter members, of which there were over 500 in March 2019, joined before the U.S. Forest Service approved the Target Range for Forest Service land. Charter memberships were discontinued last year after it became certain the range would be approved.

Clark said that, at this point, the club is waiting for officials with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to develop a range site plan for approval by the Forest Service.

"Once they OK that site plan, then it's a matter of getting the funding together, and we have several options for funding the range," Clark said, adding that once the funding is set, then the county can start breaking ground.

Details of range funding sources and their potential stipulations and restrictions will be put forth in the March 10 meeting, which will be attended by Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, who submitted the initial Target Range application on behalf of the county, and Sheriff Mack Mason.

"Shooting is a sport," Mason said. "Shooting is a fun

sport. It is also a fundamental sport, to know how to use a firearm properly, safely and accurately."

Sheriff Mason has been an adviser to the Gun Club since its inception in July 2017, and he said one of the major determining factors for the Forest Service allowing the range was the initial charter membership group sticking together and paying its dues.

"(In terms of public land), Union County is 47.4% owned by the federal government," Mason said. "We are the people; we are the

federal government.

"We've searched and found what looks to us like what is the only spot in Union County that will not be an abuse to someone's peace and tranquility."

Georgia Sport Shooting Association President Carol Rosenqvist is also expected to attend the meeting, and it's possible that a representative of Congressman Doug Collins' office and one from Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue's office will be present as well, Clark said.