

LIVING NEXT DOOR TO A NATIONAL FOREST

Chattahoochee-Oconee
National Forests
GEORGIA

Forest
Service



Southern
Region

United States Department of Agriculture

What Living Next to a National Forest Means to Private Landowners

For many people, having a piece of property next door to a national forest is the fulfillment of a dream. Living next door to a national forest allows a homeowner to enjoy the beauty of the forest, the abundance of wildlife, the opportunity for spectacular scenery, and a sense of solitude. At the same time, it is important for new property owners to understand what it means to live next door to public lands. Along with the many benefits of being a national forest neighbor, there also come a number of responsibilities. Listed below is information on a variety of topics that property owners should find useful. For additional information, please refer property owners or potential owners of property next to a national forest to the USDA Forest Service office in Gainesville, Georgia at (770) 297-3000.

Permits

The Forest Service issues permits each year for collecting items like firewood, dead and down wood, pine straw and sawdust. Permits are available at the District Ranger's Office. It is required that individuals get a permit before removing any product from national forest land. Collection of minor forest products such as berries, acorns, nuts

or small amounts of medicinal roots for personal use is allowed in most areas without a permit.

Special Use Permits

The Forest Service issues special use permits such as permits for road rights-of-way and public utilities if a service or benefit is offered to the public. An annual special use permit fee is required. Each permit must be compatible with existing uses of national forest land. Special use permits are not granted where reasonable alternatives are available on private land. Property owners can request an application for a permit by letter or in person. The application, once submitted to the Forest Service, will undergo a screening process for acceptance.

Land Lines

Most of the national forest lands acquired by the Forest Service in the 1930's were accurately surveyed, but marked and established with less precise hand held instruments. As property lines are maintained and when necessary resurveyed, they are occasionally corrected/relocated for past posting errors. Property owners should keep structures and improvements a reasonable distance away from common property lines in case the land line needs to be corrected.

A common practice of most surveys is to initially clear the vegetation along a line between two corners to locate the true line. This trial line may be mistaken as the property line. If you are unsure of the location of a line, please contact a licensed land surveyor or your local district ranger office be-

fore performing any construction near the line.

Tract folders of national forest lands are available at the USDA Forest Service. These files contain legal descriptions of lines, corners, and features along real property lines. Property corners are designated with a variety of objects including iron pins, rocks, stakes, and monuments. Corners are usually “witnessed” by three witness trees. These trees refer to the corner’s location in relation to the witness tree. The Forest Service shares responsibility with landowners to protect corners and markers along property lines.

Land Exchanges

The Forest Service occasionally exchanges land to consolidate national forest holdings or to acquire desirable tracts of land in the public interest. One reason that the agency may exchange a tract of land is when that tract is surrounded by private ownership. National forest lands which have been identified as a priority for exchange are identified in the Land Ownership Acquisition Plan which is on file at the local district office as well as the supervisor’s office in Gainesville, Georgia.

Fire

The Forest Service is responsible for protecting national forests from wildfire. The Georgia Forestry Commission will suppress fires on state and private lands. The Forest Service suppresses fire on private land if it poses a threat to national forest land or when assistance is requested by other agencies.

If a property owner allows a fire to escape onto national forest land or if suppression activities are necessary by the Forest Service, the landowner may be billed for suppression and restoration costs and damages.

The Forest Service sometimes uses controlled fire to accomplish certain management objectives. These objectives may include enhancing wildlife food, clearing an area of debris, or reducing the hazard of wildfire by clearing the area of brush, debris, and other flammable material that has accumulated on the forest floor.

Roads

The Forest Service maintains almost 1,200 miles of roads on the two national forests in Georgia. These roads serve as access for recreation use, hunting, fishing, fire control, and other management activities.

Right-of-way access is often purchased from private landowners when no other access to national forest lands is available. If there is a right-of-way across private property, the landowner should be aware that the public has right of access on that right-of-way to national forest land.

Recreation

National Forest recreation activities include camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, boating, horseback riding, and much more. Property owners who live adjacent to the national forest should be aware that the public has the right to recreate on national forest land even when that land is adjacent to private property.

A recent change in rules relating to horseback riding on the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests may affect property owners living next to the national forest. Horseback riding and mountain biking are restricted to Forest Service roads or Forest Service designated trails on the two national forests in Georgia. Equestrians who live next door to the national forest can no longer ride directly from their property onto the national forest for horseback riding. Additional information on this issue can be found on the Forest Service website at www.fs.fed.us/conf.

USDA Forest Service

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