



NATIONAL DEER ASSOCIATION

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Judy Toppins
Forest Supervisor
Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests
1755 Cleveland Highway
Gainesville, GA 30501

30 August, 2023

RE: Support for Chattahoochee-Oconee Fiscal Year 2025 LWCF Nominations

Dear Ms. Toppins:

On behalf of the National Deer Association (NDA), I am writing to state our support for the U.S. Forest Service's \$6.1556M request for funding from the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Land and Water Conservation Fund for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. We are a national non-profit conservation organization with the mission to ensure the future of wild deer, wildlife habitat and hunting. We represent tens-of-thousands of members nationwide, and our membership includes hunters, landowners and natural resource professionals.

The NDA is dedicated to ensuring the future of wild deer, wildlife habitat and hunting. The FY25 request of over \$6M advances all three by reducing forest fragmentation and creating and improving public access through the acquisition of four tracts, totaling +1,644 acres, in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. Through our extensive work on deer and habitat management across North America, we know that the actions proposed by the Forest Service will benefit wild deer by enhancing the varying habitat requirements, critical habitat components and ecosystem preferences of the region's fauna. Moreover, we know firsthand, through our role as a member of the Foothills Landscape Collaborative, from reviewing upcoming implementation projects in-person, as well as working with your staff to develop the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest's "Collaborative Habitat Restoration in the Mountains and Piedmont of Georgia" Stewardship Contracting Proposal, that developing habitat connectivity and diversity is a vital function of those actions. Additionally, the Forest Service's acquisition of these four tracts will provide recreational opportunities in the National Forest, in an area with high biological diversity and resiliency to climate change. Conservation ownership and management of these tracts is also critical to protecting water quality and quantity for downstream users.

We applaud the Forest Service's diligent and thoughtful work in drafting a request that will provide significant conservation and public access benefits on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.

Sincerely,

Torin Miller
Senior Director of Policy