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Title:
Comments: I write to formally object to the Finding of No Significant Impact decision on the proposed Union County Gun Range. As an Appalachian Trail hiker and volunteer maintainer/manager for over 30 years, I am concerned about the impacts to this National Scenic Trail. There are 3 concerns with respect to the A.T. that are addressed in the EA: 1) Impacts on solitude from noise, 2) visual impacts on the user, and 3) safety of users of the A.T. and other recreation users that may not be on the A.T. but in areas near the gun range that are not on the Trail.

The safety issues are addressed in detail in an objection letter from the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club. I support their comments and consider this to be a very significant problem.

I do want to comment on the noise and its impacts on solitude for recreational users. As a former GATC president who has worked on A.T. management issues with USFS partners, I have met numerous USFS employees who are passionate protectors of Wilderness values. The Forest Service has a long and distinguished record of careful management of federal designated Wilderness areas. The current Finding of No Significant Impact for this project is inconsistent with that record of good management.

The proposed gun range would significantly impact A.T. hikers in a remote section of Trail in the Mark Trail Wilderness area. The statements in the E.A. are inconsistent with USFS traditions of protecting Wilderness experiences. The E.A. essentially admits that thru-hikers would only use this area because they have no choice if they want to hike the entire Trail. The proposal seems to fall outside of Limits of Acceptable Change in Wilderness areas.

I do not think that alternatives to this site for a gun range have been adequately explored or that a need for another gun range in this area has been fully justified.

In addition, I have concerns about the use of public land for a private facility. Why should public lands be used for this?

I urge you to reconsider the finding of "No Significant Impact" for this gun range proposal. It most definitely will have a significant impact on the Appalachian Trail and hikers in the area.