

South Fourche Campground

U.S. Forest Service
Ouachita National Forest

EVALUATION AND DOCUMENTATION OF A
DE MINIMIS FINDING TO SECTION 4(F) PROPERTY
FOR PUBLIC PARKS, RECREATION LANDS, AND
WILDLIFE AND WATERFOWL REFUGES

AHTD Job Number 080439

Bear Creek & So. Fourche La Fave River Strs. & Apprs.

Perry County

February 2017



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway
Administration

Arkansas State Highway &
Transportation Department



Section 4(f) *De Minimis* Evaluation

1 What would the project accomplish?

The Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD), in conjunction with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is proposing to replace two weight-restricted and Functionally Obsolete bridges on Highway 7 across the South Fourche La Fave River and Bear Creek in Perry County, Arkansas. The project will remove the safety hazards associated with narrow bridges and reduce the restrictions on heavy loads on this section of Highway 7.

2 What is Section 4(f)?

Section 4(f) is part of a law that was passed to protect public parks, recreation areas, wildlife/waterfowl refuges, and important historic sites from being harmfully affected by transportation projects.

3 What Section 4(f) properties are being impacted?

The South Fourche Campground, a Ouachita National Forest facility, is located on the east side of Highway 7, south of the South Fourche La Fave River bridge (Figure 1). The campground property is approximately 2.3 acres and offers overnight and day use recreational opportunities, including:

- Six primitive, ADA-accessible campsites
- River access for fishing and paddling
- Restroom facilities
- Picnicking

South Fourche Campground: Campsite & Picnic Pavilion



Figure 1

What is meant by Functionally Obsolete?

A bridge is considered 'functionally obsolete' when it does not meet current design standards (for criteria such as lane width), either because the volume of traffic carried by the bridge exceeds the level anticipated when the bridge was constructed and/or the relevant design standards have been revised. (Federal Highway Administration)

Both bridges being replaced are historic structures and also eligible for Section 4(f) protection. The Highway 7 bridge over Bear Creek is eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) while the bridge over the South Fourche La Fave River was listed on the NRHP in 2004. Impacts to these historic bridges are discussed in the “Programmatic Section 4(f) Evaluation for Federally-Aided Highway Projects That Necessitate the Use of Historic Bridges” available from the AHTD Environmental Division.

4 Does Section 4(f) apply to the South Fourche Campground?

The South Fourche Campground is an important public recreational area within the Ouachita National Forest and qualifies for Section 4(f) protection.

Section 4(f) impacts can be recognized as “*de minimis*,” which means relatively minor, if they meet the conditions shown in Table 1. Properties with only *de minimis* impacts do not require a full Section 4(f) evaluation.

Table 1

Can we use a *de minimis* finding on this Section 4(f) property?

| | |
|---|---|
| Did we specially design the project to protect the South Fourche Campground as much as possible? Did we use mitigation and enhancement where it was suitable? | √ |
| Did the official(s) with authority over the park have a chance to consider this information and agree that the project will not greatly harm the things that make the park important? | √ |
| Did the public have an opportunity to review and comment on the effects of the project on the park and the things that make it important to them? | √ |

5 Can the South Fourche Campground be avoided?

The proposed project impacts the South Fourche Campground because the proposed new alignment is on the east side of existing Highway 7, where the campground is also located. The new bridge is being built on new alignment in order to maintain traffic on the existing bridge during construction.

The project was initially designed to avoid impacts to the South Fourche Campground by routing the new alignment on the west side of Highway 7, away from the campground. The immediate west side of Highway 7, south of the South Fourche La Fave River, consists of steep rock bluffs, as seen in Figure 2. Constructing new alignment on this side of Highway 7 would require extensive blasting that would affect the visual qualities of Highway 7, a Forest Service Scenic Byway, as well as views from the campground. There would also be temporary noise impacts to the South Fourche Campground from blasting and a substantial increase in project cost.

South Approach, Highway 7 Bridge over South Fourche La Fave River



Figure 2

Upon reviewing the project at an on-site field inspection with Ouachita National Forest staff, it was determined that these impacts would be more adverse than the property impacts associated with constructing the new bridge on the east side of Highway 7.

6 How will the project impact the South Fourche Campground?

Approximately 0.42 acre of permanent right of way and approximately 0.37 acre of temporary construction easement will be acquired from the South Fourche Campground. These land impacts can be seen on Figure 3. The temporary land conversion affects an area where camping and picnicking occur, but no recreation activities will be permanently impacted.

Impacts as a result of the highway construction will include the temporary closure of three camping sites and loss of several trees in the campground. Noise impacts are also expected throughout construction, but will be minor and temporary. Access to the South Fourche Campground, river access, restroom facilities, and remaining campsites will be maintained throughout construction. Recreational uses after construction of the highway will be unchanged from the present conditions.

The South Fourche Campground sign is within the existing Highway 7 easement and proposed construction limits and will be moved prior to construction.

South Fourche Campground Property Impacts

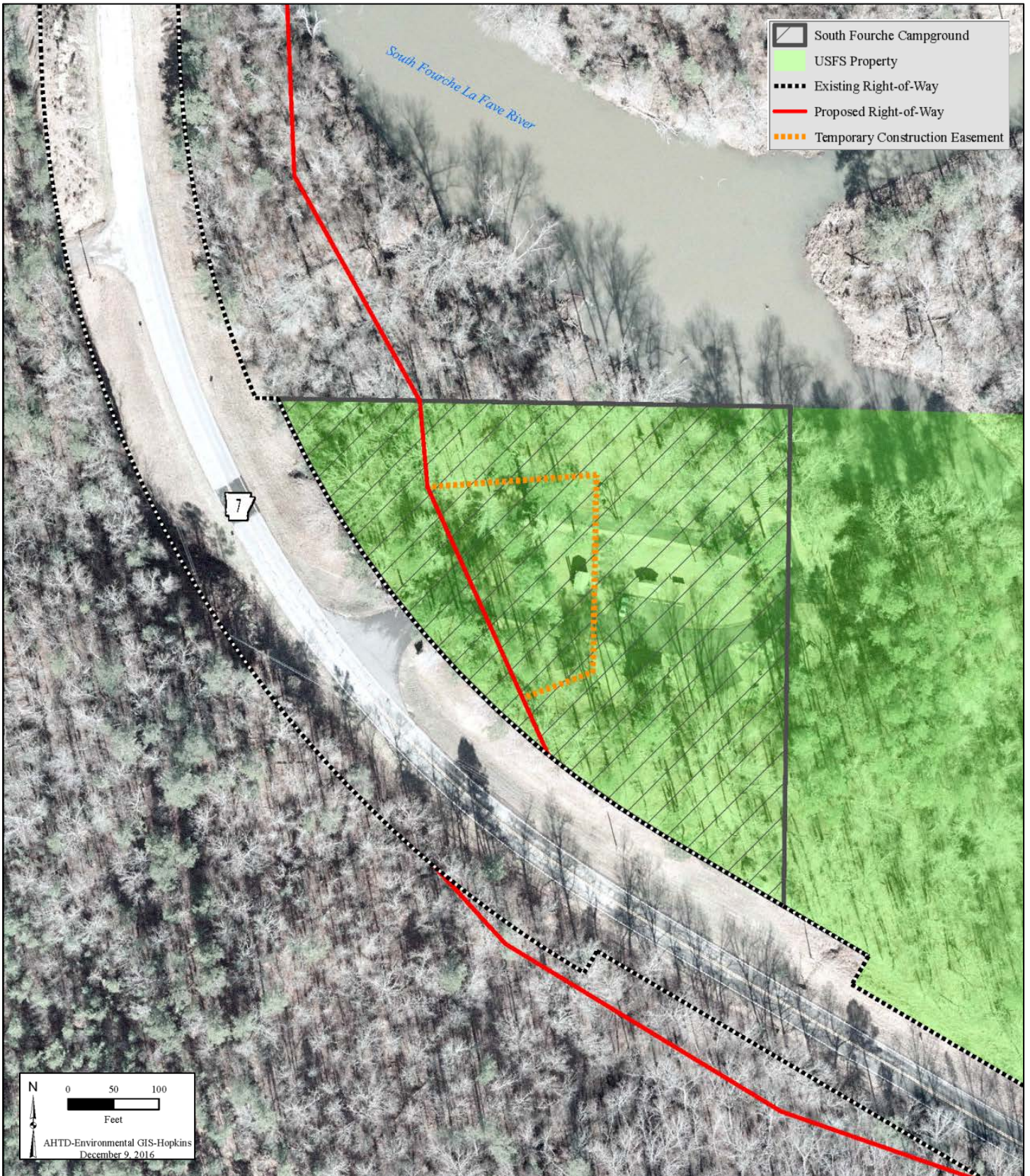


Figure 3

7 What measures were taken to reduce or mitigate these impacts?

The following measures were included in the proposed project to reduce harm to the South Fourche Campground:

- Access to the remaining three campsites, restroom facilities, and river access will be maintained throughout construction, including paving activities within the campground.
- Paving in the campground will be completed in a continuous manner to minimize length of campsite closures.
- The timing of campsite closures and paving work in the campground will be coordinated with the Ouachita National Forest to avoid impacts during peak use periods.
- The South Fourche Campground sign will be replaced, in coordination with the Ouachita National Forest.
- No construction vehicles will be allowed in the South Fourche Campground outside of the proposed right of way. Construction vehicles will only be allowed in the temporary construction easement when they are required for paving work within the campground.
- Following construction, the AHTD Environmental Division, in coordination with the Ouachita National Forest, will ensure that replacement native trees are planted.

8 How was the public involved in the Section 4(f) process?

A Public Notice in the local newspaper invited everyone to review and comment on the proposed project's effects on the South Fourche Campground. A summary of these comments is included in Appendix A.

The Ouachita National Forest has agreed that this project will not have a harmful effect on the South Fourche Campground. A copy of this agreement is included in Appendix A.

9 What is the decision?

We believe that this evaluation determines that the proposed roadway improvement will not harm the protected features, qualities, or activities that make the park important for recreation under Section 4(f), thus qualifying for a *de minimis* finding on the South Fourche Campground.

APPENDIX A: SECTION 4(F) PUBLIC COMMENTS & USFS CORRESPONDENCE
