

DECISION MEMO

Watershed Improvement Project
Towns, Union, and Lumpkin Counties, Georgia
Brasstown Ranger District
USDA Forest Service - Chattahoochee National Forest

DECISION

I have decided to proceed with watershed improvement projects on approximately 42 acres on 14 sites on the Brasstown Ranger District in Towns, Union, and Lumpkin Counties, Georgia. The sites include:

| <u>Area</u> | <u>Acres</u> | <u>Compt</u> | <u>County</u> |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Deavertown and Casteel | 3 acres | 410 | Union |
| 2. Edwards Cove | 1.5 acres | 385 | Union |
| 3. Cindy Cove-Helton Creek | 6 acres | 389/414 | Union |
| 4. Cane Creek | 1.5 acres | 515 | Union |
| 5. Black Mountain | 2 acres | 526 | Union |
| 6. Coopers Cr (streamside camp sites) | 1 acres | 520 | Union |
| 7. Lance Creek | 2 acres | 535 | Lumpkin |
| 8. Crow Mountain-Meadow Gap | 3 acres | 536/537 | Lumpkin |
| 9. Mill Creek | 3.5 acres | 553 | Lumpkin |
| 10. Fish Knob | 2 acres | 402 | Union |
| 11. Calf Stomp | 5 acres | 394 | Union |
| 12. Rocky Mtn-Suches Creek | 7 acres | 524 | Union |
| 13. Rocky Top | 1.5 acres | 359 | Union |
| 14. Hunter Knob | 3 acres | 356 | Towns |
| Total | 42 acres | | |

All sites except Coopers Creek are old roadbeds and/or illegal trails. In all cases, overuse and unauthorized uses are resulting in watershed concerns. The objectives for treating these areas are to control soil erosion, control the movement of sediment into local streams or lakes and stop unauthorized use on undesignated roads and trails. This project meets Forest Plan Goal 24, "Maintain or restore soil productivity and quality." as stated in chapter 2 of the existing Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Sites are located in Management Prescriptions 1.B, 3.A., 4.A., 4.F.1, F.H., 7.E.1, 7.E.2, 8.A.1, 8.A.2, and 9.H. The proposed watershed restoration activities are consistent with the Objectives and Standards of all these Management Prescriptions.

Restoration activities will include ripping the roadbed, shaping and water barring with heavy equipment (i.e. Dozer, track hoe or tractor), seeding with a grass seed mixture which will include grasses beneficial to wildlife, liming and fertilizing, mulching, silt fences where needed, and installation of barriers, such as tank traps or guardrails at road entrances to prohibit vehicular traffic. In some cases, trees will be felled into the roadbed to further restrict vehicular traffic. Foot travel will not be excluded on closed roadbeds or trails. On some roads, these activities will take place only on specific sections that are in need erosion control measures. Portions of roads with establish vegetation will not be disturbed.

In undeveloped recreation sites, areas where bare soil is present will be mechanically treated to break up compacted soil (either with hand tools, a tractor or dozer), and then seeded, limed fertilized, and mulched. Silt fences will be placed to prevent further erosion and until the vegetation buffer is established. A vegetative buffer will be established between the site and adjacent waterways. The work will be completed in the spring of 2005 and/or fall of 2005/ spring of 2006.

Additional details of the existing conditions and location of the specific sites and further details of the proposed action can be found in the Project File at the Brasstown Ranger District office.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose and need for these proposed actions is to control unauthorized off-road-vehicle use on National Forest lands and to stop soil erosion and the movement of sediment into local streams. The proposal is in response to management direction to restore watersheds and enhance water quality on National Forest lands. This decision will implement direction in the Chattahoochee-Oconee Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) to: Maintain or restore soil productivity and quality (Goal 24)

SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Scoping for this project began in January 2005 with a letter to groups and individuals known to be interested in the management of National Forest lands. Notice of the proposed action also was posted in the Forest's Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions. Responses were received from three individuals including representatives of The Appalachian Trail Conference, Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, and a private individual. Responses we received were in support of these activities.

Concerns were expressed about the use of non-native species such as fescue. The project will be in compliance with the Regional Foresters guidance for R8 invasive Exotic Species. No Category 1 species (known to be invasive and persistent – includes Fescue) or Category 2 species (suspected to be invasive) will be used on this project. All revegetation will use native or non-invasive non-native species (FW-056). Fescue will not be used.

The District ID team identified the following concerns: Protection of water quality and soil productivity; protection of proposed, endangered, threatened, and sensitive (PETS) species; protection of cultural resources. Scoping both internally and externally raised no concerns that were determined to be extraordinary circumstances.

REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION

These actions do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and therefore, are categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The category identified in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 "Environmental Policy and Procedures" Section 31.12, **Category 4** – "Repair and maintenance of roads, trails, and landline boundaries" and **Category 5** – "Repair and maintenance of recreation sites and facilities".

FINDING OF NO EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES

The District interdisciplinary team (ID team) screened these actions for the presence of any one of the extraordinary circumstances identified in FSH 1909.15 Section 30.3. We found that no extraordinary circumstances exist that might cause the action to have significant effects on the quality of the human environment. Resource conditions that were considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or an EIS were:

- a. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.
- b. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.
- c. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.
- d. Inventoried roadless areas.
- e. Research natural areas.
- f. American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.
- g. Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

We found that no extraordinary circumstances exist that might cause the action to have significant effects. Therefore, these actions are categorically excluded from documentation in an EIS or EA.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

Forest Plan Consistency – I have found that these actions are consistent with the management direction and management requirements of the Forest Plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest.

Cultural Resources – The actions will not adversely affect any sites listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or will they cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.

Endangered Species – Implementing this decision will not adversely affect proposed, endangered or threatened species or result in loss of any other species' viability, or create significant trends towards Federal listing of the species under the Endangered Species Act.

State approved Best Management Practices (BMP's) will be met and this project will comply with the Clean Water Act.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW, APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES AND IMPLEMENTATION

This decision is not appealable (36 CFR 215.8). These actions are not subject to notice and comment (36 CFR 215.4). This decision can be implemented immediately (36CFR 215.10).

CONTACT PERSON: Jim Wentworth (706) 745-6928 ext 107, jwentworth@fs.fed.us

SIGNATURE OF RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL

/s/ Alan Polk
ALAN POLK
District Ranger
Brasstown Ranger District

3/30/05
Date