



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Chattahoochee-Oconee
National Forests
Toccoa Ranger District

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Blue Ridge, GA 30513
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File Code: 1950/2600

Date: September 7, 2006

Dear Forest User

The Toccoa Ranger District is seeking public comments on a proposed project by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to expand an existing permanent wildlife opening (food plot) on the Blue Ridge Wildlife Management Area in Lumpkin County, Georgia. An existing old roadbed off of the Bull Mountain Road (FS road #83) that provides access to a small (<0.3 acre) food plot would be widened to create a linear wildlife opening. The existing road is approximately 0.4 miles in length and approximately 15 feet wide. It is located on a ridge top and goes through an approximately 20 year old mixed Virginia pine, loblolly pine, and white pine clearcut for its entire length. It would be expanded by a bulldozer to an average width of approximately 100 feet. The upper edge of the food plot also would be expanded. The area would be limed, fertilized, and seeded with a clover/grass mixture beneficial to wildlife. The total acreage of the linear opening and food plot would be 4-5 acres upon completion. This work would occur in 2006-2007.

The purpose of the project is to enhance habitat conditions for both game and non-game wildlife species. High quality food plots are a very important habitat element for species such as white-tailed deer, wild turkey, ruffed grouse, and numerous songbirds, raptors, and small mammals. However, they comprise a very small portion (0.2 percent) of the landscape of the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests. The project will address the Forest Plan goal to provide a diversity of habitat for the full range of native and other desired species (Goal 2). The project is located in Management Prescription 9.H. (Management, Maintenance, and Restoration of Plant Associations to their Ecological Potential) which permits the expansion of existing permanent openings and the creation of new openings.

The land area to be treated for this project is located along a ridgetop; no stream channels or riparian corridors exist within the boundaries to be cleared. There is a small stream below the existing opening but the opening will only be expanded on the upper side, outside of the riparian corridor. Forest plan standards related to soil disturbance and revegetation will be implemented to minimize soil movement from the project, with appropriate erosion control measures installed during clearing and prompt revegetation to re-establish ground cover.

We are currently in the process of determining the significant environmental issues and public concerns. You can help us in completing our analysis by providing comments on this proposal as we have described it. The project appears to fall into a category of actions that may be excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment (Forest Service Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook 1905.15, Chapter 30, Section 31.2). The specific categorical exclusion is Category 6 – Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities. A recent Federal Court decision in Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck invalidated the provisions of 36 CFR Part 215 that excluded this category from



notice, comment, and appeal. Since this project is subject to the Court order, I am making it subject to a formal notice and comment period.

In accordance with 36 CFR 215.6(a) (3), individuals or organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the following information:

- 1) Your name and address.
- 2) Title of the Proposed Action (Blue Ridge WMA Food Plot Expansion Project).
- 3) Specific substantive comments (215.2) on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision.
- 4) Your signature or other means of identification verification. For organizations, a signature or other means of identification verification must be provided for the individual authorized to represent your organization.

Comments must be postmarked or received within 30 days beginning the day after publication of this notice in the News Observer. Comments should be sent to Jim Wentworth, Brasstown Ranger District, P. O. Box 9, Blairsville, GA 30514, telephone (706) 745-6928; fax (706) 745-7494. Additional information may be obtained at this address. Oral or hand-delivered comments must be received within our normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Comments may be mailed electronically in a common digital format to our office at jwentworth@fs.fed.us

Thank you for your time and interest in the management activities on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest.

Sincerely,

/S/ ALAN POLK

ALAN POLK
District Ranger

Enclosure: Project Area and Location Maps