

# **CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION**

## **Dodd Tract Soil and Water Project**

Armuchee-Cohutta Ranger District

Chattahoochee National Forest

USDA Forest Service

Murray County, Georgia

### **DECISION**

The Dodd Tract is a recent National Forest land acquisition which encompasses a segment of Holly Creek and Leadmine Branch. This land has some historical overuse patterns that are adding sediment to Holly Creek. To correct these problems the following actions will be undertaken: 1) Seed, fertilize and mulch an old vehicle access route and any other site that is denuded of vegetation; 2) Close existing vehicular access into this area to prevent further overuse and erosion; 3) Repair and revegetate damaged streambank by placing rock, logs, and fabric and planting woody vegetation; 4) Remove former landowner's gate from streambank; 5) Provide public parking for dispersed recreation activities; and 6) Provide 2 hardened access routes from parking area to selected streamside locations.

### **PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION**

In 2003 the Forest Service acquired the 108-acre Dodd Tract which includes a portion of Holly Creek and Leadmine Branch. Holly Creek contains a number of important aquatic species that are adversely affected by sedimentation. The portion of the Dodd Tract along Holly Creek has heavy dispersed recreation use. This area is a horseshoe shaped area between FS 18 (Holly Creek Road) and Holly Creek. For years an old road off of the Holly Creek Road has allowed access into this area paralleling Holly Creek. This access has led to denuded soil and streambank erosion. At the confluence of Holly Creek and Leadmine Branch is a gate and a ford which accesses the remaining portion of the Dodd Tract.

The project is located in Management Prescription 11 (Riparian Corridors) and 7B (Scenic Corridors and Sensitive Viewsheds). Major human activities that create long-term impacts to water drainage, soil exposure and permanent removal of vegetation are prohibited in this management prescription.

This decision will implement direction in the Chattahoochee-Oconee Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) by: closing vehicular access to this tract, revegetating the bare areas and providing an area for public parking more than 100 feet from Holly Creek.

Vehicular access into this tract is causing problems with denuded sites, trash dumping and provides access to ford Holly Creek. This access can be stopped by placing large stone barriers at the two access points.

Stream bank restoration is needed at the heavily used sites. Placement of logs, fabric and woody vegetation will help to stabilize the bank and prevent further erosion. The gate at the ford location will be removed and this area stabilized as well.

There are few locations along Holly Creek for public parking and a heavy level of dispersed use. A portion of the Dodd Tract along Holly Creek road can provide parking for 6 to 8 cars to help alleviate this problem. The parking area will be located at least 100 feet from Holly Creek in any direction and should provide safe entry and exit from Holly Creek Road. Towards the rear of the parking there will be 2 hardened access routes leading to designated areas on Holly Creek. Steps or other hardened surfaces will protect the stream bank and provide for safe passage.

## **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 categories that apply to this action, as identified in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 “Environmental Policy and Procedures”, Section 31.12 – Categories Established by the Chief, **Category 4** – “Repair and maintenance of roads, trails, and landline boundaries.”

## **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 none of the following extraordinary circumstances exist that might cause the action to have significant effects on the quality of the human environment:

- Federally listed threatened and endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species;
- Floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds;
- Congressionally designated areas such as Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, National Recreation Areas; inventoried roadless areas; research natural areas;
- American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites; archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

The mere presence of one or more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion. It is the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist. These actions will not significantly affect any unique characteristics or features of the area. Therefore, these actions are categorically excluded from documentation in an EIS or EA.

## **SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The Armuchee-Cohutta District maintains a list of people and groups which have expressed interest in activities on the National Forest. Everyone on the list was sent a letter on February 10, 2005 describing this proposal and requesting comments. One response was received in support of correcting the soil and water problems but requesting access to remain open for foot travel. This project will allow foot traffic into the area.

The District ID team identified federally listed Threatened and Endangered aquatic species and their habitat as a primary issue. Several Forest specialists including a hydrologist, soil scientist, landscape architect, and forest planner visited the site to assess needs and suggest improvements. Additional issues and concerns raised were the need for streambank restoration, designating access points to Holly Creek, providing parking for dispersed recreation use and blocking off vehicular access to the horseshoe shaped area.

## **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** – A cultural resource survey was conducted and no resources were found in the proposed project area. Thus, 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** – The areas proposed for ground disturbance have been previously disturbed through dispersed recreation and bull dozing by the previous land owner. No potential Threatened and Endangered Species habitat exists in this area. A biological evaluation (BE) has been completed. Implementing this decision will not adversely affect proposed, endangered, sensitive species (PETS), or locally rare species, result in loss of any other species' viability, or create significant trends towards Federal listing of the species under the Endangered Species Act.

**Best Management Practices** – The activities will comply with State approved Best Management Practices (BMP's). These are not major ground disturbing activities that would require a land disturbing permit or trout stream buffer variance from the state of Georgia.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

Implementation of this decision may begin immediately (36 CFR 215.10). I plan to begin implementation of the restoration portion of this project in late April 2006. The construction of the parking area and paths to Holly Creek will begin following their design by the landscape architect.

**ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES**

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

**CONTACT PERSON**

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Michael Murphy, at 706-695-6736.

**RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL**

/s/Debra L. Whitman  
DEBRA L. WHITMAN  
District Ranger  
Armuchee-Cohutta Ranger District

April 13, 2006  
DATE