



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Chattahoochee-Oconee  
National Forests  
Conasauga Ranger District

3941 Highway 76  
Chatsworth, GA 30705  
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File Code: 1900  
Date: August 6, 2008

## Scoping Notice - Dill Creek Prescribed Fire Project

Dear Interested Citizen,

The Conasauga Ranger District of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest is seeking comments on the following project. A map of the project area has been enclosed. We encourage you to participate by providing your comments and suggestions on this proposal. Please provide your comments by **September 5, 2008**.

### Proposed Action

A low-intensity, dormant season prescribed burn is proposed for a 292-acre area east of Dill Creek in Murray County, Georgia. This burn unit is comprised of National Forest, a portion of the Holly Creek Preserve (a Nature Conservancy Preserve), and private land. An individual burning plan would be prepared and approved for this unit. The area would be ignited using aerial or ground ignition sources. Ignition would be initiated on ridge tops and the fire would be allowed to back down slopes (using strip head fires, if necessary) and into riparian and moister areas, reducing or eliminating fire intensity in these areas and creating a mosaic of burned and unburned areas. Roads or trails functioning as fire control lines that are uphill from the fire would be fired by hand to ensure that the fire does not overrun and cross the control lines. No fireline construction would be necessary; existing roads, trails, and streams will serve as natural barriers.

### Purpose and Need

The purpose of the prescribed burn is to begin the process of restoring fire as a natural element of the ecosystem after many decades of fire suppression. Continuous fire exclusion in the area has increased the abundance of fire-intolerant species, such as Virginia pine, red maple, and white pine, while fire-tolerant species such as shortleaf pine and various oak species have decreased. The effects of this ecosystem shift begin at the ground level, where a formerly diverse array of forbs and grasses no longer occur. Nesting cover, insects, fruits, and other food sources have declined as a result, negatively affecting small mammals, birds, and other wildlife. Mast-bearing oaks now present in the canopy are being replaced over time by fire-intolerant tree species less valuable to wildlife.



Fire Condition Classes are used by the Forest Service to characterize ecosystem condition and wildfire risk. The Dill Creek area is categorized as Condition Class **3**: a) a fire regime significantly altered from its historical range, b) high risk of losing key ecosystem components, c) departure from historical frequencies by multiple return intervals, and d) significant alteration from the historical range of vegetation attributes. Restoring low-intensity fire to the area is a step toward improving the Fire Condition Class.

This proposed action expands the role of fire to recover and sustain fire-adapted ecosystems (Forest Plan Goal 61). The proposed burn unit is within Management Prescription 7.B- Scenic Corridors and Sensitive Viewsheds and 9.H- Ecological Restoration as described in the Chattahoochee-Oconee Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). Prescribed burning is consistent with the direction provided for these Management Prescriptions. Riparian corridors (Management Prescription 11) of Holly Creek and Emery Creek will be utilized as natural firebreaks; this is also consistent with the Forest Plan. No firebreak construction will be necessary in riparian corridors.

### **Public Involvement**

**I would like to hear from you regarding this project before making my decision.** The project appears to fall into a category of actions that may be excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. Specifically, the project falls within the following categorical exclusion from the Forest Service Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook (1909.15), Chapter 30: Category 6, Chapter 31.2: Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities.

The Dill Creek Prescribed Burn is subject to a formal notice and comment period. In accordance with 36 CFR 215.6(a)(3), individuals wishing to be eligible to appeal the **Dill Creek Prescribed Fire Project** must provide the following information during the 30-day comment period, which ends on **September 5, 2008**:

- 1) Your name and address
- 2) Title of the Proposed Action
- 3) Specific substantial 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.

## How to Provide Comments

You may send your comments and suggestions as follows:

<b>Comment Format</b>	<b>Contact Information</b>
Hard Copy Letter	Conasauga Ranger District Attn: Ruth Stokes 3941 Highway 76 Chatsworth, GA 30705
E-mail	<a href="mailto:rbstokes@fs.fed.us">rbstokes@fs.fed.us</a> Subject: Dill Creek Project
FAX	706-695-1872
Phone	Ruth Stokes, 706-695-6736, x 105

Thank you for your interest in the management of the Conasauga Ranger District.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Michele H. Jones*  
MICHELE H. JONES  
District Ranger

Enclosure: Dill Creek Prescribed Fire Proposal Map