

DECISION MEMO

WATERSHED RESTORATION PROJECTS

USDA Forest Service
Blue Ridge Ranger District
Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest
Towns, Union, Fannin, and Dawson Counties, Georgia

I. DECISION

A. Description of Decision

My decision is to proceed with watershed improvement projects on approximately 23 acres of unauthorized roads and trails on National Forest lands on the Blue Ridge Ranger District in Towns, Union, Fannin, and Dawson Counties, Georgia. The sites include:

Watershed Restoration Projects

Area	Acres	Compt	Quad	Management Rx*
Fish Gap	0.5 acre	504	Mulky Gap	9.H, 7.E.1
Dove Ridge	1.0 acre	347	Hiawasse	7.E.1, 1.B
Big John Creek	0.5 acre	313	Hightower Bald	8.A.2
Cowart Gap	0.5 acre	314	Hightower	4.A
Bell Gap	8.0 acres	304	Macedonia	8.A.1, 1.B
Roaring Fork	5.0 acres	397	Coosa Bald	7.E.1, 3.A
Soapstone	0.5 acre	334	Tray Mountain	7.A
Knight Branch	0.5 acre	628	Wilscot	9.H
Mulky Gap	0.25 acre	399	Mulky Gap	7.E.1
Jarrard Creek	0.25 acre	501	Coosa Bald	3.A
Cochran Falls	4.0 acre	577	Nimblewill	3.C
Garrett Farm	2.0 acres	516	Suches	4.H
Total	23.0 acres			

* 1.B – Recommended Wilderness Study Area, 3.A – Coosa Bald Scenic Area, 3.C- Ed Jenkins National Recreation Area, 4.A – Appalachian Trail Scenic Corridor, 4.H. Forest-designated Outstandingly Remarkable Streams, 7.A – Scenic Byway Corridor, 7.E.1 – Dispersed Recreation Areas, 8.A.1 – Mix of Successional Forest Habitats, 8.A.2 – Forest Interior – Mid-to-late Successional Forests, 9.H- Management, Maintenance, and Restoration of Plant Associations to their Ecological Potential. Portions of several of the areas also fall in the embedded Management Prescription MRx 11- Riparian Corridors.

All sites are old roadbeds and/or illegal ATV 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 off-road vehicle use on undesignated roads and trails.

Restoration activities will include ripping the roadbeds/trails, shaping and water baring 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, 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. Heavy equipment will not be used in streambed or other sensitive areas. Silt fences, hay bales, or other appropriate measures will be used where needed to prevent off site soil movement. All closed roadbeds and trails will remain open to foot travel. 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.

B. Purpose of Decision

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 National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) to: Maintain or restore soil productivity and quality (Goal 24)

II. REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when they are within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 sections 31.1 or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect.

A. Category of Exclusion

The project is within the category of exclusion FSH 1909.15 Section 31.12 (4). - Repair and maintenance of roads, trails, and landline boundaries.

B. Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances

1. Steep Slopes or Highly Erosive Soils :

Portions of the unauthorized roads and trails in this project are located on steep slopes and/or highly erosive soils. There will be no adverse effects to soils from this project. The proposed treatments are designed stop soil erosion and the movement of sediment into local streams, and to restore soil productivity and quality.

2. Threatened and Endangered Species or Their Critical Habitat :

As required by this Act, potential effects of this decision on listed species have been analyzed and documented in a Biological Evaluation (Project File). It was determined that this decision will have 'no effect' on listed species or their critical habitats.

3. Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds :

None of the project sites are located in floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.

4. Congressionally Designated Areas:

Wilderness Areas:

None of the project sites are located in a congressionally designated Wilderness Areas (Management Rx 1.A.).

Wilderness Study Areas:

Portions of the project on Dove Ridge and Bell Gap are in Management Rx 1.B – Recommended Wilderness Study Areas. There will be no adverse affects on these areas from the proposed treatments. The closure and revegetation of the illegal ATV trails in these areas will enhance the desired conditions of the Wilderness Study Areas.

National Recreation Areas:

The Cochran Creek area is located in the Ed Jenkins National Recreation Area (Management Rx 3.C). There will be no adverse affects on this area from the proposed treatments. The closure of the old road to vehicular traffic will enhance the desired conditions of the area for non-motorized recreation opportunities. The road will remain open to pedestrian use.

National Scenic Areas:

Portions of the project in the Roaring Fork and Jarrard Creek areas are in Management Rx 3.A – Coosa Bald National Scenic Area. There will be no adverse affects on this area from the proposed treatments. The closure and revegetation of the old roads and illegal ATV trails will protect and enhance the outstanding natural beauty, watershed integrity and other distinctive values for which the area was designated.

Wild and Scenic Rivers:

None of the project sites are located in a designated or recommended Wild and Scenic River.

5. Inventoried Roadless Areas :

Portions project on Dove Ridge and Bell Gap are in inventoried Roadless Areas. There will be no adverse affects on these areas from the proposed treatments. The

closure and revegetation of the illegal ATV trails in these areas will enhance the roadless characteristics of these areas.

6. Research Natural Areas :
None of the project sites are located in a Research Natural Area.
7. Native American Religious or Cultural Sites, Archaeological Sites, or Historic Properties or Areas
There are no known Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas that may be affected by this decision (Project Folder).
8. No other extraordinary circumstances related to the project were identified.

There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A scoping letter was mailed to 111 individuals and organizations on March 4, 2008. Nine scoping responses were received. Comments addressed concerns with impacts to streambeds and sensitive areas, and the closure of these roads and trails to pedestrian use. The project description was clarified to address these concerns.

Further details are in the project file located at the Blue Ridge Ranger District.

IV. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY AND/OR RELATED TO OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

My decision will comply with all applicable laws and regulations. I have summarized some pertinent ones below.

Forest Plan Consistency (National Forest Management Act) - This decision is responsive to guiding direction contained in the Chattahoochee-Oconee Forest Plan, as summarized in Section I of this document. This decision is consistent with the Forest Plan.

Endangered Species Act - See Section II, Item B2 of this document.

Sensitive Species (Forest Service Manual 2670) - Potential effects of this decision on sensitive species have been analyzed and documented in a Biological Evaluation (Project File). This decision will have “no impact” on sensitive species.

Clean Water Act - This Act is to restore and maintain the integrity of waters. The Forest Service complies with this Act through the use of Best Management Practices. This decision incorporates Best Management Practices and applicable Forest Plan standards to ensure protection of soil and water resources.

V. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL

This decision is not subject to a higher level of administrative review or appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f).

VI. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

These actions are expected to begin in the summer of 2008 and continue until completion.

VII. CONTACT PERSON

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Jim Wentworth at the Blue Ridge Ranger District, Highway 515 Blairsville, GA 30512; telephone 706-745-6928.

VIII. SIGNATURE AND DATE

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment as it is within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 sections 31.12 or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the Project File.

/s/ Alan Polk

Alan Polk
District Ranger

August 6, 2008

Date