



File Code: 1950

Date: August 1, 2008

Dear Forest Stakeholder:

I am asking for your comments on this proposal to prescribe burn various locations on the Chattahoochee National Forest. The Chattooga River Ranger District is proposing prescribed burning to enhance forest health, improve wildlife habitat diversity and reduce hazardous fuels accumulations on approximately 6665 acres of National Forest system land in Stephens, Habersham, and White Counties. Listed below are the proposed areas:

Area	Acres	Description
<p>Compt.209 Brown's Bottom Management Area 4.H - Forest designated outstandingly remarkable streams</p>	<p>522</p>	<p>Located in the Lake Russell Wildlife Management Area in the general location of Browns Bottoms in Compartment 209. The proposed area consists of 522 acres and will require no mechanical control lines. The control lines will consist of Forest Service roads and the Middle Fork Broad River. The primary objective in this area is to reduce fuel loading within the Middle Broad River watershed where higher intensity wildfire (due to fire exclusion) could consume the soil's organic layer making it more susceptible to erosion. Wildlife habitat would also benefit from this burn.</p> <p>LMP OBJ. 8.1 Maintain Shortleaf pine forest on the Chattahoochee in desired conditions. (LMP Page 2-7)</p> <p>LMP OBJ. 58.1 Reduce extreme fire behavior characteristics and spotting distances by treating fuels to create a defensible space within designated wild land (WUI) urban interface zones. (LMP Page 2-53)</p>
<p>Compt. 210/211 Farmer Mtn. Management Area 9. H - Management, maintenance, and restoration of plants association to their ecological potential. 4.D Botanical –zoological areas</p>	<p>1430</p>	<p>Located in the Lake Russell Wildlife Management Area in the general location of Farmer Mtn. in Compartment 210/211. The proposed area consists of 1430 acres and will require no mechanical control lines. The control lines will consist of Forest Service roads and Leatherwood Creek. The primary objective in this area is to reduce fuel loading within the urban interface. This burn unit contains a high concentration of southern Pine beetle stands needing fuels treatment. This burn unit contains 2 populations of smooth purple coneflowers, 1 cemetery and a small section of the Frady Branch Horse Trail. Forest health and wildlife habitat enhancement would be additional benefits.</p> <p>LMP OBJ. 15.1 Establish and contribute to the recovery of threatened, endangered, and candidate plants over the life of the Forest Plan. (LMP Page 2-12)</p> <p>LMP OBJ. 58.1 Reduce extreme fire behavior characteristics and spotting distances by treating fuels to create a defensible space within designated wild land (WUI) urban interface zones. (LMP Page 2-53)</p> <p>LMP OBJ. 8.1 Maintain Shortleaf pine forest on the Chattahoochee in desired conditions. (LMP Page 2-7)</p>



<p>Compt. 233/234</p> <p>Tugalo Village</p> <p>Management Area</p> <p>9. H - Management, maintenance, and restoration of plants association to their ecological potential.</p> <p>4.D - Botanical –zoological areas</p> <p>4.H - Forest designated outstandingly remarkable streams</p>	<p>2426</p>	<p>Located in the Tugalo Village community of Habersham County in Compartments 233/234. The proposed area consists of 2426 acres. This unit is bordered on the north east side by private properties and is considered a wildland urban interface environment. The south side of this burn unit will consist of part of the Districts Botanical Area located on the north side of Panther Creek. The Panther Creek trail will have sections that will be included in this burn unit. The purpose of the prescribe burn for this area would be plant community and landscape restoration, wildlife habitat improvement and fuel reduction in the wildland urban interface.</p> <p>LMP OBJ. 15.1 Establish and contribute to the recovery of threatened, endangered, and candidates plants over the life of the Forest Plan. (LMP Page 2-12)</p> <p>LMP OBJ. 58.1 Reduce extreme fire behavior characteristics and spotting distances by treating fuels to create a defensible space within designated wild land (WUI) urban interface zones. (LMP Page 2-53)</p> <p>LMP OBJ. 8.1 Maintain Shortleaf pine forest on the Chattahoochee in desired conditions. (LMP Page 2-7)</p>
<p>Compt. 260/261</p> <p>Chattahoochee River East</p> <p>Management Area</p> <p>4. F.1 – Scenic and Wildlife Management Area.</p> <p>2. B.1 – Recommended Wild River Segments.</p>	<p>1795</p>	<p>Located in the Chattahoochee Wildlife Management Area in the general location of Martin Branch Bridge in compartments 260/261. The proposed area consists of 1795 acres. This burn unit would be located on the east side of the Chattahoochee River and would be burned separately and in different years from the prescribed burn proposed for the west side of the Chattahoochee River. The purpose for this burn will be plant community and landscape restoration, wildlife habitat improvement and to reduce heavy fuel accumulations. This burn unit would require no mechanical control lines. Forest Service system roads and the Chattahoochee River would serve as control lines.</p> <p>LMP OBJ. 58.1 Reduce extreme fire behavior characteristics and spotting distances by treating fuels to create a defensible space within designated wild land (WUI) urban interface zones. (LMP Page 2-53)</p> <p>LMP OBJ. 8.2 Maintain pitch pine forest on the Chattahoochee in desired conditions. (LMP Page 2-7)</p>
<p>Compt. 259/261/264</p> <p>Chattahoochee River West</p> <p>Management Area</p>	<p>492</p>	<p>Located in the Chattahoochee Wildlife Management Area in the general location of Low Gap Campground in Compartment 259, 261 and 264. The proposed area consists of 492 acres. This burn unit would be on the west side of the Chattahoochee River and would be burned separately and in different years from the</p>

<p>2. B.1 – Recommended Wild River Segments.</p>		<p>proposed prescribed burn on the east side of the Chattahoochee River. The prescribed burn purpose would be plant community and landscape restoration, wildlife habitat improvement and to reduce heavy fuel accumulations. This burn unit would require no mechanical control lines. Forest Service system roads and the Chattahoochee River would serve as control lines.</p> <p>LMP OBJ. 58.1 Reduce extreme fire behavior characteristic and spotting distances by treating fuels to create a defensible space within designate wild land (WUI) urban interface zones. (LMP Page 2-53)</p> <p>LMP 3.7 Maintain existing oak and oak-pine forest reduce stem density on 5,500 acres on the Chattahoochee, and 5200 acres on the Oconee of these forest types within the first 10 years of Plan implementation. (LMP Page 2-6)</p>
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The use of prescribed fire to meet resource objectives is highly effective, cost efficient, and used by many natural resource management agencies. The specific purposes are:

1. Forest Health – to contribute to the maintenance or restoration of native tree species whose role in the forest ecosystem has been reduced by past land use; or (b) is threatened by insect and disease, fire exclusion, or other factors.
2. Wildlife Habitat Improvement – Prescribed fire is broadly accepted in the scientific and management community as an important disturbance process in many natural systems that occur throughout the Southern Appalachian physiographic region. Fire is often used as a management tool because of it’s many potential benefits which include: (1) reduction of fuel loads to minimize the risk of impacts of wildfire; (2) reduction of the evergreen understory to promote regeneration of desirables species such as oaks; (3) increased diversity of plants, small mammals, birds, amphibians, and insects; (4) stimulation of fast growing new vegetation to increase productivity and forage for herbivores; and (5) stimulation of nutrients cycling rates to increase site productivity. Prescribed burning will generally increase the health and sustainability of the ecosystem by increasing diversity and productivity and decreasing susceptibility to insect infestations and disease. Prescribed burning will also help to remove slash, needles, and leaf litter, which in turn continues to encourage growth of ground-level vegetation and other tree species within the stand.
3. Hazardous Fuel Reduction - fuel reduction in these proposed burn units is needed due to wildland urban interface issues and Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) mortality located within the areas. It reduces the danger of wildfire to adjacent private lands by reducing fuel loading in areas where large accumulations of pine needles, hardwood leaves, and small woody debris have occurred over time. Treating these fuels with prescribed burning assists in reducing extreme fire behavior, spotting distance and creates a defensible space within the designated wildland urban interface.

These burns would be a moderate to low intensity surface fire; a site-specific and weather specific burn plan would be prepared for these burn units. These plans would describe climatic conditions under which the burns would be executed, and would consider the effects of the fire on other forest resources including the smoke produced. All bladed dozer lines used to contain the burns would be re-vegetated after the burn is conducted using a non-invasive grass mixture best suited to the area, time of year and benefit to wildlife. Lines will consist of bladed dozer line, existing roads, streams and constructed hand lines.

Burning would take place during the dormant season. The dormant season for the purpose of this project would be defined as from approximately November 1 thru April 15th.

It is very helpful to receive your comments, concerns, and ideas early in our planning process to help identify all of the important issues and conduct an analysis for this proposed project that meets the intent of NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act). This project appears to fall into a category of actions that may be excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. However, this determination would not be finalized until after consideration of your comments and concerns. My staff may also use your comments to modify the specific methods described in the proposals. Planning and analysis within the project areas is expected to be completed by the end of Sept 2008.

Please make your responses as specific as possible so that we can be sure they are adequately addressed. This would include the following information:

- 1) Your name and address.
- 2) Title of Proposed Action.
- 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 authorization to represent your organization.

Comments must be postmarked or received within 30 days beginning the day after publication of this notice in the Northeast Georgian. Send your written comments to the Chattooga River Ranger District office at the address given on the Letterhead. You may also comment by phone (see letterhead), e-mail to Wayne Herron (cwherron@fs.fed.us) or in person at our office in Clayton, Georgia. Phone or hand delivered comments may be made at the Ranger District office at (see letterhead) within the normal weekday business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. In accordance with regulations, all written comments received, including those submitted electronically, will be placed in the project file and will become a matter of public record.

Thank you for your interest and involvement.

Sincerely,

/s/ David W. Jensen
District Ranger

Enclosure: Maps of Project Location.