

Decision Memo

USDA Forest Service Southern Region
Chattahoochee National Forest
Blue Ridge Ranger District
Fannin and Lumpkin County, Georgia
Prescribed Burning

DECISION, and Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

In our continuing efforts to protect neighboring communities and natural resources, I have decided to implement prescribed burning in various locations on the Blue Ridge Ranger District (see attached map). The project consists of prescribed burning approximately 4,000 acres over a five year period in the vicinities of the following: in Fannin County Blue Ridge Campground located one mile southeast of Blue Ridge (79 acres), West Skeenah located ten miles southeast of Blue Ridge near Hwy 60 and Forest Service Road (FSR) # 640 (800 acres), Lovinggood located 15 miles southeast of Blue Ridge off of FSR # 42 and # 188 (634 acres), Rock Creek located thirteen miles southeast of Blue Ridge off of FSR # 69 and # 766 (450 acres), Frozen Branch Loop located off of FSR # 69 and east of the Chattahoochee National Fish Hatchery (480 acres), Fruitkoff Point located three miles southeast of Blue Ridge off of FSR # 711 (225 acres), Turkey Farm located five miles southeast of Blue Ridge off of FSR # 795 (286 acres), and in Lumpkin County Jones Creek located twelve miles northwest of Dahlonega and northwest of FSR # 28-1 and west of FSR # 77 in the Blue Ridge Wildlife Management Area (1,020 acres).

Implementing this project will:

- *maintain* existing oak and oak-pine forests, by reducing stem density in these forest types. This burn will generally top-kill trees up to three inches in diameter at the root collar, thereby reducing stems across the area. Chattahoochee-Oconee LRMP-Goal 3-Terrestrial Plants and Animals and Their Associated Habitats-page 2-6.
- And *reduce* the likelihood of a wildfire moving from National Forest System lands onto private lands or from private lands onto National Forest System lands. Chattahoochee-Oconee LMRP-Goal 58- Fire Management-page 2-53.

REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION

This action does 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 specific category, identified in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 "Environmental Policy and Procedures" is Section 31.2 Category 6: Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities (see attached map).

FINDING OF NO EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES:

In 2003 the district interdisciplinary team screened these actions for the presence of any one of the extraordinary circumstances identified in Interim Directive No. 1909.15-2002-2 to Forest Service Handbook 1909.15. Section 30.3 paragraph 2 lists the following resource conditions that were considered:

- Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species;
- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds;
- Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas;
- Inventoried roadless areas;
- Research natural areas;
- American Indians and Native religious or cultural sites;
- Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

We found that no extraordinary circumstances exist that might cause the action to have significant effects.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public scoping began in May, 2004. The purpose of scoping was to determine the issues and concerns related to the proposal. Five scoping responses were received on the original letter which invited comments on a prescribed fire project of the same areas. An additional legal notice requesting comments for this project was placed in local papers of record in February, 2008. The time period was for 30 days. There were two phone comments received from residents in the Blue Ridge area. One was a voice mail from James Daves that was not in support, another was a phone call from Tom Jones supporting the project.

The comments received were used to refine the project and analysis. They were also used to explore the possibility of extraordinary circumstances and potential effects to those resources. These comments are located in the project file.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

Forest Plan Consistency – The actions in this decision are consistent with the Chattahoochee- Oconee National Forests LMRP of 2004.

Endangered Species – Implementing the actions in this decision will not adversely affect threatened or endangered species, or result in loss of any other species' viability, or create significant trends towards Federal listing of the species under the Endangered Species Act.

Cultural Resources – The actions in this decision will not adversely affect any sites listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places, nor will they cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historic resources.

State-approved Best Management Practices (BMP's) will be met and this project will comply with the Clean Water Act.

The project follows the Forest-wide and Management Prescription (MP) standards as mentioned above. Specifically:

- The prescribed burn is consistent with the desired conditions for the specific MP's within the project area. This involved an analysis of effects in relation to those expected by the Forest plan. Refer to page 1 where the purpose and need for the project was examined in relation to the effects from the project.
- This prescribed burning project was chosen after considering economic and environmental aspects of various renewable resources and protection of forest resources to provide for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife and fish. These resource values are discussed throughout the DM.
- The project will provide for diversity for plant and animal communities based on the suitability and capability of the land area in overall multiple use objectives. See the purpose and need for the project on page 1.
- This project will not produce substantial and permanent impairment of site productivity and will ensure conservation of soil and water resources.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This prescribed burn project is scheduled to be begin in 2008. It is to be on a burn rotation of three to five years.

APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is not subject to appeal, pursuant to USFS regulations 36 CFR 215.11 and 215.12. No comments were received during the 30 day legal notice comment period. Implementation can begin immediately.

CONTACT PERSON

For further information concerning this decision contact district Fire Management Officer, Mike Davis, by phone at (706) 745-6928 extension 105, by letter at P.O. Box 9, Blairsville, GA, 30514, or by e-mail at madavis@fs.fed.us.

SIGNATURE AND DATE

 /s/Alan Polk

Alan Polk
District Ranger
Blue Ridge Ranger District

 5/23/08

Date