

# **Decision Memo**

## **Southern Pine Beetle Prevention Project At Jake Mountain and Hunter Knob**

USDA Forest Service Southern Region  
Chattahoochee National Forest, Brasstown and Toccoa Ranger Districts, Lumpkin and Towns Counties, Georgia

### **DECISION, and Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action**

I have decided to carry out the following activity to help prevent outbreaks and spread of Southern Pine Beetle (SPB). Approximately 66 acres of loblolly pine plantations are designated for thinning which will improve the health and vigor of the remaining trees. The thinnings will take place in Stands 32 and 37 of Compartment 584 in the Jake Mountain area of Lumpkin County and Stand 23 of Compartment 355 in the Hunter Knob area of Towns County. Existing skid trails and log decks will be used. These stands will be thinned to approximately 100 trees per acre.

The stands in the Jake Mountain area are located in Management Prescription 9.H. The stand in the Hunter Knob area is located in Management Prescription 8.2.A. Thinning for Forest Health is permitted in these prescriptions. This decision will implement Goals in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan ( Plan) to reduce stem density on an annual average of 1,500 acres of overstocked loblolly pine stands on the Chattahoochee during the first ten years of Plan implementation (Objective 40.1).

### **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 12: Harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction.

### **FINDING OF NO EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES:**

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 Alaska Native religious or cultural sites;
- Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

The following Scenic Integrity Objectives will be used to establish a more natural appearing landscape:

D. Slash will be lopped to within an average of 2 feet of ground, when visible within 100 feet on either side of F.S. roads 299 and 724.

F. Stems are cut to within 6 inches of the ground in the immediate foreground.

G. Unit marking is applied so as to not be visible within 100 feet of F.S. roads 299 and 724.

H. Work will be scheduled outside of major recreation seasons.

I. Special road and landing design is used. Log landings, roads and bladed skid trails will be located out of view if possible to avoid bare mineral soil observation from F.S. roads 299 and 724.

T. The visual impact of roads will be blended so that they remain subordinate to the existing landscape character in size, form, line, color, and texture.

W. Cut and fill slopes will be revegetated to the extent possible.

Y. Provide a range of stem diameters but favor 14 inch and larger stems in a mixture with other smaller sized tree stems.

AA. Impacts to forest trails will be minimized. Trail-related mitigations can include all or portions of the following: Temporary road and/or skid trail crossings across designated forest trails should be kept to a minimum. Any crossings should be perpendicular to designated forest trails. If trails are used as skid trails/haul roads, specify trail cleanup/rehabilitation at the end of the contract. Trail width will not be increased except where it follows the county road. Retain character trees and trees that define the trail corridor. Minimize changes to trail alignment and surfacing; do not straighten the trail or change its surface unless alternate material will enhance trail and protect resource. Warning signs will be placed on all trail access points and along the trail where activities are occurring.

## **SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Public scoping began in May 2005 and then again in January 2006. The purpose of scoping was to determine the issues and concerns related to the proposal. Five scoping responses were received on this 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.

All responses were in concurrence with this project. A detailed summary is included in the project folder.

## **FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS**

**Forest Plan Consistency** – The actions in this decision are consistent with the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Chattahoochee National Forests (Forest Plan) and all Amendments to the Forest Plan.

**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.

This project complies with the seven requirements of the National Forest Management Act related to vegetation manipulation at 36 CFR 219.27 (b).

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

This decision will be implemented beginning in May 2006.

## **NOTICE, COMMENT AND APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES**

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12 (e) (1). Notice of the proposed action was published. An opportunity to comment on the DM was provided. Comments received were only supportive of the actions proposed.

## **CONTACT PERSON**

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## **RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL**

/ Alan Polk

March 3, 2006

Alan Polk  
District Ranger  
Brasstown Ranger District

DATE: March 3, 2006