



File Code: 1950

Date: April 20, 2006

Dear Interested Persons:

I am requesting comments for the **Plantation Forest Health Projects** on the Oconee Ranger District of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. The proposed project(s) involve pre-commercial thinning of existing pine plantations in 9 separate Watershed Management areas on the Oconee Ranger District as identified by the Watershed and Acreage Table below. These Project areas are separate and independent, and the appropriate National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) documentation will be written for each watershed management area.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to pre-commercially thin loblolly pine plantations 17 years of age or younger. The majority of these sites were harvested in the 1990's, mechanically site prep'ed (KG Blade or roller chopped), prescribed burned, and planted. Pre-commercial thinning will consist of spacing the understory seedling and sapling sized trees (trees less than 5.0 inches in diameter at breast height). Phenotypically superior trees (tallest, straightest, healthiest, etc.) will be selected as leave trees. The few hardwood trees that exist will be retained except for sweetgum, elm and red maple. The average spacing will vary from 12 to 16 feet depending upon the stand age.

The thinning will be accomplished predominantly by a contract hand crew using chainsaws or brush cutters. The Forest Service will administer the contract. Boundaries of pre-commercial thinning areas will be marked in orange paint. A maximum stump height of 8 inches will be allowed. No new roads (system or temporary) will be required. Those sites where mechanical thinning is acceptable (see Table 1) may utilize mowers, chippers or small shear head equipment in order to facilitate research into new technology/equipment. Hand crews are significantly cheaper than mechanical thinning and relatively few acres are anticipated to be treated mechanically. Georgia Best Management Practices for Forestry (BMP's) and Forest Plan standards related to riparian corridor management (equipment limitations and erosion protection) would apply to all treatments.

These actions are expected to occur over the next several years dependent upon funding levels.

Pre-commercial thinning activities consist of spacing phenotypically superior (taller, straighter trees with no obvious deformities or diseases) so that the remaining trees are not competing for sunlight, moisture or nutrients. This has a number of benefits including:

- Reduces the risk of Southern Pine Beetle infestation (overstocked plantations are highly susceptible)
- Trees grow to a larger size (diameter) sooner. This is especially beneficial in RCW habitat.
- Increased sunlight reaching the forest floor increases ground cover production and improves the wildlife habitat value of these stands for certain species.



- Reduces long-term extreme fire hazard by spacing out the tree crowns; short-term fire hazard is increased due to fuel accumulation associated with the pre-commercial thinning until the debris naturally breaks down or the site is prescribed burned 2-3 years after the thinning.
- Increased dispersed recreation use once the trees are spaced out and the understory slash has broken down or been treated to facilitate hiking/walking. Current stand conditions prohibit use by most recreationists.

WATERSHED	ACRES	COMPARTMENTS
Apalachee River Lower	247	172, 173, 184 & 195
Oconee River Greenbrier Creek	994	169, 174, 175, 176, 178, 179, 180, 182, 186, 187, 189, 190, 191, 194 & 195
Oconee River Big Creek	546	165, 167, 168 & 170
Little River Lower	513	143, 147, 149, 154, 155, 156, 157 162 & 164
Little River Upper	168	159 & 160
Murder Creek	312	133, 140, 142, 144, 145, 146, & 151
Big Cedar Creek	608	121, 123, 124, 125, 130, 135, 137 & 139
Ocmulgee River Big Sandy Creek	532	101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 108, 115 & 117
Ocmulgee River Rum Creek	423	1, 3, 8, 110, 111, 114, 116, 118, 119 & 120

The proposed action of pre-commercial thinning overstocked pine plantations on the Oconee Ranger District accomplishes several desired future conditions as stated in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP; January 2004). Listed are some of the goals that will be accomplished through these project proposals:

1. Goal 51 – Contribute to the conservation and recovery of the red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*) until species viability is assured throughout its range and it is no longer listed as an endangered species under the endangered species act.
2. Goal 58 – Reduce the risks and consequences of wildfire through fuel treatments that restore and maintain conditions of the fire regime Condition Class 1 to the extent practicable.
3. Goal 1 – Contribute to the viability of native and other desirable wildlife species.
4. Goal 3 – Enhance, restore, manage and create habitats as required for wildlife and plant communities, including disturbance-dependent forest types.
5. Goal 31 – Provide a spectrum of high quality, nature-based recreation settings and opportunities, that reflect the unique or exceptional resources of the Forest and the interests of the recreating public on an environmentally sustainable, financially sound, and operationally effective basis. Adapt management of recreation facilities and opportunities as needed to shift limited resources to those opportunities.

Attached is a general vicinity map of the Watershed Management areas for the Plantation Forest Health project proposals. More detailed maps are available upon request at the district office (address on the letterhead).

Comments

A recent Federal Court decision in Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck invalidated the provisions of 36 CFR Part 215 that excluded categorical exclusions from notice, comment and appeal. The District Court further clarified that its order is to be applied prospectively after July 7, 2005 nationwide. Since this project is subject to the Court order, I am making this project subject to a formal notice and comment period.

In accordance with 36 CFR 215.6(a)(3), individuals or organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the following information during the 30-day comment period:

- 1) Your name and address.
- 2) Title of the 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 authorized to represent your organization.

Comments must be postmarked or received within 30 days beginning the day after publication of this notice in the Eatonton Messenger. Written comments should be sent to: District Ranger Bill Nightingale, Oconee Ranger District, Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, Attn: Plantation Forest Health Project. Phone or hand-delivered comments may be made at the Ranger District office at 1199 Madison Road; Eatonton, Georgia 31024 (Phone 707-485-7110) within the normal weekday business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Comments may also be E-mailed to this office, in a common word format (without attachments), using the following e-mail address: bnightingale@fs.fed.us. 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.

Sincerely,

/s/ William B. Nightingale

WILLIAM B. NIGHTINGALE
District Ranger

Enclosure(s)



COMP_NO	STAND_NO	ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY_NUM	SOIL MAPUNI T	ACRES	Hand Thinning	Mechanical Thinning	Forest Plan Management Prescription	WATERSHED SUBTOTAL
195	14	88GA08I02	WPC2	31.9	YES	YES	7.E.2	
172	4	88GA08I02	PaE3	29	YES	YES	9.H	
172	5	88GA08I02	PaE3	16.5	YES	YES	9.H	
172	7	88GA08I02	PaE3	22.3	YES	YES	9.H	
172	17	88GA08I02	PaE3	30.8	YES	YES	9.H	
172	28	88GA08I02	WeE2	5.5	YES	YES	9.H	
172	29	90GA08-02	WpC2	5	YES	YES	9.H	
172	30	88GA08I02	PaC3	10.3	YES	YES	9.H	
172	31	88GA08I02	PaE3	26.5	YES	YES	9.H	
173	8	88GA08I02	GwB2	26.9	YES	YES	9.H	
184	13	77OC180184193M13	PaC3	41.9	YES	YES	7.E.2	
Applachee River Lower Watershed								246.6
121	31	88GA08I02	HaB3	13.2	YES	YES	7.E.1	
121	34	88GA08I02	HaC3	15	YES	YES	7.E.1	
123	3	88GA08I02	HaB3	61.5	YES	YES	8.D	
123	5	87GA08I05	HaC3	40.6	YES	YES	8.D	
123	16	87GA08I05	HaC3	11.5	YES	YES	8.D	
124	18	87GA08I05	HaB3	46.7	YES	YES	8.D	
124	19	87GA08I05	HaC3	9.6	YES	YES	8.D	
125	5	88GA08I02	HaC3	11.7	YES	YES	8.D	
125	11	88GA08I02	WkE2	7.6	YES	YES	8.D	
125	28	88GA08I02	HaC3	11	YES	YES	8.D	
130	22	89GA08I02	LoE3	15.3	YES	YES	8.D	
130	24	88GA08I02	GwE3	23.5	YES	YES	8.D	
135	5	88GA08I02	HeC2	17	YES	YES	8.D	
135	9	88GA08I02	PaE2	12.2	YES	YES	8.D	
135	13	88GA08I02	PaD2	27.4	YES	YES	8.D	
135	21	88GA08I02	GwD2	24.8	YES	YES	8.D	
135	30	88GA08I02	PaD2	16.7	YES	YES	8.D	
135	32		PaD2	8.2	YES	NO	8.D	
135	33	88GA08I02	PaC2	5.6	YES	NO	8.D	
137	15	88GA08I02	GwD2	29.6	YES	NO	8.D	
137	16	93GA08-02	HwD2	30.4	YES	YES	8.D	



137	17	88GA08I02	PaD2	32.9	YES	YES	8.D
137	18	88GA08I02	HwD2	10.4	YES	NO	8.D
139	11	88GA08I02	HwD2	11.8	YES	YES	8.D
139	12	87GA08I05	GwE2	92.4	YES	YES	8.D
139	15	88GA08I02	GwC2	9.4	YES	YES	8.D
139	19	87GA08I05	HwD2	11.5	YES	YES	8.D
Big Cedar Creek Watershed							607.5
143	16	88GA08I02	WPD2	8.6	YES	YES	8.D
143	20	94GA0802	WkD2	13.1	YES	YES	8.D
147	3	88GA08I02	WkD2	34.9	YES	YES	8.D
147	6	85GA08S07	WkD2	11.8	YES	YES	8.D
147	9	85GA08S07	GwD2	6.3	YES	YES	8.D
147	26	85GA08S07	PaB2	15.7	YES	YES	8.D
147	27	85GA08S07	PaD2	16	YES	YES	8.D
149	4	89GA08I04	GwB2	14.9	YES	NO	8.D
149	24	89GA08I04	GwB2	38.5	YES	NO	8.D
149	25	89GA08I04	LoE2	12	YES	NO	8.D
154	23	84GA08I06	TC	40.2	YES	YES	8.D
154	25	84GA08I06	GwC2	20.7	YES	YES	8.D
154	27	84GA08I06	WPC2	7.3	YES	YES	8.D
154	28	88GA08I02	CeE2	13.8	YES	YES	8.D
155	14	88GA08I02	CeE2	41.6	YES	YES	8.D
155	19	88GA08I02	WkD3	38.4	YES	YES	8.D
155	23	88GA08I02	WkD3	13.1	YES	YES	8.D
155	25	88GA08I02	WkD3	32.4	YES	YES	8.D
155	33	88GA08I02	Pac	16.8	YES	YES	8.D
156	26	88GA08I02A	Pac	19.8	YES	NO	8.D
156	27	88GA08I02A	TC	24.8	YES	NO	8.D
157	23	88GA08I02	TC	31.5	YES	NO	8.D
162	14		GwD2	22.8	YES	NO	8.D
164	7	84GA08I06	GwD2	17.8	YES	YES	8.D
Little River Lower Watershed							512.8
159	12	89GA08I02	HwD2	10.9	YES	NO	8.D
159	17	89GA08I04	PaC2	16.3	YES	NO	8.D
159	18	96GA0818	HeC2	27.2	YES	YES	8.D
159	20	89GA08I02	GwD2	11.2	YES	NO	8.D
160	24	89GA08I04	HeB2	67.8	YES	NO	8.D

160	26	88GA08I02	GwD2	34.3	YES	YES	8.D	167.7
Little River Upper Watershed								
133	27	88GA08I02	PaC3	12.7	YES	NO	8.D	
140	25	88GA08I02	HwD2	17.9	YES	YES	8.D	
140	32	88GA08I02	LoE2	16.6	YES	YES	8.D	
140	36	89GA08I01	HeC	8.8	YES	YES	8.D	
142	40	88GA08I02	HeB2	10.3	YES	YES	8.D	
144	19		PaB2	13.8	YES	NO	8.D	
144	20	88GA08I02	GwE2	4.1	YES	YES	8.D	
144	20	88GA08I02	PaD3	11.4	YES	YES	8.D	
145	1	87GA08I05	PaC2	41.8	YES	YES	8.D	
145	18		HeC2	12.9	YES	NO	8.D	
145	19	87GA08I05	PaD2	12.5	YES	YES	8.D	
145	20	87GA08I05	PaC2	15.1	YES	YES	8.D	
145	22	87GA08I05	HeB2	9.4	YES	YES	8.D	
145	28	88GA08I02	PaD2	6.2	YES	YES	8.D	
145	43	87GA08I05	PaD2	5.8	YES	YES	8.D	
146	8	85GA08S07	WkD2	27	YES	NO	8.D	
146	9	85GA08S07	WkD2	22	YES	NO	8.D	
146	12	85GA08S07	PaB2	7.3	YES	NO	8.D	
146	13	85GA08S07	PaC2	14.4	YES	NO	8.D	
146	29	85GA08S07	PaC2	12	YES	NO	8.D	
151	9	88GA08I02	PaD2	15.2	YES	YES	8.D	
151	13	88GA08I02	PaE2	14.9	YES	YES	8.D	312.1
Murder Creek Watershed								
101	20	95GA0802	CeD	36.5	YES	YES	8.D.1	
102	28	84GA08I01	CeB	27	YES	NO	8.D.1	
102	34	84GA08I01	CeD	10.1	YES	NO	8.D.1	
103	3	84GA08I01	TC	28	YES	NO	8.D.1	
103	12	84GA08I01	TC	13.3	YES	NO	8.D.1	
103	13	84GA08I01	TC	26.2	YES	NO	8.D.1	
103	18	84GA08I01	CeB	21.3	YES	NO	8.D.1	
103	20	84GA08I01	CeB	10.2	YES	NO	8.D.1	
104	13	88GA08I02	CeB	18.7	YES	YES	8.D.1	
104	33	88GA08I02	CeD	17.4	YES	YES	8.D.1	
105	6		CeE2	62.1	YES	NO	8.D.1	
105	9		CeE2	26.4	YES	NO	8.D.1	

105	13		CeC	53.6	YES	NO	8.D.1
106	9	87GA08I01	HeC	46	YES	YES	8.D.1
108	36	89GA08I02	HeC	2.2	YES	NO	8.D.1
108	36	89GA08I02	IrD	10.5	YES	NO	8.D.1
115	1	87GA08I01	HeC	15.9	YES	YES	8.D.1
115	15	88GA08I02	HeC	35.9	YES	YES	8.D.1
117	16	88GA08I02	TC	28.9	YES	YES	8.D.1
117	25	88GA08I02	HeC	41.3	YES	YES	8.D.1

531.5

**Ocmulgee
River - Big
Sandy
Creek
Watershed**

1	10	88GA08I01	GwC2	11.6	YES	YES	3.B
1	11	88GA08I01	GwD2	34	YES	YES	3.B
1	12	89GA08I03	GwD2	6.5	YES	NO	3.B
1	50	89GA08I03	GwC2	7.7	YES	NO	3.B
3	4	88GA08I01	GwC2	29.2	YES	YES	3.B
8	51	89GA08I03	GwC2	4.7	YES	NO	3.B
110	13	89GA08I02	HwE2	29.2	YES	NO	8.D.1
111	9	98GA0819	WkD2	15.3	YES	YES	8.D.1
111	10		CeC	34.1	YES	NO	8.D.1
114	23	88GA08I02	WkE3	29	YES	YES	8.D.1
116	12	85GA08S04	WkE3	55.6	YES	NO	8.D.1
116	22	88GA08I02	CeE2	43.6	YES	YES	8.D.1
118	34	89GA08I04	HwE2	13.2	YES	NO	8.D.1
119	19	89GA08I02	CeD	17.6	YES	NO	8.D.1
120	1	89GA08I02	HeC	13.8	YES	NO	8.D.1
120	6	88GA08I02	WC	13.8	YES	YES	8.D.1
120	10	98GA0819	HwE2	39.2	YES	YES	8.D.1
120	23	88GA08I02	HwE2	25.2	YES	YES	8.D.1

423.3

**Ocmulgee
River -
Rum Creek
Watershed**

165	5	85GA08E02	PcC3	13.8	YES	NO	7.E.2
165	18	85GA08E02	PcC3	53.1	YES	NO	7.E.2
165	22	85GA08E02	HaB3	9.3	YES	NO	7.E.2
165	23	85GA08E02	PcC3	17.4	YES	NO	7.E.2
165	28	85GA08E02	PcC3	59.7	YES	NO	7.E.2
165	29	88GA08I02	PaB3	18.3	YES	YES	7.E.2

165	30	85GA08E02	PcD3	35.9	YES	NO	7.E.2
165	31	85GA08E02	PwE2	47.6	YES	NO	7.E.2
167	15	87GA08I03	TC	11.4	YES	NO	3.B
168	4	92GA08-01	PaD3	18.4	YES	YES	3.B
168	13	92GA08-01	WeE3	10.2	YES	YES	3.B
168	14	88GA08I02	WeE2	19.3	YES	YES	3.B
168	15		LoE2	9	YES	NO	3.B
168	21		WeE2	14.8	YES	NO	3.B
170	5	85GA08S05	PaC3	16.6	YES	NO	3.B
170	6	85GA08S05	GwE2	23.9	YES	NO	3.B
170	8	85GA08S05	PaC2	21.9	YES	NO	3.B
170	16	88GA08I02	PaC3	20.9	YES	YES	3.B
170	19	85GA08S05	WeE3	21.8	YES	NO	3.B
170	26	85GA08S05	WPD3	17.1	YES	NO	3.B
170	27	85GA08S05	PaE3	13	YES	NO	3.B
170	29	88GA08I02	WeE3	39.5	YES	YES	3.B
170	30	88GA08I02	WeE3	33.5	YES	YES	3.B

546.4

Oconee
River -
Big
Creek
Watersh
ed

169	6	84GA08I03	WeE3	35.1	YES	NO	7.E.2
169	8	84GA08I03	PaC3	36.2	YES	NO	7.E.2
169	9	84GA08I03	PaC3	54.8	YES	NO	7.E.2
169	18	88GA08I02	LoE3	45.2	YES	YES	7.E.2
174	20	88GA08I02A	PaC2	37.7	YES	NO	9.H
175	3	81OC175I02	PaC3	34.5	YES	YES	3.B
175	19		PaE3	34.9	YES	NO	3.B
175	20	81OC175I02	WhB	18.2	YES	YES	3.B
175	24	92GA08-01	PaE3	8.2	YES	YES	3.B
175	25		PaD2	8	YES	NO	9.H
176	9	88GA08I02	PaC3	21.3	YES	YES	7.E.2
176	10	88GA08I02	PaB3	30	YES	YES	7.E.2
176	11	88GA08I02	PaC2	51.5	YES	YES	7.E.2
176	12	88GA08I02	LoE3	8	YES	YES	7.E.2
176	14	88GA08I02	PaC3	11.7	YES	YES	7.E.2
176	15	88GA08I02	PaD3	14.1	YES	YES	7.E.2
176	16	88GA08I02	PaD3	8.5	YES	YES	7.E.2

178	1	86GA08S01	TC	43.6	YES	NO	9.H
178	17	86GA08S01	WeE3	26	YES	YES	9.H
179	17	94GA08-03	WeE3	23.2	YES	YES	9.H
180	6		WPC2	23.6	YES	NO	9.H
180	16	88GA08I02	WPC2	10	YES	YES	9.H
180	17	88GA08I02	WPD3	21.9	YES	YES	9.H
180	53	88GA08I02	WPC2	16.8	YES	YES	9.H
182	3	88GA08I02	WeE2	35.5	YES	YES	9.H
182	6	88GA08I02	WPD2	26.6	YES	YES	9.H
186	1		WPB2	23.1	YES	NO	9.H
186	7	89GA08I01	WeE3	36.6	YES	YES	9.H
186	15	89GA08I01	PaD3	4.1	YES	YES	9.H
187	14	88GA08I02	PaD3	14.7	YES	YES	7.E.2
189	3	88GA08I02	WeE2	31.1	YES	YES	9.H
190	10	88GA08I02A	PaD2	26.2	YES	NO	9.H
191	20	88GA08I02A	PaC2	35.4	YES	YES	9.H
191	25	87GA08I05	WPC2	26.4	YES	YES	9.H
194	18	85GA08S05	WeE2	39.9	YES	NO	9.H
194	21	88GA08I02	WhB	41.9	YES	YES	9.H
195	16	88GA08I02	WeE2	29.9	YES	YES	7.E.2

994.4

Oconee
River -
Greenbrier
Creek
Watershed