

**DECISION NOTICE
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Land Bridge Road -- Bridge Relocation

**USDA Forest Service – Region 8
Sumter National Forest
Andrew Pickens Ranger District
Oconee County, South Carolina**

The Andrew Pickens Ranger District, Sumter National Forest has decided to authorize Oconee County to relocate a bridge that crosses the Chauga River on Land Bridge Road in Mountain Rest, South Carolina. Land Bridge Road is a public road managed by Oconee County. The road crosses a mosaic of public and private lands, with the river crossing and adjacent approaches being on national forest system (NFS) lands.

Decision

I have decided to implement Alternative 2. This alternative with design criteria and monitoring best meets the Purpose and Need as stated in the *Land Bridge Road Bridge Relocation Project Environmental Assessment* (EA).

The Decision authorizes construction of a new bridge and road segment, dismantling and removal of the old bridge, obliteration of the existing road segment that will no longer be used, and construction of two gravel parking areas and connector trail for recreation access. Existing easements will be revised to support the new location of the county road and bridge on NFS lands. Other connected actions will include soil stabilization and clearing of vegetation for the new road segment. Design criteria will be incorporated in construction and relocation of the new bridge to reduce adverse impacts to water quality in the Chauga River.

The bridge will span the entire width of the Chauga River (approximately 70 feet), and rest on support structures located on each side of the river banks.

The newly aligned roadway section will replace approximately 300 feet of existing roadway. The new section will be centered in a 50-foot wide cleared and grubbed strip. The actual roadway will be 20 feet wide. The roadway will be graded to alignment and sloped as shown on the plans (Figures 1 and 2). The subgrade will be shaped and compacted with suitable material. The road section will consist of a minimum of five inches compacted stones and where asphalt is used, the road section will consist of an additional minimum two inches of compacted surface Type C asphalt.

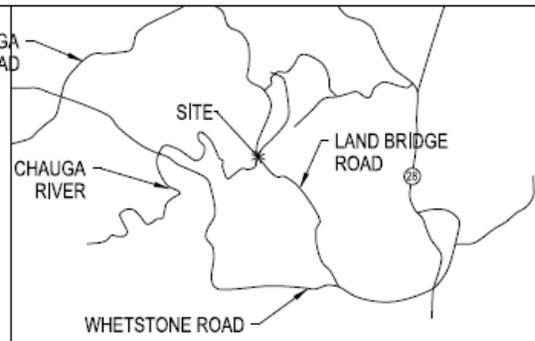
Two small gravel parking areas will be constructed on each side of the river for recreational users of the river. The size of the parking area on the east side of the river will be approximately 30 feet x 120 feet. The size of the parking area on the west side of the river will be approximately 30 feet x 60 feet (Figures 1 and 2). A short connector trail will be constructed on

the eastern side of the river leading from the parking area to the river. The trail will be constructed according to Forest Service standards.

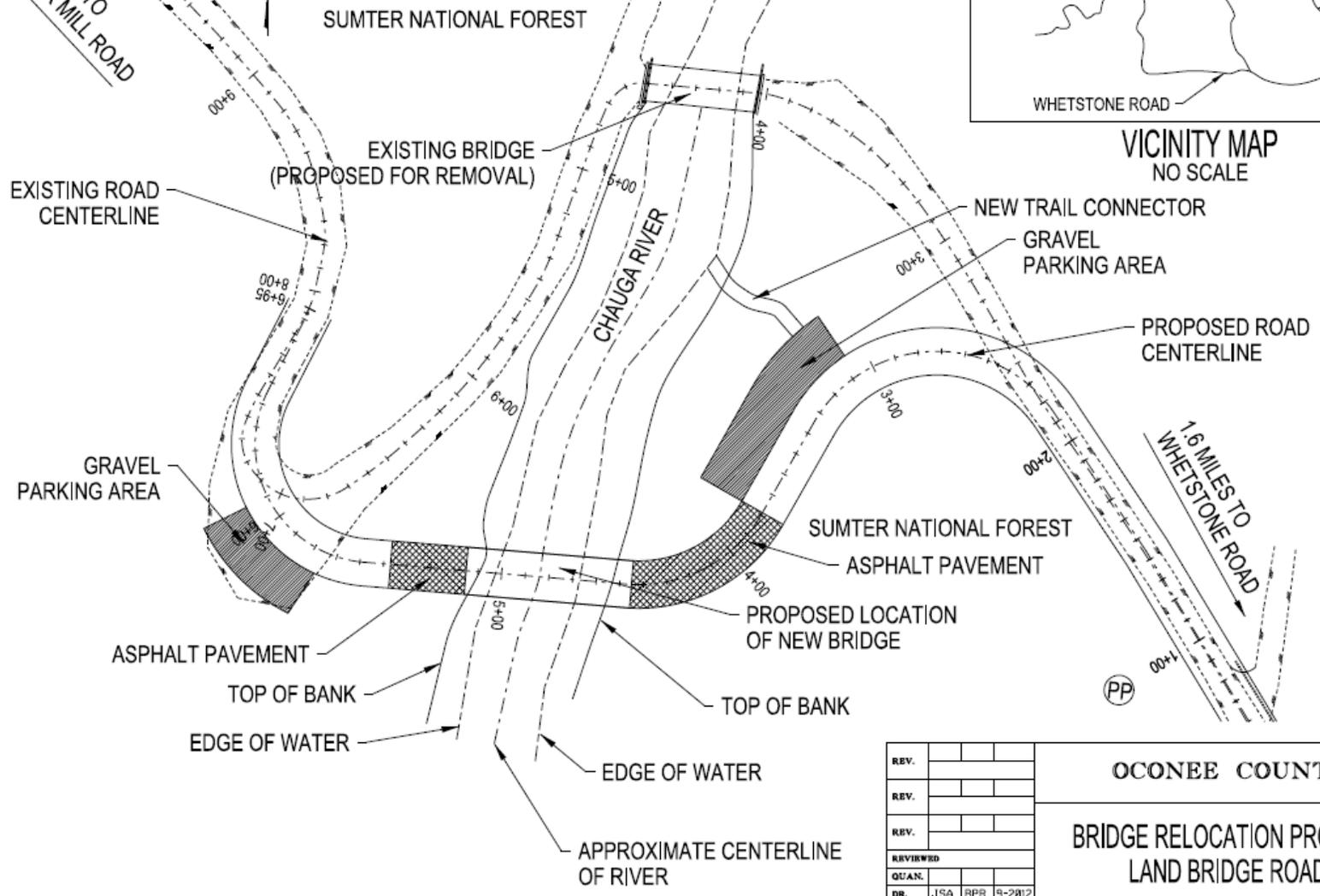
An illustration of the project and vicinity map is shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

0.8 MILES TO
VERNER MILL ROAD



VICINITY MAP
NO SCALE



REV.			
REV.			
REV.			
QUAN.			
DR.	JSA	BPR	9-2012
DES.	JSA	BPR	9-2012
BY	CHL	DATE	

OCONEE COUNTY			
BRIDGE RELOCATION PROJECT LAND BRIDGE ROAD			
FILE NO.	ROUTE LAND BRIDGE RD	COUNTY OCONEE	DRAWING NO. 1 OF 1

Connected Actions

Connected actions associated with this proposal include the following activities:

- Removing trees and other vegetation along the newly proposed route. Cleared vegetation will be removed or broken down on-site (i.e. – chipped, scattered, masticated, etc.). Merchantable wood products from the cleared strip will be sold commercially or by personal use firewood permits.
- Revising the county’s existing easements to reflect the new location of the road and bridge. The Forest Service will issue an easement to Oconee County under the Forest Roads and Trails Act (FRTA, 16 USC 533) for construction and maintenance of the new right-of-way.
- Dismantling and removal of the old bridge.
- Obliterating the existing road to stabilize exposed soils within the riparian corridor and reduce impacts to water quality.
- Stabilizing/rehabilitating disturbed soil areas of the site, including disking, fertilizing, seeding, and mulching. Seeding will be with native and/or non-invasive non-native species.

Design Criteria

Forest Plan standards, *South Carolina Best Management Practices for Forestry* and *South Carolina Department of Transportation Best Management Practices* (BMPs) will be followed. Where design criteria from one source differ from those of another, the more conservative criterion will be applied.

The following design criteria apply to the action alternative.

1. SC DOT Standard Specification Section 815 Erosion Control will be followed (located in project file).
2. SC DOT Supplemental Technical Specifications SC-M-815-11 will be followed (located in project file).
3. Davis & Floyd Engineering specifications for the project have been developed and will be followed for :
 - a. Silt Fence Construction
 - b. Stone Construction Entrance Detail
 - c. Sediment Tube Detail
 - d. Concrete Washout Area Detail
 - e. Type “A” Inlet Protection Detail

f. Type "E" Inlet Protection Detail

4. Specific Erosion Control Measures include the following (additional measures in BMP and other technical specification documents also apply):

a. *TEMPORARY SEDIMENT AND EROSION CONTROL*

Erosion Control for this project shall be as per SCDOT Standard Specifications for Highway Construction-2007, Section 815-Erosion Control. During construction, temporary BMPs will be installed to minimize erosion and remove sediment by capturing and filtering runoff before it leaves the project limits. The intent is for the BMPs to be installed with a phased approach where perimeter controls are installed prior to clearing and earthwork activities and additional measures are introduced throughout varying stages of the construction process.

b. *TEMPORARY PERIMETER CONTROLS*

During the actual construction of the project, several BMPs will be installed to control sediment deposition from the project site. These measures will include:

- 1) Silt Fence installation for several applications including:
 - a) Perimeter of soil stockpiles.
 - b) Along downslope side of the access roads to the bridge.
 - c) Beyond proposed embankment toes of slope with a double row of silt fence spaced a minimum of five feet apart along the top of bank of the river on both sides of the river.
 - d) Delineation of work limits as required.
- 2) Gravel Construction Entrances.
 - a) Ditch checks within the access road ditch section.
 - b) Stabilized contractor and material staging area(s).
 - c) Tree barricades.

c. *TEMPORARY BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES*

In addition, other erosion control measures will be installed as applicable to the type of construction:

- 1) Concrete washout area(s).
- 2) Soil Tracking.
- 3) Dust Control.
- 4) Surface roughening, temporary seeding and mulching.
- 5) Type "A" and "E" inlet protection filters at catch basins and drop inlets as construction sequencing dictates.
- 6) Within the limits of this project along the downstream edge of the bridge construction limit, silt turbidity curtains will be installed if and when construction activities generate excessive turbidity.

d. *PERMANENT BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES*

The following measures are permanent water quality structures which may be incorporated as part of a bridge project:

- 1) Manufactured Treatment Devices and Inlet Filters
- 2) Hydraulic Erosion Control Products (Type 4).
- 3) Stabilized protection at stormwater outfalls.
- 4) Vegetative swales.
- 5) Trash and recycling containers.

As each of the BMPs has its own varying degree of erosion prevention and trapping efficiency, calculations will be performed on the perimeter silt fencing as it is both the most prominent BMP during construction as well as the last line of defense prior to permanent stabilization. Calculations will be performed against a 100 foot sample section of the worst case scenario where a single row of silt fence will receive the most contributory area against the steepest back-slope. In addition, the fence is assumed to be installed at the toe of the steepest slope such that the proposed maintenance shelf will only improve the calculated results. Furthermore, the calculation will assume the upper-end of the runoff coefficient for bare soil as well as eliminating the contributory effects of other downstream BMPs. The resulting trapping efficiency of the worst case condition will be calculated and detailed in the contract documents.

5. Identified heritage sites will be avoided during site disturbing activities.
6. Identified PETS species location will be avoided during site disturbing activities.
7. The spread of nonnative invasive plant species will be minimized by ensuring equipment cleaning provisions are met, that no non-native invasive species are planted and that invasive plant species are treated that have the potential to impact resource management objectives in the project area.
8. Road surface approaches to the new bridge will be paved to reduce annual road maintenance disturbance within the riparian corridor and improve water quality.
9. A sediment pond (also known as a plunge pool) will be constructed near the parking area on the west side of the river to function as a sediment trap and prevent erosion due to the steep slope adjacent to the proposed parking area on the west side of the river.
10. Prior to dismantling the existing bridge, Forest Service biological staff must carefully examine the underside of the bridge for the presence of bats. If any bats are found roosting under the bridge, then all dismantling activities must be suspended. Forest Service biological staff will contact USFWS's Charleston Field Office.

Monitoring

Activities and effects will be monitored to ensure compliance with the Forest Plan and *South Carolina Best Management Practices for Forestry* and *South Carolina Department of*

Transportation Best Management Practices (BMPs) and other specific design criteria specified below. Monitoring is done through project plan reviews and periodic on-site evaluations. Timber harvest activities, if needed, will be supervised by a Forest Service timber sale administrator. The project area will also be monitored for the introduction and spread of non-native invasive plant species.

Reasons for the Decision

Based upon the analysis presented in the EA, I have selected Alternative 2, because it meets the purpose and need as follows:

- 1) The new bridge will meet SC DOT standards for structure, traffic safety, and weight limits:
 - a. The bridge will be two lanes wide. The existing bridge is single lane
 - b. Emergency vehicles will be able to use the bridge.
 - c. The elevation of the new bridge will meet standards for a 100-year storm event.
- 2) Re-aligning the road and paving the road surface at river crossing approaches will improve visibility, traffic flow and water quality in the following ways:
 - a. The new alignment will not be as steep as the existing road and will have curves with a wider turning radius, making it easier to see oncoming traffic.
 - b. More gradual and paved road approaches to the Chauga River will reduce road-related sedimentation into the river.
 - c. The new road segment will not be entrenched, so drainage from the road will be able to exit the roadway out to the forest floor instead of cutting down the roadbed and into the river.
- 3) Parking areas will provide a safe pullout for vehicles to be out of the roadway. The connector foot trail will provide safe, convenient, and low impact access to the Chauga River for recreation.

In making this decision, I also considered the *Revised Land and Resource Management Plan Sumter National Forest* (Forest Plan) and associated Environmental Impact Statement and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) regulations. Other documents that I considered in making my decision were the Biological Evaluation.

Alternatives Considered

One other alternative was considered in detail in the Environmental Assessment.

No Action alternative. The existing bridge and existing road alignment will remain unchanged. This alternative does not meet the purpose and need of providing a bridge that meets SC DOT standards or a roadway that provides for safe traffic flow and protection of soil and water resources.

Public Involvement

The District Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) conducted scoping to identify the issues related to the Proposed Action. On October 18, 2012, a scoping letter was sent to organizations and individual citizens on the Andrew Pickens Ranger District mailing list requesting their comments on the project. A legal notice was posted in *The Journal (Seneca, SC)* on April 8, 2014 and the project also appeared in the the *Schedule of Proposed Actions for the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forest (SOPA)*, which also appears on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forest's website at: http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=42111. No comments were received during the 30-Day Notice and Comment Period.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

Forest Plan Consistency

The selected alternative is consistent with the Forest Plan as described on pages 5-7 of the EA. Forest-wide goals, objectives, standards and management prescriptions are described in Chapter 2 and 3 of the Forest Plan.

Biological Assessment/Evaluation (BA/E), Heritage Resources

A BA/E was completed for this project.

The BA/E determined for the following sensitive species: bald eagle, Chauga crayfish, Edmund's snaketail, Diane fritillary, Eastern small-footed bat, Rafinesque's big-eared bat, Southern Appalachian salamander and sweet pinesap that the project "May impact individuals but not likely to cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of viability"

The Northern long-eared bat is proposed for listing as "endangered" by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The BA/E determined that the removal of trees and other vegetation along the new right-of-way is "Not likely to jeopardize proposed species or modify proposed critical habitat" and that dismantling and removal of the old bridge will "not likely adversely affect the species". The USFWS concurred with this determination in a letter dated March 20, 2014.

The project area was surveyed and it was determined that no historic properties will be impacted by reconstruction activities. The South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) was consulted and concurred with this finding (letter dated June 25, 2013). The Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians concurred in an email letter dated June 26, 2013.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

After considering the environmental effects described in the Land Bridge Road, Bridge Relocation Project (EA), I have determined that the actions in Alternative 2 are not a major federal action having a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my findings on the following:

Context

The physical, biological, and social effects are limited to the project area and immediate adjacent areas, which are analyzed in Chapter 3 of the EA. All actions are consistent with the *Revised Land and Resource Management Plan, Sumter National Forest* and all environmental effects are within the range disclosed in the *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan Sumter National Forest*.

Intensity

1. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered (see EA, Chapter 3, Environmental Consequences, pages 17-67). Design criteria include actions to prevent or lessen adverse impacts of the decision (EA pages 13-15, Decision Notice pages 4-6). The low intensity of the effects within the limited context of this project makes the adverse effects insignificant.
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety (see EA, Chapter 3, Environmental Consequences, pages 57-58).
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area (historic and cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas) (see EA Chapter 3, Environmental Consequences, pages 17-67).
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial because there is no scientific controversy over the impacts of the project (see EA pages 17-67 and Scoping, page 7).
5. The effects documented in the EA are not highly uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown environmental risk (see EA Chapter 3, Environmental Consequences, pages 17-67).
6. The actions in this decision are not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, and do not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration (EA, page 7, 1.7 Decision to be Made and 2.0 Alternatives, pages 9-13).

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