

Decision Memo

Southern Pine Beetle Prevention Project

USDA Forest Service Southern Region
Chattahoochee National Forest
Brasstown Ranger District
Union and Towns County, 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 35 acres of loblolly pine plantations are designated for commercial thinning. Thinning these stands will improve the health and vigor of the remaining trees which will help control the outbreak and spread of SPB. Stand 6(20ac.) of Compartment 355 will require opening an old existing road for 3/8 mile. Stand 5(15ac.) of Compartment 359 lies adjacent to a system road and will require only skid trails. Both of these stands will be thinned to approximately 50 basal area. Stand 6 Comp. 355 is located in Management Prescription 8.A.2. Stand 5 Comp. 359 is located in Management Prescription 7.E.1. Thinning for Forest Health is permitted in both of these prescriptions.

Within the Sale Area in Stand 5 Comp. 359 there exists an open illegal OHV road. This road will be blocked and seeded using KV dollars.

This decision will implement Goals in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Land and Resource management Plan (Forest 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.

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

SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public scoping began in Feb 2004. 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. Scoping both internally and externally raised no concerns that were determined to be extraordinary circumstances.

The Appalachian Trail Club, The National Wild Turkey Federation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Georgia Forest Watch and Howard Markel were all in concurrence with this activity.

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 DATE

This decision will be implemented beginning in September 2004.

NOTICE, COMMENT AND APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.8 (a) (4).

CONTACT PERSON

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SIGNATURE AND DATE OF RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL

 /s/ Alan Polk

Alan Polk
District Ranger
Brasstown Ranger District

DATE August 5, 2004