

# **DECISION MEMO**

## **Nancytown Lake Amphibian Habitat Enhancement Project**

USDA Forest Service -Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests –Chattooga Ranger District -Habersham County, Georgia

### **1. DECISION**

I have decided to approve the proposal to enhance amphibian habitat adjacent to Nancytown Lake. Nancytown Lake is located near Mt. Airy, Georgia (see attached map). A recent survey by Forest Service, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and Piedmont College biologists found that improving aquatic habitat at the back edge of the lake would enhance habitat for amphibians. The biologist observed a decrease in amphibian population in the area adjacent to the Nancytown Lake. This decrease is due to plant succession. This backwater area in the recent past had large pockets of standing water. Currently, only one small pocket of water remains, which is being used by amphibians for breeding and for other life history needs. The locally rare salamander, the four toed (*Hemidactylium scutatum*), has decreased in population numbers from this area. There is a need to provide wet habitat for these amphibians. In addition, dead fallen trees along the shoreline of Nancytown have been removed, also decreasing known sites of its occurrence.

The project consists of digging pits to create small pools of standing water at the backwater area of Nancytown Lake. The purpose to dig these pits is to provide waters for amphibians. These small depressions will be absent of fish. Pits only need to be 1-1.5 ft in depth and at least 10 feet in width. A maximum of 8 pits will be constructed by hand and a bulldozer. Also, approximately 15 downed logs 10-15 feet in length will be collected from an adjacent southern pine beetle kill site and placed by hand or pushed by the dozer into the back water area to enhance amphibian habitat. No live trees or standing dead trees will be utilized for this project. The dozer will only be operated at the edges of the wet areas.

Any lakeshore disturbance would be mitigated by seeding with native plants and mulching any exposed soils that result from proposed activities. Direction in our Land and Resource Plan (Forest Plan) guides us to enhance and protect aquatic habitat by creating, installing and implementing habitat improvements (Pages 4-19 and 4-91.)

Interdisciplinary input on the project was obtained from the Forest botanist, archeologist, fisheries biologist, and wildlife biologist. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) was also involved in planning this project.

I have determined that this project falls into a category of actions, which will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Specifically, this action falls under Category 7 of Section 31.2 in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15. Category 7 includes modification of stream or lake aquatic habitat using native materials or normal practices.

I have also determined that there is no extraordinary circumstances existing that may cause the project to have significant effects. Therefore, neither an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) nor an Environmental Assessment (EA) will need to be prepared. Specifically:

- The aquatic habitat enhancement project will not take place on steep slopes or highly erosive soils. The proposed project will occur on flatter topography resulting in no significant risk of erosion.
- There are no known Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive flora or fauna (either aquatic or terrestrial) within or along the sections of stream where the project is planned. Therefore, the proposed project will have no effect on any federally listed species and no sensitive species will be impacted by the activities in this decision (see the Biological Evaluation in the project file.)
- No jurisdictional wetlands (as defined in the Forest Service Manual 2527.05--8) or municipal watersheds will be affected by this project (project file). There are some floodplains contained within the project areas of the backwater areas of Nancytown Lake, however since this project is clearly not changing the character of the floodplain and is maintaining the benefiting values of the floodplain, it is therefore not considered extraordinary within the context of the overall proposal.
- No congressionally designated area, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas will be affected by this project. The project is not within a research natural area.
- The project area is not within a currently inventoried roadless area. This is based on the most recent inventory which was prepared as part of the Southern Appalachian Assessment.
- There are no known Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas in the project area.
- The cumulative effects of this project combined with others in the foreseeable future will not be significant.

## **2. PURPOSE AND NEED**

The habitat enhancement described in this project is needed to move from the existing condition toward that described by the Forest Plan. Direction in our Forest Plan guides us to enhance and protect aquatic habitat by installing and maintaining in-stream improvements and improving aquatic habitat (pages 4-19 and 4-91.) The structures to be installed are cover logs arranged and pinned into the streambed sides to provide improved habitat for brook trout. Data from trout population monitoring shows a trend of increasing populations where stream structures are installed (Durniak, Keefer & Ruddell, 1991; available for review in the project file at the Chattooga Ranger District office in Clarkesville, GA).

The project site is in MA 16, where the direction is to provide the public with a wide range of fishing opportunities through intensive management (Forest Plan, 4-108.) Enhancement of the stream as described will help meet the MA and Forest direction and will move these areas toward the desired condition envisioned by the Forest Plan.

## **3. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Scoping both internally and externally raised no concerns that were determined to be extraordinary circumstances.

A letter detailing this project was sent out to 37 individuals, agencies and public organizations in November of 2003 (see project file, Chattooga Ranger District.) No responses were received for this project.

#### **4. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS**

This project is consistent with the Forest Plan, as amended. The actions in this project fully comply with the Forest-wide standards and guidelines (Forest Plan, 4-12 through 4-49) as well as the MA 16 standards and guidelines (Forest Plan, pages 4-107 to 4-110).

The actions are designed to comply with all management requirements in the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Final EIS for Vegetative Management in the Appalachian Mountains.

By following the standards and guidelines and management requirements as stated above, 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 36 CFR 219.27(b) and will provide the desired effects on water quality and fish habitat. This action will avoid permanent impairment of site productivity and ensure conservation of soil and water resources.

#### **5. IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

This decision may be implemented immediately.

#### **6. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES**

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

#### **7. CONTACT PERSON**

For further information concerning this decision or the appeal process contact Doug Watson by phone, letter, e-mail, or in person. The address of the Chattooga Ranger District office is P.O. Box 1960, Clarkesville, GA 30523, and the phone number is (706) 754-6221. Contact Doug by e-mail at [cdwatson@fs.fed.us](mailto:cdwatson@fs.fed.us).

#### **8. SIGNATURE AND DATE OF RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Michael Gryson**  
**District Ranger**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**DATE**

