

Decision Memo

Oakey Mtn. – Moates Knob OHV Trail Reroutes for Riparian Area Health and User Safety

Chattooga and Tallulah Ranger Districts

USDA Forest Service -Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests
Habersham and Rabun Counties, Georgia

DECISION & PURPOSE AND NEED

We have decided to approve the proposal to reroute two sections of the Oakey Mountain and Moates Knob OHV Trails. The first reroute is approximately a 1-mile section of the Moates Knob OHV Trail. The open section will be closed and a new section will be constructed from the gap above the head of Chastain Branch, southeast towards Oakey Mountain and tie into the Oakey Mountain OHV Trail. This new section is approximately the same length as that being closed. After the new section is completed, the existing section that follows along Chastain Branch will be obliterated, signed as closed, and revegetated. The second reroute is on the Oakey Mountain OHV Trail and is located on the south side of Ann Gap. The current section is steep, hard to maintain, and is potentially hazardous to the inexperienced rider. The reroute will start from the bottom of the gap and go toward the west to the top of the ridge and then meander along the ridge top until it ties back into the existing trail. (See Map Attached)

Activities associated with the construction of the reroutes consist of removing brush and trees from within the clearing limit of the reroute, construction of the trail bed by dozer, placement of gravel on sections to harden the tread, and the construction of three bridges to cross over ephemeral stream channels. Crossings of the ephemeral streams will be in an inverted V pattern to allow for drainage from the trail away from the streambed. (Toler, Sullivan)

Activities associated with the closure and rehabilitation of the old section of trail consist of berm construction, culvert removal, obliteration of the old roadbed along certain sections, seeding and fertilizing the old roadbed, planting of trees and other vegetation, and educational and closure signing of the closed section. These efforts are intended to discourage and prevent any continued use of the abandoned section. (Toler, Sullivan, Groves)

It has been identified that Forest Plan goals 26 and 34 are not being met along the Chastain Branch section. Goal 26 directs management to restore and or maintain aquatic ecosystems in amounts, arrangements, and conditions capable of supporting viable populations of all native and desired nonnative species of aquatic flora and fauna within the planning area. Goal 34 directs that trails do not adversely affect soil and water resources.

Over the last few years, stream structures have been installed and fishery improvements have been made to Chastain Branch in an attempt to improve stream habitat. Sedimentation related to trail use has continued to create poor water quality for aquatics.

There has been a considerable effort made in mitigating sediment flow into the stream from the trail, which has been only partially effective.

Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Decision

We have determined that these actions fall within Category #1 (“Construction and reconstruction of trails.”) of Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, Section 31.2 for categorical exclusions. These actions have been determined to have no significant effect on the quality of the human environment, either individually or cumulatively, and are therefore categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA).

Based on the results of internal and external scoping, we have determined that no extraordinary circumstances exist that could cause the actions involved with this project to have significant effects.

FINDINGS

These actions are consistent with the 2004 Forest Plan for Management Prescription Area 6B. They adhere to applicable standards, guidelines, and monitoring requirements in the Forest Plan.

These projects comply with the seven requirements of 36 CFR 219.27(b) by following the Forest-wide standards and guidelines as mentioned above. These requirements include the multiple use goals for the area; potential effects on residual biota and adjacent biota; site productivity and the conservation of soil and water resources; and the desired effects on the environment.

- No Proposed, Endangered, Threatened or Sensitive (PETS) plants were present in the trail locations during inventories. (Project File).
- The biological evaluation completed for these projects determined that there would not be any adverse effects on species of special concern.
- These actions comply with the National Historic Preservation Act. (Project File).
- The areas of new construction do not contain any wetlands, floodplains, or municipal watersheds (from “Soil Survey of Habersham County, Georgia,” available for review at the Tallulah District Office).
- Soil surveys of the project areas show that approximately 1/2 of the Moates Knob Reroute is on steep slopes and contains erosive soils (from “Soil Survey of Habersham County, Georgia,”). Best Management Practices will be used to mitigate the effects on these soils. This will include hardening sites with stone or riprap, placement of drainage structures, and other mitigation as needed.
- This project is not within any congressionally designated areas.

- State-approved Best Management Practices will be employed and this project will comply with the Clean Water Act.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A letter detailing these projects were sent out to individuals, agencies and public organizations on December 14, 2001 (see project file, Tallulah Ranger District.) Issues from this scoping remain the same and additional public scoping was not deemed necessary. Five responses were received. Responses to concerns have been noted in this decision by altering methods, mitigation, or providing more explanation.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

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

IMPLEMENTATION

These projects may be implemented immediately. These projects are scheduled to begin in the summer of 2004, based on volunteer availability and district work schedules.

CONTACT PERSON

For further information concerning this decision contact Allen Smith by phone, letter, e-mail, or in person. The address of the Tallulah Ranger District office is 809 Highway 441 South, Clayton, GA 30525, and the phone number is (706) 782-3320. Contact Allen by e-mail at asmith02@fs.fed.us.

SIGNATURE AND DATE OF RESPONSIBLE OFFICIALS

/s/ Michael Gryson

7/9/04

Michael Gryson
District Ranger, Chattooga Ranger District

Date

/s/ Steven N. Cole for

7/8/04

David W. Jensen
District Ranger, Tallulah Ranger District

Date

Oakey and Moates Knob Reroutes

