

DECISION NOTICE
SUPPLEMENT TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (4/15/02)
And
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Pertaining to changes in the extension of the Pinhoti Trail across the Cohutta Unit
Of the Armuchee-Cohutta Ranger District
Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest

BACKGROUND

The decision to implement the actions of Alternative 3 was made on April 15, 2002 based on the analysis presented in the Environmental Assessment for the Pinhoti Trail Extension project. During that analysis it was identified that the trail route from State Highway 52 north to Forest Development Road (FDR) 90 was unknown until right-of-way (ROW) issues were resolved. The proposed ROW over private land was not successfully negotiated. However, another trail route has now been found that stays entirely on national forest land and a county road ROW, thus eliminating the need for a ROW across private land. This document locates the new trail section between Highway 52 and FDR 90.

Another action associated with the Pinhoti Trail Extension is the development of a trailhead parking area at the intersection of FDR 90 and FDR 90A in an area locally known as Stillhouse. During field reconnaissance, a better location for the Stillhouse Trailhead Parking Area was found at the end of FDR 90A. This site would require less soil disturbance to construct the parking lot and would provide more parking than the previously selected site on FDR 90. This document changes the trailhead location from the intersection of FDR 90 and FDR 90A to the end of FDR 90A.

DECISION

It is my decision to continue the implementation of Alternative 3 and adopt the two changes to Alternative 2 and 3 as presented in this supplement. The first change locates the trail section on the ground between Highway 52 and FDR 90. This section is approximately 8.3 miles long, of which existing roads will be utilized for 4.25 miles and new trail construction is needed for 4.05 miles. The users of this new section of trail will be hikers and mountain bikers.

The second change is to locate the Stillhouse trailhead parking area at the end of FS 90A. This decision will open 0.6 miles of FS 90A that is currently gated and closed to public access. I have decided that a road analysis is not needed because FS90A is in good condition and will not require any improvements to allow the public to access Stillhouse trailhead parking area. Presently, it will accommodate passenger cars and the increased level of use that is expected.

SUPPLEMENT

1. The following section of trail from Highway 52 to FDR 90 is incorporated into Alternative 2 and 3 as described (see attached map for trail layout):

From the Cohutta Overlook off of Highway 52 proceed north on a woods road until it ends; at this point new trail construction is required until the trail reaches the county road near Mulberry Gap. The trail will follow the county road south approximately 1 mile where Forest Service land adjoins the county road to the north. The trail will take off on a woods road to the north. At the end of this road, new trail construction will be required along the ridge leading to the north until it meets another woods road. The trail will stay on this road until it coincides with FDR 90A.

2. The location of the Stillhouse Trailhead Parking Area is changed from the intersection of FDR 90 and FDR 90A to the end of FDR 90A. The gate on FDR 90A will be opened to allow public access 0.6 miles to the new parking area.

FINDINGS

The new trail location adopted in this document is incorporated into Alternative 2 and 3. Thus, the effects on this action will be the same for each alternative. The new trail location was surveyed for archeological resources and it was concluded that it would not affect any cultural resources. Additionally, a biological survey concluded that the new trail location would not affect the biological resources beyond that which was disclosed in the 2002 EA.

Under the Revised Forest Plan the trail is located in Management Prescriptions 9H(Management, Maintenance, and Restoration of Plant Associations), 7B(Scenic Corridors and Sensitive Viewsheds), 7E1(Dispersed Recreation Areas), 7E2(Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management) and 12A(Remote Backcountry Recreation – Few Open Roads). Each prescription allows trail usage and development where certain criteria are met. This action is consistent with the Forest Plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. In review of the proposed action and alternatives considered from the 2002 Environmental Assessment, the new trail location and development between State Highway 52 and FDR 90 will have no additional effects beyond that which has been disclosed. It also does not change the potential environmental effects of the selected alternative or the other alternatives considered.

The new Stillhouse Parking Area location poses less potential for environmental effects than the original site because less ground disturbance will be needed. The new parking area will utilize an old logging deck that is level and graveled. The size of this site provides more parking opportunities than the old site located on FDR 90. The location of the new parking area will improve access for hunters and other visitors. Additionally, as more people use the area for recreation, the frequency of illegal motorized use is expected to decrease.

This action is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. This is based upon the 10 factors found at 40 CFR 1508.27 (b):

1. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered and this supplemental action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the environment (EA, Chapter 3).
2. The supplemental trail construction and development (Alternative 3), will not negatively affect public health and safety.
3. The supplemental actions will not affect any unique characteristics of the geographical area (EA, Chapter 3).
4. The effects of this project on the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Chapter 1 and Appendix H of the EA discusses the public contacts made in the course of the environmental analysis, documents the public issues, and lists the persons, organizations, and references used in the environmental effects analysis.
5. This supplement to the Decision Notice to construct trail, does not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks. The Armuchee-Cohutta Ranger District has successfully carried out the planned activities in similar situations in the past.
6. The supplemental decision does not set a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. All connected actions have been considered and their effects disclosed so that a decision on this project is not a decision in principle about a future action.
7. The supplemental action or cumulative effects of the actions in Alternative 3 and other foreseeable actions have been evaluated throughout the EA (Chapter 3). There will be no significant cumulative effects between this project and other ongoing or planned projects on either National Forest or private land. The effects of other foreseeable future actions as well as past actions and ongoing actions were included in the analysis.
8. The supplemental actions will not adversely affect any sites listed, eligible, or potentially 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. This is based on the findings of site-specific heritage resource surveys conducted in the project area.
9. Implementing this supplemental decision will not adversely affect threatened or endangered species, or result in the loss of any species viability or create

significant trends toward Federal listing of the species under the Endangered Species Act. This is based upon the findings of site-specific inventories of the project area as documented in a Biological Evaluation. It will not adversely affect viability of any species. By complying with Forest Plan goals and objectives related to biological habitat diversity (36 CFR 219.19), this project contributes to maintenance of viable populations of plants and animals.

10. None of the supplemental actions threaten to lead to violations of federal, state or local environmental laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. This will be ensured by carrying out the selected actions in a way that is consistent with the goals and objectives, management requirements and mitigation measures established in the Forest Plan.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

If no appeal is received, implementation of this supplemental decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of appeal disposition.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW AND APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.7. A written Notice of Appeal must be postmarked or received by 45 days after the day a legal notice of this decision is published in the *Chatsworth Times*. Any Notice of Appeal must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14 and should be sent to:

Regional Forester, USDA Forest Service
Attn: Appeals
1720 Peachtree Road, N.W., Suite 811N
Atlanta, Georgia 30309

CONTACT PERSON

For additional information concerning this decision, contact:

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Chatsworth, Georgia 30705
(706) 695-6736 Ext. 103

/s/ Debra Whitman
DEBRA L. WHITMAN
Responsible Official / District Ranger

7/2/04
Date