



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Chattahoochee Oconee
National Forest

Oconee Ranger District
1199 Madison Road
Eatonton, GA 31024
706-485-7110
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File Code: 1950/2400/2600

Date: April 12, 2004

Dear Forest Friend:

I am inviting you to comment on the following proposed pre-commercial thinning project on the Oconee Ranger District of the Chattahoochee – Oconee National Forest. The pre-commercial thinning project will accomplish two objectives: 1). Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) Habitat Improvement, on the Hitchiti Experimental Forest and 2). Improved Forest Health, within the general boundaries of the Oconee Ranger District.

Pre-commercial Thinning for RCW Habitat Improvement

Natural and artificial regeneration of previous Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) damage within pine stands has become overstocked. Additional natural regeneration has resulted in dense, overstocked pine seedlings and saplings with scattered various species of hardwoods of all ages. I am proposing 11 areas with an estimated total of 99 acres to be pre-commercially thinned. RCW cavity trees are within or adjacent to the project areas. The proposed pre-commercial thinning will reduce the seedling and sapling stocking to 300- 400 stems per acre. Oak and Hickory species will be favored over pine stocking and will be included in the remaining stems per acre. Pre-commercial thinning will improve the habitat for the RCW, by increasing the growth and development of the trees and by reducing development of diseases and the hazard of SPB. I also propose to include removing all seedlings and saplings of all species within a 50' radius of all RCW cavity trees within the project areas to maintain acceptable habitat for nesting RCW's.

Pre-commercial Thinning to improve Forest Health

Natural and artificial regeneration of harvested stands has become overstocked. Additional natural regeneration has resulted in dense, overstocked pine seedlings and saplings with scattered various species of hardwoods of all ages. I am proposing 15 areas with an estimated total of 452 acres to be pre-commercially thinned. The proposed pre-commercial thinning will reduce the seedling and sapling stocking to 300 – 400 stems per acre. Oak and Hickory species will be favored over the pine stocking and will be included in the remaining stems per acre. Pre-commercial thinning will increase growth and development of the trees, reduce development of diseases, reduce the hazard of SPB and increase plant and wildlife diversity.

The anticipated implementation date for the precommercial thinning project is late summer to early fall 2004.



As required by the National Environmental Policy Act, I am seeking comments for the project. I anticipate a decision memo will be prepared for this project. If you would like to comment on the project, or you would like additional information about the project, please contact the Oconee Ranger District . Comments must be postmarked or received by April 26, 2004. Your comments need to be as specific as possible and include the following information:

1. Name and address and (if possible) telephone number.
2. Title of the project.
3. Specific facts or comments along with supporting reasons that I should consider in reaching a final decision on this proposal.

Your comments can be sent to the address on the letterhead. If you have any questions regarding this project, please contact Tim Walker or myself at the District Office between the hours of 8:00 AM and 4:00 PM, Monday through Friday at 706-485-7110.

Sincerely,

/s/ William B. Nightingale

WILLIAM B. NIGHTINGALE
District Ranger

Enclosure(s)