



File Code: 1950/2470-3
Date: April 19, 2004

Dear Interested Forest Stakeholder:

My staff and I are proposing several projects across the district designed to restore native tree species and reduce the risk of future southern pine beetle (SPB) infestations across the district.

Restoration projects are proposed for several forest communities that have been killed by the SPB during the epidemic years from 1999 through 2002. The actions proposed are designed to contribute to the Forestwide goals 3 and 8 of restoring native tree species whose role in the ecosystem has been lost due to the four-year SPB epidemic (Land and Resource Management Plan for the Chattahoochee – Oconee National Forests (Forest Plan), 2004, page 2-6 and 2-7).



Figure 1 – Trees Killed by Southern Pine Beetle Infestations

Below is a listing of the restoration objectives for each project site, and an attached map shows locations. Restoration objectives were developed for each project by examining ecosystem classification information, including modeling that displays forest communities that have a natural potential to occur on each site.

Area #	Project Location	Acres (est.)	Restoration Objectives for the Area
R1	Bad Creek Ridge	15	Regenerate forest community killed by the southern pine beetle to a shortleaf pine stand. <i>Objective 3.1 in the Forest Plan.</i>
R2	Camp Creek Road #2	23	Regenerate stand to a shortleaf pine forest community. An 80% - 20% mixture of pines and native hardwoods in the overstory would be the long-term objective. <i>Objective 3.1 in the Forest Plan.</i>
R3	Camp Creek Road #1	10	Regenerate a portion of the existing loblolly pine plantation to a shortleaf pine forest community with about 20% of the area in native hardwood species. <i>Objective 3.1 in the Forest Plan.</i>
R4	Watergauge Road	8	Restore a stand killed by the southern pine beetle to a mixture of shortleaf pine and oak species. Oaks and other native hardwoods would be regenerated in the drainage area, covering approximately 20-25% of the area. <i>Objective 3.1 in the Forest Plan.</i>



Area #	Project Location	Acres (est.)	Restoration Objectives for the Area
R5	Raven Rock Road	5	Regenerate a portion of an existing loblolly pine plantation to a shortleaf pine forest community. <i>Objective 3.1 in the Forest Plan.</i>
R6	Wolf Creek	14	Regenerate a forest community killed by the SPB to a shortleaf pine stand, with up to 20% of the overstory composed of native hardwoods, including oaks and hickories. <i>Objective 3.1 in the Forest Plan</i>
R7	Hog Mountain	20	Regenerate the former loblolly pine stand into a mixture of shortleaf pine (80%) and native hardwood (20%) species. <i>Objectives 3.1 and 3.6 in the Forest Plan</i>
R8	John Rowland Branch Road	25	Regenerate a portion of the existing loblolly pine plantation to a shortleaf pine forest community with approximately 20% of the area in native hardwoods, including oaks and hickories. <i>Objective 3.1 in the Forest Plan.</i>
R9	Eastman Mountain	5	Regenerate a portion of the loblolly pine stand into a mixture of shortleaf pine (80%) and native hardwood species (20%). <i>Objectives 3.1 and 3.6 in the Forest Plan</i>
R10	Joe Mountain	38	Regenerate the area into a pitch pine forest community with about 10-20% of the overstory in native hardwood species. <i>Objective 3.2 in the Forest Plan</i>
R11	Stamp Creek Road #1	16	Regenerate a forest community killed by the SPB to a shortleaf pine stand, with up to 20% of the area in native hardwoods, including oaks and hickories. <i>Objective 3.1 in the Forest Plan</i>
R12	Stamp Creek Road #2	45	Restore the area to a mixture of native pines, including Table Mountain, pitch, and/or shortleaf pine tree species, with up to 20% of the area in native hardwoods. <i>Objective 3.2 and 9.F-03 in the Forest Plan.</i>
R13	Worley Ridge	31	Restore the area to a mixture of native pines, including Table Mountain, pitch, and/or shortleaf pine tree species. Hardwoods including oaks and hickories would be developed on up to 20% of the area. <i>Objective 3.2 and 9.F-03 in the Forest Plan.</i>
R14	Bridge Creek Road	23	Restore a stand killed by the southern pine beetle to a mixture of shortleaf pine and other species. Native hardwood species would be favored on approximately 5 acres, and on the other 18 acres an 80%-20% mixture of pines and hardwoods would be the long-term goal for the overstory. <i>Objective 3.1 in the Forest Plan.</i>
R15	Racepath	29	Regenerate the area into a pitch or shortleaf pine forest community, with oaks and hickories favored on up to 20% of the area. <i>Objective 3.2 in the Forest Plan</i>
R16	Finney Creek	22	Regenerate the area into a mixture of pitch or shortleaf pine (80%) and native hardwood species (20%). <i>Objective 3.2 and 3.6 in the Forest Plan</i>

Methods for regeneration of the forest communities described above would include one or more of the following treatments:

- ❖ Public fuel wood gathering (Bad Creek Ridge and Watergauge Road projects) and/or selective tree cutting to remove some trees in order to increase growing space for seedlings and prepare the project site for regeneration;
- ❖ Mechanical tree pushing using heavy equipment to reduce the number of standing dead trees, prepare the site for prescribed burning, and make the planting and seedling environment more favorable for survival and establishment;
- ❖ Prescribed burning to reduce fuel loadings and to make the planting and seedling environment more favorable for survival and establishment.
- ❖ Reforestation by tree planting, stump sprouting, or growth of existing seedlings and saplings (advance reproduction);

These projects are proposed to be implemented over the next 2-4 years (2004-2007). The actions within each project are designed to restore communities of native tree species on sites where they once likely occurred (Forest Plan, page 2-6). Specifically, these particular projects would accomplish restoration of shortleaf, pitch, and Table Mountain pine forest communities with a diversity of other species present in the overstory and understory. Chestnut, southern red, scarlet, post, white, and black oaks would likely be present in the mixture of trees eventually dominating these sites. In addition, species of hickory, yellow poplar, blackgum, flowering dogwood, and others would add to the species diversity.



Figure 2 - Dense Pine Stand

Prevention Projects are also proposed for the next 2-3 years. These are primarily thinning projects that would help to substantially reduce the risk of future southern pine beetle infestations (Forest Plan, Goal 40, page 2-39) by reducing the density of trees in young pine forest communities. Thinning provides more growing space for the remaining trees and would reduce the stress of competition (for sunlight, water, and nutrients) on the trees. This treatment would also allow a variety of understory and herbaceous species to flourish, increasing species diversity on the site. Specifically, trees would be thinned to approximately 150-250 stems per acre in a commercial or non-commercial operation.

On projects where loblolly pine exists, the thinnings would create gaps in canopy where native species could increase in growth and get established in the overstory of the forest community. Below is a listing of the stands proposed to be thinned along with the specific project objective:

Area #	Project Location	Acres (est.)	Current Stand	Objectives of Thinning
T1	Camp Creek Road	24	Shortleaf pine	Thin overstory shortleaf pine on ridges to reduce SPB infestation risk (<i>Objectives 8.1 and 40.1 in the Forest Plan</i>) and release native hardwoods, where present, in draw area in the southeast 1/3 of the stand. (<i>Objective 3.6 in the Forest Plan</i>)
T2	Watergauge Road	16	Shortleaf pine	Thin overstory shortleaf pine to reduce SPB infestation risk (<i>Objectives 8.1 and 40.1 in the Forest Plan</i>)
T3	Wolf Creek Road	17	Shortleaf pine	Thin overstory shortleaf pine to reduce SPB infestation risk (<i>Objectives 8.1 and 40.1 in the Forest Plan</i>)
T4	Wolf Creek Road 2	17	Loblolly pine	Thin overstory loblolly pine to reduce SPB infestation risk (<i>Objectives 8.1 and 40.1 in the Forest Plan</i>) and also to release shortleaf pine (<i>Objective 3.1 in the Forest Plan</i>) along with native hardwoods across the entire unit, resulting in higher species diversity within the overstory of the forest community.
T5	Wolf Creek Road 3	36	Loblolly pine	Thin overstory loblolly pine to reduce SPB infestation risk (<i>Objectives 8.1 and 40.1 in the Forest Plan</i>) and also to release shortleaf pine (<i>Objective 3.1 in the Forest Plan</i>) along with native hardwoods across the entire unit, resulting in higher species diversity within the overstory of the forest community.
T6	Wolf Creek Road 4	32	Loblolly pine	Thin overstory loblolly pine to reduce SPB infestation risk (<i>Objectives 8.1 and 40.1 in the Forest Plan</i>) and also to release shortleaf pine (<i>Objective 3.1 in the Forest Plan</i>) along with native hardwoods across the entire unit, resulting in higher species diversity within the overstory of the forest community.
T7	Upper Cliff Creek Road	33	Shortleaf pine	Thin overstory shortleaf pine to reduce SPB infestation risk (<i>Objectives 8.1 and 40.1 in the Forest Plan</i>) and also to release native hardwoods across the entire unit. (<i>Objective 3.6 in the Forest Plan</i>) This treatment would move the stand toward more of a mixture of pines, oaks, and hickories.
T8	Stonewall	12	Loblolly pine	Thin overstory loblolly pine to reduce SPB infestation risk (<i>Objectives 8.1 and 40.1 in the Forest Plan</i>) and also to release shortleaf pine (<i>Objective 3.1 in the Forest Plan</i>) along with existing native hardwoods across the entire unit, resulting in higher species diversity within the overstory of the forest community.

Area #	Project Location	Acres (est.)	Current Stand	Objectives of Thinning
T9	Sarah's Creek Road	32	Pitch pine	Thin overstory pitch pine to reduce SPB infestation risk (<i>Objectives 8.2 in the Forest Plan</i>) and release native hardwoods, where present, in the northwest portion of the stand. (<i>Objective 3.6 in the Forest Plan</i>)
T10	Lower Walnut Fork Road	17	Table Mountain pine	Thin overstory Table Mountain pine to reduce SPB infestation risk (<i>Objective 9.F-04 in the Forest Plan</i>).
T11	Lower Walnut Fork Road 2	21	Pitch pine	Thin overstory pitch pine to reduce SPB infestation risk (<i>Objectives 8.2 and 40.1 in the Forest Plan</i>) and also to release native hardwoods across the entire unit. (<i>Objective 3.6 in the Forest Plan</i>) The result would be a more mixed stand of pines, oaks and hickories.

I would like to hear from you regarding these projects before making my decision. All of these projects appear to fall into a category of actions that may be excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. This determination, however, will not be finalized until after consideration of your comments and concerns. My staff may also use your comments to modify the specific methods described in the proposal.

These project proposals are a starting point for discussion and analysis and no decision has been made. Responses from the local community, interested individuals and groups, other government agencies, and Forest Service employees are needed to help determine the extent of analysis so we meet the intent of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Comments received help us to develop viable options to the proposal, and/or indicate additional mitigation and monitoring measures needed.

Responses should contain relevant facts or comments along with supporting reasons that we would then consider in reaching a final decision on these projects. Comments received, including names, become part of the project record and are available for public review. We would appreciate receiving your comments by May 11, 2004. This will help ensure a thorough and complete analysis of the proposal. Send your written comments to the Tallulah District office at the address given on the letterhead. You may also comment by phone (see letterhead), e-mail to Steve Cole (sncole@fs.fed.us) or in person at our office in Clayton, Georgia.

Please note that you will be sent further correspondence on this proposed project **only** if you comment on it or if you request further correspondence on it.

This letter is being sent to organizations and individuals who have previously participated or been interested in our project proposals. This letter assumes that you have some familiarity with the planning process as conducted by the Forest Service in accordance with NEPA. If you are

receiving this letter and are unsure of the context or how to participate, please contact Steve Cole at the Tallulah District office (address and phone on letterhead). Management of the National Forest is a public trust and is best conducted with broad participation.

Thank you for your interest and involvement.

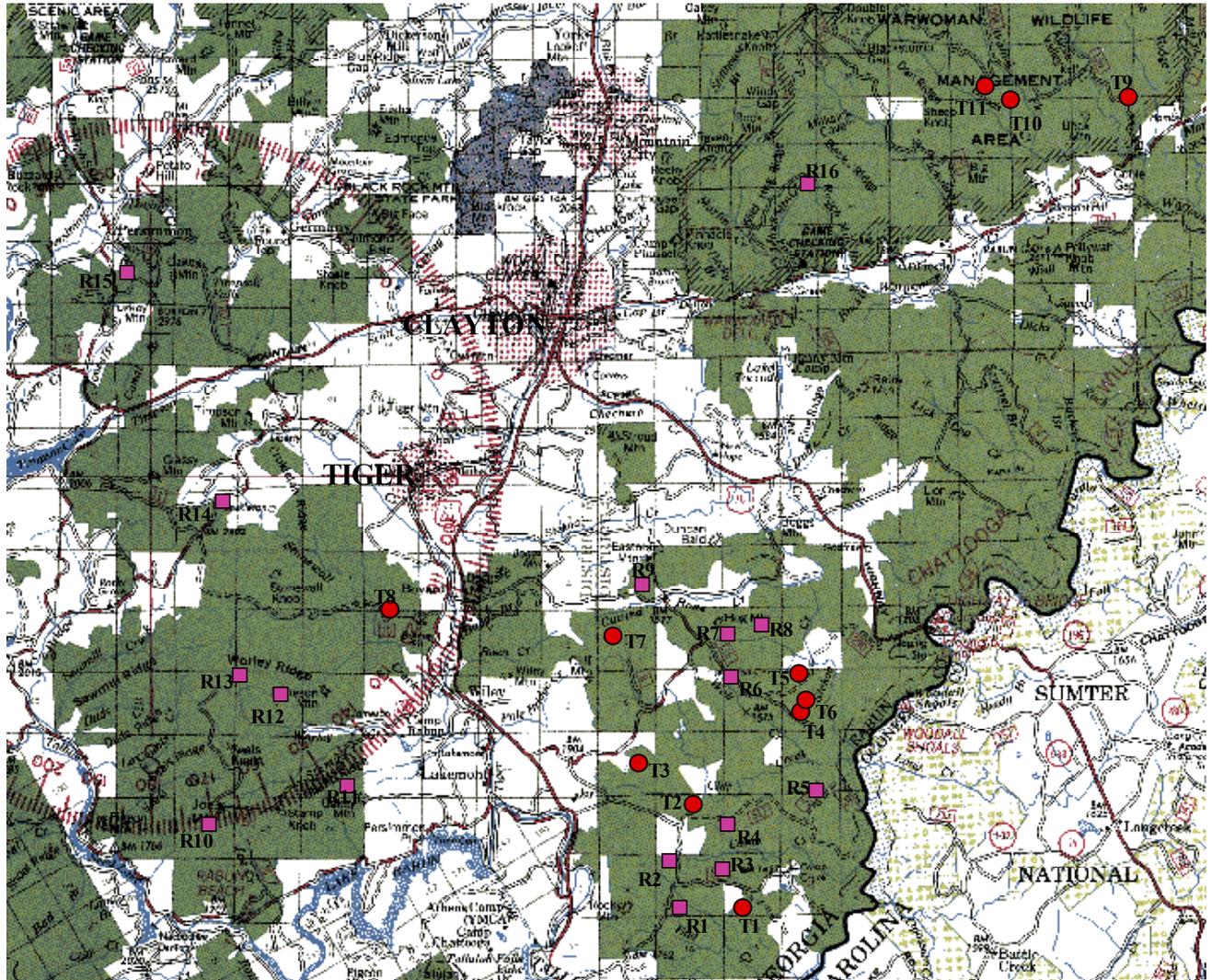
Sincerely,

/s/ David W. Jensen
DAVID W. JENSEN
District Ranger

Enclosure: Map of Project Locations.

Proposed Restoration and Prevention Projects

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forests - Tallulah Ranger District - Rabun County



- Prevention - thinning (T) Projects
- Restoration (R) Projects



April 5, 2004 - snc