



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Brasstown Ranger
District

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File Code: 1950/2600

Date: June 18, 2003

Dear Forest User,

This letter is to clarify the scoping notice that was mailed March 21, 2003 by the Brasstown and Toccoa Ranger Districts of the Chattahoochee National Forest, which announced that public comments were being taken on a project designed to enhance conditions for wildlife species that utilize early successional habitat. It also describes a modification to the original proposal that will place additional emphasis on management for the golden-winged warbler.

The Forest Service, in cooperation with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources proposed to enhance early successional habitats along 5 roads in the Coopers Creek Wildlife Management Area on the Chattahoochee National Forest by utilizing a method called road daylighting. The proposal is designed to improve wildlife habitat for a suite of species that need low growing grasses, legumes, and shrubs for foraging and nesting habitats. This project will benefit a wide variety of early successional species including species such as golden-winged warbler, prairie warbler, chestnut-sided warbler, and ruffed grouse. Populations of these and other early successional species are declining due to the loss of the young forest habitats.

After evaluation of the area, daylighting was proposed because it meets the needs of the wildlife by providing desirable habitat. The daylighting technique includes the removal of selected portions of the forest canopy along the edges of an existing road to allow sunlight to stimulate the growth of needed food sources and provide nesting habitat along road edges. This technique can be accomplished by commercial tree removal, cut and leave, and/or personal use firewood permits. The end result would be an improvement of habitat for wildlife species that use early successional forests. To keep the early successional habitat in the desirable condition, periodic mowing, burning, and/or chainsaw felling would need to occur on a 5 to 15 year basis. Road daylighting as is proposed, also has the additional benefit of reduced road maintenance costs. A daylighted road dries more quickly after rainfall, which reduces rutting and decreases the need for grading and gravelling.

The road surface itself would not be increased to any great extent (except maybe where opportunities to construct a safer turn out area exist), but the area along the road is where the management activity would be taking place. This project zone would include some of the forest adjoining the road from 30 to 100 feet on each side of the road. There would be a wide variety in width dictated by terrain and overstory tree species. Individual prescriptions will be developed for each road to fit the need for early successional habitat with the existing forest. A portion of the overstory along these roads will be retained including selected oaks to provide for acorn production. In order to reduce soil erosion and protect streams, approximately 30 percent of the canopy would be retained overall, which includes trees along steep slopes and within stream zones.



The following roads are proposed for treatment:

1. Road to Mulky Gap food plot (0.5 mi.) (Brasstown RD)
2. Road to Cavender Gap food plots (0.5 mi.) (Toccoa RD)
3. Road to Fanny Gap food plots (2.1 mi.) (Brasstown RD)
4. Fanny Gap linear food plot (0.5 mi.) (Brasstown RD)
5. Road to check station food plot (2.0 mi.) (Toccoa RD)

All of the roads are gated roads used to access existing wildlife openings. No new roads will be constructed.

The areas adjacent to the existing wildlife openings associated with these roads also would be managed to further enhance conditions for early successional species, with particular emphasis on golden-winged warbler. The areas surrounding the openings will be managed to provide a border of weedy herbaceous habitat and brushy habitat that will provide nesting habitat for golden-winged warbler and other songbirds. Several of these openings are adjacent to young regeneration areas. On these sites, tree-mowing equipment and or chainsaws would be used to set back the regeneration adjacent to the wildlife opening approximately 100-150 feet into the young stand. For those openings adjacent to older forests, treatment methods similar to the road daylighting portion of the project (commercial tree removal, cut and leave, firewood permits) would be used. Topographic conditions such as steep slopes will determine the how much of the area around the openings would be treated. These sites will be maintained by mowing or burning on a 5-15 year rotation. Upon completion, this project will contribute toward providing the desired habitat conditions for early successional species including high-elevation early successional species such as the golden-winged warbler.

Environmental concerns already being considered by the planning team include protection of water quality, protection of archaeological resources, protection of sensitive and endangered plant and animal species, and maintaining the established Visual Quality Objectives.

Comments received from the earlier scoping period will be considered in the development of this project and do not need to be resubmitted. However if you have additional concerns and considerations that you want the Forest Service to consider in our decision-making process, you can send them to Jim Wentworth at the address shown above or by e-mail to jwentworth@fs.fed.us. Please submit your comments by July 18, 2003.

Thank you for your interest in management of the Brasstown and Toccoa Ranger Districts of the Chattahoochee National Forest.

Sincerely,

Alan Polk
District Ranger
Brasstown Ranger District

Cassius Cash
District Ranger
Toccoa Ranger District

Enclosure