

**DECISION NOTICE**  
**AND**  
**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**  
**For The**  
**PINHOTI TRAIL EXTENSION PROJECT**

USDA Forest Service  
Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests  
Armuchee-Cohutta Ranger District  
Fannin, Gilmer and Murray County, Georgia

**Responsible Official:**

Armuchee-Cohutta District Ranger  
Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests  
3941 Highway 76  
Chatsworth, GA 30705

## **DECISION**

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to identify and publicly disclose the possible environmental consequences of USDA Forest Service involvement in the development of the Pinhoti Trail extension project on the Chattahoochee National Forest. The analysis area includes lands within the proclamation boundary of the Cohutta unit of the Armuchee-Cohutta Ranger District both inside the Cohutta Wildlife Management Area and outside. The EA is available for public review in the Armuchee-Cohutta District Office in Chatsworth, GA and in the Forest Supervisor's Office in Gainesville, GA, or at the Forest's website at: [www.fs.fed.us/conf](http://www.fs.fed.us/conf).

## **ALTERNATIVE SELECTION**

Based on my review of the analysis documented in the EA, it is my decision to adopt the actions of Alternative 3, which are discussed in detail in the EA in chapters 1 and 2, and in Tables 4 and 5, Alternative 3 Description and Alternative 3 Mitigation Measures, respectively. Alternative 3 calls for the development of the Pinhoti Trail from Dennis, GA to the Benton MacKaye Trail on the South Fork of the Jacks River totaling 33.3 miles. The trail project will utilize 17.7 miles of existing system, state and county roads, 7.0 miles of "old woods roads", 5.6 miles of existing trails, and 3.0 miles of new construction. Connected actions include the acquisition of a Right-of-Way at the southern terminus of the project area at Dennis, GA, the construction of three trailhead parking areas and the improvement of one existing trailhead parking area. Permissible user groups will vary by trail section to include a mixture of hikers, equestrians, and/or mountain bikers. The EA also evaluated the consequences of no action by the Forest Service.

## **REASONS FOR THE DECISION**

Based on the analysis presented in the EA, I have selected Alternative 3 because:

A. It meets the following purpose and need:

1. It completes the final link in the Pinhoti Trail thereby connecting the Pinhoti Trail in Alabama to the Appalachian Trail in Georgia via the Benton MacKaye Trail.
2. It helps to meet the increasing demand for trail opportunities by various user groups while conserving soil and water resources.
3. It provides the best route for a non-motorized trail opportunity in a predominately natural or natural-appearing environment.
4. It maintains viable populations of all existing native vertebrate species and maintains the habitat of Management Indicator Species.

B. It addresses the following significant issues:

1. Effects on backcountry hunting and solitude
2. Effects of multi-use trail development on wilderness character and wilderness designation
3. Effects on PETS species, MIS and aquatic biota
4. Effects on cultural resources
5. Effects on soil and water

## **LAWS, REGULATIONS AND POLICIES THAT APPLY**

The multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Forest Management Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act, and their implementing regulations apply to the planning and implementation of this decision.

Alternative 3 adopts the mitigation measures found in the State of Georgia Best Management Practices (BMPs).

## **ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED**

The analysis of the effects in the EA is tiered to the Final EIS and Forest Plan of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests as amended and the Final EIS for Vegetation Management in the Appalachian Mountains. In addition, the decision was designed within the constraints required by these documents.

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Based on my review of the EA, analysis of potential effects, the Forest Plan as amended, State BMPs, input and recommendations received, and past experience with similar forest management activities, I have determined that with mitigating measures and management requirements applied, this is not a major federal action, either individually or cumulatively, and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement is not necessary. This determination is based upon the following factors found at 40 CFR 1508.27 (b):

1. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered and this action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the environment (EA, Chapter 3).
2. Alternative 3 will not negatively affect public health and safety.
3. The planned 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. Alternative 3 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 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. 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 planned 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 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. Alternative 3 will not adversely affect viability of any species. By complying with Forest Plan guidelines 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 planned 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 standards and guidelines, management requirements and mitigation measures established in the Forest Plan. For water quality management, state-approved BMPs will be used for this project. These BMPs are from the state water quality management plan and have been designed with the goal of producing water that meets state water quality standards. The project will be monitored to ensure BMPs are implemented.

If implementing BMPs on a specific site results in effects significantly higher than anticipated, because of unforeseen site factors or events, appropriate corrective measures will be considered and implemented. Activities carried out will be consistent with the management guidelines, direction, requirements, mitigation measures and objectives established by the Forest Plan.

## **OTHER FINDINGS**

The National Forest Management Act requires the following findings:

**Vegetative Manipulation** – The activities in this decision that involve vegetative manipulation of tree cover comply with the seven requirements of 36 CFR 219.27 (b) by following the standards and guidelines identified for Management Areas 15 and 16 in the Forest Plan as amended.

**Forest Plan Consistency** – I have determined that the actions included in this decision are consistent with the Forest Plan of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests as amended.

## **IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

If no appeal is received, implementation of this 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 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:

USDA Forest Service, Southern Region  
Attn: Appeals Deciding Officer  
1720 Peachtree Road, N.W., Suite 876S  
Atlanta, Georgia 30367-9102

**CONTACT PERSON**

For additional information concerning this decision, contact:

Debra Whitman, District Ranger  
Armuchee-Cohutta Ranger District  
3941 Highway 76  
Chatsworth, Georgia 30705  
(706) 695-6736

For additional information concerning the Forest Service appeal process, contact:

John J. Petrick, Forest Planner  
Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests  
1755 Cleveland Hwy  
Gainesville, GA 30501  
(770) 297-3005

**/S/ Debra Whitman**

Debra Whitman  
Responsible Official / District Ranger

**April 15, 2002**

Date