

**DECISION NOTICE**  
**AND**  
**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS**  
**FOR**  
**WILDLIFE FOOD PLOT RENOVATION**  
**WITHIN FOUR USFS DISTRICTS**  
**ON THE CHATTAHOOCHEE-OCONEE NATIONAL FOREST**  
**INCLUDING BRASSTOWN, TOCCOA,**  
**TALLULAH AND THE CHATTOOGA DISTRICTS**

**Responsible Official:**

Chattahoochee-Oconee Forest Supervisor  
Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests  
1775 Cleveland Highway  
Gainesville, GA 30501

## **DECISION**

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to identify and publicly disclose the possible environmental consequences of The Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division (WRD), Game Management Section proposal to renovate approximately 700 acres of existing state maintained, wildlife food plots over a 5-year period on the Chattahoochee National Forest. The 500 small areas (averaging 1.4 acres each) proposed for treatment are located on 8 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) in Fannin, Union, Lumpkin, White, Habersham, Towns, Rabun and Stephens counties (see Appendix A). These WMAs are managed cooperatively by USFS and Georgia WRD. WRD personnel will conduct the field work.

No more than 100 sites (140 acres) will be treated in any given year (see Appendix A). Treatments are necessary to rehabilitate wildlife food plots which have been taken out of effective production by white grubs (beetle larvae) noxious weeds or both. The EA is available for public review in the Forest Supervisor's Office in Gainesville, GA, or at the Forest's website at: [www.fed.fs.us/conf](http://www.fed.fs.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 2, which are discussed in detail in the EA in chapters II and III. Alternative 2 calls for the use of 3 common pesticides to renovate a maximum of 100 food plots per year (<0.05% of the land area of the 8 WMAs). Two herbicides (glyphosate and sethoxydim) are approved for use to be applied by hand (backpack sprayer) or boom sprayers depending upon the severity of the weed infestation. This is most effectively accomplished in early spring and late summer when target noxious vegetation is vigorously growing. If white grubs are also present in significant densities, then the decision to apply 2 lbs/acre of carbaryl (Sevin 80S) in a tank mix with sethoxydim (Poast) to control grubs is also permitted.

The EA also evaluated the consequences of no action or the use of manual or mechanical methods by the Wildlife Resources Division on the Forest.

## **REASONS FOR THE DECISION**

Based on the analysis presented in the EA, I have selected Alternative 2 because:

- A. It meets the following purpose and need:
  1. Follows guidelines for wildlife habitat improvements set by the current Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP), the Master Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between WRD and the Forest Service and the Wildlife Habitat Management Handbook (FSH 2609.23R8).

2. Follows a logical, feasible, efficient, common sense approach to solving a chronic problem which threatens wildlife habitat quality on the Forest.
3. Poses no significant threat to water, wildlife, fish, human health, or Proposed, Endangered, Threatened, or Sensitive Species (PETS).
4. Reduces erosion potential by reducing exposed soil caused by plowing and other mechanical attempts at food plot renovation which are currently being practiced.

B. It addresses the following significant issues:

1. Water Quality
2. Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat
3. Proposed, Endangered, Threatened, and Sensitive Species (PETS)
4. Human Health

## **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.

The policy of managing the National Forests with ecosystem management as the guiding principle also applies. When assessing the need for high quality wildlife openings, consideration must be given to research documenting at least 54 bird and 14 mammal species using clover plots. Several of these are key Management Indicator Species (MIS) that the Forest Service is required by law to sustain and monitor including white-tailed deer, wild turkey, black bear, ruffed grouse, and indigo bunting. Provision of habitats for important neotropical migrants also applies. In the case of clover plots, these include but are not limited to 36 of the 54 bird species identified in the 1992 study in the spring period alone.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED**

The analysis of the effects in the EA is tiered to the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Forest Plan of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests as amended, the Final EIS for the LRMP, and the Final EIS for Vegetation Management in the Appalachian Mountains, as amended. Sevin was examined in detail in the Final Region 8 gypsy moth EIS. In addition, the decision was designed within the constraints required by these documents.

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Based on my review of this EA, analysis of potential effects, related EIS documents and Record of Decision, the Forest Plan as amended, the master MOU, the Wildlife Management Handbook, input and recommendations received, and past experience with similar 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 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 III).
2. Alternative 2 will not negatively affect public health or safety (EA, Chapter II).
3. Based on the no pesticide application buffer area within 100 ft. of any perennial or intermittent stream, the planned actions will not effect water quality (EA, Chapter II). This distance exceeds that currently required in the Vegetative Management EIS (which was incorporated into the LRMP), and was based on public comments/suggestions received early in our analysis process.
4. The effects of this project on the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Chapter 1 of the EA and Appendix E of the EA, discusses the public contacts made in the course of the environmental analysis. Chapter I and Appendix E document the public issues and list the persons, organizations, and references used in the environmental effects analysis. All 10 letters concerned about various aspects of the the action during two comment periods were answered individually giving further explanation and answering questions/concerns. Extra fact sheets were developed and distributed for clarification on Sevin and Roundup. There were 47 letters that required no further explanation about this project.
5. Alternative 2 does not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks. Spraying with these 3 chemicals has been conducted on state lands by WRD personnel for 15 years with no problems. WRD personnel have Certified Pesticide Applicator's licenses.
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 2 and other foreseeable actions have been evaluated throughout the EA (Chapter III). There will be no significant cumulative effects between this project and other ongoing or planned projects on National Forest land.
8. The proposed 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 historical resources. This is based on findings of past site specific heritage resources surveys on the existing openings.

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 (Biological Evaluation, Appendix G of the EA). The selected alternative will not adversely affect viability of any species. By complying with Forest Plan guidelines related to biological habitat diversity (CFR 36 219.19), 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, the planned action actually benefits water quality by reducing ground and soil disturbance thereby reducing potential for runoff and siltation.

## **Other Findings**

The National Forest Management Act requires the following findings:

**Suitable Lands** – There are 700 acres of food plots on CONF that will be eligible for the treatment. Of these, only 100 sites (140 acres) per year will be treated.

**Vegetative Manipulation** - The activities in this decision that involve vegetative manipulation of ground cover comply with the guidelines in the Final EIS for Vegetation Management in the Appalachian Mountains, as amended.

**Special Areas** - There is no impact on any congressionally designated areas in the project area. The activities in this decision will not affect the eligibility of any stream for consideration as part of the Wild and Scenic River System.

**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, 5 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.

Implementation of this decision is expected to begin prior to January 2003. The time frame considered in this decision is for a five year period.

## **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 *Gainesville 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:

John J. Petrick, Forest Planner  
Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests  
1775 Cleveland Highway  
Gainesville, GA 30501  
(770) 297-3010

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

John J. Petrick, Forest Planner  
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Gainesville, Georgia 30501  
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**ALICE CARLTON**  
**Responsible Official / Forest Supervisor**  
**Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest**

**Date**