

DRAFT DECISION NOTICE AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT COOPER CREEK WATERSHED PROJECT

**US Forest Service – Region 8
Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests
Blue Ridge Ranger District
Union County, Georgia**

1. INTRODUCTION

This document details my decision regarding the Cooper Creek Watershed Project which includes: vegetation management (commercial timber sales and non-commercial treatments), prescribed burning, and road access management (road reconstruction, temporary road construction, year-round and seasonal closures and changes in road maintenance levels). A summary of the proposed activities by alternative are shown in Table 1 below. Implementation of these activities are expected to begin in 2018. These actions were developed at the onset of the project and are based on site-specific needs and preliminary issues. Over the course of this project, these actions have been modified to be responsive to public input (EA sections, 1.8 Public Involvement and 1.9 Issues). In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Forest Service regulations, the potential environmental impacts of this proposal were assessed and documented in an Environmental Assessment released concurrent with this draft decision. The EA is incorporated herein by reference.

Table 1. Comparison of treatment acres/miles by Alternative

	Alternative 1: No Action	Alternative 2: Proposed Action	Alternative 3
VEGETATION MANAGEMENT			
Commercial			
Oak/ Oak-Pine Thinning	0	112	101
Pine/Pine-Oak Thinning	0	843	740
Canopy Gap Thinning	0	466	100
ESFH	0	253	249
Woodland/ Variable Density Thinning	0	641/0	489/0
Total Commercial	0	2,315	1,679
Non-Commercial			
Woodland/ Variable Density Thinning	0	123/0	231/0
Canopy Gaps	0	0	104
Midstory	0	1.056	358
Release	0	260	219
Total		1,439	912
Acres of Herbicide Use	0	3,251	1,327
Acres of Prescribed Burning	11,842	11,842	11,842
<i>Acres of Old-Growth Designated</i>	0	1834	1834
ROAD ACCESS			
System Road Reconstruction	0	2.8	3.0
Temporary Road Construction	0	5	5
Year-round Closure	0	6.7	9.1
Seasonal Closure	0	21.6	21.6
Changes In Maintenance Level	0	0.3	9.2
Decommissioning	0	0	2.7
Parking Lot Expansion (acres)	0	0	1

2. BACKGROUND

The project is located in the Cooper Creek watershed (HUC# 060200030102) and the adjacent Coosa Creek (HUC# 060200020505) and Youngcane Creek (HUC# 060200020506) watersheds, in Union County Georgia.

The purpose and need for action was informed by the Cooper Creek Watershed Assessment (completed in 2011), the Watershed Restoration Action Plan (WRAP) for the Cooper Creek Watershed (completed in 2011), the Cooper Creek Ecological Classification System (ECS) (completed in 2013) and the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). The watershed assessment described current condition, desired future condition, and possible management practices/opportunities for each resource area. In addition, related Forest Plan Goals and Objectives and Inventory Needs also were identified. The Cooper Creek WRAP identified specific actions that could be taken to improve conditions in the watershed. The Cooper Creek ECS system was developed through a spatial analysis of landscape variables to produce a map of potential vegetation for the area. The ECS and the Travel Analysis Plan (TAP) were used to identify actions needed to move the area toward desired conditions and to match objectives identified in the watershed assessment to the most ecologically appropriate portions of the project area (McNab et al. 2015). In May 2014, an Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) issued a scoping notice describing the Proposed Action for the Cooper Creek Watershed Project. Input received during the scoping process was used to develop an alternative to the Proposed Action. The effects of the Proposed Action and Alternatives on the environment were assessed in the final EA for this project. The Final EA, project treatment maps and supporting documents can be requested from the district office or found online at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=44385>

3. DECISION

My decision is to authorize the implementation of Alternative 3 with some minor modifications as described below and summarized in Table 2. These actions consist of vegetation management (commercial timber sales and non-commercial treatments), prescribed burning, and road access management (road reconstruction, temporary road construction, year-round and seasonal closures and changes in road maintenance levels). The modifications to Alternative 3, which are based on public input include the following:

1) Based on working with the public and considering their concerns, I have decided to eliminate commercial timber sale activities within the riparian mesic hemlock-white pine, riparian mesic hemlock-hardwood, and headwaters mesic oak-hickory Land type Phases (as modeled by the Cooper Creek ECS). The Riparian LTAs do not have a fixed width but vary based on landform, soils, and other factors and ranged from approximately 150-300 feet wide. This modification was made in response to concerns that restoration activities should be focused on the more upland portion of the stands, particularly where white pine is uncharacteristic and oak regeneration can be promoted on the landscape. It will result in a reduction in commercial harvest activities of approximately 282 acres (17%) from that proposed in Alternative 3 (from 1679 to 1397 acres- Table 1). However, since the implementation of Riparian Corridor standards and stream management zone Best Management practices (BMP's) limit the amount of harvest activity in riparian areas, the actual change from Alternative 3 will be less than is indicated by the gross acre totals. As a result, this modification is considered minor and within the scope of the effects analyzed for Alternative 3 and the purpose and need of the project. I find the selected

alternative will continue to move towards desired future conditions. Additional documentation is in the project record.

2) Based on the comments from the public and after considering unresolved concerns I have decided to modify the proposed Woodland Restoration treatments to focus these treatments only on the most xeric sites. The xeric ridges within these stands will be thinned to a residual basal area (BA) of 30 to 40 square feet per acre. The subxeric, submesic, and mesic portions of these stands will be thinned at variable density depending on site conditions (residual BA of 50-80 sq. ft. /ac.) to enhance oak regeneration and improve forest health. My decision reflects a minor change from what was described and analyzed in Alternative 3. The changes respond to concerns (comments received on the EA during the 30 day notice and comment period) related to focusing woodland treatments on the most ecologically appropriate portions of the stands. Overall, the changes are considered minor because while the acres managed for woodland conditions in these stands is reduced from 489 to 58 acres, the majority of the remaining acres will still be thinned (Table 1). The total acres thinned is only reduced slightly (48 acres) based on modification 1, above. Although the residual basal area will be higher in portions of these stands than was proposed in Alternative 3, I find that the restoration and forest health purpose and need for the project will be met. Specialists reviewed the changes in the context of their environmental consequences and found the changes to be within the scope of what was analyzed.

3) As a result of working with the public I have decided to address unresolved concerns by reducing the acreage of midstory treatments by 123 acres in Management Prescription (MRx) 7.E.1 Dispersed Recreation (from 233 acres to 110 acres). This modification was made in response to concerns about the level of commercial and non-commercial activities proposed in MRx 7.E.1 which is classified under NFMA as unsuitable for timber production (FLRMP page 3-125). Although the midstory treatments are a noncommercial activity, they are considered a preparatory step toward commercial harvest activity in the future. Management direction in MRx 7.E.1 limits the creation of early successional habitat to 4% so I have decided to reduce the midstory treatments to 4% of the area to match the Early Successional Forest Habitat Objective in the MRx. Since this is a noncommercial activity I consider this a minor change and find that the selected alternative will continue to move towards the overall desired conditions for the area.

The acreage of commercial activities in MRx 7.E.1 was reduced significantly between the Proposed Action and Alternative 3 (from 850 acres to 327 acres) and will be reduced slightly further to 293 acres by the elimination of commercial activities in the riparian Landtype Phases described above. The Forest Plan provides that timber management activities are permitted in this management prescription including “*salvage sales, sales necessary to protect other multiple-use values, or activities that meet other Plan goals and objectives*” (Standard 7.E.1-008). This includes the creation of up to 4% early successional forest habitat (Standard 7.E.1-009).

Vegetation management activities are proposed in the northern portion of the Management Prescription area in the vicinity of the Spencer Mountain road (FDR 4D) and Gillespie Branch road (FDR 287). The primary recreation use of the Spencer Mountain and Gillespie Branch areas is hunting. Limited dispersed camping also occurs along these roads. Analysis shows that many of the stands are moderately departed from historic conditions, primarily due to the closed canopy conditions found in these stands. The vegetation management activities proposed in MRx 7.E.1 are designed to enhance wildlife habitat conditions for both game and non-game species by increasing structural diversity, enhancing oak regeneration, and creating early successional forest

habitat The proposed activities also will improve forest health conditions by thinning dense white pine stands and creating more diverse park-like stands. In addition, many of the stands adjoin or are in close proximity to private lands and the thinning of these dense stands will reduce future wildlife risk in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI).

4) To address unresolved concerns related to old growth I have decided to modify the areas designated as future old-growth blocks including the elimination of non-commercial treatments in three stands that are close to meeting old-growth criteria (Compartment 399, stand 62, Compartment 504, stand 9, and Compartment 633 stand 18). This modification is in response to comments received on the EA during the 30 day notice and comment period, including the identification of additional stands with old-growth characteristics, and recommendations for selecting alternative stands to better meet Forest Plan direction. I consider this a minor change since this results in a change in some individual stands identified as future old-growth, but it does not appreciably change the total acres in the project allocated to future old-growth (increase of only 56 acres).

My decision is based on the scientific analysis in the EA that demonstrates a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgement of incomplete or unavailable information. The analysis identifies techniques and methodologies used, considers current and accurate science, and references scientific resources relied upon. The analysis includes a summary of scientific evidence relevant to evaluating reasonably foreseeable impacts. Project design criteria (EA, pages 28-30); visual standards (EA, Appendix J) and the monitoring plan (EA, Appendix I) are included in this decision.

Table 2: Summary of treatment acres/miles for Alternative 3 as Modified

	Alternative 3 as Modified
VEGETATION MANAGEMENT	
Commercial	
Oak/ Oak-Pine Thinning	80
Pine/Pine-Oak Thinning	550
Canopy Gap Thinning	93
ESFH	233
Woodland/ Variable Density Thinning	58/383
Total Commercial	1,397
Non-Commercial	
Woodland/ Variable Density Thinning	66/76
Canopy Gaps	73
Midstory	232
Release	214
Total	661
Acres of Herbicide Use	589
Acres of Prescribed Burning	11,842
<i>Acres of Old-Growth Designated</i>	1890
ROAD ACCESS	
System Road Reconstruction	3.0
Temporary Road Construction	5
Year-round Closure	9.1
Seasonal Closure	21.6
Changes In Maintenance Level	9.2
Decommissioning	2.7
Parking Lot Expansion (acres)	1

4. DETAILS OF THE DECISION

Based on the modifications to Alternative 3 (Table 2) discussed above, acreage of commercial timber harvest was reduced from 1,679 acres to 1,397 acres, the acreage of non-commercial treatment decreased from 912 acres to 661 acres, and the acreage of potential herbicide use was reduced from approximately 1,327 acres to 589 acres. The specific treatments and stands included in this decision are listed below.

(1)Vegetation Management:

Oak/Oak-Pine Thinning (Goal 3, Obj. 3.7):

The Blue Ridge Ranger District is proposing to commercially reduce the basal area (BA) in overstocked, oak-dominated stands. The purpose of the treatment is to encourage oak regeneration and improve the health and vigor of these stands. Additional benefits, such as increased herbaceous understory and structural diversity in these stands may also be achieved which will improve wildlife habitat for both game and non-game species. Residual BA may vary with each stand, but will range from 60-80 square feet per acre. One of the objectives is to restore and sustain the more desirable white and red oak species, therefore those species will be high priorities for retention.

Compartment	Stand	Forest Type	Age	Acres
504	23	Yellow poplar, White oak, Northern red oak	25	28
505	9	White oak, White pine	110	32
505	28	Chestnut oak, Black oak, White oak	120	20
			Total	80

Pine/Pine-Oak Thinning (Goal 3, Obj. 3.6):

The stands proposed for pine thinning are high density white pine dominated stands of varying ages. The proposal is to reduce the basal area (BA) of these stands by focusing on commercial white pine thinning using ground based equipment. These treatments will improve the health and vigor of the stands and will release desirable oak species, resulting in an increase in the oak component in future stands. In those stands where sufficient oak regeneration is not present, thinning will allow sunlight to reach the forest floor stimulating oak regeneration over time. The thinning of these dense stands also will enhance understory and groundcover development and structural diversity in these stands which will improve wildlife habitat for both game and non-game species. In addition, some of these stands adjoin or are in close proximity to private lands and the thinning of these dense stands will reduce future wildlife risk in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). Residual basal area (BA) for thinning may vary with each stand but will range from 60-80 square feet per acre.

Compartment	Stand	Forest Type	Age	Acres
398	7	White pine	88	48
399	21	White pine	30	30
399	49	White pine	31	20
399	53	White pine	23	7
503	32	White pine, White oak, Chestnut oak	89	31
504	10	White pine	53	37

Compartment	Stand	Forest Type	Age	Acres
504	12	White pine	109	58
504	16	White pine	89	40
504	17	White pine, Red maple, Chestnut oak	119	30
504	28	White pine, Hemlock	89	64
504	30	White pine	89	25
504	50	White pine, Chestnut oak, Scarlet oak	54	11
505	11	White pine, White oak, Yellow poplar	41	19
505	12	White pine, White oak, Scarlet oak, Chestnut oak	110	45
505	23	White pine, Hemlock, White oak	100	12
505	25	White pine, White oak, Chestnut oak	106	29
505	26	White pine	30	6
505	27	White pine, White oak, Chestnut oak	30	6
505	29	White pine	98	8
505	30	White pine	98	11
505	31	White pine	100	13
			Total	550

Canopy Gap Thinning (Goal 7, Obj. 7.1):

Canopy gap thins have many definitions, but for our purposes they may be defined as a stand level reduction in basal area (BA) combined with small openings of 0.25-0.5 acres each. Commercial thinning will be accomplished with ground based equipment.

The primary purpose of canopy gap thinning is to increase structural diversity in mesic hardwood stands to enhance habitat for a variety of bird species such as Kentucky warbler, hooded warbler, black-throated green warbler, wood thrush, and Eastern wood pewee. In addition, the reduction in basal area (BA) will allow sunlight to reach the forest floor stimulating oak regeneration.

The stands are mostly mid-successional mature mesic hardwood stands consisting of yellow poplar, chestnut oak, white oak, northern red oak, and hickory. White pine is a minor component in a few of the stands and chestnut oak is abundant. Stands are overstocked with closed canopies. Existing basal area (BA) range from 140 to 180 square feet per acre. Residual basal area may vary with each stand, but will range from 60-80 square feet per acre. The dominant trees in these stands will be selected for retention and will include oaks and other soft and hard mast producing species.

Compartment	Stand	Forest Type	Age	Acres
398	6	Chestnut oak	104	7
398	16	Chestnut oak	89	13
398	17	Yellow poplar, White Pine	52	19
398	19	Yellow poplar	89	18
398	28	Yellow poplar, White oak, Northern red oak	108	36
			Total	93

Non-Commercial Canopy Gap Treatment (Goal 7, Obj. 7.1):

The following table includes stands proposed for non-commercial canopy gap treatment. In these stands, small canopy gaps of 0.25 to 0.5 acres will be created to increase structural diversity. No thinning will occur between the groups. This treatment will be accomplished by cutting trees manually with a chainsaw with the woody material left on site.

Compartment	Stand	Forest Type	Age	Acres
399	2	Chestnut oak	108	15
399	3	Yellow poplar	78	10
399	37	Chestnut oak, Yellow poplar, White oak, Northern red oak	98	48
			Total	73

Early Successional Forest Habitat (Goal 2):

The majority of the stands proposed for regeneration are dominated by white pine but also include several submesic hardwood stands. The primary purpose of regenerating these stands is to improve habitat conditions for species such as prairie warblers, field sparrows, yellow breasted chats, ruffed grouse, white-tailed deer and other early successional species. Secondary objectives include restoration of oak on sites where white pine is dominating but not ecologically appropriate.

Stands will be harvested with a two-aged with reserves method, retaining approximately 20 square feet basal area (BA) of overstory trees per acre. Where present, oaks and hickories will be given priority for retention. Stands may require post-harvest release treatments (chemical, mechanical and/or burning) to reduce competition from undesirable species. Following harvest, the white pine stands will receive site preparation treatments, planting of native oak species, and subsequent release treatments. Site preparation treatments may include chemical and/or non-chemical methods such as prescribed burning. If after harvest, natural oak regeneration in other stands is insufficient, supplemental oak planting may occur.

In addition to the stands to be regenerated, two closed wildlife opening access roads, totaling approximately 1 mile also will be day lighted to provide additional early successional forest habitat. The stands within 100 feet either side of these roads will be commercially thinned to approximately 20 square feet of basal area.

Compartment	Stand	Forest Type	Age	Acres	Post-Harvest Cultural Treatments
398	28	Yellow poplar, White oak, Northern red oak	108	19	Release
398	32	White pine	60	15	Site prep, planting, release
398	33	White pine, Virginia pine	88	20	Release
399	12	White pine, Chestnut oak, Northern red oak	81	20	Release
399	14	White pine, White oak, Northern red oak	88	21	Release
504	15	White oak, White pine, Chestnut oak	120	23	Release
504	21	White pine, Chestnut oak	119	13	Release
504	31	White pine	54	22	Release
505	7	Chestnut oak, White oak	110	28	Release
505	19	Chestnut oak, Scarlet oak, Yellow poplar	123	14	Release
505	26	White pine	30	18	Site prep, planting, release

Compartment	Stand	Forest Type	Age	Acres	Post-Harvest Cultural Treatments
Road Daylighting				20	Release
Total				233	

Woodland Restoration (Goal 3, Obj. 3.4):

Woodland habitat is a type of early successional habitat that is important to a number of species of concern. The stands proposed for woodland restoration vary in age, density, and diameter range, but are all primarily oak dominated stands on south facing slopes and xeric sites. Many of these stands are above 3,000 feet in elevation making them suitable for high elevation early successional habitat as well.

The proposed woodland restoration treatments proposed in Alternative 3 will be modified to focus these treatments only on the most xeric sites. On the xeric ridges within these stands, overstory basal area (BA) will be reduced to 30 to 40 square feet per acre. The subxeric, submesic, and mesic portions of these stands will be thinned at variable density depending on site conditions (residual BA of 50-80 sq. ft. /ac.) to enhance oak regeneration and improve forest health.

Species selected for retention will include fire tolerant hardwoods and yellow pines. Commercial thinning will be accomplished using ground based equipment. In the xeric portions of the stands, post-harvest herbicide treatments may be necessary to encourage the dominance of herbaceous species, and reduce sprouting of undesirable hardwoods such as yellow poplar and red maple. Herbicides will not be used in the remaining portions of these stands. Following harvest, these stands will be prescribed burned to control woody sprouting and encourage herbaceous development. Until the desired condition has been reached, burning intensity, frequency and seasonality will be guided by project-level monitoring.

The stands proposed for treatment have been separated into two categories by the treatment type. The first table includes stands that are being considered for commercial thinning while the second table includes stands proposed for non-commercial thinning.

Compartment	Stand	Forest Type	Age	Acres	
				Woodland	Variable Density Thinning
503	6	Chestnut oak, White oak, Scarlet oak	121		13
503	7	White pine, Chestnut oak, White oak	90	2	31
503	34	White oak, Scarlet oak, White pine	131	9	11
504	4	Chestnut oak, White oak, Scarlet oak	119	20	38
504	5	Chestnut oak, White oak, Black oak	109	4	33
504	18	Chestnut oak, Northern red oak	119	1	47
505	3	Chestnut oak, Scarlet oak	113		11
505	4	Scarlet oak, White oak, Chestnut oak	103		27
505	6	Chestnut oak, White oak, White pine	124		28
505	15	Chestnut oak, Northern red oak, Black oak	38	1	15
505	21	White pine, Chestnut oak, Scarlet oak	38	11	22

Compartment	Stand	Forest Type	Age	Acres	
				Woodland	Variable Density Thinning
505	22	Black oak, White pine	100	3	7
506	1	White pine, Chestnut oak, White oak	57		20
506	28	White pine, White oak, Chestnut oak	62	2	23
633	17	Chestnut oak, Scarlet oak, White oak	133		9
633	19	White oak, Scarlet oak, Northern red oak, White pine	53		11
633	24	Northern red oak, Scarlet oak, White oak	103	5	37
			Total	58	383

The following table includes stands proposed for non-commercial thinning. This treatment will be accomplished by cutting trees manually with a chainsaw and/or using herbicide treatment. In both cases, woody material will be left on site.

Compartment	Stand	Forest Type	Age	Acres	
				Woodland	Variable Density Thinning
503	31	Chestnut oak, Northern red oak, Yellow poplar	141	17	15
503	33	White oak, Northern red oak, White pine	23	2	16
504	1	Chestnut oak, Black oak	119	17	15
504	7	Chestnut oak, White oak, Black oak	119	21	9
504	8	Chestnut oak, White oak, Scarlet oak	119	9	21
			Total	66	76

Midstory Treatment (Goal 3, Obj. 3.7):

The purpose of the midstory treatment is to allow enough sunlight to the forest floor to stimulate new and existing oak regeneration while providing enough shade to suppress shade intolerant species such as yellow poplar. The desired result is oak regeneration that is at least 4.5 feet tall in order to perpetuate a substantial oak component in the future for wildlife and native diversity. The majority of these oak dominated stands are on north facing aspects where yellow poplar is very competitive. The remaining stands are on south facing aspects. Stands vary in the density of the midstory, but all have little to no advanced oak regeneration, and where present is in the seedling stage.

This treatment will be accomplished by cutting trees manually with a chainsaw and/or using an herbicide treatment. In both cases, woody material will be left on site. To prevent undesirable shade intolerant species from regenerating, the overstory canopy should be left intact, and no more than 30% of the total basal area (BA) treated. Follow up treatments may be necessary.

Compartment	Stand	Forest Type	Age	Acres
399	1	Northern red oak, Chestnut oak	99	45
399	28	Chestnut oak	108	48
399	36	White oak, Chestnut oak, Northern red oak	93	17

Compartment	Stand	Forest Type	Age	Acres
504	13	Black oak, White oak, Chestnut oak	119	22
504	20	White oak, Black oak	129	19
504	24	Chestnut oak, White pine	119	57
505	20	Black oak, White oak, Chestnut oak	107	24
			Total	232

Release (Goal 3, Obj. 3.7):

The following stands were regenerated between 1970 and 1990. They were harvested by complete overstory removal without ensuring the presence of advanced oak regeneration resulting in stands dominated by yellow poplar. However, oaks are present in sufficient quantity that a crop tree release will transition the stand into a more desirable oak dominated condition.

The release will be accomplished with manual chainsaw felling with woody material left on site. Only those trees competing with desirable oaks or other soft and hard mast producing species will be treated.

Compartment	Stand	Forest Type	Age	Acres
399	18	Yellow poplar, White oak, Northern red oak	40	24
399	32	Yellow poplar, White oak, Northern red oak	31	23
399	34	Yellow poplar, White oak, Northern red oak	40	28
504	19	Yellow poplar, White oak, Northern red oak	24	40
504	25	White oak, Yellow poplar, White pine	34	25
504	27	Yellow poplar, White oak, Northern red oak	33	23
504	29	Yellow poplar, White oak, Northern red oak	24	30
505	17	Yellow poplar	26	21
			Total	214

Herbicide Use - Alternative 3 as modified includes the use of herbicides for connected site preparation, release and midstory control treatments in certain restoration and maintenance treatment areas. A total of 589 acres will be treated with herbicide use. Although the majority of the treatment is proposed for upland areas, in order to protect aquatic resources, only aquatically labeled herbicides will be used.

Early Successional Forest Habitat: 1) Site preparation: In areas proposed for oak restoration through the planting of oak seedlings, harvested areas will be site prepared for regeneration using a combination of foliar and/or cut-stump methods through directed applications of triclopyr herbicides. Treatments will be directed at non-desirable woody vegetation remaining on site following the commercial harvests - typically stump sprouting vegetation less than 6 feet tall (foliar method) or standing trees from 1 inch to 8 inches dbh (cut-stump method). 2) Release: Connected release treatments will be employed in areas proposed for regeneration to promote growth of planted or naturally regenerating oak seedlings. Planted and/or naturally regenerated oaks will be released one or more times by directly applying triclopyr herbicides to competing vegetation within a three to four foot radius of seedlings using the foliar method.

Woodland Restoration: In the xeric portions of the stands proposed for woodland restoration,

both with commercial harvest and without (non-commercial), midstory vegetation will be treated with herbicides to create a more open understory environment. Midstory vegetation will be treated using a combination of foliar and/or cut-stump methods through directed applications of triclopyr herbicides. Foliar methods will be employed to treat stump sprouting vegetation and other woody vegetation less than 6 feet in height. Cut-stump methods will be used for taller vegetation. Herbicides will not be used in the remaining portions of these stands

Midstory Control: In areas proposed for mid-story vegetation control, midstory vegetation will be treated with herbicides to increase natural oak regeneration. Midstory vegetation will be treated using either injection or cut-stump methods through direct applications of triclopyr herbicides.

Estimated herbicide rates to be applied under the proposed herbicide use treatments are shown in the table below. The herbicide use treatments includes early successional forest habitat, woodland restoration and midstory control. These rates were the basis for the risk assessment analysis which was disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA.

Herbicide	Application Method(s)	Lbs ai/gal	% (fraction) in solution	Gallons of solution/acre	Lbs ai/acre
Triclopyr (amine)	Cut-stump	3.0	50%	1.0	1.5
Triclopyr (amine)	Injection	3.0	50%	1.0	1.5
Triclopyr (amine)	Foliar	3.0	4%	15	1.8

Prescribed Fire: These control burns will be implemented by hand and/or aerial ignition methods on a landscape scale, with the desired goal of a mosaic burn pattern. High to moderate fire intensities are desired for the south and west-facing xeric ridges, with moderate intensity fire on the midslopes. Low intensity backing fires will be used adjacent to trails and in riparian areas and mesic hardwood stands. A site-specific burn plan will be prepared for each burn unit. This plan will describe the weather and fuel conditions under which the burn could be safely executed and consider the effects of the fire on other resources, including smoke impacts. All bladed dozer lines used to contain the burns will be re-vegetated, after the burn is conducted, using a non-invasive grass mixture that is best suited to the area, time of year and benefit to wildlife. The preferred fire lines will consist of existing roads, streams, and constructed hand line while limiting and reducing the amount of bladed dozer line.

Burning will take place during both the dormant and growing season to achieve the desired fire conditions. The dormant season is defined as approximately November 1st through April 15th, with the primary implementation period being February through March. The growing season is approximately April 16th through October 30th, with the preferred time being April 16th through May. After initial treatments, a 3-5 year prescribed fire rotation is expected to be necessary to continually maintain the desired conditions. Project level vegetation monitoring will be used to determine exactly when and how many prescribed burns are needed to maintain the fire adapted habitats within these burn units.

Prescribed Burn Block Name	Acres	Season
Addie Gap	551	Growing/Dormant
Bryant Creek	1,375	Growing/Dormant

Prescribed Burn Block Name	Acres	Season
Coosa Bald	2,143	Growing/Dormant
Duncan Ridge (3 Units)	647	Growing/Dormant
Rich Ridge	1,161	Growing/Dormant
Spencer Mtn	1,502	Growing/Dormant
Fish Knob	1,764	Growing/Dormant
Cliff Ridge	1,543	Growing/Dormant
Dunsmore Mtn	1,156	Growing/Dormant
Total	11,842	

(2) Road Access

System Road Reconstruction: This will include curve widening/realignment to accommodate timber haul activities, reshaping of the road template to restore proper drainage, and as needed, replacement of existing culverts and drainage structures to address present and future resource needs and Best Management Practices (BMP's).

Road Name	Road Number	Estimated Mileage
Mulky Gap	4	0.25
Cooper Creek	33	0.25
Bryant Creek	33A	0.75
Duncan Ridge	39	0.25
Burnett Creek	261	0.75
Gillespie Branch	287	0.75
Total		3.0

Temporary Road Construction: To provide access for the commercial vegetation management treatments, up to 5 miles of temporary roads will be constructed, the majority of which will utilize previous temporary road templates. These roads will be closed and re-vegetated after the commercial vegetation management treatments are completed.

Year-round and Seasonal Closures and Changes in Road Maintenance Levels: The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests recently completed a Travel Analysis Process (TAP) that identified a target road system needed for safe and efficient travel and access while also allowing for the protection, management, and use of the National Forest. This target road system is also an effort by the agency to more closely align the current transportation network with existing program capacities. Based on this analysis and other resource considerations, a number of system roads in the Cooper Creek Watershed will be designated for year-round and/or seasonal closure, or administrative changes in the road Maintenance Level.

Year-Round Closure: Burnette Gap (FDR 108) and Mark Helton Branch (FDR 33B) will be closed year-round to all vehicular traffic (both administrative and public). Duncan Ridge Branch (39B) will be closed year-round to public vehicular traffic. All are dead-end roads that receive limited use. The closure of these roads to vehicular traffic will reduce maintenance requirements down to basic custodial care.

Road Name	Road Number	Estimated Mileage
Burnette Gap	108	2.4
Mark Helton Branch	33B	4.5
Duncan Ridge Branch	39B	2.2
Total		9.1

Seasonal Closure: The following roads or segments of these roads will be closed to public use from approximately January 1 to March 15 – the exact dates will be weather dependent. These roads will be closed during this time period of unfavorable weather where a combination of conditions and use results in the rapid deterioration of the road template, resulting in a public safety hazard as well as significant resource damage.

Road Name	Road Number	Estimated Mileage
Flatlands	637	1.5
Knight Creek	264A	2.9
Longcove Creek	264B	1.2
Gillespie Branch	287	2.0
Dixon Branch	88	3.7
Duncan Ridge (portion)	39	3.0
Bryant Creek	33A	3.3
Sea Creek	264	4.0
Total		21.6

Changes in Road Maintenance Levels: The road maintenance levels will be changed for the following roads. These changes will more accurately reflect the current level of maintenance for roads within the Lake Winfield Scott Recreation Area and will also implement maintenance level objectives identified by the Chattahoochee TAP.

Road Name	Road Number	Mileage	Change in ML*
Lake Winfield Scott Branch C	37C	0.1	ML 2 to ML 4
Lake Winfield Scott Branch D	37D	0.2	ML 2 to ML 3
Duncan Ridge	39	2.0	ML 2 to ML 3
Burnett Gap/Calf Stump	108	2.4	ML 2 to ML 1
Mark Helton Branch	33B	4.5	ML 2 to ML 1
Total		9.2	

*ML1- Closed to all motor vehicle use including administrative traffic, suitable for non-motorized uses; ML2- Maintained for use by high-clearance vehicles and not suitable for passenger cars; ML3- Maintained to be passable to prudent drivers in passenger cars during the normal season of use; ML4- Maintained to provide a moderate degree of user comfort and convenience at moderate travel speeds for prudent drivers in a standard passenger car during normal season of use.

Road Decommissioning: The following roads or segments of these roads will be decommissioned by establishing vegetation and, if necessary, initiating restoration of ecological processes interrupted or adversely impacted by the unneeded road. Decommissioning includes applying various treatments, including one or more of the following:

1. Reestablishing former drainage patterns, stabilizing slopes, and restoring vegetation;
2. Blocking the entrance to a road or installing water bars;
3. Removing culverts, reestablishing drainages, removing unstable fills, pulling back road shoulders, and scattering slash on the roadbed;
4. Completely eliminating the roadbed by restoring natural contours and slopes; and
5. Other methods designed to meet the specific conditions associated with the unneeded road.

Road Name	Road Number	Estimated Mileage
Burnett Gap	108	0.6
Fortenberry	395	2.1
Total		2.7

(3) Expansion of Parking Lots

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources - Wildlife Resources Division has requested the expansion of the parking lot at the Cooper Creek Check Station on FSR #4 (Mulky Gap). Existing parking at the site is not adequate to accommodate the large number of vehicles for participants in the annual adult-child hunt each October, resulting in traffic problems and safety concerns. The existing parking lot will be expanded by approximately ½ acre. In addition, the existing trailhead parking at Addie Gap on FSR 33A (Bryant Creek) will also be expanded to approximately ½ acre to improve parking conditions for recreationists.

Old-Growth Designation: The following table listed those stands in each 6-level HUC that will be designated as small blocks of future old growth.

Watershed	Management Area	Compartment	Stand	Acres
Coosa	3.A National Scenic Area	395	005	17.3
			006	16.3
			007	14.0
			011	14.0
			014	16.7
			019	33.4
			021	34.8
			023	48.8
			025	12.9
			7.E.1 Dispersed Recreation	
024	85.3			
062	27.0			
Coosa – Total				341.3
Young Cane	7.E.1 Dispersed Recreation	404	004	37.8
			005	17.3
			023	20.8
			024	19.5
			025	16.1
		402	014	45.3
		403	007	109.0
Young Cane – Total				265.8
Cooper	3.A National Scenic Area	501	004	54.0
			009	38.3
			010	37.4
			014	44.8
			019	45.8
			020	35.1
			025	36.5
			030	28.0
			032	29.9
			033	31.8
			038	18.7
			040	17.2
			042	17.4
			046	30.9
			056	15.7
			057	33.6
	9.H Management, Maintenance, and Restoration		626	013
017				56.3

Watershed	Management Area	Compartment	Stand	Acres
		630	006	31.6
			007	6.4
		632	001	10.2
		633	018	13.7
			033	27.5
			041	18.3
	1.A Designated Wilderness	392	001	8.4
			032	54.0
			033	217.7
			034	42.9
			035	159.5
		036	57.8	
		7.E.2 Dispersed Rec with Veg	504	009
Cooper-Total				1,283.0
Project -Total				1,890.1

5. DECISION RATIONALE

In making the decision to authorize the vegetation management (commercial timber sales and non-commercial treatments), prescribed burning, and road access management (road reconstruction, temporary road construction, year-round and seasonal closures and changes in road maintenance levels) activities in the Cooper Creek project area, I have reviewed the existing environmental conditions and the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects for all alternatives. I have also considered comments received from the public. I gave careful consideration of how well alternative 3 as modified met the 1) purpose and need, and 2) responded to public concerns and the issues, as follows:

1) Purpose and Need

I believe that my decision to authorize Alternative 3 as modified best meets the purpose and need as identified in the EA (Section 1.3 and Section 1.5) and is consistent with and serves to implement the goals and objectives outlined in the Forest Plan.

2) Response to Public Concerns and the Issues

Based on comments received during the scoping and draft EA comment period, the Forest Service responded to comments from agencies, groups and individuals. Forest Service responses from the scoping notice comments are included in the project record. Relevant identified issues through the scoping process were responded in detail in the EA (Section 1.9, pages 6-8). Scoping notice comments were used to develop the Alternative 3. Scoping notice comments are available on the project website: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=44385> (CARA Scoping Comments Report 2016). Draft EA comments were used to develop my draft decision (CARA Draft EA Response to Comments Report 2017). Forest Service responses to the Draft EA comments are included in the CARA Response to Comments Report and are available on the project website. Additional discussion about meetings and field trips with the public are described in the Public Involvement section of this document. Section 3 of this document provide additional details about how Alternative 3 was modified to address public concerns.

I have also considered the Forest Plan and effects described in the *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests (2004)*.

My decision is based on the scientific analysis in the EA that demonstrates a thorough review of relevant information, including how the Proposed Action addressed the main environmental issues identified through scoping and interdisciplinary review.

6. OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

In addition to the proposed action, the EA analyzed the no action alternative as described below:

No Action Alternative

The “No action” alternative is included to meet requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act [40 CFR 1502.14 (d)] which stipulates that “in addition to the proposed action, the no action alternative shall always be fully developed and analyzed in detail.” Under this alternative, none of the activities described in Alternative 2 (The Proposed Action) or Alternative 3 will occur in the project area. Existing trends will be expected to continue. However, ongoing Forest Service permitted and approved activities will continue in the project area. Activities such as road maintenance, NNIS treatments, fire suppression, hunting, fishing, and camping will continue to occur within the project area. Section 3.2 of the EA (page 33-34) displays ongoing and reasonably foreseeable future actions that will be expected to occur under this alternative. I eliminated the No Action Alternative from consideration because it will not meet the purpose and need for the project and resources will not be moved towards the Forest Plan’s desired condition for the area.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detail Study

Federal agencies are required by NEPA to rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives and to briefly discuss the reasons for eliminating any alternatives that were not developed in detail (40 CFR 1502.14). Public comments received in response to the Proposed Action provided suggestions for alternative actions. Some of these alternatives may have been outside the scope of the project, duplicative of the alternatives considered in detail, or determined to not achieve the purpose and need.

Three alternatives were considered but eliminated from detail study because they did not meet the Forest Plan Goals and Objectives and/or purpose and need of the project. Details of the alternatives considered but eliminated from detail study can be found in Section 2.3 of the EA (page 27 of the EA).

7. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Existing conditions and Forest Service recommendations regarding resource management in the Cooper Creek watershed were documented in the Cooper Creek Watershed Assessment Report (Appendix B). A stakeholder meeting to discuss the findings of the watershed assessment, as well as to gather public input on the potential management activities, was held at the Georgia Mountain Research and Education Center in Blairsville, GA on August 9, 2011. A stakeholder meeting to present the findings of the Cooper Creek Ecological Classification System (ECS) was held in the field on October 14, 2012.

The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies listed on the Blue Ridge District mailing list for comment during scoping on May 2, 2014. This document described the proposed actions, preliminary issues identified by an interdisciplinary team, who to contact for additional information, and how and where to send comments. The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions on July 1, 2014. Five hundred and eighty-nine responses were received during

the scoping period. Each comment was analyzed, categorized, and summarized through use of the Content Analysis and Response Application (CARA). Using the comments from the public, other agencies, and from within, the interdisciplinary team developed a list of issues to address.

A draft EA was sent to all those who responded to the scoping notice in January 2016. The draft EA comment period was 30 days, during which time approximately 2,684 comments were received. Responses to comments received can be found on the project website (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=44385> under Appendix K (CARA Draft EA Response to Comments Report 2017)).

Throughout this process, several meeting and field trips were held with key stakeholders including Georgia Forest Watch, the Georgia Chapter of the Sierra Club, Southern Environmental Law Center, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and other interested parties in order to discuss their concerns and to provide additional information about the proposed alternatives and modifications. Additional information among parties were shared through email correspondence as documented in the project record. Section 3 of this document provide additional details about how Alternative 3 was modified to address public concerns.

A communication plan was also developed for this project, designed to keep all stakeholders and key players informed of the status of the project.

8. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

This Finding of No Significant Impact incorporates by reference the project record, including the final Biological Evaluation/Biological Assessment for this project. After carefully considering the environmental effects described in the *Cooper Creek Watershed Project Environmental Assessment* (EA), I have determined that my decision will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

Context

The physical, biological and social effects are limited to the project area and immediate adjacent areas, which are analyzed in Chapter 3 of the EA. All actions are consistent with the *Revised Land and Resource Management Plan, Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests* and Amendment #1. All environmental effects are within the range disclosed in the *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests*.

Intensity

Intensity is a measure of the severity, extent, or quantity of effects, and is based on information from the effects analysis of this EA and the references in the project record. The effects of this project have been appropriately and thoroughly considered with an analysis that is responsive to concerns and issues raised by the public. The agency has taken a hard look at the environmental effects using relevant scientific information and knowledge of site-specific conditions gained from field visits. My finding of no significant impact is based on the context of the project and intensity of effects using the ten factors identified in 40 CFR 1508.27(b).

1. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered (see EA, Chapter 3, Environmental Consequences, pages 33-181). Design criteria include actions to prevent

or lessen adverse impacts of the decision (EA – Section 2.4). The low intensity of the effects within the limited context of this project makes the adverse effects insignificant.

2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety (see EA, Section 3.19). The U.S Forest Service Health and Safety Code Handbook will be followed for all workers during project activities. Appropriate measures (such as posting signs or restricting forest user access) will be taken to inform the public of activities such as herbicide applications, smoke impacts (from prescribed fire) and logging truck activity.

3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area (historic and cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas). Project specific mitigations will be implemented to avoid affects to heritage resources, as discussed in Section 3.18 of the EA. Wetlands will not be impacted by the activities (EA, Section 3.4 and 3.11). The EA analyzed potential impacts to 303d listed streams (impaired streams), and determined that project activities will not degrade these streams (EA, Section 3.4).

4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial because there is no scientific controversy over the impacts of the project. Chapter 3 of the EA provides the scientific and analytical basis for the determination of effects to the physical, biological and social environments. Chapter 4 lists the Forest Service interdisciplinary team and other specialists who provided input and/or were consulted during analysis. Reference information is provided on pages 182-195 of the EA. Other federal and state agencies also provided input information during scoping and/or the review period or concurred with determinations made in the BE and, where appropriate, in the review of the heritage reports. Additional literature was provided by Georgia Forest Watch in support of their comments on the draft EA. This literature was reviewed by the ID Team and is documented in the project folder. A review of the environmental assessment and the project record indicates that the best available scientific information was used to inform the environmental analysis. There is no known scientific controversy with respect to the effects of this action. The effects associated with this type of action are well understood and documented in scientific literature referenced in this EA, and the Forest Plan FEIS.

5. The effects documented in the EA are not highly uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown environmental risk (see EA Chapter 3, pages 33-181)

6. The actions in this decision are not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and do not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration (EA, Chapter 3, pages 33-181). Future decisions will require review under the National Environmental Policy Act including public notification.

7. There are no significant adverse cumulative effects between this project and other past, present and reasonable foreseeable actions (see EA Chapter 3, pages 33-181).

8. The actions will have no adverse effect on sites eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and will not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources. The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests conducted a heritage survey on all proposed treatment areas. The location of cultural resource sites in the project area were identified using historic survey records and field surveys of areas

where information was unavailable. Effects of project activities on heritage resources are disclosed in Section 3.18 of the EA. A Heritage survey for this project has been sent to the Georgia DNR Historic Preservation Division and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPO) for review, and concurrence with the above determinations was received on January 2, 2018 and January 8, 2018, respectively.

9. The effects of the actions on endangered and threatened species and critical habitat were assessed in a Biological Evaluation/Biological Assessment for this project (May 30, 2017) and reached a determination of “no effect” for small whorled pogonia, and “*May Affect, Likely to Adversely Affect*” for Indiana Bat and Northern-Long-eared Bat. The project will comply with the Terms and Conditions, Reasonable and Prudent Measures, and Conservation Measures from the February 7, 2017 USFWS Biological Opinion which incorporates revised Forest Plan Standards for the conservation of federally-listed bats. It also is consistent with the tree-removal conservation measures described in the final 4(d) rule for the northern-long-eared bat. The USFWS reviewed the Biological Evaluation/Biological Assessment and concurred with the above determinations on July 27, 2017.

10. The actions will not violate Federal, State or local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (Biological Evaluation/Biological Assessment) are found in the project record, and section Findings required by Other Laws and Regulations in the Decision Notice)

9. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

My decision to authorize Alternative 3 with minor modification is consistent with the intent of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests Land Management Plan. It is consistent with the Forest Goals and Objectives listed in the Purpose and Need for the project (see EA, pages 2-5). The project was designed in conformance with Forest Plan standards and incorporates appropriate land use and resource management plan guidelines. A monitoring plan is in place to ensure compliance with the Forest Plan during implementation of the project (EA Appendix I).

My decision does not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment and it is consistent with the following key laws, regulations, and requirements:

National Environmental Policy Act – This act requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental effects. This Decision Notice is in compliance with NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ regulations 40 CFR 1500 to 1508) for implementing NEPA. The effects of the Proposed Action and alternatives were analyzed and were disclosed in the EA which was available for public review.

Clean Water Act of 1977 – Chapter 3, Section 3.4 of the EA discloses the effects of project activities water quality and quantity. Based on this information, my decision will not affect the existing high quality water flowing through the area.

Executive Order 11990 – My decision will have no adverse effects to wetlands and therefore complies with this executive order. (EA Section 3.4 Water)

Executive Order 11988 – My decision will have no adverse effects to floodplains and therefore complies with this executive order. (EA Section 3.4 Water).

Endangered Species Act of 1973 – This Act directs that all Federal departments and agencies shall seek to conserve endangered, and threatened (and proposed) species of fish, wildlife and plants. This obligation is further clarified in a National Interagency Memorandum of Agreement (dated August 30, 2000) that states our shared mission to “...enhance conservation of imperiled species while delivering appropriate goods and services provided by the lands and resources”.

Based on information disclosed in the EA (Section 3.13 and the Biological Evaluation/Biological Assessment available in the project record), I have determined that my decision will not have adverse effects to Proposed, Endangered, Threatened, Sensitive and Locally Rare species.

Wild and Scenic Rivers Act – There are no Wild and Scenic Rivers within the project area (EA Section 1.5).

Executive Order 13186 – Chapter 3, Sections 3.12 and 3.14 of the EA disclose the effects of project activities on migratory birds, primarily as related to the effects on their habitats. Based on this information, my decision is in compliance with this Executive Order for the Conservation of Migratory Birds.

Executive Order 13112 – Invasive species: This Executive Order directs that Federal Agencies should not authorize any activities that will increase the spread of invasive species. Chapter 3, Sections 3.15 of the EA disclose the effects of Non-Native Invasive Plant Species, My decision includes noxious weed management to effectively reduce the spread of existing and new infestations of noxious weeds and invasive plant species. Therefore, my decision is consistent with this order and will not increase the spread of invasive species.

American Antiquities Act of 1906 and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966: A survey was conducted and the Forest Archeologist made the determination that the proposed treatments will not significantly affect any cultural resources in the project area; no historic or cultural features will be impacted (EA, Section 3.18). The State Historic Preservation Office concurred with this finding. Therefore, my decision is in compliance with these Acts.

Violating Federal, State and Local Laws – My decision does not violate any Federal, State or local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment.

10. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR OBJECTION OPPORTUNITY

This project is subject to the pre-decisional objection process pursuant to 36 Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) §218 Subparts A and B. The opportunity to object ends 45 days following the date of publication of the legal notice in *North Georgia News and News Observer* newspapers published in Blairsville and Blue Ridge, GA, respectively. The publication date of the legal notice in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection, and those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by another source.

Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted timely, specific written comments regarding the proposed project during scoping or other designated opportunity for public comment, unless based on new information arising after designated comment opportunities (§218.8(c)). The objection must contain the minimum content requirements specified in §218.8(d) and incorporation of documents by reference is permitted only as provided in §218.8(b). It is the objector’s responsibility to ensure timely filing of a written objection with

the reviewing officer. All objections are available for public inspection during and after the objection process.

Written objections, including attachments, must be filed via mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, express delivery or messenger service (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 12:00 and 1:00 to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays) to:

Betty M. Jewett, Reviewing Officer
Forest Supervisor
Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests
1755 Cleveland Highway
Gainesville, Georgia 30501

Electronically filed objections may be submitted by email in word (.doc or .docx), rich text format (.rtf), text (.txt), and hypertext markup language (.html) to objections-southern-chattahoochee-oconee@fs.fed.us

Please state “Cooper Creek Watershed Project” in the subject line when providing electronic objections, or on the envelope when replying by mail.

Objection may also made directly on the Cooper Creek Watershed Project webpage: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=44385> by selecting the “**Comment/Object on Project**” link in the “**Get Connected**” group at the right hand side of the project webpage. Attachments may be in the following formats: plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc, .docx), or portable document format (.pdf).

If an objection is received, notice of an objection resolution meeting open to the public will be posted on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests website.

11. IMPLEMENTATION

As per 36 CFR 218.12, if no objections are received within the legal objection period, this decision may be signed and implemented on, but not before, five business days from the close of the objection filing period. If an objection is filed, this decision cannot be signed or implemented until the reviewing officer has responded in writing to all pending objections, and the responsible official has addressed all concerns and instructions identified by the reviewing officer.

When the objection filing period has ended and responses have been made to all objections by the reviewing officer and the responsible official has addressed all concern and instructions identified by the reviewing officer, the responsible official may make a final decision on the proposed project. The reviewing officer shall issue a written response to objectors within 45 days following the end of this objection-filing period (this may also be extended by the reviewing officer up to 30 days).

12. CONTACT

For additional information about this decision, contact James Wentworth, District Wildlife Biologist, 2042 Highway 515 W, Blairsville, GA 30512; email: jwentworth@fs.fed.us; Telephone: (706)745-6928 ext. 107; FAX: (706)706-745-7494.

For information about the objection process, contact Nelson Gonzalez-Süllow, (770) 297-3051, email: nelsongonzalezsullow@fs.fed.us

ANDREW L. BAKER
District Ranger

Date

USDA Non-Discrimination Policy Statement

[DR 4300.003 USDA Equal Opportunity Public Notification Policy \(June 2, 2015\)](#)

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Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

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