

# News Release

## USDA Forest Service

*Southern Region  
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### **USDA FOREST SERVICE RELEASES LAND MANAGEMENT PLANS TO GUIDE FOREST MANAGEMENT IN SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN FORESTS**

**ATLANTA** – Maintaining healthy, resilient and productive mountain forests remains the highest aim for the newly revised Southern Appalachian Land Management Plans, which were released this week.

Concluding a final round of scientific analysis--coupled with consideration of more than 12,000 public comments on the draft plans—officials for the USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, approved the revised plans January 15. They will guide forest management on five Southern Appalachian National Forests for the next 10-15 years. The new plans, which are expected to be implemented by March 1, effectively create a blueprint aimed at improving forest health, productivity and the enjoyment of mountain forests, said Regional Planning Director Chris Liggett.

“While the overall forest management direction of these forest decisions did not change from last year’s draft plans, forest specialists have worked hard over the last few months to make key changes and adjustments that respond to public comments, address local concerns and incorporate additional scientific analysis,” he said.

The revised plans allow land managers to use an array of forest management tools to address threats from invasive insects and disease, wildland fires, unmanaged recreational activities and urban sprawl. Meanwhile, the plans enhance the rich biological diversity on the 3.2 million national forest acres in the Southern Appalachians.

“These plans are a product of unprecedented citizen involvement that offered extraordinary access to the planning process, and a cooperative spirit among several federal, state and local organizations,” said Bob Jacobs, Regional Forester for the USDA Forest Service Southern Region. “They respond to a number of common, critical challenges facing mountain forests.”

The five forests include the National Forests in Alabama, Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests in Georgia, Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee, Jefferson National Forest in Virginia, and the Sumter National Forest in South Carolina.

“The plans place continued emphasis on maintaining forests and their many resources,” Liggett said. “These plans enable managers to deal with

threats facing all forests --- invasive species, wildland fires, unmanaged recreation, and urban sprawl. Based on scientific information and input from a variety of sources, the plans balance diverse public interests and stewardship responsibilities of our forests over the next decade, ensuring that the Southern Appalachians will remain a valuable resource for generations to come.”

The land management plans are directly linked to the successful Southern Appalachian Assessment of 1996. That assessment, which offered citizens numerous opportunities to work directly with forest specialists, pointed to a number of key issues, which demanded a more consistent management approach across the Southern Appalachians. The two-year study included state and federal agencies. These plans respond to at least 12 regional issues in those forests.

Plan highlights include:

- Providing tools for managers to actively maintain healthy, productive resilient forests--using the best available science.
- Greater flexibility to use tools that reduce risks of wildfire, insect infestation, and diseases.
- Ensuring the Southern Appalachian forests continue to serve as a source for some of the purest water supply in the Southeast, alongside offering a number of other valuable natural resources.
- Maintaining open spaces by providing protection of roadless areas that provide wild and natural features of the forests.
- Offering outstanding scenic, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities, while addressing concerns for unmanaged recreation on national forests.

The planning process included a 90-day period for public comment. Each forest scheduled public sessions that encouraged citizen interaction with forest specialists. Additionally, forest officials were available to meet with groups and individuals to continue dialogue with citizens. Public comments were then analyzed and used as the plans were completed.

Copies of the plans and executive summaries will be available electronically, as well as in print.

Interested media should contact the following for more information:

Alabama National Forests

- Mary Gaines (334) 241-8173

Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests

- Karen McKenzie (770) 297-3061

Cherokee National Forest

- Terry McDonald (423) 476-9700

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- Donna Wilson (540) 265-5177

Sumter National Forest

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