



Forest Service

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News Release

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Work on Sina Branch Road to Begin in Polk County

Cherokee National Forest – Ocoee Ranger District

BENTON, TENN, July 22, 2020 – USDA Forest Service officials at the Cherokee National Forest say a portion of National Forest System Road 67 (NFSR) – Sina Branch Road in Polk County will be closed while a new culvert is being constructed. The road work is scheduled to occur during the last week of July and may extend through the month of September.

Sina Branch Road – National Forest System Road (NFSR) 67 will be closed from the north approximately 0.75 miles south from the junction with NFSR 55 (a location known locally as the “Turkey Foot”) and from the south approximately 3.8 miles south from the junction with NFSR 55.

An aquatic organism passage (AOP) culvert will be constructed on Grays Branch to ensure fish and other aquatic creatures are able to move up or downstream under the road. This will be the fourth of eight planned culvert replacements to be implemented. Removing the existing culvert barriers will once again connect streams in the Sina Branch Watershed, expanding the habitat for the rare Tennessee Dace and other aquatic species. Implementation of the entire project will be phased over multiple projects spanning several years. The first two replacements were conducted in October 2017.

The upcoming culvert work is part of the Tennessee USDA Forest Service-Natural Resource Conservation Service Joint Watershed Restoration Partnership, the goals of which are to expand efforts to improve water quality in the Hiwassee watershed, restore riparian (streamside) health and resiliency, reconnect and enhance aquatic habitats, and make meaningful progress toward improving the overall watershed condition.

This project is one of three components of the Joint Watershed Restoration Project:
Reduce sediment; Improve the health and resiliency of the forest ecosystem by reducing

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nonnative invasive species; Increase flood resiliency and aquatic organism passage.

AOP projects included in this proposal were selected to open up additional habitat for Tennessee Dace, a very rare minnow that is listed as a Forest Viability Concern species and a Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency deemed in-Need-of-Management species. Replacement of the 8 culverts identified as barriers on Sina Branch Road will open up 40+ miles of habitat for Tennessee Dace.

This project is a partnership with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, The Nature Conservancy, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, and U.S. Forest Service. The restoration of Tennessee Dace is an on-going effort among various resource management agencies and entities to help ensure that this unique native fish remains in Tennessee streams.

Ocoee District Ranger, Mike Wright said, "Projects like this are always harder to do alone and it takes dedicated partnerships like the ones we have developed for this project to be successful. The improvements that the Sina Branch project provides will be of considerable benefit to Tennessee Dace and many other aquatic species in Sina Branch and other area streams.

I realize that closing portions of the roads during construction work may be inconvenient for some people. Construction work such as this must be done when water levels and the risk for flooding are low, so the weather was a big factor in determining when this work could be done. This project will not only benefit aquatic life in the creeks but it will enhance the resiliency of our infrastructure to flooding and ensure that access to this area of the forest will be available for future generations."

For more information about the Sina Branch AOP project contact the Ocoee Ranger District Office at 423-338-3300.

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