USDA United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | National Forests in North Carolina
Pisgah National Forest
Pisgah Ranger District | 1001 Pisgah Hwy
Pisgah Forest, NC 27868-7721
828-877-3265

File Code: 1900
Date: September 29, 2006

Dear Interested Members of the Public and Forest Users:

I have signed the Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Case Camp Ridge Environmental Assessment (EA) within the Pisgah Ranger District, Transylvania County. The DN discusses in detail my decision and rationale for reaching it. Copies of the DN and FONSI are enclosed. The July 2006 Preliminary Analysis has been updated to the September 2006 EA to better address comments received by members of the public and a Roads Analysis has also been completed—the September 2006 EA and Roads Analysis are available upon request or can be downloaded from the Forest's website: www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc/nepa/nepa.htm

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. A written appeal, including attachments, must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date this notice is published in *The Asheville Citizen-Times*. The Appeal shall be sent to National Forests in North Carolina, ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, 160-A Zillicoa Street, Asheville, North Carolina, 28801. Appeals may be faxed to (828) 257-4263. Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Appeals may also be mailed electronically in a common digital format to: **appeals-southern-north-carolina@fs.fed.us**

Those who provided comments or otherwise expressed interest in a particular proposed action by the close of the comment period may appeal this decision (as per the recent *The Wilderness Society v. Rey* ruling). Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. For further information on this decision contact Michael Hutchins, Pisgah National Forest NEPA Coordinator at 828-682-6146.

Sincerely,

/s/*Randy Burgess*
RANDALL BURGESS
District Ranger

Enclosure

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Southern Region
Forest Service

September 2006

Case Camp Ridge

Decision Notice

And

Finding Of No Significant Impact

Pisgah Ranger District, Pisgah National Forest
Transylvania County, North Carolina

Decision Notice
& Finding of No Significant Impact

Case Camp Ridge Project

USDA Forest Service
Pisgah Ranger District, Pisgah National Forest
Transylvania County, North Carolina

Decision and Rationale

Decision

Based upon my review of the alternatives, I have decided to select **Alternative D** (Selected Alternative) of the Case Camp Ridge Project Environmental Assessment (EA – see Section 2.2.4, Chapter 2) on the Pisgah Ranger District, Pisgah National Forest and the Project Design Features listed in Section 2.4, Chapter 2, Section 3.7.3.3, Chapter 3, and Appendix F of the Case Camp Ridge Project EA. The Selected Alternative will:

- Harvest about 141 acres using the two-age regeneration harvest prescription.
- Harvest about 23 acres using the selection harvest method.
- Harvest about 99 acres using the santitation thinning method.
- Harvest about 12 acres using the overwood removal method.
- Reconstruct approximately 7.5 miles of existing system roads, and construct about 1¼ miles of temporary roads for timber harvest operations. Part of the reconstruction includes replacement of 14 undersized culverts and a temporary bridge on Bennett Cove Creek. About 0.85 miles of the temporary roads would be ripped, seeded, and closed following harvest activities. One road accesses stand 73-29 and the other passes through stands 75-19 and terminates in 75-04.
- Perform site preparation and release (within 2 to 5 years following site preparation) on about 176 acres of the stands to be regenerated with herbicide (Triclopyr ester and amine formulations) and hand tools (chainsaw and hand ax) following timber harvesting.
- Perform Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) with hand tool methods on approximately 356 acres in stands 73-01, 73-07, 73-08, 73-10, 73-13, 73-16, 73-19, 73-25, 73-26, 74-01, 74-02, 74-03, 74-04, 74-05, 74-08, 74-09, 74-12, 74-13, 75-02, 75-03, 75-04, 75-08, 75-11, 75-16, 75-20, and 75-24 (monitoring would be conducted to determine need to treat non-native invasives).
- Perform pre-harvest (advanced) oak shelterwood treatment with herbicide (Triclopyr ester and amine formulations) and hand tools on about 265 acres in stands 73-18, 73-24, 74-06, 74-07, 74-11, 74-17b, 74-20, 74-25, 75-01, 75-06 and 75-13 (includes treatment of non-native invasives).
- Manage Forest Service Road (FSR) 5047 (Bearpen Branch Road) as a linear wildlife opening (approximately 1.5 acres)—the road would be added to Closure Notice 01-05-2004 prohibiting use of motorized vehicles, non-motorized or wheeled conveyances (bicycles), and horse riding or other saddle or pack animals.
- As previously stated, convert 0.4 miles of temporary roads to linear wildlife openings creating approximately 0.7 acres of permanent grass/forb habitat. One road accesses stand 73-29 and the other passes through stands 75-19 and terminates in 75-04. Convert the grass/forb habitat on FSR 5047 to permanent, grass/forb habitat by adding it to the Forest's Closure Notice (01/05/2004) for linear wildlife strips (fields).
- Provide approximately 6 acres of additional grass/forb habitat in 3 to 5 wildlife openings ranging from 0.5 to 2 acres in size. The areas proposed for their location are the flattened ridge tops between stands 74-5 & 18; 74-16 & 18; and, within the eastern portion of stand 75-04 and possibly extending into 75-17.
- Maintain newly developed and existing wildlife fields with herbicide (Imazapic and Glyphosate) to establish native warm season grasses.
- Control existing non-native invasive plant species along haul routes and haul routes adjacent to existing and proposed harvest stands with herbicide (Glyphosate and/or Triclopyr) on

about five acres. Prior to harvest, treat non-native invasive plants along Forest Service roads adjacent to harvest stands with herbicides (Triclopyr and/or Glyphosate) and/or manual methods.
- Designate stands 73-05 (170 acres), 74-26 (202 acres), 75-26 (44 acres), and 75-27 (41 acres) as small patch old growth.

Rationale

The purpose and need for the proposal is disclosed in Section 1.5, Chapter 1 and summarized below:

- Providing habitat conditions for wildlife species particularly turkey across the project area by dispersing early successional habitat across the landscape and regulating the amount of 0-10 year age class. Forest Plan standards for 0-10 year age class distribution in MA 4D allows up to 10% by compartment or Forest Plan AA (Forest Plan, page III-31). Currently, the percent of 0-10 year age class is 0% in each compartment. Thinning may also be used to improve wildlife habitat (Forest Plan, page III-86);
- Providing a minimum of 0.5% with a maximum of 3% permanent grass and forb openings for turkey habitat (Forest Plan, page III-84). Currently, 0.4% permanent grass and forb openings exists within the compartments;
- Utilizing timber management practices as the primary tool to create desirable habitat (Forest Plan, page III-84);
- Designating small patch old growth to increase biological diversity and provide structural components of old growth at the stand and landscape level (Forest Plan, page III-27). Currently, there are no small patch old growth patches designated in Compartments 73-75;
- Providing for stocking control and species variety through TSI practices (Forest Plan, pages III-35 & 36) to encourage reproduction of oak, other hard mast and soft mast producing species by treating those stands where such seedlings or saplings are present to favor growth of these species and limit competition from other species. Currently, there are no activities implemented that have provided TSI for stocking control and species variety in the project area.

I believe this alternative will best meet the purpose and need while addressing key issues regarding visuals and herbicide use. Alternative D will provide much needed early successional habitat for turkey and other wildlife species that need these habitat conditions and best meets the scenery management objectives. Currently Compartments 73, 74, and 75 have 0% early successional habitat and through the Selected Alternative they will have 6.9%, 7.3%, and 5.2% early successional habitat respectively (Appendix B). In addition, about 87% of the stands within these three compartments are greater than 80 years in age—following implementation of the Selected Alternative, about 82% of the three compartments would be greater than 80 years in age (Section 3.11.2.1, Chapter 3).

In reaching my decision, I began by reviewing the purpose and need for the project and all of the alternatives presented in the Environmental Assessment (EA). I then carefully weighed the effects analyses of the alternatives analyzed in detail and the public comments received on the EA. The Case Camp Ridge Project Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) conducted field surveys, database queries, and other localized analysis in order to determine effects the alternatives analyzed in detail could have on the area's ecology, including threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. During their analyses, they took a hard look at past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions that could be combined with expected effects from the Case Camp Ridge proposal. I believe they provided me sufficient analyses and conclusions to make a reasoned decision.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the Selected Alternative, I considered three other alternatives in detail: Alternative A – No Action, Alternative B – Proposed Action, and Alternative C. A description of these alternatives can be found in Sections 1.4, Chapter 1 and 2.2, Chapter 2.

Alternative A – No Action

Under this alternative current management plans, such as existing wildlife management, wildfire suppression, general road maintenance, and special use permit operations, would continue to guide management of the project area. I did not select this alternative for several reasons. This alternative would not have provided habitat conditions for wildlife species; performed TSI and pre-harvest oak shelter wood treatments, designated small patch old growth, nor used herbicides to control/manage non-native invasive plant populations. I believe active

management is needed to move the area towards the Forest Plan's desired future condition.

Alternative B – Proposed Action

Under this alternative about 47 additional acres of two-age harvest; eight additional acres of group selection harvest; 55 additional acres of site preparation; up to 356 additional acres of TSI using herbicides; three less acres of grass/forb habitat would have occurred when compared to the Selected Alternative—all other actions are the same as the Selected Alternative. I did not select this alternative because I believe the additional 47 acres of two-age harvest would have a greater impact to scenic resources. The Case Camp project area is bounded by the Blue Ridge Parkway to the north, Looking Glass Rock to the south, and U.S. Highway 276 to the east. I recognize this alternative was designed to meet Forest Plan scenery standards; however, I decided to select an alternative that met the purpose and need while having less potential scenic impacts in the area.

Alternative C

Under this alternative up to 356 acres of TSI would be accomplished with herbicide and hand tool methods—all other actions proposed under this alternative were the same as the Selected Alternative. I did not select this alternative because I believe that it is important to best meet the project's purpose and need while having the least potential impact on the environment. I believe the necessary TSI treatments can be achieved with manual methods about as effectively and efficiently as with herbicide applications (Veg Mgt FEIS Vol. I, page IV-66). As a result, there would be up to 356 less acres with herbicide applied to them, reducing potential for accidental spills. I believe that herbicide use is the most efficient method for managing/controlling non-native invasives and competing vegetation during site preparation treatments and the Selected Alternative would permit herbicide use for these two treatments.

Other Alternatives Not Considered

Section 2.3 of the EA disclosed three alternatives I considered but eliminated from detailed study. Since they were not considered in detail in the EA, they were not considered in the range of alternatives for my decision.

Public Involvement

The proposal was listed in the January, April, and July 2006 editions of the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA). The proposal was provided to the public, agencies, and organizations for comment during scoping from January 13, 2006 thru February 13, 2006—thirteen individual comments were received during scoping. On April 4, 2006, several members of local and regional environmental organizations attended Forest Service employees on a field trip to the project area.

Using comments received from the public, agencies, and organizations during this period as well as internal review, the interdisciplinary team (IDT) developed a list of issues to address.

The proposal was provided to the public for a 30-day notice and comment period that began on July 11, 2006, and ended on August 14, 2006—154 separate timely comments were received during the notice and comment period and two untimely comments were received after the comment period. On August 10, 2006, representatives of the US Forest Service participated in a public meeting hosted by local and regional environmental organizations at Brevard College.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions 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 by finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action (Section 2.2.4, Chapter 2, and Appendix E).
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety and implementation will be in accordance with project design features (Section 2.4 Chapter 2; Section 3.4, Chapter 3; and Appendix F).
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because there are no park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas in the project area, nor are there local law or

requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (Section 3.12, Chapter 3).

4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial because there is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project (Sections 3.1.2, 3.2.2.3, 3.3, 3.4.2, 3.5.2, 3.6.2, 3.7.3.3, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10.2, 3.11.2, and 3.12.2, Chapter 3).
5. We have considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (Sections 3.1.2, 3.2.2.3, 3.3, 3.4.2, 3.5.2, 3.6.2, 3.7.3.3, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10.2, 3.11.2, and 3.12.2, Chapter 3).
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because the project is site specific and effects are expected to remain localized and short-term (Sections 3.1.2, 3.2.2.3, 3.3, 3.4.2, 3.5.2, 3.6.2, 3.7.3.3, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10.2, 3.11.2, and 3.12.2, Chapter 3).
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant (Sections 3.1.2.5, 3.2.2.3, 3.3, 3.4.2, 3.5.2, 3.6.2, 3.7.3.4, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10.2, 3.11.2, and 3.12.2, Chapter 3; and Appendix A).
8. The action will have no effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (Section 3.6, Chapter 3). The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources (Section 3.6, Chapter 3). A heritage report was completed for this project and mailed to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians Tribal Heritage Protection Office (THPO) on July 14, 2006.
9. A Biological Evaluation (BE) was completed for this project on June 29, 2006, that concluded: *No Threatened and Endangered species nor their habitat are known or were found to occur in any of the proposed activity areas. Consequently, this project would have no effects upon any proposed or listed, federally threatened or endangered species. Because of project design, there would be no effects to the local populations of the Regional Forester's Sensitive species listed in Table 4 above* [BE]. *There is no occupied or unoccupied habitat recognized as essential for listed or proposed species recovery, nor to meet Forest Service objectives for the Sensitive species identified. Formal consultation with the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service is not required.* The BE was included within the EA that was provided to members of the public and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on July 11, 2006. The USFWS concluded on August 9, 2006, that *Based on the information provided in the EA and a review of our records, we do not believe any of the alternatives are likely to adversely affect federally listed endangered or threatened species or critical habitat. Thus, the requirements of section 7(c) of the Act are fulfilled.*
10. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. The action is consistent with the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan Amendment 5 (Sections 1.2, 1.5, and 1.5.1, Chapter 1).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

My decision to implement the Selected Alternative is consistent with the intent of the long-term goals and objectives listed on pages III-1 and III-2 of Forest Plan Amendment 5. The project was designed to meet land and resource management plan standards and I believe it incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines.

Administrative Review and Contacts

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. A written appeal, including attachments, must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date this notice is published in *The Asheville Citizen-Times*. The Appeal shall be sent to:

National Forests in North Carolina
ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer
160-A Zillicoa Street
Asheville, North Carolina 28801

Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Appeals may be faxed to (828) 257-4263 or mailed electronically in a common digital format to: **appeals-southern-north-carolina@fs.fed.us**.

Those who provided comments or otherwise expressed interest in a particular proposed action by the close of the comment period may appeal this decision (as per the recent *The Wilderness Society v. Rey* ruling). Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. For further information on this

decision contact Michael Hutchins, Pisgah National Forest NEPA Coordinator at 828-682-6146.

Implementation Date

As per 36 CFR 215.9, if no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, the 5th business day following the close of the appeal-filing period (215.15). If an appeal is filed, implementation may occur on, but not before the 15th business day following the date of appeal disposition.

/s/*Randy Burgess* *9/29/06*

RANDALL BURGESS
District Ranger
Pisgah Ranger District

Date

APPENDIX G – RESPONSE TO COMMENTS FOR THE CASE CAMP RIDGE PROJECT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

General Discussion

The formal 30-day Notice and Comment period for the Case Camp Ridge Project Preliminary Analysis (PA) began July 11, 2006, and ended on August 14, 2006. 154 timely comments were submitted by members of the public during this comment period and two untimely comments were submitted—all comments are located in the project record.

Comments submitted had the following 24 "themes" contained within them (several individuals' submitted addresses without providing comments):

Alternatives (range of)	Clear Cutting	Cultural Resources	Economics
Erosion/Soil	Extend Comment Period	Global Warming	Harvesting
Herbicides	Implementation Monitoring	Inadequately Informed	Invasives
Mountain Treasures	No Action	Old Growth	Prescribed Burning/Wildfires
Public Meeting/Hearing	Recreation/Tourism	Road Construction/ Reconstruction, including Roads Analysis Process	Road Use
Scenery	Support (for proposal)	Water Quality	Wildlife

To meet requirements at 36 CFR 215.6(b), a summary of comments received for each "theme" are listed followed by the Agency's response.

Alternatives (range of)

Comments received on this theme were concerned with the range of alternatives analyzed in detail. Respondents believed a wider range of alternatives could have been analyzed in detail pursuant to 40 CFR 1500.2(e) while still achieving the projects purpose and need. There were concerns that effects analyses were similar between Alternatives B and C due to the narrow range of alternatives analyzed and a restoration alternative should have been analyzed in detail to compare against Alternatives B and C.

Agency Response

A new alternative was analyzed in detail following the 30-day notice and comment period—Alternative D. Alternative D proposed similar actions as Alternative C, but proposes to perform timber stand improvement (TSI) with manual methods only and not with herbicides.

An alternative that did not propose commercial harvesting was considered but eliminated from detailed study (Alternative 1, Section 2.3.1, Chapter 2) because it did not achieve the purpose and need [Utilizing timber management practices as the primary tool to create desirable habitat (Forest Plan, page III-84), Section 1.5, Chapter 1].

Clear Cutting

Comments received on this theme addressed clear cutting—both against clear cutting and support for clear cutting.

Agency Response

Clear cutting is not proposed with the Case Camp project (see also Appendix D for more information on various harvest methods). Two-age harvesting is proposed and would retain residual trees—a range of 15 ft^2/ac to 40 ft^2/ac depending on scenery standards.

Cultural Resources

The comment received on this theme was concerned that there was a lack of actual effects analysis on cultural resources. The concern is that members of the public are not afforded enough rationale on the statement in the PA that *there are no expected adverse cumulative effects to cultural resources as a result of the proposal.*

Agency Response

There would be no adverse cumulative effects to cultural resources because the proposed Case Camp project undertaking is not supplementary to past undertakings in the project area. This conclusion is based on past and present Section 106-National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) compliant inventory and evaluation (by archaeologists) of all proposed project areas (ground disturbing), and the subsequent completion of a Report-of-Findings that is reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Office. All sites identified as eligible to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in the Case Camp project areas were assessed on how best to ensure protection during project implementation—in come cases this meant reducing or eliminating stands from the proposal. All significant and NRHP eligible sites will be protected by avoidance.

Economics

Comments received on this theme were concerned about the proposal being developed to provide revenue for lumber companies at the expense of the environment and eco-tourism. There were also concerns that the financial efficiency disclosed in the PA did not consider other forms of revenue the project area provides associated with tourism and recreation.

Agency Response

The proposal was designed to meet the purpose and need (Section 1.5, Chapter 1). There are many non-timber related revenue sources associated with National Forests, including the Pisgah National Forest and the Case Camp Ridge project area. The Case Camp project proposes to use a timber sale to help meet objectives—a financial efficiency analysis is needed when expected revenue exceed $100,000 (Forest Service Manual 2400, Chapter 32.12). Financial efficiency is defined in FSH 2409.18, Chapter 13.05 as: *The usefulness of inputs (costs) to produce outputs (revenues) and effects when financial costs and financial revenues are included in the computations. Financial efficiency is measured using revenue/cost ratios for timber sale projects.* Economic efficiency is defined as: *The usefulness of inputs (costs) to produce outputs (benefits) and effects when all costs and benefits that can be identified and valued are included in the computations. Economic efficiency is measured using benefit-cost ratios in timber sale project analysis (FSH 1909.17).*

A financial efficiency analysis was prepared for the Case Camp proposal and not an economic analysis because determining non-timber related resource opportunities is best determined at the Forest Plan level. As FSH 2409.18, Chapter 13.1 states: *1. Forest Plan Analysis. Financial and economic information is used as required by the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act, as amended by the National Forest Management Act of 1976, to help establish the size and extent of the timber sale program on each National Forest. Program costs and benefits are examined in relation to timber and* ***non-timber resource opportunities*** [emphasis added] *to help establish a cost-efficient program that will achieve the desired balance of multiple resource objectives and future ecological conditions. The financial and economic information indicates the*

efficiency of timber harvest in each Forest plan management area and can be used to help develop budgets necessary to accomplish Forest plan objectives. See FSH 2409.13 and 1909.17 for information available from Forest plan analyses.

Recreation opportunities have been shown to generate revenue in the Forest Service in general and on the Pisgah National Forest in particular. It is important to note that the purpose of the project is not to maximize revenue, but to move habitat in the area towards the Forest Plan's desired future condition. At the project area level, the Agency strives to balance needs of all resources based on Forest Plan designations for management area emphasis—the management area emphasis for the Case Camp project is on providing high quality wildlife habitat.

This concern is actually a Forest level issue and has been addressed in the Final Supplement to the Final Environmental Impact Statement, Volume I and Appendix B of Volume II, for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. Specifically stated in Volume I, pages IV 60-61: [B]*ecause variation in employment among alternatives is small, the Forests can easily meet the demand for recreation of the RN2 settings* (Roaded Natural 2, Recreational Opportunity Spectrum, which is the setting for MA 4D). It should be noted that the primary recreational uses of the project area is dispersed recreation, including hunting, hiking and some dispersed camping. This project proposes to create wildlife habitat that is lacking in the area. Page B-102 in Volume II of the Final Supplement displays employment and income values for recreation users' days, particularly dispersed hunting and other dispersed recreation activities.

Erosion/Soil

Comments received on this theme were concerned about the potential for the proposal to increase erosion and adversely affect water quality. There was also a concern the analysis did not adequately disclose erosion potential of soils in the project area.

Agency Response

While there may be the potential for adverse effects to aquatic resources due to harvest-related activities, the EA disclosed in Section 3.1.2.1: *The installation of the four drainage culverts associated with Forest Service Road (FSR) 5040, FSR 5043 and FSR 5045 may cause some sedimentation if weather conditions are such that sediments could be carried down these ephemeral channels. Sediment loading and turbidity can result in the loss of interstitial habitat within the substrate and cause direct mortality by the crushing or smothering of less mobile organisms such as aquatic invertebrates, fish eggs and juveniles. This effect would be minimized by implementing best management practices (BMPs) including the replacement of culverts within a 48-hour period and seeding and mulching the disturbed area immediately after implementation. Conditions in this area would likely improve after replacing the undersized culverts with larger ones which would allow for more natural stream flow and better passage for aquatic organisms. Many of these undersized culverts which would be replaced with larger ones currently have head cutting and soil erosion around them and downstream of them.*

While there may be the potential for adverse effects to soils due to harvest-related activities, but as disclosed in Section 3.5.2.1: *There are no anticipated adverse effects to soils with either of these alternatives because the soil types in the project area are moderately to very deep and well to excessively drained—reducing potential for compaction [two acres (<1%) of poorly drained soil map unit 862 would be impacted by Alternative B]; would not be taken out of production through permanent road construction or conversion to non-forest land; and would have project design features (Section 2.4, Chapter 2) and Forest Plan standards (Best Management Practices or BMPs) applied to further reduce potential for compaction and long-term damage. There would be some erosion with the construction of up to 1½ miles of temporary roads* [since reduced to 1¼ miles of temporary road]. *However, the effects would be short-term and limited in their extent when applied to the total area of operation. In addition, all but 0.4 miles of the temporary roads would be closed, ripped, and seeded. Alternative B proposes to harvest with cable logging systems (partial suspension of logs) on 31 acres. The remaining harvest under Alternative B (294 acres) and all harvest under*

Alternative C (293 acres) would use ground based logging equipment (rubber tired skidders)—which is about 3% of AA 9. While cable logging systems afford higher protection to soils than ground based systems, adverse effects to soils (e.g., permanently taken out of production) are not expected to occur for the reasons stated above.

Soil map units (series) in the activity areas were reviewed for erodibility. Each series, except the Trimont series, are listed as having moderate hazard of off-road or off-trail erosion—the Trimont series (63 acres under Alternative B and 53 acres under Alternatives C and D) is listed as having severe hazard of off-road or off-trail erosion (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service). A moderate hazard rating indicates that some erosion is likely and that erosion-control measures may be needed—a severe hazard rating indicates that erosion is very likely and that erosion-control measures, including revegetation of bare areas, are advised (USDA NRCS). All series are listed as having severe hazard of erosion on roads and trails (USDA NRCS). A severe rating indicates that a high level of erosion is expected, that the roads or trails require frequent maintenance, and that costly erosion-control measures are needed (USDA NRCS). The proposal has been designed to reduce potential for erosion to adversely affect aquatic resources and water quality and would comply with standards and guidelines listed on pages III-40 – III-42 of the Forest Plan.

Extend Comment Period

Comments received on this theme requested the comment period be extended to allow more time to provide comments on the proposal.

Agency Response

Extending the official 30-day notice and comment period is not allowed pursuant to 36 CFR 215.6(a)(1)(iv). Information on the proposal was mailed to interested members of the public during a scoping period that began on January 13, 2006; a 30-day notice and comment period that began on July 14, 2006; and information was placed on the Forest's web site since January 2006.

Global Warming

Comments received on this theme were concerned the proposal would increase global warming since trees would be harvested and they absorb CO_2.

Agency Response

The issue of global warming is outside the scope of this project. Trees do absorb CO_2, but potential for future absorption of CO_2 would not be lost with the proposal as trees would be retained and a new forest would be re-established. Potential for future CO_2 absorption would be lost if the proposal would deforest the area, which is not the case.

Harvesting

Comments received on this theme were concerned that commercial harvesting has potential to cause adverse effects to ecosystems, scenery, soils, cultural resources, water quality, and recreation/tourism.

Agency Response

There are differing opinions on benefits or impacts of harvesting. The Forest Service ensures potential impacts to resources are minimized through project design features, establishment of best management practices, Forest Plan standards and guidelines, timber sale contract clauses, administration of timber sale contracts, and periodic effectiveness and implementation monitoring. Adverse effects identified during implementation are addressed through clauses in the timber sale

contract. See also cultural resources, erosion/soils, scenery, recreation/tourism, and water quality themes.

Herbicides

Comments received on this theme were concerned with potential adverse effects to ecosystems, water quality, and humans as a result of using herbicides. There were also concerns expressed about adverse effects attributed to Glyphosate and its wide-spread use.

Agency Response

As disclosed in Section 3.4, Chapter 3: *Use of herbicides is not expected to have adverse effects on wildlife, water quality, and humans due to proper application as per Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs), product labels, risk assessments, fact sheets, mitigation measures contained in the Vegetation Management in the Appalachian Mountains (VMAM) FEIS, issued in July 1989, Forest Plan standards and guidelines (Forest Plan, page III-181), and design features disclosed in Appendix F. The use of herbicides has the potential to pose some risk to wildlife, water quality, and humans; however, any pesticides applied would be done according to the labeling information, at the lowest rate effective at meeting project objectives in accordance with guidelines for protecting the environment, and manually (not aerially). This risk is further reduced by requiring the applicator to be trained in safety precautions, proper use, and handling of herbicides. Other factors reducing risk are the low level of active ingredient per acre and placement of notice signs in areas where herbicides have been applied. The signs include information on the herbicide used, when it was applied, and who to contact for additional information.*

Glyphosate would not have wide-spread use in the project area only being used on the specific invasive plants—total treatment area is expected to be less than 5 acres in the 2,768 acre project area.

Triclopyr and Glyphosate herbicides used in forestry applications according to label directions and according to the project design features listed in Appendix F would present low risks of environmental impact and low risks to animal and human health. The 30 foot buffer between application areas and streams and 100 foot buffer from public or domestic water sources (#11) and the 200 foot buffer between mixing/loading areas and open water or private lands (#14) would prevent contamination of water.

Alternative D was developed to partially respond to this concern. This alternative proposes to perform the 356 acres of timber stand improvement (TSI) using manual methods only—herbicide would not be used for TSI.

Implementation Monitoring

Comments received on this theme were concerned with monitoring of logging contractors during harvest-related operations. Specific concerns were how monitoring occurs to ensure trees that are supposed to be retained are not cut, if fines occur when unauthorized trees are cut, and how logging trucks would be kept off the dual-designated roads on weekends.

Agency Response

To ensure trees that are supposed to be retained are not cut within a sale area boundary they are painted with tree marking paint that contains a tracer that only the US Forest Service can identify using a tracer paint kit. Trees to be retained are also specified as such in the timber sale contract. All timber sales are administered by a team consisting of a Harvest Inspector (HI), Sales Administrator (SA), Forest Service Representative (FSR), and Contract Officer (CO). This team ensures that all work performed meets contract specifications. Timber Sale contracts have weekly inspections by either the HI or SA who checks stumps for tree marking paint and the sale unit

boundary to ensure undesignated timber has not been cut and removed. If trees are suspected of being cut that are designated to be retained the HI or SA immediately notifies a US Forest Service Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) who will open an investigation. If the investigation shows unauthorized cutting has occurred the purchaser will be charged and will appear in Federal Court. Standard fines are double the current market stumpage value of the tree along with the sale stumpage value which equals 3 times the current market value of the tree. Unauthorized cutting could lead to criminal charges in Federal Court and if found guilty the purchaser could also be charged the cost of the investigation and denied bidding on future Forest Service timber sales.

On dual designated roads/trails a contract clause would be utilized to allow weekday hauling only.

Inadequately Informed

This comment was concerned that the Forest Service did not adequately inform individuals west of Brevard, North Carolina about the August 10, 2006, public meeting held at Brevard College.

Agency Response

The meeting was hosted by members of local and regional environmental organizations. The organizations provided press releases to local newspapers, including *The Hendersonville Times* and *The Asheville Citizen-Times* the week before the August 10, 2006, meeting.

Invasives

Comments received on this theme were concerned the proposal to reconstruct roads, construct temporary roads, and harvest timber would increase the potential for non-native invasive species to become established or increase in the project area, requiring even more herbicide treatments. There was also a concern with the statement in the PA that there is no effective control known for *Lonicera japonica* and thus no recommendation to control it in the project area. As the commenter noted, the same concern is not shared for *Microstegium vinineum* as this species is averse to sunlight and opening the forest would do nothing favorable for it.

Agency Response

Control of *Microstegium vinineum* and *Lonicera japonica* within the analysis area (AA) is not practical because of the size of the AA. These species were not identified within activity areas and thus are not expected to become established where harvest or temporary road construction occurs. Section 3.3, Chapter 3 disclosed that: *The other way in which non-native plants may persist in the area is by continual disturbance. For example, a maintained road shoulder or wildlife field often has persistent ruderal and non-native plant species. These areas are often maintained in an early successional state for wildlife or human benefit. Therefore, it is expected that this proposal could slightly increase the persistence of non-native vegetation in the analysis area. To reduce this effect, it is recommenced that native plants be utilized in wildlife improvement and roadside erosion control plantings. It is recognized that erosion control and wildlife production are the primary goals of seeding areas and some non-native plant species may be highly beneficial to accomplish these goals.* The proposal has been designed to reduce potential for spread of non-native invasive plants—(A) Section 1.4, Chapter 1: *Control existing non-native invasive plant species along haul routes and haul routes adjacent to existing and proposed harvest units with herbicide (Glyphosate and/or Triclopyr) on about five acres.* (B) Section 2.4, Chapter 2: *1) To avoid the possible effect of invasive plant species to this proposal, all known populations of Miscanthus sinensis, Celastrus orbiculaus and Spiraea japonica should be controlled prior to disturbance activities. Miscanthus sinensis was found along Forest Roads. All populations total less than one acre. Control of Miscanthus sinensis, Paulownia tomentosa and Ailanthus altissima is most easily and effectively done by the use of herbicide (Glyphosphate). 2) It is recommended that native plants be utilized in wildlife improvements and roadside erosion control plants. 12) National objectives include reducing impacts from invasive species and to improve the effectiveness of treating selected invasive species on the*

Nation's forests and grasslands. Survey area would be established to monitor control efforts. Survey areas would be established before control treatment, checked during treatment, and within nine months after treatment. A post-treatment evaluation report would be completed and filed in the project file.

Mountain Treasures

Comments received on this theme were concerned with the adverse effects logging could have on the Daniel Ridge Mountain Treasure area. Mountain Treasures were designated by The Wilderness Society as areas they believe contain exceptional forest habitats and rich diversity.

Agency Response

Mountain Treasure areas have not been designated by the Forest Plan and are not managed as specific management areas such as MA 4D which is to "[e]*mphasize high quality habitats for wildlife requiring older forests and freedom from disturbance from motorized vehicles. Allow small widely dispersed openings throughout the management area. Close most roads to private motorized vehicles. Early successional habitat is provided in conjunction with managing suitable timber land in these areas."* (Forest Plan, page III-78). However the Forest Plan emphasizes providing habitat for turkey rather than bear for the three compartments the proposal is within (Forest Plan, page F-2).

No Action

Comments received on this theme were concerned with impacts to ecosystems, water quality, humans, recreation/tourism, aquatic and terrestrial species, and invasive establishment potentially caused by harvest-related activities and herbicide use and requested no such actions be taken in the project area.

Agency Response

Preference for no-action to be taken is noted. The No-action Alternative was considered in detail in Chapter 3 by resource. The decision notice will select an alternative and explain why the other alternatives considered in detail were not selected.

Old Growth

A comment was received on this theme that was concerned with potential impacts to old growth in the area; requested additional old growth be designated; and requested no stands greater than 90 years old be harvested. Comments were also received that stated enough old growth was designated in the project area and not to designate any more.

Agency Response

Over 2,100 acres of medium patch old growth are currently designated in the analysis area and the proposal would designate an additional 457 acres of small patch old growth (Appendix C); 304 acres more than needed to meet Forest Plan standards (Forest Plan, page III-27). Additional old growth designation is not necessary to meet Forest Plan standards.

Prescribed Burning/Wildfires

Comments received on this theme expressed support for prescribed burning with some questioning why the proposal did not have any prescribed burning under Alternatives B and C. A comment stated that grass/forb habitat develop following burns and another comment requested wildfires not be controlled.

Agency Response

The interdisciplinary team reviewed the project area for prescribed burning potential—due to steep slopes and rich coves, it was determined that prescribed burning was not appropriate. Prescribed burning is occurring near Funneltop Mountain and is being analyzed for potential on high elevation balds near Black Balsam Knob.

Public Meeting/Hearing

Comments received on this theme requested the Forest Service hold a public meeting/hearing on the proposal.

Agency Response

A public meeting was hosted on August 10, 2006, at Brevard College by members of local and regional environmental organizations. Representatives of the Forest Service attended the meeting, provided a PowerPoint presentation concerning the proposal, and responded to questions from members of the public.

Recreation/Tourism

Comments received on this theme were concerned of possible adverse effects harvest-related actions could have on recreation/tourism in the area. There were also concerns that the recreation effects analysis was lacking.

Agency Response

The dispersed recreation section was updated since the PA was issued. Section 3.10.2, Chapter 3 now discloses: [t]*here would be temporary impacts to dispersed recreationists primarily noise from logging operations and log hauling. Timber sale contracts are typically for a two year period, and the operating period is March 15th – December 15th. The area of impact would shift as the logging operations are completed and move to other roads (i.e., once logging is completed along Seinard Ridge Road, operation would move to another area, such as Log Hollow Road).*

In addition: *The Final Supplement to the Final Environmental Impact Statement, Volume I and Appendix B of Volume II, for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests address recreational activities and economics at the Forest level. Specifically in Volume I, pgs. IV 60-61p, 'Because variation in employment among alternatives is small, the Forests can easily meet the demand for recreation of the RN2 settings' (Roaded Natural 2, Recreational Opportunity Spectrum, which is the setting for MA 4D). Page B-102 of in Volume II of the Final Supplement displays employment and income values for recreation user days, particularly hunting and other dispersed recreation activities* (Section 3.10.2, Chapter 3).

Road Construction/ Reconstruction, including Roads Analysis Process

Comments received on this theme were concerned with potential adverse effects road construction and reconstruction could have on ecosystems, water quality, recreation/tourism, and spread of invasives. There was also a concern raised that a Roads Analysis Process (RAP) should be completed pursuant to 36 CFR 212.

Agency Response

Road construction with the proposal would only be temporary roads (1¼ miles) and would be ripped, seeded, and closed following harvest activities (0.4 miles of the 1¼ miles would be converted to linear wildlife openings creating about 0.7 acres of permanent grass/forb habitat). To reduce adverse effects of temporary road construction to water quality and aquatic habitat, [T]*emporary roads*

would be constructed to avoid runoff into area streams. In addition, silt fence, straw bales, or brush barriers would be placed along the length of the road where it parallels or crosses a stream as needed to control runoff and stream sedimentation. (Project Design Feature #11, Section 2.4, Chapter 2). See also Invasive theme and Recreation/Tourism theme above.

A RAP has been completed for the proposal and helps identify the necessary transportation system in the project area. Additional analyses would be necessary for future road management in the analysis area.

Road Use

A comment was received on this theme concerned with noise pollution to recreationists caused by vehicular use. There was also a comment concerned with developing/maintaining roads in the project area would be inconsistent with the increasing role the Pisgah Ranger District has as an area with high value for recreationists.

Agency Response

See Recreation/Tourism theme above. To reduce impacts to recreationists that use roads with dual trail designations, [M]*inimum right-of-way clearing limits would be used on roads that have dual trail designation and timber hauling would be limited to Monday-Friday* (Project Design Feature #13, Section 2.4, Chapter 2). The Forest Plan designated management areas on the Pisgah Ranger District. The Case Camp project is within Management Area 4D and the proposal is consistent with MA 4D management direction—wildlife habitat improvement and suitable for timber management.

Scenery

Comments received on this theme were concerned with adverse effects to the scenic resources in the area and near the area that could be caused from harvest-related actions. Specific concerns were raised of scenic impacts from the Blue Ridge Parkway, Looking Glass Rock, and trails within the project area.

Agency Response

A scenery analysis was completed for the project and concluded that with specific project design features, the proposal would adhere to assigned visual quality objectives (Section 3.7.3, Chapter 3). The scenery analysis considered several viewpoints, including the Blue Ridge Parkway, Looking Glass Rock, and trails within the project area (Section 3.7.2.1, Chapter 3). Alternatives C and D were developed to address scenery issues raised by members of the public. Several acres and some stands proposed for harvest in Alternative B were dropped for scenery and other resource concerns to develop Alternatives C and D.

Support (for proposal)

Comments received on this theme provided support for the proposal as designed and believe the area has not been managed adequately to improve wildlife habitat, especially for game species.

Agency Response

Support for the proposal is noted.

Water Quality

Comments received on this theme were concerned with potential adverse effects to water quality caused by road construction/reconstruction, harvesting timber, and herbicide use. A comment

expressed concern with the proposal's ability to meet Clean Water Act anti-degradation regulations for turbidity.

Agency Response

As stated in the EA: *Sedimentation of aquatic habitats within the activity area may occur with the reconstruction of existing system roads, the construction of temporary roads and skid trails, the reinstallation of four culverts that were blown out during large storm events, the replacement of 14 undersized culverts, and the installation of the temporary bridge on Bennett Cove Creek. The installation of the four drainage culverts associated with Forest Service Road (FSR) 5040, FSR 5043 and FSR 5045 may cause some sedimentation if weather conditions are such that sediments could be carried down these ephemeral channels. Sediment loading and turbidity can result in the loss of interstitial habitat within the substrate and cause direct mortality by the crushing or smothering of less mobile organisms such as aquatic invertebrates, fish eggs and juveniles. This effect would be minimized by implementing best management practices (BMPs) including the replacement of culverts within a 48-hour period and seeding and mulching the disturbed area immediately after implementation. Conditions in this area would likely improve after replacing the undersized culverts with larger ones which would allow for more natural stream flow and better passage for aquatic organisms. Many of these undersized culverts which would be replaced with larger ones currently have head cutting and soil erosion around them and downstream of them* (Section 3.1.2.1, Chapter 3).

During and after project implementation, BMPs would be monitored by a Sales Administrator and/or Harvest Inspector to ensure effectiveness. The turbidity standard in these drainages would be met by working when background turbidity is less than 10 NTU, and by working on one stream crossing replacement location at a time, rather than doing several sites at the same time.

As stated in Section 3.1.2.3, Chapter 3: *Water quality is not expected to be adversely affected as long as Forest Plan standards and NC-FPGs are followed, and timber sale contract clauses are implemented. Implementing contract clauses that minimize soil disturbance are the first step in controlling soil displacement and runoff. A Forest Service sale administrator is present during contract actions to ensure clauses relative to designed erosion control are implemented. The implementation and inspection of erosion control measures, and a quick response to correct potentially failing measures, reduces risk of soil disturbed during harvesting to be transported to stream channels as sediment. If these measures do not fully prevent soil displacement and runoff from the harvest area a stream channel buffer is in place to filter surface flow and sediments (all harvest units adjacent to streams with perennial water flow shall be at least 100 feet away from the banks of the stream channel). Stream channels that have been characterized as intermittently flowing (water is not present most of the year and aquatic insects are absent) have a 30 feet stream side buffer in place. Stream side buffers are designed to filter out any sediment coming from the adjacent harvest area as well as provide stream shading and potential large wood.*

Wildlife

Comments received on this theme were mixed – some expressed support for the proposal's objective of improving early-successional wildlife habitat, especially for game species while some expressed concern the proposal would adversely affect some non-game species, especially the cerulean warbler.

Agency Response

The Eastern wild turkey (which is a game species) is identified in the Forest Plan (Amendment 5, p. F-2) as the species whose standards are to be used for primary habitat management objectives for all three compartments within the project area. Improving habitat for *a* game species was one of the primary purposes behind this project, but non-game species that rely on this area were also analyzed for. Although they may not have specific standards detailed in the Forest Plan, non-game and game species alike were submitted to the same degree of analysis in determination of effects for each alternative—this is what is used in recommending a preferred alternative and proposing project

design features. The Wildlife Analysis prepared for this project recognized that although Cerulean warblers are not known in either the Analysis or Activity Areas, their associated habitat of mature hardwood forest on steep slopes and coves is present and they therefore could occur there (WILDA, p. W-4, project record). Furthermore, the analysis of direct and indirect effects for this species recognized the reduction of habitat on the 58 acres of proposed cable harvest units in Alternative B and pointed out that these stands were excluded in Alternative C, which was the preferred alternative (WILDA, p. W-9 & W-11, project record). The 58 acres are also excluded in Alternative D—the Forest Service believes that neither Alternatives C nor D would degrade habitat for this particular species.