

Decision Notice
& Finding of No Significant Impact
**Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas
And For
Privet Control Research Studies**

USDA Forest Service
Oconee Ranger District, Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest
Greene, Oglethorpe, Putnam, Jasper and Jones Counties, Georgia



Decision and Rationale for the Decision

Decision

Based upon my review of the alternatives, I have decided to select **Alternative B** (Proposed Action) of the *Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies* (EA) on the Oconee Ranger District, Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. The Selected Alternative will:

- Herbicide treatment to prepare the site for regeneration of longleaf pine in 14 stands totaling 104 acres. This would be followed by a release treatment within five years of planting, if necessary, within a portion of the following compartment and stand numbers: (Compartment/Stand) 5/06, 5/50, 6/08, 6/11, 6/07, 7/05, 8/08, 8/52, 9/03, 9/08, 9/12, 9/13, 9/14, and 9/16. All of the sites are located on the Hitchiti Experimental Forest and contain a loblolly pine over-story that was killed by Southern Pine Beetle outbreaks, and provides habitat for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker
- Herbicide treatment to prepare the site for regeneration of oak in portions of three stands totaling 20 acres. This will be followed by a release treatment within five years of planting, if needed, within a portion of the following compartment and stand numbers: (Compartment/Stand) 8/08, 107/22, 115/33, and 115/35. These sites contained offsite loblolly pine that will be restored to a mixed hardwood (oak) forest type.
- Herbicide treatment to prepare the site for regeneration of a mixture of pine and oak in portions of 18 stands totaling 236 acres. This will be followed by one release treatment within 5 years of planting, if needed, within a portion of the following compartment and stand numbers: (Compartment/Stand) 107/24, 115/32, 115/37, 125/04, 141/06, 144/07, 144/35, 150/01, 152/10, 153/01, 153/02, 153/19, 154/01, 156/02, 157/12, 161/02, 176/01, and 180/10. These stands contained a loblolly pine over-story that was killed by the Southern Pine Beetle. The proposed treatments will help to re-establish a mixed pine-oak community in these locations.
- Herbicide treatment to release planted and natural pine and oak trees in portions of 6 areas, totaling 48 acres. The areas are located within a portion of the following compartment and stand numbers: (Compartment/Stand) 115/18, 115/33, 155/37, 119/01, 144/37 and 172/05. These areas contained a loblolly pine over-story that was killed by the Southern Pine Beetle. The proposed treatments will help desired pine and oak regeneration that is already present become re-established into a mixed pine-oak stand type.
- Herbicide treatment for a research study, by the Southern Research Station, for the efficiency of a combination of mechanical and herbicide treatments for Privet (Invasive species) control within the Schull Shoals Experimental Forest. Privet control is an important part of ecosystem restoration. The study area consists of approximately 20 acres within a portion of stand 30 and 31 in compartment 166; and stand 62 in compartment 170.

Treatment of stump sprouts and single stems of selected species for site preparation will use one of the following application methods 1) basal stem spraying (for trees and shrubs less than 3 inches in diameter) with an herbicide with the active ingredient triclopyr (ester formulation); and 2) hack and squirt method (for trees and shrubs between 3 and 8 inches in diameter) with an herbicide with the

active ingredient triclopyr (amine formulation) or glyphosate, depending on the time of year of application. 3) Cutting trees and then treating the cut stumps with an herbicide with the active ingredient triclopyr (amine) or glyphosate to prevent stump sprouts from the cut trees from becoming established. Treatment of species such as red maple, sweet gum, and various under-story brush species would occur throughout the stand. The objective is to control competing vegetation to allow species such as oak or pine to re-establish.

Release of planted and natural oak and pine trees would occur with a spot foliar treatment with a herbicide mixture containing the active ingredients triclopyr (ester) and imazapyr.

Background

As stated in Section 1.3 of the EA, the objectives of the proposal are, through harvesting and related activities, to:

- Improve the existing condition and composition of forested stands with Southern Pine Beetle mortality.
- Improve the existing condition of acorn mast production and wildlife habitat;
- Maintain and restore natural communities
- Restore long-term RCW habitat conditions in areas impacted by SPB mortality.

I believe the Selected Alternative accomplishes these objectives in the most cost efficient manner.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the Selected Alternative, I considered two other alternatives in detail. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in Section 2.3 of the EA.

Alternative A – No Action

Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. I did not select this alternative for several reasons. Under this alternative, the projects described in the proposed action would not be accomplished. No management actions would be taken to improve the existing condition of the environment in the project area. There would be no release or site preparation done in stands with large southern pine beetle mortality, and no wildlife habitat restoration or improvements would occur. The privet control study would not be undertaken. This alternative is likely inconsistent with the RCW Recovery Plan.

Alternative C – Manual Methods

This alternative would treat the same areas, but would use manual methods exclusively, either through a Forest Service contract or with Forest Service employees, to site prepare and release planted and native seedlings. Manual release methods would require a minimum of two or three follow up treatments because of continuous sprouting and re-sprouting of the competing vegetation. This alternative would cost more than twice as much to implement and Alternative B.

The Chinese privet control/eradication study would not take place under this alternative.

Other Alternatives Not Considered

Section 2.2 of the EA disclosed one alternative I considered but eliminated from detailed study. Since it was not considered in detail in the EA, it was not considered in the range of alternatives for my decision. The exclusive use of prescribed fire to accomplish site preparation and release was considered but dropped from detailed study. In many locations, fuel loadings are too heavy to warrant the safe use of prescribed fire for site preparation. In addition, there is no control over species selectivity with the use of fire in a release treatment. With the limited number of available burning days, it would be difficult to implement the proposals in a timely manner.

Public Involvement

On April 27, 2004, a scoping letter explaining the proposal and requesting site-specific information on it was mailed to 71 individuals and organizations that have expressed previous interest in management on the Oconee Ranger District. In addition, the proposal appeared in both print and internet versions of the quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. A legal notice requesting comments was also published in *The Eatonton Messenger* on May 6, 2004. Two written and verbal responses were received during scoping.

Issues were identified from public comments received during the scoping period and internal management concerns. Analysis responding to key issues is evaluated and disclosed in Chapter 3 – Environmental Effects.

A 30-day review of the pre-decisional Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies EA was initiated on August 25, 2005. No individuals and organizations responded with substantive comments (36 CFR 215.12) during the comment period.

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 my finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action (Sections 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 Chapter 3; and Section VIII - Appendix D; Table 1 - Appendix E Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies EA).
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety and implementation will be in accordance with mitigation measures (Section 1.7 Chapter 1; Section 2.4, Chapter 2; and Section 3.1.2, Appendix A, B, and C; Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies EA).
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 1.7.8, Chapter 1, Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies EA).

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 (Section 1.7, Chapter 1 and Sections 3.1.2, 3.2.2, Chapter 3, Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies EA).
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 1.6 and 1.7, Chapter 1 and Sections 3.1.2, 3.2.2, Chapter 3, Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies EA).
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 1.6 and 1.7, Chapter 1 and Sections 3.1.2, 3.2.2, Chapter 3, Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies EA).
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant (Sections 1.7.1, 1.7.2, 1.7.3, 1.7.4, 1.7.5, 1.7.6, 1.7.7, and 1.7.8, Chapter 1, and Sections 3.1.2, 3.2.2, Chapter 3, Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies EA).
8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because sites are either avoided or protected (Section 1.7.4, Chapter 1, Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies EA). The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources, because the sites are either avoided or protected (Section 1.7.4, Chapter 1, Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies EA).
9. The action is not likely to adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or their habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973, because the project entails restoration of SPB mortality to desirable or native tree species (Sections 3.1.2 and 3.2.2, Chapter 3 Appendix B and Appendix D, Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies EA). On August 24th, 2005, the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service concurred that the proposed action will have effects ranging from beneficial to not likely to adversely affect any species that is federally listed as endangered or threatened.
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 (Section 1.7.8, Chapter 1, Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies EA). The action is consistent with the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests (Section 1.3.1, Chapter 1, Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies EA).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

My decision to implement the Selected Alternative is consistent with the intent of Forest Plan's long-term goals and objectives as stated in section 1.3.1, Chapter 1, Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies EA. The project was designed to conform with land and resource management plan standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines.

Administrative Review and Contacts

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12. No substantive comments expressing concerns were received during the 30 day comment period relating to the proposed action(s) analyzed and documented in the EA (36 CFR 215.12(e)(1)).

For further information on this decision, contact Bill Nightingale, District Ranger or Tim Walker, Project Leader, Oconee Ranger District, 1199 Madison Road, Eatonton, Georgia 31024. Phone: 706-485-7110;

Implementation Date

As per 36 CFR 215.9(c)(1), when no substantive comments are received during the 30 day comment period relating to the proposed action(s) analyzed and documented in the EA, implementation of this decision may occur immediately after publication (36 CFR 215.7(b)) of a decision documented in a Decision Notice.

/s/ William B. Nightingale _____
WILLIAM B. NIGHTINGALE
District Ranger
Oconee Ranger District

September 26, 2005 _____
Date

APPENDIX A: Decision Notice List of Treatment Sites

Compartment -Stand	Acres	Pre Treatment Forest Type	Post Treatment Forest Type	Site Preparation (1)	Release (2)	Forest Plan Management Prescription
5-06	18	Loblolly Pine	Longleaf	X	X	3.B
5-50	10	Loblolly Pine	Longleaf	X	X	3.B
6-08	3	Loblolly Pine	Longleaf	X	X	3.B
6-11	5	Loblolly Pine	Longleaf	X	X	3.B
6-07	15	Loblolly Pine	Longleaf	X	X	3.B
7-05	5	Loblolly Pine	Longleaf	X	X	3.B
8-08	2	Loblolly Pine	Longleaf	X	X	3.B
8-08	5	Loblolly Pine	Oak Hickory	X	X	3.B
8-52	5	Loblolly Pine	Longleaf	X	X	3.B
9-03	4	Loblolly Pine	Longleaf	X	X	3.B
9-08	3	Loblolly Pine	Longleaf	X	X	3.B
9-12	4	Loblolly Pine	Longleaf	X	X	3.B
9-13	20	Loblolly Pine	Longleaf	X	X	3.B
9-14	7	Loblolly Pine	Longleaf	X	X	3.B
9-16	3	Loblolly Pine	Longleaf	X	X	3.B
107-22	5	Loblolly Pine	Oak Hickory	X	X	8.D.1
107-24	10	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	8.D.1
1115-18	10	Loblolly Pine	Longleaf		X	8.D.1
115-32	7	Loblolly Pine	Longleaf/Oak	X	X	8.D.1
115-32	10	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak		X	8.D.1
115-35	10	Loblolly Pine	Oak Hickory	X	X	8.D.1
115-37	10	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak		X	8.D.1
115-37	15	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	8.D.1
119-01	7	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak		X	8.D.1
125-04	7	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	8.D
141-06	7	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	8.D
144-07	15	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	8.D
144-35	10	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	8.D
144-37	7	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak		X	8.D
150-01	30	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	8.D
152-10	15	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	8.D
153-01	25	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	8.D
153-02	15	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	8.D
153-19	10	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	8.D
154-01	20	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	8.D
157-02	10	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	8.D

Compartment -Stand	Acres	Pre Treatment Forest Type	Post Treatment Forest Type	Site Preparation (1)	Release (2)	Forest Plan Management Prescription
157-12	10	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	8.D
161-02	10	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	8.D
166-30	5	Oak/Willow	Privet Control	X	X	3.B
166-31	5	Oak/Willow	Privet Control	X	X	3.B
170-62	10	Sweetgum/Pop	Privet Control	X	X	4.E.1
172-05	4	Loblolly Pine	Oak		X	9.H
176-01	10	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	9.H
180-10	10	Loblolly Pine	Lob/Oak	X	X	9.H
Total Acres	428					

1 Treatment of stump sprouts and single stems of selected species for site preparation will occur using one of the following application methods 1) basal stem spraying (for trees and shrubs less than 3 inches in diameter) with an herbicide with the active ingredient triclopyr (ester formulation); and 2) hack and squirt method (for trees and shrubs between 3 and 8 inches in diameter) with an herbicide with the active ingredient triclopyr (amine formulation) or glyphosate, depending on the time of year of application. 3) Cutting trees and then treating the cut stumps with an herbicide with the active ingredient triclopyr (amine) or glyphosate to prevent stump sprouts from the cut trees from becoming established. Treatment of species such as red maple and sweetgum would occur throughout the stand. The objective is to control competing vegetation to allow species such as oak, hickory, loblolly and longleaf to re-establish themselves or for artificial regeneration to survive.

2 Release of planted and natural oak, hickory, loblolly and longleaf trees would occur with a spot foliar treatment with an herbicide mixture containing the active ingredients triclopyr (ester) and imazapyr.

Figure DN-1: Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies Vicinity Map

Herbicide Use in SPB Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies Oconee Ranger District

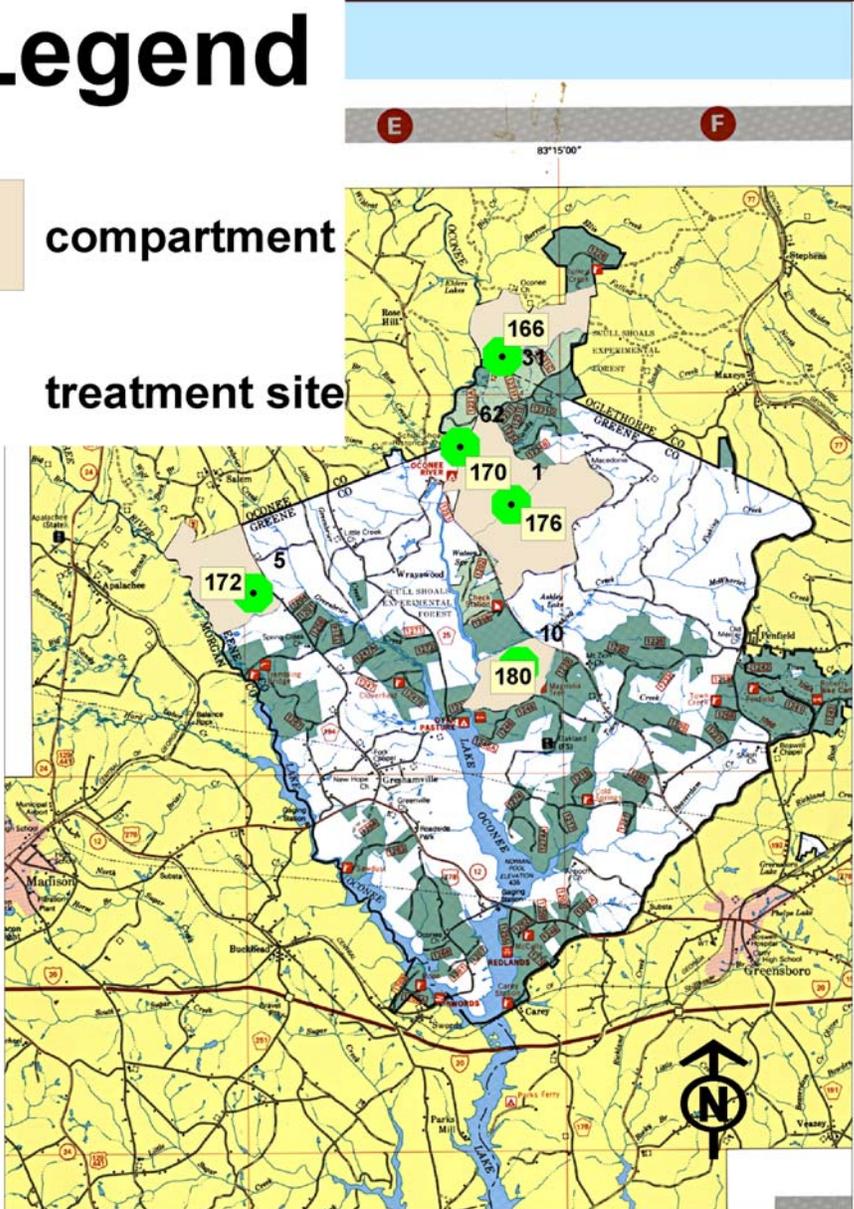
Legend



compartment



treatment site



Data shown on this map are for reference only. The Forest Service strives to obtain accurate and precise data; however, there may be some errors in these data
<mapscale 1 inch = 2.8 miles>

Figure DN-2: Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies Vicinity Map

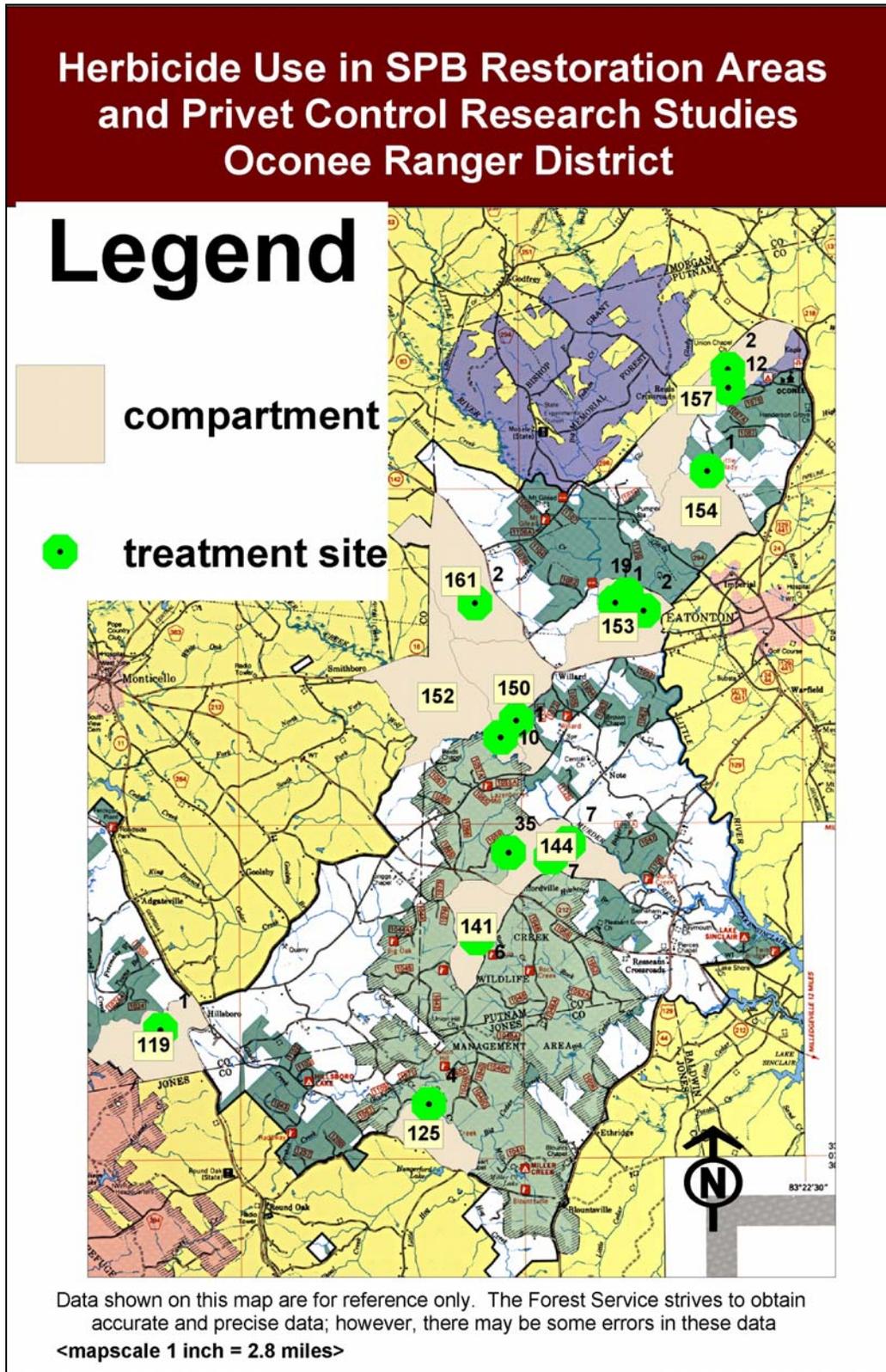


Figure DN-3: Herbicide Use in Southern Pine Beetle Restoration Areas and Privet Control Research Studies Vicinity Map

