

# **DECISION MEMO**

## **Stonewall Knob Pitch Pine – Oak Restoration**

USDA Forest Service – Chattahoochee–Oconee National Forests – Chattooga River Ranger District  
Rabun County, Georgia

### **1. DECISION**

**I have decided to approve the proposal for public fuel wood gathering, selective cutting of remaining trees, natural (oaks and other species) and planted (pitch pine) reforestation, and manual competition control for young trees. These actions will take place over the next six years on a 19-acre area on Stonewall Knob Road (FDR 21A). The area is located west of Tiger, Georgia, and is shown on the attached map.**

Members of the public will be allowed to gather firewood from a portion of the trees within the area, while reserving approximately 250-300 trees across the area. Species reserved from fuel wood gathering will include oaks, pitch pine, flowering dogwood, and others. Reserve trees will be banded with paint and **all** permittees told individually how to identify them (concern of Sisk, 1/25/08; Gatins (Georgia Forest Watch), 1/25/08, Myers, 1/23/08). The area will be checked periodically to ensure persons cutting trees have permits and are staying within the area (Sisk, 1/25/08).

Existing system roads will be used to get to the fuel wood area. No new roads will be needed.

All standards (Forest Plan) and Best Management Practices (BMP's) (available for review at the Chattooga River District office) will be followed, including but not limited to the items listed below:

- ✓ Water bars will be placed on all exposed soils within the area once a majority of the firewood has been removed. Water bars will turn water off of exposed areas and reduce the velocity of the water; all entries into the stand will be closed to deter future illegal all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use (concern of Gatins, 1/25/08; Sisk, 1/25/08).
- ✓ All exposed soil will be fertilized, seeded and mulched to establish vegetative cover as soon as possible after closure. The area will be monitored during fuel wood gathering for exposed soils requiring immediate treatment.
- ✓ Maintenance of the Stonewall Knob Road will be completed periodically to minimize erosion and potential sedimentation and provide for safe access (concern of Sisk & Gatins, 1/25/08).
- ✓ Den trees will be reserved by painted bands and protected from cutting during the other actions. (FW-010).

I have determined that this action falls under categories in the Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 that exclude it from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment. Specifically, the fuel wood gathering falls under Category 8, section 31.12, which includes approval of short-term special uses of National Forest System lands. Firewood gathering for personal use under this project includes removal of wood using chain saws and pickup trucks. The regeneration actions fall

under Categories 5 and 6 of Section 31.2, which includes “regeneration of an area to native tree species, including site preparation which does not involve the use of herbicides or result in vegetation type conversion.” The possible manual release falls under Category 6 of Section 31.2, which includes “timber stand ... improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction.”

I have also determined that there are no extraordinary circumstances existing that may cause the project to have significant effects. Specifically:

- ❑ The fuel wood area does not have steep slopes or highly erosive soils. The "Soil Survey of Rabun and Towns Counties, Georgia" (available for review at the Chattooga River District office) shows the Hayesville soil series covering the area. This soil series is rated as having moderate erosion hazard and slight equipment limitations (project file.) Moderate erosion hazard means that “some attention must be given to controlling erosion.” Mitigating measures that apply to erosion include prompt revegetation of exposed soils and installation of broad-based dips or waterbars that will minimize erosion within the area and sediment carried off the site. The hazards and the mitigation are ordinary and routine and clearly are not significant within the context of this project.
- ❑ The action will not affect any federally Endangered or Threatened species, nor impact any Forest Sensitive species. It will not result in a trend toward federal listing under the Endangered Species Act, or a loss of viability on the Forest (see soils information in project file.)
- ❑ No jurisdictional wetlands (as defined in the Forest Service Manual 2527.05--8), floodplains, or municipal watersheds will be affected by this project (project file).
- ❑ No congressionally designated area, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas will be affected by this project. The project is not within a research natural area.
- ❑ The project area is not within a current inventoried roadless area.
- ❑ No known historic or prehistoric sites which are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places will be affected by this project (project file).
- ❑ The cumulative effects of this project combined with others in the foreseeable future will not be significant.
- ❑ The project area does not meet minimum old growth requirements for the applicable forest community (project file).

## **2. PURPOSE AND NEED**

Most of the pitch pine trees within this stand have been killed by the southern pine beetle (SPB) during the past epidemic years of 1999-2002 and 1995-1996. The actions in this decision will contribute towards meeting Goals 3 and 8 in the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Chattahoochee and

Oconee National Forests (Forest Plan) by restoring a mixture of pitch pine and oak to this site. Specifically, this project will increase the acreage restored and maintained in pitch pine mixtures, as directed in Objectives 3.2 and 8.2 in the Forest Plan.

In addition, this designated fuel wood area would help supply some of the local demand from the public for firewood for those who heat their homes with wood.

### **3. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Scoping both internally and externally raised no concerns that were determined to be extraordinary circumstances.

A letter detailing this project was sent out to 83 individuals, agencies and public organizations on January 8, 2008 (see project file). Four responses were received. My staff have responded to concerns in these responses throughout this Decision Memo, identifying the concern where it is addressed.

### **4. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS**

This project is consistent with the Forest Plan, as amended. The actions in this project fully comply with the Forest-wide standards (Forest Plan, Chapter 2) as well as direction in Management Prescription 9.H, Management, Maintenance, and Restoration of Plant Associations to their Ecological Potential (Forest Plan, pages 3-167 to 3-170).

The fuel wood gathering followed by the natural and planted regeneration and competition control are an appropriate method to meet the goals, objectives, and standards given in the Forest Plan. The activities described are recommended by the Forest Plan for this forest community (pages F-47 to F-51 in Appendix F).

State-approved Best Management Practices (BMP's) will be met and this project will comply with the Clean Water Act.

This project follows the Forest-wide and Management Prescription (MP) standards as mentioned above. Specifically:

- ❑ This project is consistent with the desired conditions for the specific MP's within the project area, and will help meet specific goals and objectives established for MP 9.H.
- ❑ This project was chosen after considering economic and environmental aspects of various renewable resources and protection of forest resources to provide for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife and fish. These resource values are discussed throughout the DM.
- ❑ This project will provide for diversity of plant and animal communities based on the suitability and capability of the land area in order to meet the overall multiple-use objectives. See the Decision and Purpose and Need sections for the project on pages 1-2.

- This project will not produce substantial and permanent impairment of site productivity and will ensure conservation of soil and water resources. See important mitigation measures listed on page 1.

## **5. IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

This decision will be implemented immediately.

## **6. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES**

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f).

## **7. CONTACT PERSON**

For further information concerning this decision or the appeal process contact Steve Cole by phone, letter, e-mail, or in person. The address of the Chattooga River Ranger District office is 809 Highway 441 South, Clayton, GA 30525, and the phone number is (706) 782-3320. Contact Steve by e-mail at [sncole@fs.fed.us](mailto:sncole@fs.fed.us).

## **8. SIGNATURE AND DATE OF RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL**

*David W. Jensen*

**DAVID W. JENSEN**

District Ranger

*February 11, 2008*

**DATE**