



File Code: 1950-1
Date: May 6, 2008

Scoping Notice

Pre-Commercial Thinning and Swamp Creek Road Repair

Dear Interested Citizen,

The Conasauga Ranger District of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests is seeking comments on the following projects:

- Pre-commercial thinning of an estimated 160 acres of young pine trees
- Repair of stream crossings along the Swamp Creek Road

Your comments and suggestions may be used to modify the specific methods described in the proposed projects. Please be as specific as possible when responding. Comments received, including names, become part of the project record and are available for public review. We would appreciate receiving your comments on the projects by **Monday, June 9, 2008**.

Pre-Commercial Thinning

This proposal would pre-commercially thin an estimated 160 acres of young pine trees on National Forest System lands in Walker and Chattooga Counties, Georgia. The thinning would take place in the fall of 2008.

I intend to categorically exclude this proposal from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment because it falls under the intent of Forest Service Handbook Chapter 1909.15, Category 6 of section 31.2, "Timber stand ...improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides and do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction."

Purpose and Need

Stands proposed for pre-commercial thinning were previously harvested and then planted with shortleaf and/or longleaf pine and are now between 9-11 years old. The stands are dense and crowded, and the trees are competing for sunlight, water, and nutrients. This competition stresses the trees and makes them more susceptible to insect and disease infestation, particularly southern pine beetle infestation.

The purpose and need for this project is to reduce the amount of competition between trees for light and water resources in dense, overcrowded stands and decrease the risk of insect and disease infestation.

This project is consistent with the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest's Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) Objective 40.1 which provides direction to "maintain forest stocking levels at no more than "fully stocked" for species, age, and site quality with priority treatment given to those vegetation communities at highest risk for insect and disease attack" (Forest Plan, p. 2-39).



These stands fall within Forest Plan Management Prescription 9.H- Management, Maintenance, and Restoration of Plant Associations to their Ecological Potential, where active management to reduce the risk of damage from native and non-native pests is emphasized (Forest Plan, p.3-169).

Proposed Action

This treatment would be implemented by using chainsaws or brush saws to cut down trees, which would be left on site. An estimated 200 trees per acre is the desired density for these stands. Shortleaf pine, longleaf pine, oak, and hickory would be the priority species to be left in the stands. The desired future composition would be a pine forest with a strong hardwood component. No roads will be built. The following table (Table 1) provides specific information for each stand proposed for treatment.

Table 1: Pre-Commercial Thinning Project Stand Information

Compartment	Stand	Acres	Forest Type	Age (Years)	Treatment
920	25	19	Shortleaf	9	Leave approximately 200 shortleaf, oak, and hickory trees per acre and remove surrounding adjacent trees. In the absence of shortleaf pine or mast bearing species leave loblolly pine.
921	1	35	Shortleaf	9	
922	6	27	Shortleaf	9	
946	11	40	Shortleaf	11	
946	13	40	Shortleaf	11	
Total acres		161			

Swamp Creek Road Repair

This proposal would conduct repair work along the Swamp Creek Road on National Forest in Whitfield County, Georgia. This project is proposed to take place in the late summer of 2008.

I intend to categorically exclude this proposal from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment because it falls under the intent of Forest Service Handbook Chapter 1909.15, Category 4 of section 31.12, “Repair and maintenance of roads, trails, and landline boundaries.” The work also falls within the context of Category 7 of section 21.2, “Modification or maintenance of stream...habitat improvement structures using native materials and normal practices.”

Purpose and Need

Public access to the Swamp Creek Road located on National Forest has been eliminated by the construction of a gate on private property. The road crosses Swamp Creek multiple times and continues to be a source of sedimentation. The purpose of this project is to repair the areas along the road which are sediment sources, restore riparian structure and function, and protect water quality.

The road falls within Management Prescription (MP) 11- Riparian Corridors and MP 4.1- Natural Areas- Few Open Roads. This project is consistent with the management direction for MP 11 because it would improve riparian and stream conditions. The project is consistent with MP 4.1 because it calls for the rehabilitation of roads that don’t contribute to the objective of preserving natural ecosystems (Forest Plan p 3-97).

Proposed Action

The proposal would repair areas of the stream bank which has been damaged by vehicle crossings, and would close and restore user-created side roads, trails, and campsites to reduce sediment run-off. The work would be accomplished with the use of dozers and mini-excavators along 2 miles of road. All disturbed soils would be seeded, fertilized, and mulched immediately after the project is completed

How to Provide Comments

You may send your comments and suggestions as follows:

Comment Format	Contact Information
Hard Copy Letter	Conasauga Ranger District Attn: PCT Project or Swamp Creek Road Project 3941 Highway 76 Chatsworth, GA 30705
E-mail	rbstokes@fs.fed.us Subject: PCT Project or Swamp Creek Road Project
FAX	706-695-1872
Phone	Ruth Stokes, 706-695-6736, x 105

The electronic versions of the information provided in this scoping letter are available on the Forest’s website at: www.fs.fed.us/conf/.

If you have questions or need additional information concerning this project, please contact Ruth Stokes, Wildlife Biologist, at 706-695-6736 x 103.

Thank you for your interest in the management of the Conasauga Ranger District.

Sincerely,

/s/ Michele H. Jones

MICHELE H. JONES
District Ranger

Enclosure: Pre-Commercial Thinning Project Map
Swamp Creek Road Project Map