

**DECISION NOTICE  
AND  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)  
FOR  
DAVENPORT MOUNTAIN FOREST STEWARDSHIP PROJECT**

**USDA Forest Service  
Chattahoochee National Forest  
Brasstown Ranger District  
Union County, Georgia**

**BACKGROUND**

The Davenport Mountain area is located on the western shore of Lake Nottely in Union County, Georgia. It is the largest contiguous block of National Forest land on Lake Nottely. Most of the land was acquired by TVA in the 1930's for construction of Lake Nottely and was conveyed to the Forest Service in 1959. The Forest Service acquired additional tracts in the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's. Mixed shortleaf pine/oak forests were the predominant forest community of the area at the time of Forest Service acquisition. However, in the last 30 years, the area has experienced several outbreaks of Southern Pine Beetle (SPB), which has greatly impacted the native shortleaf pine communities. Shortleaf pines have been eliminated or have been greatly reduced in many of the mixed shortleaf pine-oak stands. Many of the larger SPB spots have been regenerated to white pine plantations.

**PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION**

The purpose and need for this project is to move the area towards the desired condition in the Forest Plan by restoring the area to a more natural appearing landscape. This will be accomplished by restoring approximately 800 acres of existing white pine plantations and degraded oak stands to shortleaf pine-oak forests.

In addition to moving the area towards the desired conditions, this project also will address a number of Forest Plan goals and objectives. Along with the maintenance and restoration of approximately 800 acres of native shortleaf pine-oak ecosystems, the project will also provide for a diversity of wildlife habitats by renovating 20 acres of existing wildlife fields order to establish more desirable forage species (clover and native warm-season grasses); enhance fishing habitat through the construction of fish attractors/cover in Lake Nottely; provide for high quality recreational opportunities and improved safety on the Davenport Mountain ATV trail system through trail relocation; reduce risks of wildfire by prescribed burning and the construction of a fire break along 2

miles of property line adjoining private subdivisions; protect and enhance scenic values of the Davenport Mountain area; and control invasive species.

The primary goals and objectives of the Forest Plan that this proposal addresses are:

**Goal 3** - Enhance, restore, manage, and create habitats as required for wildlife and plant communities, including disturbance-dependent forest types (Addresses objectives related to the restoration of shortleaf pine forests (Objective 3.1), woodlands (Objective 3.4), oak and oak-pine forests (Objectives 3.6 and 3.7).

**Goal 8** – Contribute to the maintenance or restoration of native tree species...(Addresses objectives related to maintenance of shortleaf pine forests in desired conditions (Objective 8.1))

The following goals and objectives of the Forest Plan will also be met with the implementation of this proposal.

**Goal 29** – Protect and enhance the scenic/aesthetic values and Landscape Character of the National Forest lands in the Southern Appalachians...by meeting all adopted Scenic Integrity Objectives on Forest Service lands within individual management prescriptions.

**Goal 30** – Provide a variety of Landscape Character themes with the predominant themes being Natural Appearing, Natural Evolving, and variations of these themes.

**Goal 58** - Reduce risks of wildfire through fuel treatments that restore and maintain conditions of fire regime Condition Class 1 to the extent practicable (Addresses objectives related to the wildland urban interface (Objectives 58.1 and 58.2)

## **DECISION**

Based on my review of the Final EA, including the discussion of the alternatives considered, the issues associated with this proposal, the environmental effects analysis, and my personal knowledge of the area, I have decided to select the actions in alternative 2 with the modification that FS road 143A will be closed to regular vehicle traffic and remain open as an ATV trail only. Once this is accomplished the FS road 143A will be removed from the Forest Road Inventory. The following actions will help restore approximately 800 acres to a native shortleaf pine-oak woodland community. I have decided the creation of a fire break near the developing wildland urban interface areas will help prevent a catastrophic fire in the future. The wildlife improvement projects listed below will also enhance the habitat for several different species of wildlife. These projects include the following actions:

**1. Thinning of white pine plantations:** This activity will consist of thinning approximately 347 acres of white pine plantations (Table 1). The ages of these plantations range from 13 to 43 years. If the younger pine stands are of commercial size

when the project is implemented they will be thinned as part of the planned timber sale. If they are not of commercial size, they will be mechanically thinned leaving the stems on site. These stands are located as follows: Compartment 407, Stands 3 & 6, Compartment 408, Stands 1, 2, 3, 11, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 29, 30, 31, & 34 and Compartment 416, Stands 2, 10 & 25. Most of these areas have approximately 200 to 300 stems per acre. These trees will be reduced to approximately 60 to 80 stems per acre. This will create enough space to start converting these stands back to a mixed shortleaf pine and oak forest type. This conversion will involve periodic prescribed burning and interplanting of oak and shortleaf pine seedlings. Approximately 1 mile of an existing temporary use (for management activities) road will be required, utilizing existing, closed roads and portions of the existing ATV trail.

The areas planted to natural oak and shortleaf pine trees will be thinned of competing vegetation if needed, using herbicides after 1 to 3 years of planting using a combination of the following application methods: 1) a spot foliar treatment (spraying on the leaves) with an herbicide mixture containing the active ingredients triclopyr (ester) (examples “Garlon”, “Weed Be Gone”) and imazapyr (example “Arsenal”); 2) basal stem spraying (for trees and shrubs less than 3 inches in diameter) with an herbicide with the active ingredient triclopyr (ester formulation); 3) Cut stem 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 (example “Round Up”), depending on the time of year of application; and 4) 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 which will inhibit the grow of the planted native oak and shortleaf pine seedlings. The objective is to control competing vegetation to allow species such as shortleaf pine and oak to be re-established. Application rates for herbicides are discussed in further detail in Appendix B, Results of Risk Analysis in the Environmental Assessment.

**Table 1. White pine stands proposed for thinning in the Davenport Mountain Forest Stewardship project.**

<b>Comp/Stand</b>	<b>Forest Type</b>	<b>Age Year</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Treatment</b>
407/03	White Pine	1983	23	Thinning
407/06	White Pine	1983	23	Thinning
408/01	White Pine	1983	33	Thinning
408/02	White Pine	1992	36	Thinning
408/03	White Pine	1983	12	Thinning
408/11	White Pine	1992	12	Thinning
408/14	White Pine	1988	20	Thinning
408/16	White Pine	1990	10	Thinning
408/17	White Pine	1982	16	Thinning
408/19	White Pine	1984	21	Thinning
408/20	White Pine	1983	26	Thinning
408/21	White Pine	1962	15	Thinning
408/23	White Pine	1992	10	Thinning
408/29	White Pine	1964	7	Thinning
408/30	White Pine	1988	16	Thinning
408/31	White Pine	1985	21	Thinning
408/34	White Pine	1983	20	Thinning

416/02	White Pine	1962	11	Thinning
416/10	White Pine	1988	6	Thinning
416/25	White Pine	1970	9	Thinning

**2. Thinning of Virginia pine plantation:** This activity will take place in Compartment 408, Stand 9 (44 acres). This stand was planted in 1990 with a Virginia pine and shortleaf pine mixture. In this stand, all Virginia pine would be removed leaving shortleaf pine with a stem density of approximately 40 trees per acre. The stand would be allowed to become a shortleaf pine/hardwood type. Oak seedlings would be planted if needed to fulfill the hardwood component of this stand. If needed, herbicide release of the planted seedlings would be accomplished using the methods described in Item #1 above.

**3. Oak/ Shortleaf Pine Woodland Restoration:** This activity will take place on approximately 390 acres in Compartment 416, stands 4-9,11-13,15, 20, 22, and, 23 (Table 2). The oak/shortleaf pine stands in this area have had repeated mortality from Southern Pine Beetle attacks and wind throw from Hurricane Opal in 1995. This area will be thinned and followed by periodic treatments of prescribed burning and herbicide as needed over the next ten years to help create an open oak-pine woodland community. Thinning will take place only on the upper and mid-slopes. Areas within these stands that are cove sites will not be thinned. Remnant shortleaf pines will be left in the thinned areas provide a seed source and to retain the representation of this important native species in the oak-pine ecosystem. Approximately 3/4 mile of temporary use road will be required, utilizing existing, closed roads and portions of the OHV trail.

If needed, herbicides will be used in conjunction with burning to reduce the vigorous sprouting of shade tolerant and fire intolerant species that take light, water and nutrients from desired herbaceous ground cover using the methods described in Item #1 above.

**Table 2. Stands proposed for Oak/Shortleaf Pine Woodland Restoration in the Davenport Mountain Forest Stewardship project.**

Comp/Stand	Forest Type	Age Year	Acres	Treatment
416/04	White Oak-N. Red Oak-Hickory	1910	63	Thin& Rx Burn
416/05	White Oak-N. Red Oak-Hickory	1902	50	Thin& Rx Burn
416/06	Loblolly Pine - Hardwood	1978	32	Thin& Rx Burn
416/07	White Oak-N. Red Oak-Hickory	1947	33	Thin& Rx Burn
416/08	Shortleaf Pine	1927	8	Thin& Rx Burn
416/09	White Oak-N. Red Oak-Hickory	1927	7	Thin& Rx Burn
416/11	Shortleaf Pine	1927	8	Thin& Rx Burn
416/12	White Oak-N. Red Oak-Hickory	1927	21	Thin& Rx Burn
416/13	White Oak-N. Red Oak-Hickory	1978	72	Thin& Rx Burn
416/15	White Oak-N. Red Oak-Hickory	1910	30	Thin& Rx Burn
416/20	White Oak-N. Red Oak-Hickory	1927	27	Thin& Rx Burn
416/22	Southern Red Oak – Yellow Pine	1927	26	Thin& Rx Burn
416/23	Southern Red Oak – Yellow Pine	1927	13	Thin& Rx Burn

**4. Construction of firebreak in the Wildland Urban Interface:** This activity will remove some of the fuel buildup adjacent to private property along approximately two miles of National Forest System Lands boundary line on the southern edge Davenport

Mountain. Most of this fuel consists of very thick young pine trees adjacent to private property. During the thinning operations mentioned in Activity 1 above, trees and brush will be pulled back 40 to 50 feet from the property boundary. If any of the stands near the property boundary are not of commercial size, the material will be removed manually or some material maybe chipped or mulched and left on the site.

**5. Fish and Wildlife improvement projects:** This will include construction of fish attractors/cover in Lake Nottely, and the renovation of existing wildlife openings on the Brown Tract (located adjacent to Davenport Mt Compartment 408) and the Davenport Tract (located in Compartment 407). See Figure 2 Map of Alternative 2 (Proposed Action).

The fish attractors will be constructed of donated Christmas Trees and brush resulting from thinnings. These brush structures will be placed in selected coves in Lake Nottely during the winter drawdown period.

Existing wildlife openings dominated by fescue and annual weedy species will be renovated to order to establish more desirable species. To control the fescue present in these fields, an herbicide treatment will be applied prior to planting. Glyphosate (example “Round Up”) will be applied at 1.6 pounds active ingredient per acre using a boom sprayer pulled by a farm tractor. If needed a spot herbicide retreatment may be applied after planting to control any residual fescue. Individual fields will then be limed, fertilized, and planted to either clover and other cool season grasses (approximately 10 acres) or native warm season grasses (approximately 10 acres). Native warm season grasses to be established will include big blue stem (*Andropogon gerardii*), little blue stem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), and switch grass (*Panicum virgatum*). If needed, prescribed fire will be used to remove heavy thatch accumulations prior to planting and to maintain the fields established in native warm season grasses.

**6. Relocation of ATV Trail:** The section of The Davenport Mountain ATV Trail that runs concurrent with System Road 143A will now be an ATV-only Trail. The FS Road 143A will be closed to regular vehicular traffic and removed from the Forest Road Inventory.

**7. Reforestation of Southern Pine Beetle damaged stands:** This activity will include the site preparation and planting of two stands that were killed by southern pine beetle attacks. Stand 32 (12 acres) of Compartment 408 and Stand 24 (7 acres) of 416 will be planted with shortleaf pine and white oak seedlings. Chainsaws, prescribed burning and/or herbicides will be used in preparing these stands for planting. These seedlings will be thinned of competing vegetation if needed, using herbicides after 1 to 3 years of planting. Herbicide site preparation and release will be accomplished using the methods described in Item #1 above.

**8. Invasive Species Control.** This activity will target the control of non-native invasive species using herbicides and chopping or digging methods. Approximately 3 acres of

autumn olive and 1 acre of multiflora rose are proposed for control. These invasives are located in and around the wildlife openings, several old log decks, and along a 0.4-mile section of FS Road 143. Control of the autumn olive and multiflora rose will be accomplished using a combination of the following application methods: 1) a spot foliar (spraying of leaves) treatment with an herbicide mixture containing the active ingredients triclopyr (ester) (examples “Garlon”, “Weed Be Gone”); 2) basal stem spraying (for trees and shrubs less than 3 inches in diameter) with an herbicide with the active ingredient triclopyr (ester formulation); 3) cut stem 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 (example “Round Up”), depending on the time of year of application; and 4) 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.

As feasible, Nepal grass will be controlled along the existing ATV trail by manual means (hand pulling).

## **MITIGATION AND MONITORING MEASURES**

For each alternative and the proposed action, all applicable standards in the current Land and Resource Management Plan would be applied. Those that apply to Alternative 2 are as follows:

1. In all stands that are to be thinned, existing skid trails and log decks will be utilized thus reducing the need to construct new skid trails and loading decks. Erosion control measures will be used on trails and decks where there is exposed soil. Any skid trails within 200 feet of the existing ATV trail will be filled with tree tops and limbs after thinning operations are completed to prevent increased illegal ATV activity. Mitigation measures for using the ATV trail as a haul road include:
  - a. To the extent feasible, scheduling the project work when the trail is normally closed, weather permitting and providing information to users of other ATV opportunities in the area.
  - b. Where the trail is used for hauling/skidding, reconstruct dips and wing ditches and narrow the width of track after project work is completed.
  - c. To reduce illegal access, use increased signage, increased compliance checks, tank traps when needed and placement of warning barricades on portions of ATV trail being used as skid or haul routes.
2. All streamside management zones will be protected in accordance to “Georgia’s Best Management Practices for Forestry”.

3. All prescribed burning activities will be carried out with approved prescribed burn plans that only allow burning under conditions that will have little impact on adjoining residential areas. Smoke management procedures will be followed.
4. For mitigation measures for herbicide use see Appendix A.
5. Monitoring of the survival of the planted oak and shortleaf pine seedlings will take place after the first and third growing seasons. This will address Goals 3 & 8 of the Forest Plan.
6. Monitoring of the oak-shortleaf pine woodland will consist of yearly checks to see if native herbaceous plants (ie. warm season grasses) are becoming established. There will also be yearly checks to see if the unwanted hardwood sprouting is being controlled. This addresses Goals 3& 8 of the Forest Plan.
7. Monitoring of song birds will take place on a yearly basis to address Goal 3 of the Forest Plan.

## **RATIONAL FOR THE DECISION**

Based on the analysis presented in the Environmental Assessment for the Davenport Mountain Forest Stewardship Project, I have decided to select Alternative 2 because it best meets the purpose and need and the Forest-wide Goals discussed above. The following is the rational for my decision.

I first eliminated the No-Action Alternative (Alternative 1) since it failed to meet the purpose and need established for the project in several ways. First being that the desired condition of a more natural appearing landscape will not occur by leaving the existing planted pine intact. Shortleaf pine- oak will not be restored. The conflict of having ATV's on an existing section of a forest system road will not be resolved and non-native invasive plant species will be left to spread out of control. Also a fire break will not be created along the private land development.

I eliminated Alternative 3, which accomplishes the same goals as Alternative 2, because of the additional cost of doing the release work manually, and ineffectiveness of not using herbicides to release the planted seedlings and controlling unwanted invasive plant species.

I chose Alternative 2 (with the aforementioned modification) because it is the most cost effective means of meeting the purpose and need of the Forest-wide Goals listed above.

## **OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL**

In addition to the selected alternative (Alternative 2), I considered all the other alternatives as presented in the EA. A complete description of these alternatives is provided in Chapter 2 of the EA.

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** - None of the proposed actions would take place. Several Forest Plan Goals and Objectives would not be met and would have to be met at another location on the Forest.

**Alternative 2 (Proposed Action)** – The following proposed actions would take place under this alternative: 1) Approximately 347 acres of white pine plantations would be thinned. 2) A 44 acre Virginia pine plantation would be thinned, these acres are included in the original estimation of 800 acres of restoration of oak-shortleaf pine forest. 3) Oak-shortleaf pine woodland restoration would take place on about 390 acres. 4) A firebreak would be created around the wildland-urban interface. 5) Wildlife openings would be renovated and fish structures built in Lake Nottely. 6) Forest system road 143A would be converted to ATV only. 7) Nineteen acres of Southern Pine Beetle damaged stands would be replanted to oak and shortleaf pine. 8) Invasive plant species would be controlled.

**Alternative 3** – This alternative include all the proposals in Alternative 2 except herbicides would not be used for site preparation or invasive species control and instead of rerouting the section of ATV trail that follows FS System Road 143A, this road would be closed to regular vehicular traffic and left as an ATV trail only.

## **ALTERNATIVES ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED STUDY**

An alternative was considered to clearcut all of the white pine plantations in order to speed up the process of converting these stands to shortleaf pine-oak. This was not considered in detail because it would not be in compliance with the Forest Plan for this Management Prescription 7.E.1 nor would it meet the Scenic Integrity Objectives for this area.

## **PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT**

A letter detailing the projects was sent to 82 individuals, agencies and public organizations on June 25, 2004. (The project file includes a list of all agencies, persons and organizations contacted in the course of scoping and environmental analysis.) In addition, the proposal appeared in the quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions for the Chattahoochee National Forest.

On site meetings were made with representatives of the Forest Service, Georgia DNR, Georgia Forest Watch, Georgia Forestry Commission, and the Lake Nottely Improvement Association. These on site meetings were conducted to clarify project proposals and activities and discuss issues and concerns.

An Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) was formed and included the following specialists: Sheldon Henderson (Co-ID Team Leader, Silviculture), Jim Wentworth (Co-ID Team Leader, Wildlife Biology) David Kuykendall (Recreation/Trails), Peter Myers (Fire/Fuels), Dick Rightmyer (Soil Science), and Becky Bruce (Cultural Resources).

A Pre-decisional Environmental Assessment and letter indicating the preferred Alternative (Alternative 2) was sent to interested publics on September 7, 2005 and to those who participated during the analysis process. A Request for Comments was also posted in The North Georgia News newspaper on September 21, 2005. The EA was available for public review at the Brasstown Ranger District office located in Blairsville, GA, and it was posted on the Forest Service website at [www.fs.fed.us/conf/](http://www.fs.fed.us/conf/). Only 2 comments were received during the comment period. Comments received were only supportive of the actions proposed.

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Based on the Environmental Assessment, I have determined that Alternative 2 with mitigating measures and management requirements applied is not a major federal action, either individually or cumulatively and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. This determination is based upon the following factors found at 40 CFR 1508.27 (b).

1. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered. The proposed actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of human environment.
2. The actions will have minimal effects on the public health and safety (EA Chapter III, page 91).
3. The actions will not have any detrimental effects on any unique characteristics of the geographic area such as park lands, historical and cultural resources, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. It may have positive effects in maintaining ecologically or culturally important areas in their current condition (EA Chapter III ).
4. Based on public involvement and analysis, the effects on the quality of the physical environment are not highly controversial (EA pp 14-34).
5. The actions do not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks to the human environment (EA throughout Chapter III).

6. The actions will not set a precedent for future actions with significant effects. They not do represent a decision in principle about a future proposal.
7. The cumulative effects of the proposed actions have been analyzed and no significant effects are anticipated. Each environmental component in Chapter 3 of the EA includes consideration of cumulative effects. The context and intensity of cumulative impacts over space and time will not be significant (EA pp. 17, 19, 23, 27, 28, 30-34, 36, 37, 42-62, 64-74, 80,82,83,85,86,90-92,96,97).
8. This action does not adversely affect cultural resources listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and will not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources (EA pp. 34-37).
9. Implementing this decision will not adversely affect threatened or endangered species, or result in loss of any other species' viability, or create significant trends toward Federal listing of the species under the Endangered Species Act. This determination is based on the site-specific surveys, the Biological Evaluation for the Davenport Mountain Stewardship Project, and concurrence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under Section 7(a) (2) of the Endangered Species Act.
10. This action does not threaten to lead to violation of federal, state, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment. This will be ensured by carrying out the proposed action in a way that is consistent with the standards, general direction, and management requirements established in the Forest Plan and this Decision Notice.

## **FINDINGS REQUIRED BY LAWS AND REGULATIONS**

1. The selected alternative is consistent with the Forest Plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest as required by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) 1976, 16 USC 1604(1).
  - It is consistent with the Forest Goals listed in the purpose and need of the proposal.
2. The actions of this project will meet all requirements of the Endangered Species Act and all agreements with the State Natural Heritage Program, in that the impacts to Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive species or critical habitat for these species are insignificant and will not affect population viability of any of these species.
3. The project is reasonable and feasible.
4. There are no significant irreversible or irretrievable resource commitments.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL RIGHTS**

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12 (e) (1). Notice of the proposed action was published. An opportunity to comment on the EA was provided. Comments received were only supportive of the actions proposed.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

For additional information concerning technical aspects of this decision, contact Sheldon Henderson, Brasstown Ranger District at: USDA Forest Service, P.O. Box 9, Blairsville, GA 30514; or by phone at 706-745-6928.

For additional information on the Forest Service planning process as it relates to this decision, contact John Petrick, Forest Planner, at 770-297-3000.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

Implementation of this decision may begin immediately after publication of a legal notice in *The North Georgia News*.

## **RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL**

/s/ Alan Polk

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ALAN POLK  
BRASSTOWN DISTRICT RANGER

Date, December 9, 2005