



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

George
Washington
& Jefferson
National
Forests

James River Ranger District
810A Madison Avenue
Covington, VA 24426
540/962-2214

Warm Springs Ranger District
422 Forestry Road
Hot Springs, VA 24445
540/839-2521

File Code: 1950

Date: May 14, 2015

Notice of Opportunity to Comment

Lower Cowpasture Restoration and Management Project

Dear Interested Party

The James River and Warm Springs Ranger Districts, are preparing an environmental assessment for the Lower Cowpasture Restoration and Management (Lower Cowpasture) Project. The project area is located in northeast Alleghany, southeast Bath, and western Rockbridge Counties. The preferred alternative includes: approximately 1,003 acres of regeneration harvest, 746 acres of thinning, 220 acres of restoration treatments, 1,467 acres of non-commercial timber stand improvements, allows biomass removal on up to 1,217 acres, 297 acres of wildlife clearings, 22 waterhole developments, 11,971 acres of prescribed burning, stabilizing slope failure in Simpson Creek, 15 culvert replacements, removing culverts from Slicky Slide road, large woody debris placement in 8 streams, reconstruct National Forest System Road (FSR) 194 in entrenched section, close 19 unauthorized roads, decommission 0.9 miles of FSR 125S (this road is currently closed to the public), construct 14.6 miles of National Forest System trails, plant 16 acres of Chestnut, and stabilize Wilson Creek dam.

The proposed project implements a land management plan and is subject to pre-decisional objection process at 36 CFR §218 Subparts A and B. In accordance with 36 CFR 218.5 individuals or organizations wishing to be eligible to submit objections seeking Pre-decisional Administrative Review must provide the following information: a) Your name and address; b) Title of the Proposed Action; c) Specific comments (§ 218.2) on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision; and d) Your signature or other means of identification verification must be provided for the individual authorized to represent your organization.

Although comments are accepted at any time before a final decision is made, they must be postmarked or received within 30 days beginning the day after publication of the legal notice in *The Recorder* and the *Virginian Review* in order to be eligible for the objection process. Comments may be faxed to 540-839-2496; e-mailed to Comments-southern-georgewashington-jefferson-warmsprings@fs.fed.us; hand-delivered to Warm Springs Ranger District, 422 Forestry Road, Hot Springs, VA 24445, or James River Ranger District, 810A Madison Ave., Covington, VA 24426; or given orally at 540-839-2521.

For more information, a copy of the Draft EA and maps please go to <http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/gwj/landmanagement/projects> or



<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/gwj/home/?cid=STELPRDB5420614>; or call 540-839-2521 to receive information by mail.

For more information about the objection process, the 36 CFR 218 regulations were published in the Federal Register (78 FR 18481-18504) on March 27, 2013 at <https://federalregister.gov/a/2013-06857>.

Please note - The potential impacts of biomass removal on soil productivity are discussed on pages 71 through 73 of the Draft EA. The analysis correctly describes that:

- *To protect long term soil productivity and ecological sustainability:*
- *No woody biomass utilization is allowed in forested stands less than or equal to site index 40 or in stands with high risk soils.*

These high risk soils were identified at a broad scale analysis as part of the forest planning process and biomass removal was not proposed in the preferred alternative in any stands with these high risk soils.

An analysis of the effects of acid deposition on soil productivity (base saturation of the soil) was also completed for this project. This analysis identified additional areas of concern about soil productivity because it is done at a much smaller scale. The soils identified in this analysis would be at high risk due to past acidic deposition and are also sensitive to removal of vegetation. Table 3A2-5 on page 73 displays the treatment areas that overlap with the soils identified as sensitive by the analysis of acid deposition. The table also displays the proposed timber treatment and the proposed biomass removal treatment. After the Draft EA was completed, we decided that we did not want to include any biomass treatment in the areas identified as high risk in this analysis as part of the preferred alternative. Therefore, for the preferred alternative: 1) the identified stands with shelterwood treatments would all be included in the 75% of the regeneration stands that will not include biomass removal; 2) the two stands that were to be treated using commercial timber stand improvement, would now become non-commercial timber stand improvement; and 3) the portion of the hardwood restoration stand would not be treated. These changes are not currently incorporated into the summaries of acres treated described in other portions of the EA. The changes are small and will be corrected in the final document.

If you have any questions you may contact Karen Stevens, Environmental Coordinator, at the Warm Springs District office, or by email at karenlstevens@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,

/s/ Patrick Roy Sheridan
PATRICK ROY SHERIDAN
District Ranger