

# **DECISION MEMO**

## **Hiking Trail Construction**

**USDA Forest Service  
National Forests in Alabama  
Talladega National Forest- Talladega Ranger District  
Talladega and Clay Counties, Alabama**

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The Talladega Ranger District is going to construct approximately 10 miles of hiking trail that may eventually become a section of the Pinhoti National Recreation Trail (NRT). The Talladega Ranger District has the goal of completing the Pinhoti NRT through the length of the Talladega National Forest. The best placement of the trail extension was determined and laid out by a Forest Service trail specialist according to topography, scenic views, and cost analysis. After a Forest Service interdisciplinary team reviewed the project location, the District Ranger decided not to construct the entire extension proposed by trail specialist based on private land in-holdings and availability of current funding.

Depending on future funding and land acquisition progress, this trail may eventually be designated as part of the Pinhoti National Recreation Trail (NRT). If completed, the Pinhoti NRT will provide the southern route to the final piece of a planned hiking corridor running the length of the Appalachian Mountains in the eastern United States from the Everglades in Florida to Cape Gaspe in the Quebec Province of Canada. Additionally, this extension will provide an important piece of the effort to link the Pinhoti Trail to the Conecuh National Forest and the Florida National Scenic Trail.

### **THE DECISION:**

I have decided to use available funding to build approximately 10 miles of new hiking trail in Talladega and Clay Counties (Figure A). This trail will be built in two sections. The first section will begin at Bull's Gap, just south of Highway 148 and extend approximately 7 miles stopping in section 27 of township 21S range 5E. The second section will begin approximately 4 miles southeast of Sylacauga at the south boundary of the Talladega Ranger District and approximately 3 miles of hiking trail will be constructed.

The trail will be constructed using Sweco type equipment (small dozer) and hand-tools. The construction and clearing of the trail will be approximately 48 inches wide with a finished width of around 30 inches. Tread grade will average 5 to 8% built along hillside contour slopes from 10 to 30%. Design criteria include avoiding large diameter trees so that no merchantable timber will be harvested or sold as a result of trail construction. Arched culverts would be installed for crossing significant drainages to prevent the hiking trail from causing sedimentation. The trail will be signed following appropriate Forest Service direction.

A small parking lot suitable for 8 to 10 vehicles will be developed at the west end of this trail just off FS Road 603-B. No cutting of merchantable timber is proposed for this project. The trail construction is proposed inside the Hollins Wildlife Management Area (WMA). These lands are co-managed by the US Forest Service and the State of Alabama Division of Wildlife and

Freshwater Fisheries. It is anticipated that trails in this area will be used by hunters and various other forest users. Hunter camps will be established outside of the trail corridor to reduce conflicts between forest users. Portions of the trail (approx ½ mile) may occupy a currently designated horse riding route.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an EIS or EA because it is consistent with Forest Service Handbook 1909.15-2004-3, Section 31.2, Category 1: “*Construction and reconstruction of trails*”.

The action is constructing a trail.

I find that no extraordinary circumstances exist as defined in FSH 1909.15, 30.3.2.

1. *Federally listed Threatened and Endangered Species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species* - No federally listed threatened or endangered species, designated critical habitat, species proposed for federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species are present on the project area. In accordance with FSM 2672.4, a Biological Evaluation (BE) was prepared to evaluate the effect of the planned activities on proposed, endangered and threatened (PET) species and designated critical habitat. The proposed actions would have “no effect” and “not likely to adversely affect” PET species or designated critical habitat. The Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the findings on BE findings in an email dated October 2, 2007. The BE determined proposed actions will have “no impact” or “may impact individuals but not likely to cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of viability” for regional forester’s sensitive species.
2. *Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds* – The proposed action is not in a floodplain, or wetland. Forest plan standards will be implemented so that no impacts to the municipal watershed will occur.
3. *Congressionally Designated Areas* – No congressionally designated areas are within the project area.
4. *Inventoried Roadless areas, Research natural Areas* – No part of the project area is designated as inventoried roadless area or research natural area.
5. *Research natural areas* - There are no research natural areas on the Talladega Ranger District.
6. *American Indians and Alaska native religious or cultural sites/Archaeological sites or historic areas* – In consultation with the Alabama State Historic Preservation Officer, (SHPO) and interested Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPO), a heritage resource survey of the project area was conducted. No American Indian or Alaska Native religious or cultural sites were on record or found.

My decision is based on an analysis of the situation and this action is consistent with these goals and objectives and a determination that the cited categorical exclusion was applicable in the absence of adverse impacts or extraordinary circumstances.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVMENT AND SCOPING**

A public notice was published in the paper of record, the *Talladega Daily Home*, on July 13, 2007. A pre-decisional memo was mailed to the District mailing list on July 6, 2007. The State of Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Area Manager had concerns over using an old road as a portion of the trail and hunter/hiker conflicts in the WMA. On August 30, 2007 the state area manager and District staff met and worked through the concerns. The decision was made to allow hunter camps just outside of the trail corridor and gate the road to allow official vehicle traffic only. Scoping also revealed that horse back riders utilize a portion of the proposed hiking trail route. The District Ranger made the decision to allow for multi-use horse and hiking along those portions of the trail that overlap (see Figure B). As future funding becomes available the hiking trail will be moved off of the road and rerouted around the horse riding route.

### **Finding Required by Other Laws:**

Revised Land and Resource Management Plan - The actions of this project are consistent with the direction outlined in the Revised Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP), which provides standards to provide a wide variety of dispersed and developed recreation opportunities within the capabilities of the land; annually evaluate existing opportunities to determine if they meet carrying capacity, demand, and financial ability to maintain in the future for maintenance, expansion or closure; and recreation induced impacts to highly sensitive components of the ecosystem will be analyzed and mitigated as needed. The forest wide goals, objectives and standards are outlined in Chapter II, Goals 22, 23 & 24. Planned trail grades, width and drainage crossings are within the limitations specified in the LRMP, it provides for adequate protection of soil, water and other physical resources, and it utilizes best science to protect and ensure habitat for wildlife and plant species.

This proposed trail is located within the area managed under Management Prescription 8.D.1, Red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) Management Area as outlined in the Revised Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This management prescription (8.D.1) is designed to provide habitat conditions for the endangered RCW. RCW management will be evident along this section of the trail and will include activities such as timber harvests and prescribed burning. These activities will occur along the trail, within the trail corridor and in the foreground and are compatible with management of this section of the trail.

## **IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW**

This decision is subject to appeal by those who provided comments or otherwise expressed interest in this particular proposal prior to the close of the 30-day notice and comment period. Written notice of appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, "Content of an Appeal" and mailed to: Regional Forester, USDA Forest Service, 1720 Peachtree Road NW, Atlanta, GA 30367-9102. Appeals must be postmarked and submitted within 45 days of

publication of the legal notice in the Talladega Daily Home newspaper.

This decision will not be implemented until at least five business days after the close of the 45-day appeal period, or 15 days after disposition of the last appeal, whichever comes later.

**CONTACTS**

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Lesley Hodge, 45 Highway 281, Heflin, AL; phone (256) 463-2273.

/s/ Kent Evans

10/5/07

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KENT EVANS  
District Ranger  
Talladega Ranger District  
National Forests in Alabama

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DATE

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