



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Region 8, Southern Region,
Conecuh RD,
National Forests in Alabama

16375 US Highway 29
Andalusia, Alabama 36420
(334) 222-2555

File Code: 1950/2400/2600

Date: April 20, 2009

Dear Friend of the Conecuh:

During the recent rash of Spring storms, the Conecuh sustained some damage from large hail and strong winds in the Open Pond area during a March 28th severe thunderstorm. Our initial concern was to address damage to the Open Pond Recreation Area and our work center facilities. We were able to successfully reopen the recreation area by the following weekend.

Currently, we are proposing to salvage a few pockets of damaged trees along County Road 24 and a section of the Conecuh Trail just south of County Road 24. Included for your review is a Request for Comments package which provides specific information about this damaged area and our Proposed Action.

If you have any questions regarding this proposal, please contact the project team leader, Tim Jones (tejones@fs.fed.us) or our planning coordinator, Debbie Russell (dfoley@fs.fed.us) via email or at the office phone number and address listed above.

Official comments on the current Proposed Action should be submitted as directed in the enclosed legal notice, as published in the Andalusia Star-News on Saturday April 18th. Remember, for your comments to be considered they must be submitted within 30 days following the publication date of this legal notice.

Thank you for your interest in the Conecuh National Forest. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

JAY EDWARDS
Acting District Ranger



Conecuh National Forest County Road 24 Storm Salvage

*Scoping/Request for Comments Package
April 20, 2009*

Background: In late March and early April a series of weather systems consisting of strong winds, large hail, and heavy rainfall caused extensive damage across south Alabama and the Florida panhandle. Governor Riley declared a State of Emergency for 11 south Alabama counties, including Covington, on March 30 due to damages sustained over the previous few days and with more severe weather pending. Officials estimate nearly \$5 million in damages have occurred throughout Covington County (AL) alone (Andalusia Star-News, 4/13/09). By April 10, Governor Riley requested President Obama to declare a major disaster area in 20 counties that had suffered \$26 million in damage to roads, bridges and public buildings as a result of wind, rain, and flooding events between March 30 and April 3 (Office of Governor Press Release, 4/10/09).

Purpose of and Need for Action: On March 28th a severe thunderstorm consisting of high winds and large hail caused damage in the Open Pond area of the Conecuh National Forest. Approximately 16 acres of trees were blown down, snapped off, and damaged within a few pockets along Covington County Road 24 (T2N R15E Sec 27 and 34). A section of the Conecuh Trail just south of County Rd 24 was also involved.



Existing conditions of snapped, leaning, and wedged trees that may continue to fall pose increased risks to the safety of the general public along County Rd 24 and trail users in the vicinity of the damaged trees. Concern also exists for the increased fuel load resulting from this storm event and its implications to wildfire risks and to increased fire intensity and residual smoke that would occur even in a prescribed burn. Given current conditions, when fire does occur unacceptable levels of thick smoke could occur along a section of County Rd 24. Increased risks to residual trees will also occur from wood boring insects known to attack damaged and stressed trees. The visual quality of this area has also been degraded as a result of the

storm damage. The visual quality of this area can be expected to become increasingly harsh as insect and disease attacks increase and the number of dying and dead trees in this area becomes greater.

Public safety is of paramount importance in carrying forward with a proposal to salvage this area because of its proximity to a major through road and a section of the Conecuh Trail. The Forest Service is obligated to "manage existing forest communities to reduce risks from insects and disease" (Goal 3, page 2-10, LRMP (Revised Land and Resource Management Plan)). Management actions must also consider the Desired Conditions of the applicable LRMP prescriptions that apply to this area. This damaged area falls within the Longleaf Pine Restoration prescription (#9.D.-pages 3-38 to 3-39, LRMP) and the Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management prescription (7.E.2.-pages 3-32 to 3-34, LRMP).

(Over)

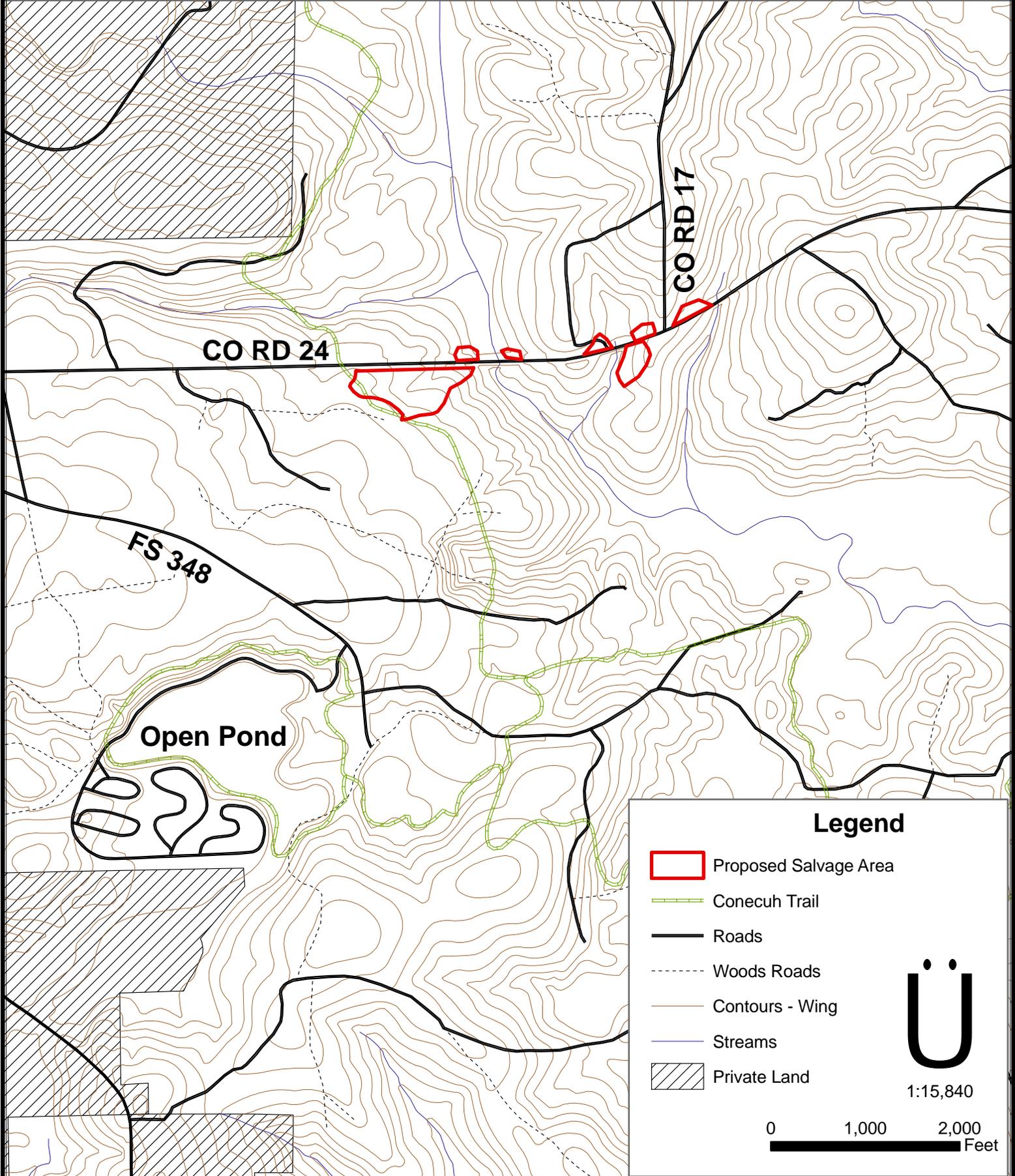
Proposed Action: The Forest Service proposes to salvage scattered pockets of damaged trees totaling approximately 16 acres along County Road 24 and the Conecuh Trail south of County Road 24 which resulted from a March 28th storm (see Proposed Salvage Areas map).



This action would be taken to:

- provide safer conditions for Conecuh Trail users and the general public along County Road 24 by removing hazardous trees and reducing thick residual smoke that could occur on the road during a prescribed burn or wildfire event,
- reduce the existing build up of hazardous fuels which contribute to damaging wildfires
- improve prescribed burning conditions relative to fire and smoke intensity,
- reduce the risk of wood boring insects that attack damaged, weakened, and stressed trees,
- improve visual quality,
- move toward desired conditions as determined by the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (2004).

Conecuh National Forest
Hail Damage Salvage Areas - Covington County Alabama
R15E, T2N, Sec 27 & 34 - Compartment 28 & 30



Legend

-  Proposed Salvage Area
-  Conecuh Trail
-  Roads
-  Woods Roads
-  Contours - Wing
-  Streams
-  Private Land



1:15,840





Caring for the Land and Serving People

USDA, Forest Service
Conecuh National Forest
16375 U.S. Highway 29, Andalusia, AL 36420
Phone: (334) 222-2555 or Fax: (334) 222-6485



Legal Notice

For Immediate Release (4/17/09)

Contact: Debbie Russell

Email: dfoley@fs.fed.us

REQUEST FOR COMMENTS Conecuh National Forest County Road 24 Storm Salvage Covington County

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.3 (1993), Acting District Ranger Jay Edwards requests comments on a Forest Service proposal to salvage approx. 16 acres of timber damaged by a March 28th storm that produced high winds and large hail in the Open Pond area. The area proposed for conventional salvaging of damaged trees is along both sides of County Rd 24 west of and including the intersection of County Rd 17 and along a section of the Conecuh Trail south of County Rd 24 (T2N, R15E, Sections 27, 34).

This project would provide safer conditions for trail users and general public use along County Rd 24, address forest health concerns of hazardous fuel build up and increased insect threats, and improve visual quality of the area. This proposal would help achieve desired conditions as determined by the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan.

We anticipate that this action will be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement or an Environmental Assessment and that a Decision Memo will be prepared. Comments on this proposal will be accepted for 30 days following publication of this notice and will be considered prior to a forthcoming decision. Standing for appeal of the final decision will be based on comments that comply with the requirements of 36 CFR 215.6 (2007). Comments may be mailed or hand delivered to District Ranger, 16375 U.S. Highway 29, Andalusia AL 36420; by fax to 334-222-6485; by electronic mail to comments-southern-alabama-conecuh@fs.fed.us; or by calling 334-222-2555.

Additional information on this proposal may be obtained by contacting Debbie Russell at the above address/phone number or at dfoley@fs.fed.us.

-- Published in the Andalusia Star-News Saturday April 18, 2009 --