USDA FOREST SERVICE
CHEROKEE NATIONAL FOREST
OCOEE/HIWASSEE RANGER DISTRICT
POLK COUNTY, TENNESSEE

DECISION MEMO
FOR
RESTORATION OF PINE/OAK COMMUNITIES
FY 2010

Decision

I have decided to restore mixed pine/oak communities on approximately 120 acres on 6 units affected by southern pine beetle or wildfire. The restoration treatments will include: planting naturally occurring pine and a second year mechanical release. There will be no herbicides used in the release treatment. See the attached map for project location.

The units will be planted with naturally occurring shortleaf pine on a spacing of 15 by 15 feet (200 trees/acre). This low level of stocking will assure the presence of shortleaf pine in the regenerated units. Planting pine is necessary because natural regeneration is unpredictable and many of the seed trees have been killed by SPB or fire. The low level of pine stocking will allow ample room for upland oak, table mountain pine and hardwood species that regenerate well after fire. Shortleaf pine is longer lived than Virginia pine and when grown in a mixed stand is less vulnerable to SPB.

A second year mechanical release will be done to ensure the survival of planted pine and naturally regenerated oak. This consists of cutting competing vegetation for three to five feet around the oak and planted pine.

The purpose of this project is to restore naturally occurring mixed shortleaf pine/upland oak communities. The areas addressed in this project were severely damaged by the southern pine beetle (SPB) outbreak that began in 1999. Some of the units have been affected by wildfire and storm events as well. Most of the pine is now dead.

Public Involvement

This project was listed in the Cherokee National Forest "Schedule of Proposed Actions" in January 2010.

Reasons to Categorically Exclude the Proposed Action

The tree planting component of this decision falls within the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 Chapter 30, section 31.2, 5, "Regeneration of an area to native tree species, including site preparation which does not include the use of herbicides or result in vegetation type conversion." The release component of this decision falls within FSH

1909.15 Chapter 30, section 31.2, 6, "Timber and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction."

Based on past experience, the effects of implementing this action will be of limited context and intensity and will not result in significant effects to either the physical or biological components of the environment. Any activities in areas that would present an ``extraordinary circumstance" as discussed in FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 30.3 will be avoided by this decision. Therefore, this decision is categorically excluded from further documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

These activities comply with the goals, objectives and standards presented in the Revised Cherokee National Forest LRMP. In addition, this activity complies fully with the Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, and National Forest Management Act, as well as all policies and procedures listed in FSH 1909.15 and Forest Service Manual 1950. A biological evaluation and cultural resources documentation are included in the project file.

Appeal Opportunities and Implementation Date

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12 (f), this decision is not subject to a higher-level review. Implementation of this decision may begin immediately.

Contact Person

Detailed records of the environmental analysis are available for public review at the Tellico Ranger District, 250 Ranger Station Rd., Tellico Plains, TN 37385. For further information on the decision contact Janan Hay, USDA Forest Service, Tellico Ranger District, phone 423-253-8400.

MONTE L. WILLIAMS District Ranger	1-13-10 DATE