



FACT SHEET

Draft Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the Uwharrie National Forest

Overview

On June 10, 2011, the USDA Forest Service unveiled the draft management plan (Proposed Plan) and draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for the Uwharrie National Forest. The Forest Service will announce the public comment period in the *Federal Register*. The public comment period ends in mid-September 2011. The public may view the plan at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/nfsnc/uwharrieplan> and send comments to comments-southern-north-carolina@fs.fed.us.

The original management plan for the Uwharrie National Forest was signed in 1986. The Proposed Plan proposes a slightly different direction for managing the Uwharrie National Forest that fulfills the Forest Service's mission of multiple-use forest management. Once finalized, the Plan will guide management of the Uwharrie National Forest for the next 15 years. The Uwharrie spans 50,814 acres across three counties in the Piedmont of (central) North Carolina. A Forest Service team will review all comments and make adjustments to the plan. The goal is to publish a final management plan for the national forest by early 2012.

Major Themes

The Proposed Plan for the Uwharrie National Forest includes three major themes:

- 1. Restoring the forest to a more natural ecological condition:** For example, reducing the amount of loblolly pine plantations in favor of reestablishing longleaf pine forests and oak-hickory forests. Increased prescribed burning would play a role in restoring longleaf, recovering endangered Schweinitz's sunflower and benefiting other rare sun-loving plants. Selective stream improvement and treatment of non-native invasive species would further the restoration theme.
- 2. Better management of cultural resources:** The Uwharrie National Forest has an abundance of artifacts and historic and prehistoric sites within its boundaries. The Proposed Plan seeks to protect these resources that provide opportunities for research, education and interpretation.
- 3. Providing outstanding and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities, with excellent trails and facilities:** It is a challenge to provide the kind of experience recreationists want while minimizing impacts to other forest resources and other forest users. Equestrians, mountain bikers, off-highway vehicle enthusiasts, hikers and hunters are vying for the same intensely used areas that are also home to numerous archeological sites, streams and special botanical features. The Proposed Plan has a goal for equestrians and mountain bikers to stay on designated trails, as off-highway vehicles do now. This would help reduce conflict between recreationists and sensitive resources.

Plan Alternatives

Unmanaged equestrian use on the Uwharrie National Forest has adversely affected archaeological sites and stream crossings causing stream banks to produce sedimentation, which degrades water quality. As a result, the plan proposes to limit equestrian use to designated trails. Some members of the equestrian community oppose this alternative. A suggestion was made to mark sites (such as archeological sites) in order to avoid use of those areas, while leaving the remainder of the national forest open for equestrian use. However, location of cultural sites is protected under the National Historic Preservation Act and disclosure of this information to the public is prohibited.

To address the disagreement with this goal/desired condition, the DEIS examines an alternative similar to the Proposed Plan *except* equestrian use would remain unrestricted across the national forest as it is in the 1986 Plan. However, mountain bikes would be restricted to a designated trail system. This will make three alternatives analyzed in detail in the DEIS: the 1986 Plan, the Proposed Plan, and the Proposed Plan *minus* the restrictions on equestrian use. Additional alternatives are considered to fulfill the intent of the 1982 Rule, but are not analyzed in detail.

Additional Plan Highlights

The Proposed Plan also calls for:

- Restoration of longleaf pine at the rate of 100 acres per year, and oak/hickory at the rate of 200 acres per year. Removal and thinning objectives for loblolly stands as they mature (prior to restoring longleaf or oak-hickory) would result in timber harvest volumes similar to what has been achieved in recent years;
- A 100 percent increase in prescribed burning would help reestablish the fire regimes necessary for maintaining and restoring longleaf and promoting the suite of sun-loving species now rare in the North Carolina Piedmont;
- A monitoring program that includes periodically reporting updates on the restoration of desired vegetation, prescribed fire, endangered species restoration, stream conditions, and management of indicator species.

Collaboration and the Planning Process

Informational meetings with state and local government officials took place prior to kicking off the collaborative public involvement process. The collaborative process to develop plan components consisted of ten public meetings and two field trips during 2005 and 2006 with up to 100 participants per meeting. Other federal and state agency representatives, local officials, adjacent landowners, non-governmental organizations and user group representatives, academia and other interested individuals participated. The earliest meeting focused on finding common ground among participants. At subsequent meetings, a variety of techniques were employed to educate participants about forest resources, receive suggestions for specific plan components, and review work from the previous meeting. Public- and private-sector scientists participated in the pre-planning assessment work and the plan development process.

With input from partners, the Forest Service developed the Proposed Plan and DEIS using the 2000 Planning Rule, as amended (1982 rule provisions). Three opportunities for comment allowed for additional input in 2007, 2009 and 2010 following release of the Notice of Intent to revise using the 1982 rule provisions. Additional public involvement in the summer of 2010 served to update participants and validate the current approach to issues and alternatives in the DEIS.

Final Steps

Once comments are received from the public, the Forest Service will prepare a final EIS and Forest Plan, incorporating input received on the drafts. A decision will be made at that point as to which alternative will be implemented. The public will be notified on that decision and allowed to appeal the decision if they disagree. Information about the appeal process will be provided with the final decision. If no appeals are received, the new Forest Plan will be implemented 30 days following publication of the decision.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all of its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, genetic information, reprisal, or because all of part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Stop 9410, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call toll-free at (866) 632-9992 (English) or (800) 877-8339 (TDD) or (866) 377-8642 (English Federal-relay) or (800) 845-6136 (Spanish Federal-relay). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.