DECISION NOTICE
and
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
for the
WELLS BRANCH TIMBER SALE

USDA Forest Service
George Washington and Jefferson National Forests
Clinch Ranger District
Wise and Scott Counties, Virginia

INTRODUCTION

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been completed, evaluating the environmental effects of two alternatives for managing the vegetation in approximately 4,000 acres of National Forest lands in compartments 2088, 2089, 2090, and 2094 on the Clinch Ranger District of the Jefferson National Forest. This area is located approximately 1.5 miles south of Exeter, VA off State Route (SR) 623 in Lee County. The project area lies in the Laurel Fork Drainage of Pigeon Creek and the Wells Branch drainage of the North Fork Powell River

The Wells Branch project area is broken into five different management prescriptions (MP) as described in the Jefferson National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (RLRMP). The first prescription is 8A1 – Mix of Successional Habitats in Forested Landscapes. This management prescription is intended to ". . . provide a mix of habitats for plants and animals associated with mid-to late-successional forest habitats." The 8A1 management prescription is designated as "suitable for timber production". There are more 8A1 in the project area than any other management prescription.

The second management prescription found in the Wells Branch Project Area is 4D Botanical – zoological areas. Areas with the 4D prescription ". . . serve as a network of core areas for conservation of significant elements of biological diversity." (RLRMP 3-27). No sale units are planned in 4D areas.

Another management prescription found in the Wells Branch Project Area is 7B - Scenic Corridors. This prescription has an emphasis on ". . . providing, through maintenance or restoration and design, high quality scenery in sensitive recreational and travel way settings." (RLRMP 3-88). The "recreational setting" in this case is Lake Keokee. These areas are "suitable for timber production". "Timber harvest practices are modified to recognize and enhance the aesthetic and recreational values of these lands." (RLRMP 3-88).

The project area also contains management prescription 7D - concentrated recreation area. These areas are managed "to provide the public with a variety of recreational opportunities in visually appealing and environmentally healthy settings." (RLRMP 3-96). This area is only about 15 acres and is centered on the parking and boat launch area at Lake Keokee. No sale area units are planned in 7D areas.

The final management prescription found within the project area is 11 - Riparian Corridors. These areas are found along all defined perennial and intermittent stream channels that show signs of scour, and around natural ponds, lakeshores, wetlands, springs, and seeps. They are managed to retain, restore, and/or enhance the inherent ecological processes and functions of the associated aquatic, riparian, and upland components within the corridor. (RLRMP 3-178). Tree removal may occur under specific circumstances. (RLRMP 3-183)

Based on the Desired Future Condition for the Management Prescriptions listed above, the following project objectives were developed:

Objective 1: Increase the acreage of early successional forest habitat in this portion of management prescription 8A1.
Objective 2: Improve the growth and vigor of stands in the area.
Objective 3: Manipulate species composition. Maintain or increase the amount of hard mast in a stand and to increase the diversity of species in the understory.
Objective 4: Re-introduce fire into the Appalachian Mountain ecosystem.
Objective 5: Provide raw wood material to local markets.

Forest Service resource specialists conducted the environmental review of the project, with input from state and federal agencies. Environmental effects were disclosed in the "Wells Branch Timber Sale Environmental Assessment". The Environmental Assessment (EA) was supplemented by reports, such as, a comments analysis, a roads analysis, old growth survey, biological evaluation, soils report, hydrology report, and archaeological report, among others.

Findings were reviewed by agencies such as the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service and State Historic Preservation Office. I reviewed the findings of all of the environmental documentation to reach a decision. Therefore, my decision was informed with input from many subject experts using the best available science.

DECISION

Based on the analysis in the EA, I have selected Alternative 2 to implement resource management objectives identified by the RLRMP for Management Prescriptions; 8A1 – Mix of Successional Habitats in Forested Landscapes, 4D - Botanical – zoological areas, 7B - Scenic Corridors, 7D - Concentrated recreation area and 11 - Riparian Corridors. Alternative 2 will result in implementation of the following activities:

1. Approximately 285 ac of regeneration harvest; 200 acres coppice w/ reserves, 85 acres standard shelterwood.
2. Approximately 285 acres of natural regeneration w/ chainsaw site prep.
3. Free Thinning; approximately 176 acres w/ Post Harvest Mechanical Stand Improvement.
4. Approximately 1.1 miles of system road construction.
5. Pre-haul maintenance on approximately 5.0 miles of FSR 2880 and 2090.
6. When practicable, utilize landings, temporary roads, and skid trails as wildlife openings/strips. Seeding will occur upon completion of use.
7. Approximately 2900 acres of prescribed burning in project area.
8. Herbicide site preparation where necessary (around 50 acres) and spot herbicide treatment of noxious weeds (about 10 acres)

Mitigation Measures

1. Stream crossings will be stabilized before road construction proceeds beyond the stream (VA state BMP's and RLRMP, 2-7, FW-1).
2. Timber, wildlife, and soils specialists will develop seed mixtures for soil stabilization
3. Irregular harvest area boundaries on regeneration units to maximize edge and reduce the visual impact (RLRMP, 2-48, FW-186).
4. Slash will be placed in skid trails and existing ATV trails to discourage illegal ATV use.
5. Favor the retention of large (> 20" DBH.) standing snags and den trees when implementing silvicultural treatments (RLRMP, 3-114, 8A1 – 003)
6. Retain a diversity of hard and soft mast species to minimize yearly fluctuations in hard and soft mast production (RLRMP, 8A1 – 006, 3-115)

7. Roads will be used as unit boundaries where feasible (only corners will be painted where the road is the line).
8. Projects are designed to avoid, minimize, or mitigate negative effects on potentially significant heritage resources. Identified special archeological features will be protected under the timber sale contract (RLRMP, 2-50, FW-204).
9. Day lighting of all Forest Service system roads and temporary haul roads by removing overstory trees and brush adjacent to the road bed.
10. To ensure public safety, existing closed system roads will remain closed to the public during harvesting activities.
11. Removal of known Indiana Bat roost trees shall be avoided. If a roost tree needs to be cut for any reason, an informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) shall occur prior to removal (if possible). If a tree is identified as an immediate threat to public or personnel safety, it can be removed at any time, but preferably not before notification of a FS biologist and the FWS. If a tree must be removed prior to notification, FWS shall be notified as soon as possible. The removal would occur when the bats are in hibernacula (November 15 through March 15).
12. To reduce the potential for sedimentation from harvest activities and associated projects, riparian buffers are designed to meet and/or exceed all VA State BMP's and Forest Plan Standards.
13. Any slash that falls in a stream or onto private property shall be removed as soon as practicable.
14. Wildlife Trees will be white banded and protected under the sale contract.
15. A minimum average of 6 trees per acre $\geq$ 9" DBH shall be retained in all regeneration harvest areas to provide Indiana Bat summer roost habitat.
16. All shagbark hickories shall be retained in harvest units unless they pose a safety hazard. Any shagbark hickory felled for safety reasons will be tracked by the Timber Sale Administration team in inspection reports.
17. All skid roads/trails, temporary roads, and stream crossings are designated and approved by the Forest Service. All stream crossings will be as close to right angles as possible, and will meet Forest Service standards

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

I have chosen Alternative 2 for the following reasons:

Alternative 2 meets the direction set forth in the Forest Plan for MP 8A1 – Mix of Successional Habitats in Forested Landscapes, 4D - Botanical – zoological areas, 7B - Scenic Corridors, and 11 - Riparian Corridors.

This action meets objectives set for this area:
Objective 1: Increase the acreage of early successional forest habitat in this portion of management prescription 8A1. Approximately 3230 acres of contiguous land is present in the 8.A.1 management prescription, and approximately 1% contains early successional vegetation (stands less than 10 years old). The proposed timber harvests will create approximately 285 acres of Early Successional Habitat (ESH) in the project area, bringing the total of ESH in the contiguous (8A1) land base to about 10%.

Objective 2: Improve the growth and vigor of stands adjacent to the ESH created by our proposed action. Growth and vigor of selected trees will increase after competing vegetation is removed during proposed thinning harvests. The increased growth and vigor will help the treated stands resist insect infestation, the occurrence of disease, and would increase production of hard and soft mast in the project area.

Objective 3: Manipulate species composition. The proposed action (including both timber harvests and prescribed fire) would increase the amount of sunlight reaching the ground therefore should encourage regeneration of more desirable timber and wildlife species. One objective is to maintain or increase the amount of hard mast in a stand. Oak is a valuable mast producer and timber species. Another goal is to

increase the diversity of species in the understory. Prescribed burning helps accomplish this as does selective timber harvesting.

Objective 4: Re-introduce fire into the Appalachian Mountain ecosystem. Historically, fires burned more frequently than they do in this age of fire suppression (Sutherland et al, 2008). Prescribed burns are intended to manipulate the species composition, increase structural diversity, increase browse, and reduce less desirable vegetation in the understory, resulting in improved wildlife habitat and improved species composition. This action would also reduce fuels available for wildfire and mimic the historic fire regime found in this forest type in the Appalachian Mountains (Sutherland et al, 2008).

Objective 5: Provide raw wood material to local markets. Trees and the products derived from them are a highly valued forest resource. The estimated demand for timber products from the Jefferson National Forest is 68 million board feet for the next decade (RLRMP 2-30). The majority of our project area has been designated as suitable for timber production. Given the congruent wildlife habitat goals, it is logical to market the wood products created by our proposed action.

SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A scoping letter, dated August 8, 2007 was posted on the forest correspondence database and mailed to all groups and individuals on the scoping list (approximately 75). A request for public comment was printed in The Coalfield Progress on August 9, 2007. Due to elapsed time and changing conditions a second scoping notice was sent out on May 27, 2010 with the ad appearing in the Coalfield on June 1, 2010.

The initial scoping effort generated six responses to the proposed action and potential alternatives; one phone call from an interested private citizen, two letters from special interest groups, and three letters from State agencies. The second scoping generated three letters (some were copies of the original letters) and one phone call. All responses were carefully reviewed and a list of comments was generated as a result. Many of the responses had similar themes that were repeated within and between the letters and/or commenter. (see EA appendix B for specific responses to comments received.)

In addition to these scoping periods a draft of this environmental assessment was released in September 2011 and a public informational meeting was held in Keokee, VA to answer questions from the public. About 40 people attended the meeting and expressed enough interest that an additional two week comment period was added. This comment period generated a number of e-mails and one written letter. No new project related issues were raised as a result of this latest comment period. (See EA, appendix B for specific responses to comments received)

Issues

Four issues identified during the scoping process were considered in detail, revisited after each opportunity for public comment, and carried forward in the analysis of this project.

Issue # 1: Effects of harvesting, roadwork, and associated projects on water quality and riparian areas.
Issue # 2: The effects of harvesting, roadwork, and associated projects on visual quality.
Issue # 3: The effects of harvesting, roadwork, and associated projects on Threatened, Endangered Species (TES) habitat.
Issue # 4: The effects of harvesting, roadwork and associated projects on Management Indicator Species (MIS) habitat.

These project issues fostered the development of the selected alternative. Project issues identified from both comment periods helped shape the selected alternative.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The following is a brief description of the other alternatives considered and the reasons for non-selection:

Alternatives Eliminated from Detailed Analysis
The following is a summary of alternatives considered by the ID team, but eliminated from detailed analysis and the rationale for dismissal.

1. **Cut and Leave**

This alternative would meet the purpose and need for the project area by creating Early Successional Habitat (ESH) without entering stands with machinery. All trees would be cut by chainsaw to create similar browse habitat without removing any of the timber that was cut.

This project would require appropriated funds to complete, which is not likely to happen. Also, the habitat conditions created by cut and leave would have limited wildlife value due to large amounts of woody debris remaining post treatment. The dense downed timber would represent a fire hazard by drastically increasing project area fuel loading. While the direct impacts to soil resources might be decreased, the risk of catastrophic fire in these areas greatly increases. Catastrophic fire increases the risk of severe damage to soil resources. Therefore, this alternative was dropped from detailed analysis.

2. **All Thinning and/or Uneven-aged Management**

An uneven-aged management, individual tree selection, and/or thinning alternatives were considered by the Inter-disciplinary (ID) Team. The Forest Plan provides guidance for ESH requirements within the project area on RLRMP page 3-115. To manage the project area with only thinning or individual tree selection would not create the ESH standards set forth in the Forest Plan (8A1 – 013). Uneven-aged management is also implemented using group selection harvests. The Forest Plan has established standards for uneven aged management, which include a contiguous block of 100 acres with < 30% slope (FW-119, page 2-34). There are no blocks of land within the proposed project area that meet this criteria, therefore uneven-aged management was dropped from detailed analysis.

A long rotation alternative (200-300 + yrs) was also considered by the ID team. The Forest Plan provides guidance on rotation ages (3-115), and in the general age-class structure (8A1 OBJ1, OBJ2, 3-118), which includes the provisions for regeneration prior to rotation age to 'meet long-term desired condition of a particular management prescription' (RLRMP, FW-113 pg 2-33). Many Appalachian hardwood (cove and upland oak types) species show signs of reduced vigor by age 100 with increasing mortality between 100 and 200 years. To manage most stands for greater than 200 years would drastically reduce the economic feasibility of harvest and vegetative ability to regenerate hard mast species (red and white oaks and hickories). As a result, the Desired Future Condition (DFC) of the project area would not be met on an extended rotation. Therefore, an all thinning and/or uneven-aged management alternatives were dropped from detailed analysis.

3. **Clear cutting**

An all clearcutting alternative was considered by the interdisciplinary team. An alternative that would involve clearcutting was considered, but eliminated from detailed study because of the current effort to reduce clearcutting acres. A commitment was made in the Revised Jefferson Land and Resource Management Plan to reduce clearcutting as a result of social considerations. Scientifically, it has been determined that clearcutting does not result in noticeably improved regeneration (number of stems per acre and species composition) as compared to the seedtree and shelterwood harvests. Therefore, clearcutting was eliminated from detailed study since the DFC for regenerating the area can be met with a modified shelterwood while meeting our commitment to reduce clearcutting.

4. **Ecosystem restoration**

An ecological restoration alternative was not considered in detail for two reasons. First, ecological restoration has not been defined as it relates to this particular project area. It could mean restoration of

American Chestnut, or the restoration of yellow pine, or even watershed restoration. While these are not mutually exclusive, it is open to broad interpretation and without more specific context, can not be reasonably considered. Second, based on previous comments, ecological restoration implies no harvesting. No early successional habitat would be created, therefore the purpose and need would not be met for the project area nor would the project area move toward the DFC for management prescription 8A1, which calls for a mixture of successtional habitats. For these reasons, an ecological restoration alternative was dropped from detailed analysis.

5. All Horse Logging

An alternative that would utilize horse logging was suggested and considered by the IDT. An overwhelming majority of the area is too steep for animal logging. Most horse logging is completed in areas where slopes are less than 20% and skids are less than 400 feet. There is only a small portion of the project area that would meet this requirement. If we examined just those areas that could be animal logged, the resulting project would not meet the purpose and need for the project. Therefore, this alternative was dropped from detailed study.

Alternatives considered in detail

Alternative 1. No Action Alternative - If the project area was unmanaged for the next 50 years, the forest would grow into a large block of mature timber, providing habitat for mostly late successional species, but would not provide Early Successional Habitat that is necessary for early and mid-successional plants and animals. Furthermore, forest health would likely decline. This is a result of overstocking, in which tree vigor would be reduced, and thereby, increasing susceptibility to insects or diseases.

There is an opportunity to move the Wells Branch area toward the DFC identified in the Forest Plan which Alternative 1 does not do. If the no action alternative were selected, the project area would not meet the Forest Plan standards for this management prescription in regards to Early Successional Habitat.

Alternative 2. Proposed Action Alternative - Implement resource management objectives identified by the RLRMP for Management Prescriptions; 8A1 – Mix of Successional Habitats in Forested Landscapes, 4D - Botanical – zoological areas, 7B - Scenic Corridors, 7D - Concentrated recreation area and 11 - Riparian Corridors, and responds to issues developed in the project proposal development. This alternative was outlined in the scoping notice sent out to the public. The proposed alternative includes about **285 acres of Standard Shelterwood and Coppice w/ Reserves harvests** in twelve blocks ranging from 10 to 40 acres (see Table 3), approximately **176 acres of free thinning**, approximately **2900 acres of prescribed burning**, and approximately **1.1 miles of system road construction.** FSR 2880 and FSR 2090 access the rest of the project area and would receive pre-haul maintenance. Approximately **1.2 miles of temporary road** is proposed to reach landing locations. **Post-harvest treatments** proposed include: disking and seeding approximately 20.0 acres of linear wildlife strip and openings, performing a herbicide and/or mechanical (chainsaw) site preparation in areas proposed for regeneration harvest, post-harvest mechanical (chainsaw) stand improvement in stands receiving intermediate treatment (thinning), planting of pine and hard mast species on approximately 100 acres, and manual/herbicide treatment of exotic species.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have determined that the actions associated with this project are not major federal actions, individually or cumulatively, and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. This finding includes consideration of the following factors concerning the context and intensity of the expected impacts of the alternative.

Context

The physical, biological and social effects of this action vary according to the resource area analyzed. These impacts are primarily limited to Wells Branch Timber Sale project analysis area. Both beneficial and adverse impacts of this project have been considered and these activities will not cause a significant effect to the quality of the human environment.

Intensity

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse.** Both beneficial and adverse impacts of this project have been considered and these activities will not cause a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. (EA, pages 23-70)

2. **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety**. There will be no significant effect on public health or safety. Standard Timber Sale Contract clauses apply to maintain public safety; (a) signs will be posted on access roads warning of logging operations during active operations in harvest units, (b) signs will be posted on all affected system hiking trails during active operations adjacent to or over the trail, and (c) system roads currently closed to public motor vehicle use will remain closed. (EA, pages 20 and 68)

3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.** The unique characteristics of the geographic area will not be significantly affected. Riparian protection zones where no timber harvesting will occur have been identified along all perennial or intermittent streams near cutting units. The harvest areas have been surveyed for cultural resources and TES species. (EA, pages 24, 66, 45 and 68, and Appendix -Biological Evaluation)

4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Disclosure of environmental impacts is based upon widely accepted principles resulting from sound scientific research. The best available science was considered in making this decision.

5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The project does not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks. The harvesting methods, logging systems and associated management activities used have a known history; subsequent results are predictable.

6. **The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.** The proposed actions will not establish a precedent influencing approval of future actions with significant effects nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. The scope of this decision is limited to the Wells Branch Timber Sale project area. (EA, pages 3-4)

7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** In relation to other actions with individually insignificant impacts, this action will not be cumulatively significant. (EA, pages 23-25)

8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.** All areas proposed for ground disturbing treatments or harvesting were examined for cultural resources. Cultural resources that could be impacted by the proposed actions were found during these surveys and input by the public. Known cultural resources in the project area will be buffered per guidance from the Forest

Archeologist. There will be no impact to any known cultural resource under this alternative and none of the known cultural resources are proposed for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (EA, page 68).

9. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.** The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973, because it was determined that the proposed project is not likely to adversely affect any federally listed species and the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this finding. (Wells Branch Biological Evaluation and USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service Letter dated March 14, 2012)

   A Biological Evaluation that was conducted for this project determined that the proposed action could potentially affect seven TES species: Indiana Bat, Small Whorled Pegonia, Eastern small-footed bat, Blackside Dace, Barrens tiger beetle, Sweet pinesap, Small spreading pogonia. The effect of the project on each of the identified species was determined to be as follows:

   Indiana bat
   This project will be in compliance with the BO issued by the USFWS on January 13, 2004 and therefore constitutes compliance with ESA, Section 7 requirements. Since implementation of this project will be in compliance with, and tiers to, the BO that was issued as a result of formal consultation and it provides both specific Plan and project level direction, plus no new information has been identified as of this date, a finding of the effect to the Indiana bat for this proposed project is: no effect, beyond that which is already disclosed in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan of March 2004 and by the USFWS in the BO of January 13, 2004. Therefore, given the project level effects analysis for the Indiana bat and the authorized level of incidental take, further Section 7 consultation is not necessary for the Indiana bat. (EA, Wells Branch Biological Evaluation and USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service Letter dated March 14, 2012)

   Small whorled pogonia
   A "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" determination was made for the small whorled pogonia for the proposed actions. The USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the USFS determination that the proposed project with the protective measures listed in the BE is not likely to adversely affect the small whorled pogonia. (EA, Wells Branch Biological Evaluation and USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service Letter dated March 14, 2012)

   Eastern small-footed bat
   There will be no direct, indirect, or cumulative effect from the stand improvement, site preparation, stand improvement, or planting and seeding proposed post-harvest. The proposed actions should not impact the species as a whole, or cause a trend toward federal listing. (EA, Wells Branch Biological Evaluation)

   Blackside dace
   No effect, beyond those already disclosed through previous consultation (see the Mussel and Fish Conservation Plan). (EA, Wells Branch Biological Evaluation and USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service Letter dated March 14, 2012)

   Barrens tiger beetle
   While these proposed actions may affect individuals, the actions should not affect the species as a whole, or cause a trend toward federal listing. There should be no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to the Barrens tiger beetle from the proposed activities of this project. (EA, Wells Branch Biological Evaluation)

Sweet pinesap
While these proposed activities may impact individuals, the actions should not affect the species as a whole, or cause a trend toward federal listing. There should be no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to the sweet pinesap from the proposed activities of this project. (EA, Wells Branch Biological Evaluation)

Small spreading pogonia
A determination that the proposed project is not likely to adversely affect the small whorled pogonia was made (EA, Wells Branch Biological Evaluation).

10. **Whether the action threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment**. The proposed action does not violate any Federal, State, or local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. All applicable laws and regulations were considered in the development of the EA.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

Forest Plan Consistency
The Jefferson National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan 2004, as amended, has been reviewed to determine whether the decision being made is consistent with the present management area direction, the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), and other laws and regulations (16 U.S.C. 1604 (g)(3)(E)). This action will emphasize the increase in Early Successional Habitat, and the growth, vigor and diversity of the vegetative species in the project area. This action is consistent with the Forest Plan.

Suitability for Timber Management
The 285 acres described above as being selected to receive a regeneration treatment and the 176 acres selected to receive a thinning treatment meet the criteria of being on land suitable for timber production as described by the RLRMP (3-88, 3-112, 3-178). These lands have undergone a three-stage process that considered physical suitability (site productivity), financial suitability, and consideration of the DFC's for various management areas. All the acres to be harvested under this site-specific analysis are suitable for timber production.

Even-aged Management
Shelterwood and Regeneration through Coppice with reserves are considered even-aged management techniques with respect to NFMA. This harvest treatment is appropriate for all stands proposed with this harvest method as described on page 2-33 of the RLRMP. This harvest method is recommended for the forest types contained within these stands. Furthermore, even-aged management of these units will help achieve the purpose and need of improving the currently unbalanced age class distribution of the stands, and improve various wildlife habitat conditions.

Ability to Regenerate Stands
Regeneration of the stands proposed for coppice with reserves and shelterwood are expected to occur by the end of the five-year period beginning from the date that logging is completed and the sale contract has been terminated. Regeneration will derive primarily from seed production from residual trees left by the shelterwood treatment, hardwood stump sprouting, and existing advanced regeneration (EA, page 43).

Vegetation Manipulation
These actions which alter vegetation are consistent with Forest Plan Direction .

As previously stated, this action would help achieve the Forest Plan goals of improving the currently unbalanced age class distribution of the stands and initiate regeneration process and/or maintain tree growth. This action would achieve these goals while minimizing impacts to biological (EA, pages 25-64), social (EA, page 66), and economic (EA, page 69) resources.

This action assures that all regenerated acres will be adequately stocked with desirable trees species as previously described.

The action was not chosen primarily because it gave the greatest output and return (EA, pages 69-70). The action was chosen primarily because it would move towards the Desired Future Condition of the area by emphasizing objectives of Management Prescriptions 8A1, 4D, 7B, 7D, and 11 (RLRMP 3-27, 88, 96 and 178). These objectives are met while simultaneously providing forest product commodity outputs for the social and economic well being of the people living in the area and helping to maintain a way of life long associated with those living in the area.

This action will avoid permanent impairment of site productivity and ensure conservation of the soil and water resource through the application of mitigation measures found in the EA (page 20). Analysis of the impacts to water and soil resource concluded that these impacts are not expected to be significant (EA, pages 25-40 and 62-64).

This action will adequately mitigate impacts to the water resource (EA, page 25), wildlife resource and fisheries resource (EA, page 45). This action will also adequately mitigate impacts on the recreation and aesthetic values of the area (EA, page 66).

This action is practical in terms of transportation, harvesting, and economics as previously discussed in this Decision Notice under the suitability for timber management heading above.

A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and EA were considered. The EA identified applicable laws and regulations. I determined these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

APPEAL RIGHTS AND PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. A written appeal, including attachments, must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date this notice is published in the *Coalfield Progress* (Wise, VA). The Appeal shall be sent to George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, 5162 Valleypointe Parkway; Roanoke, Virginia 24019-3050. Appeals may be faxed to (540) 265-5145. Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Appeals may also be mailed electronically in a common digital format to *appeals-southern-georgewashington-jefferson@fs.fed.us*

Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. For further information on this decision, contact District Ranger, Clinch Ranger District, 9416 Coeburn Mountain Road, 24293 and Phone: 276-328-2931.

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 business days following the date of appeal disposition. (36 CFR 215.9)

Jorge J. Hersel

JORGE J. HERSEL
District Ranger
Clinch Ranger District

March 27, 2012
Date

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