

News Release

USDA Forest Service
National Forests in Mississippi
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National Forests in Mississippi's Proposed Management Plan Released for Comment

The U.S. Forest Service today released the Proposed Forest Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the National Forests in Mississippi (NFMS) for public review and comment. The Plan will guide management activities on the 1.2 million acres of national forest lands for the next 15 years. The Plan is the result of a collaborative effort between National Forest managers, partner agencies, conservation organizations, and interested members of the public. The draft documents are available online at www.fs.usda.gov/mississippi. Written or electronic comments will be accepted for 90 days following the publication of the Notice of Availability in the *Federal Register*.

The revised Plan establishes a strong commitment to an all-lands approach to conserve high priority forest ecosystems and landscapes in Mississippi. The Plan promotes achievement of many state-wide goals and objectives including: restore and manage longleaf pine within its historical range; suppress and eradicate non-native and invasive plants and pests; restore fire-adapted lands and reduce risk of wildfire impacts; protect and enhance water quality; protect, conserve, and enhance fish and wildlife resources; and manage forests to mitigate and adapt to global climate change.

The Forest Service is scheduling public workshops in February through April where NFMS staff will be available to answer questions about the draft documents. Stakeholders can interact with Forest staff and other stakeholders to seek ways to modify the draft Forest Plan, and written comments can be submitted. The Forest website will announce the dates, times and locations of these workshops.

The Plan works to fulfill the Forest Service's mission of managing national forests for multiple uses. The intent to restore native ecological systems is supported by conservation groups, and restoration activities will result in a continued flow of timber products desired by industry and communities.

Highlights of the Plan include:

- Improve and restore native ecosystems by converting plantings of loblolly and slash pines to native longleaf pine, shortleaf pine, and hardwoods at about 2,300 acres annually. These species are also more resilient to extreme weather events such as hurricanes and can sequester more carbon longer than the loblolly plantations.
- Maintain a diversity of tree ages including the establishment of old growth stands in at least 10 percent of all forest types.
- Protect species diversity, including nine Threatened or Endangered species, by enhancing and maintaining species habitat and ecosystem diversity. The Nature Conservancy and U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service have been partners on identifying native ecological systems and species needs throughout the revision process.

- Restore historic fire regimes and reduce fuel loadings by maintaining current level of prescribed burning at a minimum of 225,000 acres annually.
- Maintain a steady flow of timber products (94 million board feet annually) from restoration practices.
- Public safety and environmental protection are the main priorities for managing and sustaining the roads, trails, and facilities that make up forest infrastructure.

The National Forests in Mississippi encompass about 1.2 million acres of land and consist of six forests: Bienville, Delta, Holly Springs, Homochitto, Tombigbee, and De Soto (which also includes the Chickasawhay Ranger District). The revision process began in 2000 and was interrupted several times by changing planning rules and the recovery efforts following Hurricane Katrina.

A content analysis team will collect comments for input into a database that will be used by the National Forests in Mississippi. NFMS will review and respond to the comments and then prepare a Final Environmental Impact Statement and Final Forest Plan.

Written comments can be submitted to:
National Forests in Mississippi
Proposed Forest Plan
P. O. Box 1919
Sacramento, CA 95812

Comments can be emailed to: NFsMSProposedForestPlan@fscomments.org

For more information, visit the website: www.fs.usda.gov/mississippi.

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