Camp Cherokee Master Site Plan
Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact
Cherokee National Forest
Ocoee/Hiwassee Ranger District
Polk County, Tennessee

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Background

The Forest Service prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Recreation Residence Standards and Guidelines and Camp Cherokee Master Site Plan in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and other relevant laws and regulations. The EA disclosed the direct, indirect and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from implementation of the alternatives as described in detail in the EA. Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project-area resources, may be found in the project record located at the Forest Supervisor’s Office in Cleveland, Tennessee. This document addresses only the Camp Cherokee Master Site Plan.

The EA (p. 4) explains the Purpose and Need for Action is the following:

- Camp Cherokee believes their Site Development Plan (2002) is out of date and needs modifications. They have prepared and are proposing a new Master Site Plan (to be approved under the Special Use Permit) to move toward meeting the changing recreational needs of the public while fulfilling the purpose of organizational camps on National Forest System (NFS) land, which is to promote the physical, mental, and spiritual health of young people, individuals with a disability, and their families through activities conducted in a natural environment. This plan defines a program and development direction for the Camp well into the 21st Century. Its intent is to present a long range development proposal for the orderly development of the permit area.

The EA was prepared by an interdisciplinary team and is available for public review at the Tellico Ranger Station, Tellico Plains, TN and on the Forest web site at http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/cherokee/landmanagement/projects.

Decision

Based upon my review of the alternatives, I have decided to implement only the portion of Alternative B as described in the EA (pp. 4-5 & Appendix C) regarding the Camp Cherokee Master Site Plan and the Design Criteria as disclosed in the Biological Evaluation (July 2013).

Alternative B (Proposed Action, as described in the EA (pp. 4-5)) authorizes the Forest Service to:
The proposed action is to approve Camp Cherokee’s new Master Site Plan (Appendix C) to move toward meeting the changing recreational needs of the public while fulfilling the purpose of organizational camps on NFS land. The Forest Service encourages the holder to construct facilities and develop programs that promote environmental education, hiking, fishing, and similar forest-related activities, rather than organized games or other urban activities. Camp Cherokee’s primary purpose is to provide a unique respite where guests can come away from their everyday routine lifestyle experiences and find new friends to share new challenges and learning experiences in a unique natural setting. This plan defines a program and development direction for the Camp well into the 21st Century. Its intent is to present a long-range development proposal for the orderly development of the permit area. The proposal involves expand the permit area from the current 44 acres to 58 acres.

The proposed Master Plan establishes three zones in the permit area (see Appendix C).

- **Zone I** is to be the area developed to primarily serve families who wished to enjoy "camping" in a modest residential environment, a private, single family, duplex, household cabin, with amenities. Additions and improvements to Zone 1 include: maintenance shop and office, caretaker residence, gear depot, two program lodges, a country store, a waterfront storage unit, move the boys cabin (8 currently) to a new location in Zone 2 (11 cabins). The dimension of the boys cabin is 20’ x 22’. The old reservoir would continue to support the existing kitchen facility and old boys bathhouse. Three family quarters (30’ x 60’, duplex with bath and kitchen facilities) would be constructed at the former boys cabin location.

- **Zone II** is the whole center of the permit area, which supports the traditional Camp. Additions and improvements include: dining hall, staff housing and lounge, wellness center/nurse, new boys and girls cabins (as stated above and three new additional, respectively) and bathrooms, an incinerator upgrade, assembly/recreation center, and water ski and camp stores. A waterline and respective trenches from the "new reservoir" (approved under a previous decision) would be constructed to the girls and boys bathhouses and the camp director residence. In addition, a functional rope course 50’ x 75’ would be constructed.

- **Zone III** is established primarily to accommodate those adults, individuals, and groups who have very little interest in the “Spartan” accommodations usually associated with “camping” but do wish to share in the richness of the experience, but in a more sophisticated living and service environment. Thus a conference center, offering comfortable motel style rooms, meeting and dining spaces, is the flagship facility of Zone III. Other additions and improvements to Zone III include: theater, eight cabins, welcome tent, gazebo, equipment shed, and three shelters. The campfire area receives extensive use and reconstruction to an area of 100’ x 100’ and appropriate bank stabilization is proposed.

- Other related improvements scattered throughout the permit area to include: roads, trails, parking; utilities; shoreline improvements, including docks and beaches; landscaping; and signs, gates, and fencing.
Developments listed in the Master Site Plan would receive further site specific review as individual structure/site plans are finalized. Amendments to the existing permit would be issued as individual plans are submitted to the Forest Service. Each amendment would authorize the actual construction of that particular phase of the Master Site Plan. The following process would be used to issue an amendment to the special use permit.

Camp Cherokee presents the Forest Service with site specific plans for the specific aspect of the Master Site Plan they wish to implement. These plans would include: drawings from an engineer or architect licensed in Tennessee; an erosion control plan; a septic permit issued by the Polk County Waste Water specialist, if needed; and other pertinent state or county permits. Appropriate Forest Service personnel (facilities engineer, wildlife biologist, hydrologist, soil scientist, aquatic biologist, archeologist, landscape architect, recreation specialist, or botanist) would review the plans and recommend the proposal be approved as is or with necessary changes. Issuance of an amendment would follow this review and approval process.

**DESIGN CRITERIA TO BE EMPLOYED (BE, dated July 2013)**

- All proposed improvement and construction activities would be subject to the guidelines of the special-use permitting process. All proposed activities would be reviewed by the interdisciplinary team and design criteria implemented to conform to RLRMP and special-use permit standards and guidelines.
- During review, potential bat roost trees would be identified and efforts made to prevent removing these trees between 15 April and 15 August.
- Regarding bald eagles and the bald eagle nest on Parksville Lake
  - FW-44: Protection zones are delineated and maintained around all bald eagle nest and communal roost sites, until they are determined to be no longer suitable through coordination with USFWS. The protection zone extends a minimum of 1500 feet from the nest or roost. Activities that modify the forest canopy within this zone are prohibited. All management activities not associated with bald eagle management and monitoring are prohibited within this zone during periods of use (nesting season is October 1 to June 15; roost use periods are determined through site-specific monitoring). Where controlled by the FS, public access routes into or through this zone are closed during the seasons of use (RLRMP 2004).
  - Bald Eagle Management Guidelines and Conservation Measures outlined by the USFWS (USDI 2009b): 1) Maintain a buffer of at least 330 feet (100 meters) between your activities and the nest (including active and alternate nests), unless a similar activity is closer than 330 feet, then you may maintain a distance buffer as close to the nest as the existing tolerated activity. 2) Restrict all clearing, external construction, and landscaping activities within 660 feet of the nest to outside the nesting season (i.e., outside the nesting season is from August through mid-January in the Midwest). 3) Maintain established landscape buffers that screen the activity from the nest.
Reasons for the Decision

Before reaching this decision, I examined the existing conditions of Camp Cherokee located in the Cherokee National Forest; reviewed all the comments (scoping, 30 day notice and comment (both sets), response to comments (both sets), and 2012 appeal issues), considered input from resources specialists, and reviewed the effects analysis of specialist, and reports included in the project record. My reasons for selecting Alternative B include:

Camp Cherokee:

- Camp Cherokee’s Master Site Plan was developed in response to national forest land and resource management issues which are to move toward meeting the changing recreational needs of the public while fulfilling the purpose of organizational camps on NFS land.
- Camp Cherokee’s primary purpose is to provide a unique respite where guests can come away from their everyday routine lifestyle experiences and find new friends to share new challenges and learning experiences in a unique natural setting.
- The Master Site Plan places a variety of activities in a desired overall relationship with each other, based on the ability of the land to support such activities.
- The conceptual development plan includes a waterfront zone, group camping zone, traditional youth camp zone, and a zone for an adult friendly campus. Approving the conceptual geographic, built environment and activity components of the plan would allow for greater efficiency and flexibility in the long-term development of the camp.
- Approving an additional 14 acres for the camp would allow more opportunities for future buildings and constructed living spaces to be setback from the lake and therefore future developments would have less negative effects on the scenic integrity of the lake.

As required by 36 CFR 219.35, I have considered the best available science in making this decision. The project record demonstrates a thorough review of relevant scientific information, consideration of responsible opposing views, and where appropriate, the acknowledgement of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered one other alternative. Alternative B and C are the same with respect to Camp Cherokee.

Alternative A (No Action)
Under Alternative A the Forest would continue administration of recreation residence permits in accordance with Forest Service laws, policies, and regulations. The proposed new Master Site Plan would be denied. Camp Cherokee would continue to be managed using the existing facilities and implementing the approved 2002 five year Site Development Plan (USDA 2003).

The 2002 five year plan was developed because the existing camp facilities were in need of repair due to age and use, and to enable them to meet the predicted demand and needs of their future clientele. This document authorized the following improvements:
1. Replacement of two boat docks. One at Camp Cherokee and the other near Mac Point on U.S. 64.
2. The construction of an administrative building west of the caretaker’s house.
3. The construction of a new lodge and boat dock on the northern portion of the camp.
4. The construction of a climbing tower/ropes course, and
5. The leveling and expansion of the soccer field.
6. Related improvements such as roads, trails, parking, signage, gates, utility infrastructure, and shoreline improvements.

The five year Site Development Plan also listed the following improvements which have already been accomplished 1) develop well for a water source –2) Construct a new caretaker cabin and 3) Replace the “ski” dock.

I did not select Alternative A (No Action) because it does not adequately fulfill the purpose of organizational camps on NFS land nor address the purpose and need for action.

Public Involvement

The Cherokee National Forest has listed the Recreation Residence Standards and Guidelines and Camp Cherokee Master Site Plan EA from January 2007 through present in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA). The Forest Service distributes the SOPA and it is available on the internet at http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/forest-level.php?110804. The project has also been available on the Cherokee National Forest webpage (http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/cherokee/landmanagement/projects).

On December 19th, 2007 the Forest sent a scoping letter to approximately 113 interested and affected agencies, organizations, tribes, individuals, and recreation residence permit holders. The letter requested comments on the proposed action. Twenty-one interested parties submitted letters, e-mails or verbal comments. During scoping, 17 of the comments were in relation to the Draft Recreation Residence Standards and Guidelines and 4 in relation to the Camp Cherokee Master Site Plan. Issues identified during scoping that were carried forward and used to develop alternatives in the EA included: 1) aesthetic and recreation value of water use improvements (i.e. boat docks, decks, etc.); 2) safety of permittees and recreational users of Parksville Lake.

A legal notice, announcing the 30-day opportunity to comment on the EA appeared in the Knoxville News Sentinel on March 22nd, 2011. The Forest mailed notice of the comment period to those parties who previously expressed interest in the project. The EA and appendices were posted on the Cherokee National Forest webpage and mailed to those that requested it. The 30-day comment period ended on April 21st, 2011. During the comment period, two comments were received. One comment was a request for information on the project. The other comment suggested changing the wording of a recreation residence standard. A decision was made (May 7, 2012) regarding Recreation Residence Standards & Guidelines and Camp Cherokee Master Site Plan. This decision was appealed and withdrawn (July 23, 2013) for various reasons pertaining only to the Recreational Residence Standards & Guidelines. The EA was redone to address the concerns pertaining to Recreational Residence Standards & Guidelines. A second legal notice, announcing another 30-day notice and comment period for the EA appeared in the
The Forest mailed the notice and comment period to everyone on the mailing list. The EA and appendices were posted on the Cherokee National Forest webpage. The 30-day notice and comment period ended on August 23, 2013. During the comment period, three comments were received. Two comments were from the same individual. Both commenters commented only on the Recreation Residence Standards & Guidelines. No comments pertained to Camp Cherokee Master Site Plan.

The project file contains a summary of all the comments received throughout the life of this project.

**Finding of No Significant Impact**

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA (pp. 72-139), I determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR §1508.27); therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. I incorporate, by reference, the EA and project record, in making this determination. I base this finding on the following.

**Context**

The context of impacts resulting from this decision is within the scope of planning goals and objectives for the Cherokee National Forest as outlined in the RLRMP. The Cherokee National Forest currently administers these permits in accordance with Forest Service laws, regulations, and policies. The decision contained herein supplements the national and regional laws, regulations, and policies regarding these special uses of NFS lands and resources with new and additional site specific standards applicable to the Cherokee National Forest.

**Intensity**

I considered the following ten elements of impact intensity (40 CFR §1508.27b) in assessing the potential significance of project effects.

1. **Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.**
   My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action. All practical means to avoid or minimize environmental harm have been adopted. A Biological Evaluation (BE) and specialist reports prepared for this project are available in the EA and project record, and unless otherwise noted are available upon request. Table 4 of the BE (p. 16) summarizes the effects determination by species by alternative:
Table 4. Determinations of Effect for Each Species by Alternative (*see explanation of codes at bottom)

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*Explanation of Codes
1- No Impact
2- May impact individuals but is not likely to cause a trend to federal listing or loss of viability
3- No effect

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.
   There will be no significant effects on public health and safety, because the project was designed to include standards of construction and maintenance of authorized improvements that meet federal, state, and local regulations and building codes. Implementation of the decision will improve the public health and safety of the authorized areas/improvements and expedite the approval process for proposals to upgrade those improvements in order to meet such standards and codes.

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.
   There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics or the area, because there are no known areas to be affected (EA pp. 72-139).

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 because there is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the Camp Cherokee Master Site Plan (EA pp. 72-139).

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.
   The Cherokee National Forest has considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. The effects analysis (EA pp.72-139) shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk.
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 action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects because it conforms to all existing RLRMP direction and is applicable only to the project area (EA pp. 3-6).

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.
   The cumulative impacts are not significant (EA pp. 72-139).

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.
   The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because there are no known such places in the project area (EA p. 136). Future proposed alterations by permit holders to existing authorized improvements within the project area that have not received site specific analysis for cultural resources will be further reviewed for eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places prior to authorizing such alterations (EA p. 136, and Appendix H). Any future site specific proposals from permit holders that have potential to destroy such resources, if identified as eligible for listing, will receive further review in accordance with the ‘Memorandum of Agreement between the USDA Forest Service and the Tennessee State Historic Preservation Office’ (EA p. 136, Appendix H). My decision will not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources, because there are no known resources to destroy. If significant resources become known through site specific review of proposals by permit holders, then no loss or destruction of such resources will be authorized.
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 ESA of 1973. The determination of effect for species by alternative (BE, p. 16) is as follows:

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10. Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. The action will not violate applicable laws and regulations for the protection of the environment. The action is consistent with the RLRMP (EA pp. 72-139).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision to implement Camp Cherokee Master Site Plan of Alternative B is consistent with the long term goals and objectives of the RLRMP. The project conforms to the RLRMP by incorporating appropriate standards, guidelines and desired conditions. Therefore, this decision complies with the National Forest Management Act of 1976.

It is my finding that the actions of this decision comply with the National Historic Preservation Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations.

This decision complies with Executive Order 12898 “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations.” A review of potential effects to human health and safety and natural resources in the vicinity of minority and low-income communities did not identify any significant or disproportionately high or adverse effects in these areas.
This decision complies with Executive Order 11988 of May, 1997. This order requires the Forest Service to provide leadership and to take action to (1) minimize adverse impacts associated with occupancy and modification of floodplains and reduce risks of flood loss, (2) minimize impacts of floods on human safety, health, and welfare, and (3) restore and preserve the natural and beneficial values served by flood plains.

This project will not change access, does not change the use or patterns of use, and does not change road standards. No new classified road construction is proposed. There are no road management decisions to be made with this project. Therefore, a project-level Transportation Analysis Plan is not required.

**Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities and Implementation Date**

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12 (e)(1) and may be implemented immediately. No comments on the Camp Cherokee Master Site Plan were received.

**Contact**

For additional information concerning this decision contact: Stephanie Medlin, Environmental Coordinator, Cherokee National Forest, 2800 Ocoee Street North, Cleveland, TN 37312, (423) 476-9700.

**Signature and Date**

/s/ Derrick Morris  

Derrick JaSal Morris  
Forest Supervisor  
Cherokee National Forest

9/23/13  

Date

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