

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/13/2020 2:52:30 PM

First name: Chad

Last name: Wammock

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Re: Chattooga River Scoping Letter FY 21 Prescribed Fire Project

I would like to provide my comments on the attached prescribed burn project. I FULLY support any and all timber management, this includes prescribed burns as well as logging. There is nothing more beneficial for the wildlife and also reduces the risk of wild fires. Please keep up the active management, our forests have been neglected too long.

Chad Wammock

1041 Granite Dr

Greensboro, GA 30642

770-833-8034

On Nov 13, 2020, at 8:38 AM, USDA Forest Service <forests@public.govdelivery.com> wrote:

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Dear Forest Stakeholder:

I am asking for your comments on this proposal to prescribe burn five areas on the Chattooga River Ranger District of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. The Chattooga River Ranger District is proposing prescribed burning to improve wildlife and plant habitat diversity, enhance forest health, and reduce hazardous fuels accumulations on approximately 976 acres of National Forest system lands in Stephens County, Georgia.

Purpose and Need

The primary purpose of this project is to maintain and enhance habitat for rare and endangered plant species found within the Upper Piedmont region of the Chattooga River Ranger District. The federally endangered smooth purple coneflower (*Echinacea laevigata*) is found within this region, with several known sites on the district. The rare Smith's sunflower (*Helianthus smithii*), a Regional Forester Sensitive Species (RFSS), can also be found within the Upper Piedmont region. The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests' only known Smith's sunflower population is located on the Chattooga River Ranger District.

Both the smooth purple coneflower and the Smith's sunflower require an open canopy with increased sunlight for growth. Reducing the competing woody vegetation is necessary to maintain optimal habitat conditions for these plants. Prescribed fire has been found to be an effective, cost-efficient tool for managing the competing vegetation.

The use of prescribed fire to meet resource objectives has multiple benefits for the forest and public. The Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) Prescribed Fire Project provides an opportunity to work towards the desired future condition of the Forest as described in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP, 2004):

* Wildlife/Plant Habitat Improvement - Prescribed fire is broadly accepted in the scientific and management community as an important disturbance process in many natural systems that occur throughout the Southern Appalachian physiographic region. Specific wildlife habitat improvements include (1) enhancing habitat diversity for a full range of native and other desired species (LRMP Goal 2); (2) enhancing, restoring, managing, and creating habitats required for wildlife and plant communities, including disturbance-dependent forest communities

(LRMP Goal 3); (3) contributing to the conservation and recovery of federally-listed threatened and endangered species through habitat maintenance and/or enhancement and, where possible, for their reintroduction into suitable habitats, and contribute to avoiding the necessity for federal listing of other species under the Endangered Species Act (LRMP Goal 15).

* Forest Health - Prescribed fire helps to contribute to the maintenance or restoration of native tree species whose role in forest ecosystems has been reduced by past land use or is threatened by insect and disease, fire exclusion, forest succession or other factors (LRMP Goal 8). Prescribed fire will be used to promote the regeneration of desirable species such as oaks, shortleaf pine and native grasses.

* Hazardous Fuel Reduction - Fuel reduction in these proposed burn units is needed due to wildland urban interface issues. Prescribed burning reduces the danger of wildfire to adjacent private lands by reducing fuel loading in areas where large accumulations of pine needles, hardwood leaves and small woody debris have occurred over time. Treating these fuels with prescribed fire assists in reducing extreme fire behavior, spotting distance and creates a defensible space within the designated wildland urban interface (LRMP Goal 58).

Proposed Action

Prescribed burns are proposed for the following areas:

AreaAcresDescription

Stephens County

Fraday Branch

Management Prescription

9.H - Management, maintenance and restoration of plant associations to their ecological potential⁹⁵This existing unit is located within and adjacent to the Lake Russell Wildlife Management Area along State Highway 184 at the Fraday Branch Trailhead Parking Area. This unit is adjacent to private property along the southern and eastern unit boundaries and is considered a wildland urban interface environment. The control lines will consist of State Highway 184, FSR 389, North Hicks Road, an unnamed tributary of Mill Creek, hand line, and previously utilized dozer line. Additionally, this unit contains smooth purple coneflower sites.

Lee Mountain A

Management Prescription

9.H - Management, maintenance and restoration of plant associations to their ecological potential²⁴²This existing unit is located in the Lee Mountain area off FSR 181. This unit is adjacent to private property along the southwest side of the unit and is considered a wildland urban interface environment. The control lines will consist of FSR 181, an unnamed tributary of Little Toccoa Creek, hand line, and previously utilized dozer line. Additionally, this unit contains smooth purple coneflower sites.

Lee Mountain B

Management Prescription

9.H - Management, maintenance and restoration of plant associations to their ecological potential²⁷This existing unit is located in the Lee Mountain area off FSR 181. This unit is in close proximity to private property to the south and east and is considered a wildland urban interface environment. The control lines will consist of FSR 181 and previously utilized dozer line. Additionally, this unit contains smooth purple coneflower sites.

Anderson Road

Management Prescription

9.H - Management, maintenance and restoration of plant associations to their ecological potential¹⁵¹This existing unit along with a 39-acre addition is located east of Toccoa Reservoir along CR 158. This unit is adjacent to private property to the south and east and is considered a wildland urban interface environment. The control lines will consist of CR 158, Rock Quarry Road, an unnamed tributary of Toccoa Creek, hand line, and previously utilized dozer line. Additionally, this unit contains smooth purple coneflower sites.

Black Mountain

Management Prescription

9.H - Management, maintenance and restoration of plant associations to their ecological potential⁴⁶¹This existing unit is located west of Black Mountain between FSR 139 and Little Toccoa Creek. This unit is within close proximity to private property to the northwest, southwest, and southeast and is considered a wildland urban interface environment. The control lines will consist of FSR 139, Little Toccoa Creek, hand line, and previously utilized dozer line. Additionally, this unit contains Smith's sunflower sites.

These burns would be implemented utilizing a variety of ignition methods, including aerial ignition. Ignition techniques would allow for moderate intensity fires to spread along ridge tops and drier sites. Ignition and fire spread in riparian areas and mesic hardwood stands is limited due to their higher moisture content, and fire behavior in these areas is generally of low intensity. Fire lines for these burn units will consist of previously utilized dozer lines, existing roads, streams, and constructed hand lines. All fire line construction and post-implementation repair to reduce erosion will adhere to the Georgia Best Management Practice Guidelines and standards from the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan.

Site-specific burn plans are prepared to meet Forest Service policy. These plans describe the weather, fuel conditions, and fire behavior under which burns can be safely implemented while also achieving objectives. The plans also consider the effects of prescribed burns on other resources, both on and off-site, including downwind smoke impacts.

Prescribed burning would take place in the growing and/or the dormant season to achieve desired conditions. The dormant season is defined as November through mid-April, with the primary implementation period being February through March. The growing season is defined as mid-April through October, with the primary implementation period being May through June. Initial treatments will begin over the next 1-3 years, followed by a 3-5 year prescribed fire rotation. The 3-5 year rotation is expected to be necessary to continually maintain and enhance the desired open structure while eliminating woody sprouts and promoting herbaceous establishment.

How to Provide Comments

We would like to hear from you regarding the proposed activities before making a decision regarding this project. The Forest Service has made a preliminary determination that this proposal falls under the following Categorical Exclusion: Category 6 "Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction." as identified in 36 CFR 220.6(e)(6) and the Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 National Environmental Policy, Chapter 32.2. Under this category, the decision would be documented as a Decision Memo at the discretion of the responsible official; however, the final determination will not be made until your comments and concerns are considered.

Please make your responses as specific as possible to ensure we may adequately address them. This would include the following information:

1. Your name and address.
2. Title of the Proposed Action.
3. Specific substantive comments (36 CFR 215.2) on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision.
4. Your signature or other means of identification verification. For organizations, a signature or other means of identification verification must be provided for the individual authorized to represent your organization.

Comments on this proposal must be postmarked or received by December 13, 2020.

You may send in your comments as follows:

Comment FormatSend to:

Hard copy letterChattooga River Ranger District

9775 Hwy. 441 South

Lakemont, GA 30552

ATTN: FY21 Chattooga River Prescribed Fire Project

Email message or documentEmail to: SM.FS.chattooga@usda.gov

Subject Line: FY21 Chattooga River Prescribed Fire Project

FAX(706) 754-1021

Subject: FY21 Chattooga River Prescribed Fire Project

PhoneAmy McClave, (706) 754-6221, x102

Phone comments may be made within normal weekday business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. In accordance with regulations, all written comments received, including those submitted electronically, will be placed in the project file and will become a matter of public record.

Electronic versions of the information provided in this scoping notice are available on the project website at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56866>. For any questions related to this project, please contact Amy McClave, Fire Management Officer for the Chattooga River Ranger District at (706) 754-6221, extension 102. Thank you for your interest and involvement.

Sincerely,

/s/Ryan Foote

District Ranger

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