Foothills Landscape Project – Pre-Implementation Process Guide and Compliance Checklist

This document will be used by Forest Service (FS) employees to implement the Foothills Landscape Project by tiering projects to the Programmatic Environmental Assessment and Final Decision. Following the process outlined below will:

- Demonstrate regulatory compliance with all overarching law, policy and regulation.
- Aid in determining when/if additional analysis under National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is warranted for any actions within a given Implementation Area (IA) of the Foothills Landscape.
- Ensure public engagement with stakeholders occurs throughout the lifecycle of the project.
- Provide planning consistency across FS units.
- Result in an Implementation Plan(s) that documents the locations and timing of management actions, applicable mitigations (project design features) and adheres to the Final Programmatic Decision Notice (DN). These implementation plans should provide adequate documentation required under NEPA for subsequent public scoping and if needed, tiered analyses and/or decisions.

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Implementation Area: Upper Conasauga

Ranger District: Conasauga

Planning Steps:

Step 1: Forest Identifies all Management Opportunities within Implementation Area

Instructions: District Interdisciplinary Teams (IDTs) will consult the Environmental Assessment, Decision Notice and Forest Plan to identify potential project-level activities for the IA that are consistent with analysis and management direction.

A. IDTs will identify the desired conditions throughout the IA by reviewing applicable management prescription (MRx) objectives and standards per the Forest Plan and characterization of current conditions based on existing data sets (i.e., FSVEG spatial, etc.) Examples include, but may not be limited to:
   - What MRx are present? Suitable or unsuitable for timber production?
   - What sixth (6^{th}) level watersheds are present? Watershed condition class? Percent Total Impervious Area (TIA)?
   - Scenic Integrity Objectives?
   - Known road or access issues? Illegal off-road problems?
   - Impaired streams, known sediment, or Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) issues?
   - What vegetation treatment opportunities are present (GIS queries)?
   - What successional conditions are present? How many acres of young forest could be created?
   - Do some stands meet minimum old growth age? Does the IA need old growth small blocks?
   - Known recreation or trail issues/ concerns?

B. IDT will review proposed actions (EA – Table 17 & Appendix B) and select all appropriate management actions available and needed to achieve desired conditions within the IA, noting which are identified for implementation directly from programmatic DN versus those requiring further review.

Throughout the implementation planning process, if at any point the IDT discovers/ determines an action is needed or a condition exists that was not accounted for in the analysis, additional disclosure and NEPA would be triggered.

C. Summary of proposed actions covered in this Implementation Guide.

Activity Name (should correspond w/ Table 17 of EA)	Location (i.e., HUC, Compartment Stand, and or Geographic Description)	Draft Acres and/or miles of road/trails, etc.	Final Acres and /or miles of road/trails, etc.	Anticipated year(s) implementation would begin
Canebrake restoration	Comp 712 Stands 38, 39	9 acres		2025
Stream habitat improvements – large wood	Comp 711 – unnamed tributary (UT) to Jack's River, Comp 709, 710, 711 – Jigger Creek and tributaries, UT to Conasauga River Comp 723 – UT to	8.8 miles		2026-2030

	Conasauga River			
Replacement of culverts, fords, or bridges to increase aquatic organism passage and function	Comp 712 – FSR 16B	1 acre		2025-2030
Continuation of prescribed burning within existing burn blocks	East Cowpen Rx Burn – Comp 711 Buffalo Rx Burn – Comp 711 Iron Mtn Rx Burn – Comp 712/714	1,619 acres		2025-2030
Prescribed fire in new burn blocks to facilitate restoration or maintenance of fire-adapted ecosystems or to reduce hazardous fuels	Buffalo Extension Rx Burn – Comp 711 Gryder Camp Rx Burn – 710/713 Burnt Schoolhouse Rx Burn – Comp 710	1,530 acres		2025-2035
Decommissioning of maintenance level (ML) 2 and ML 1 system roads	FSR 51C – Ken Mountain RD; final 0.4 miles of road that enters the Ken Mountain Recommended Wilderness Study Area	0.4 miles		2025
Decommission low-use trails	Murray's Lake Trail	0.8 miles		2025
Restoration of southern yellow pine forest on dry sites dominated by mid to late-successional Virginia or white pine – 2 aged regen harvest	Comp 710 Stand 10 Comp 711 Stands 14, 27, 37 Comp 712 Stand 27 Comp 723 Stands 19, 29, 32, 41, 51	251 acres		2025-2035
Restoration of southern yellow pine forest or oak forest on sites currently occupied by off-site pine plantations (loblolly or white pine) or failed shortleaf or pitch pine plantations	**2 Aged Regen Harvest – Restore Shortleaf:** Comp 709 Stand 16 Comp 710 Stands 18, 34 Comp 711 Stands 13 Comp 713 Stands 26, 33 Comp 723 Stands 30	222 acres		2025-2035
	2 Aged Regen Harvest – Restore Oak: Comp 709 Stand 8; Comp 711 Stand 12	52 acres		
	Commercial Thinning – Restore Oak: Comp 711 Stand 15; Comp 713 Stand 9; Comp 723 Stand 57	82 acres		
Maintenance of southern yellow pine forest –	Comp 711 Stands 18, 28	47 acres		2025-2035

Commercial thinning				
Commercial and non-commercial thinning of pine plantations to improve forest health – Commercial thinning	Comp 709 Stands 14, 21 Comp 710 Stands 1, 4, 31, 32, 51 Comp 711 Stands 19, 21, 30, 38 Comp 712 Stands 28, 32 Comp 713 Stands 2, 16 Comp 723 Stands 25, 49, 52, 55, 65	690 acres		2025-2035
Maintenance of oak forest – Commercial thinning	Comp 710 Stands 2, 3, 5, 17 Comp 713 Stand 3	206 acres		2025-2035
Maintenance of oak forest – Midstory reduction	Comp 710 Stands 26, 29 Comp 711 Stands 26 Comp 712 Stands 6, 9, 13 Comp 713 Stands 7	151 acres		2025-2035
Maintenance of oak forest – Expanding gap treatment	Comp 723 Stands 40, 47	95 acres		2025-2035
Canopy gap creation in closed-canopied mesic stands – Commercial thinning	Comp 723 Stands 31, 64	34 acres		2025-2035
Restoring open woodland habitats on appropriate sites	Comp 711 Stands 16, 17	22 acres		2025-2035
Create young forest (ESH) by daylighting roads and permanent openings	Road Daylighting: 3.9 miles Comps 710, 711, 723 WLO Daylighting: 9 WLOs Comps 710, 711, 723	24 acres of Road Daylighting 10 acres of WLO Daylighting		2025-2035
Create or expand permanent openings	Expand 4 WLOs: Comps 710, 711, 723	10 acres		2025-2035

Step 2. Complete Initial Field Reviews and Validate Thresholds for Proposed Action

Instructions: Specialists should review the IA and complete their relevant checklist below. Information and documentation, if needed, should be included with this document. Once review is complete, and all specialists have signed, move to Step 3.

NOTE: It is the responsibility of the FS resource specialists to ensure **a)** the applicable steps below are followed, **b)** findings are communicated to IDT/ Line Officer, and **c)** resulting information is carried through accordingly and documented in the draft Implementation Plan for the IA.

Some of the following procedures may be repeated as planning evolves or deferred until sufficient information becomes available and it is prudent.

Aquatics and Terrestrial Wildlife

☒Review existing data to determine known locations of Threatened and Endangered (T&E) species, designated critical habitats, Regional Forester's Sensitive Species, or locally rare species (i.e., consult Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) spatial database (DNR-WCS) on AGOL, FS GIS shapefiles and other applicable records.). As part of the above process and specific to Terrestrial Wildlife, also:

- Consult with Georgia DNR for current range information for all federally listed bats to determine applicability of Forest Plan standards at: https://georgiawildlife.com/BatSurveyGuidance
- Review current spatial extent of suitable Indiana bat roosting/ maternity habitat in IA.
- Consult with Georgia DNR to verify current information about known roost trees or hibernacula for NLEB (northern long-eared bat) in IA.

☒ Obtain updated official species list from IPaC (Information for Planning and Consultation) for the project area at: https://ipac.ecosphere.fws.gov/. If new species are listed and present in IA and could be affected by the proposed action, consult with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)/ supplement NEPA accordingly.

List Date IPaC pulled: 8/1/2024

☒ Identify potential AOP opportunities (in conjunction with Forest Soil Scientist and Engineer).

- ***FLP Specific**: When increasing aquatic connectivity by removing barriers to aquatic organism passage, it should be noted that some barriers are beneficial in preventing encroachment of non-native species or movement of native species. The potential for negative consequences of removing a barrier should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.*

☒ Identify known issues that are contributing to decreased habitat quality (i.e., sediment sources, riparian function, increased water temperatures, etc.).

☒ Review existing data to determine presence or potential of priority wildlife species such as migratory songbirds, game species (i.e., consult DNR-WRD, Game Management, Region 8 bird records).

☒ Consider opportunity or need for wildlife habitat improvement, especially in conjunction with commercial vegetation treatments such as:

- Permanent openings acres in the project area. Consider creation or expansion (could create up to 1% of NFS acres per 6th level HUC).
- Opportunities for daylighting selected system roads.
- Opportunities for pollinator habitat improvement.

☒ The project design must comply with the following project design features:

- ***Forest Plan Standard FW- 009****: Known black bear den sites will be protected from disturbance by a buffer of a minimum of 100 feet.*
- ***Forest Plan Standard FW- 010****: Potential bear den trees (greater than 20-inch diameter at breast height (dbh), hollow with broken tops) will be retained.*
- ***FLP Specific****: Within individual project areas to be implemented within the Foothills Landscape area, an assessment of existing acres of permanent openings would be completed prior to implementation to determine the maximum allowable acreage of new openings (up to 1% of the National Forest acreage in each 6th level watershed). Permanent openings would be managed as traditional grass/forb (food plots), shrub, native grass/forb, or pollinator habitat as appropriate for the site.*
- ***FLP Specific****: When feasible, native plants that support pollinators would be planted on the forest where appropriate i.e., including logging decks, wildlife openings, powerline, and road rights-of- way. This would specifically include planting milkweed for monarch butterflies. (Work with interested non-profits and organizations to determine the correct plants to consider and the proper locations to conserve and enhance the pollinator habitat across the landscape.)*

☒ If relevant, use space below to list additional survey needs or pertinent information to include in Implementation Plan (i.e., consideration of thresholds for annual reporting of activities affecting endangered bat habitat per Forest Plan standard FW-238, Large Woody Debris opportunities, roads w/in 300' of impaired streams present, etc.):

Wild pigs are abundant in the Upper Conasauga River IA, affecting water quality and aquatic habitats in an important watershed. The Forest Service is addressing this issue through trapping efforts via an interagency agreement with USDA Wildlife Services, APHIS**.** Upper Conasauga IA is within the Cohutta WMA. The Cohutta WMA has two rifle hunts each fall (approximately 5 days each). Hunters from around the eastern half of the country travel to participate in these hunts. Timber contracts need to include a no-cut period during these hunts.

☐ Maps and visual aids have been attached. Level of detail should be sufficient to allow for adequate planning and identifcation of issues and concerns.

Please select one of the statements below:

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OR

☒ All activities shown in the draft plan have been reviewed for compliance with the Foothills Landscape EA or other relevant NEPA compliance and my resource. There are changed conditions or specific actions that are not in compliance. These conditions or actions are listed below.

There are changed conditions for this resource since the Foothills decision was signed. An updated list of T&E species for the UCON IA was obtained from IPaC on 8/1/24 and several new species with the potential to occur in the project area were listed. The following **wildlife species** were evaluated regarding potential effects from UCON project activities:

- **Whooping crane** *(Grus americana). A*n experimental population (nonessential) regularly travels through Georgia during migration from Wisconsin to winter in Florida and several other states. It is listed in IPaC as a concern for the entire state of Georgia. For purposes of section 7 of the ESA, nonessential experimental populations are treated as proposed for listing. In these instances, a nonessential experimental population provides additional flexibility because other federal agencies are not required to consult under section 7(a)(2). Section 7(a)(4) requires federal agencies to confer (rather than consult) with the FWS on actions that are likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a species proposed for listing, except on National Wildlife Refuge System or National Park System lands, where they are treated as threatened species. However, this project would have **no effect and is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence** of the experimental population of whooping crane that migrates over Georgia and no conference is required.
- **Monarch butterfly** (*Danaus plexippus*) is now proposed for listing as threatened (12/12/24) under the ESA. The proposed 4(d) rule states the following activities would be excepted from take: *Activities that may maintain, enhance, remove or establish milkweed and nectar plants within the breeding and migratory range that do not result in conversion of native or naturalized grassland, shrubland or forested habita*t. Activities in the Foothills Landscape Project's proposed action (avoiding milkweed during herbicide treatments, prescribed burning on a 3-5 year rotation, planting milkweed and native nectar-producing plants where possible, midstory control when thinning pine stands, creating or expanding permanent openings) would fall within the proposed 4(d) rule as they do not lead to the conversion of forested lands. The effects of the project on monarch butterfly were considered and disclosed in the Terrestrial Wildlife Report, Biological Evaluation, and summarized in the Environmental Assessment because the species was a Regional Forester's Sensitive Species (RFSS) at that time. **This new information does not require any further review or NEPA analysis or consultation**. This project is likely to benefit this species, however it may impact individuals but is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of monarch butterflies. This is consistent with the findings in the Programmatic EA and Biological Evaluation.
- **Frecklebelly madtom** *(Noturus munitus*) was listed as Threatened in March 2023. This species was reviewed as a RFSS (Aquatic Resource Report) but was not considered for further analysis in the Biological Evaluation or EA because it does not occur in the project area or within 1 mile downstream. Similarly, **trispot darter** (*Etheostoma trisella*), **goldline darter** (*Percina*

aurolineata), and **amber darter** (*Percina antesella*) are federally listed fish that were initially considered but eliminated from further analysis in the Foothills BE and Aquatics Report because they are not expected to occur in the area affected by the project or within 1 mile downstream. The Foothills Project would have **No Effect on these species and this new information does not require any further review or NEPA analysis or consultation.**

- **Northern long-eared bat**. On August 22, 2022, the Eastern and Southern Regions of the Forest Service submitted 2,927 planned and ongoing projects for re-initiation of consultation for the Northern Long-eared Bat (NLEB) due to the anticipated reclassification of NLEB from threatened to endangered. A Biological Opinion (BO) was provided to the Forest Service on March 31, 2023. Of that total, 519 projects - including the Foothills Landscape Project - had a determination of "may affect, is likely to adversely affect" (LAA) and these projects were issued an Incidental Take Statement with Terms & Conditions in this non-jeopardy biological opinion. All LAA projects that were originally consulted on using the 4d rule must still comply with the conservation measures within the 4d rule. The following terms and conditions apply:
    - 1. The project will not disturb or disrupt hibernating NLEBs in a known hibernaculum during hibernation.
    - 2. The project will not alter the entrance or interior environment of a known hibernaculum at any time of year.
    - 3. The project will not remove any trees within 0.25 miles of a known NLEB hibernaculum at any time of the year. The 0.25-mile tree clearing buffer serves multiple purposes including protecting hibernating bats from disturbance, protecting the hibernaculum's microclimate (4d rule, pages 1909-1910), protecting roosting habitat around the hibernacula, and providing some roosting and foraging protection during spring staging and fall swarming.
    - 4. The project will not cut or destroy known occupied maternity roost trees, or any other trees within a 150-foot radius from the maternity roost tree, from June 1 – July 31.

  In addition, the BO was amended in August 16,2023 to state that the Forest Service will also incorporate all applicable Conservation Measures (CMs) from the *Bat Conservation Strategy for the Forest Service-Managed Lands of the Eastern United States* (BCS) as they pertain to roost, maternity capture, and hibernaculum features and buffers into project activities when the project may have an adverse effect on NLEB, overlaps a roost, maternity capture, or hibernaculum buffer as defined in the BCS, and is not part of a Forest Service contract in the contracting bid, award, or execution stage by March 31, 2024.

  The UCON project complies with the 4d rule and also incorporates the applicable Conservation Measures from the BCS related to one maternity capture buffer (1,131-acre buffer). A checklist of all CMs applicable to the UCON project area is found in the project record. No further or consultation is required, other than annual reporting of project activities and CMs applied to the USFWS.

- **Tricolored bat.** On September 13, 2022, the USFWS proposed to list the tricolored bat as endangered. The effects of the FLP on tricolored bats were considered and disclosed in the Foothills Programmatic EA and Biological Evaluation because the species is on the Regional Forester's Sensitive Species (RFSS) list; it was determined that this project may impact individuals but is not likely to affect viability or lead to federal listing of the species. The proposed listing triggers the need for conference with the USFWS or consultation once listing is finalized, therefore this project is currently in compliance with ESA regarding this species. It is expected that the listing will be finalized in late summer 2024 and that formal consultation to cover this and other existing projects regarding tricolored bat will be completed prior to final listing. The determination of effect would be that this project "May Affect, Is Likely to

Adversely Affect" this species, but compliance with the anticipated BO and incidental take statement would satisfy the Forest Service's responsibilities under Section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act.

Signature *Ruth Stokes*

Biologist

Botanical and Rare Communities (T&E and Sensitive*, NNIS)

☒ Review existing data to determine known locations of T&E species, designated critical habitats, Regional Forester's Sensitive species, or locally rare species (i.e., consult DNR – WCS spatial database on AGOL, FS GIS shapefiles and other records).

☒ Obtain updated official species list from IPaC for the project area at: https://ipac.ecosphere.fws.gov/. If new species are listed and present in IA and could be affected by the proposed action, consult with USFWS/ supplement NEPA accordingly.

List Date IPaC pulled: 8/1/2024

☒ Review existing data to determine known locations of rare communities (i.e., bogs, caves, rock outcrops).

☒ Review existing data to determine known locations of Non-native Invasive Species (NNIS); If needed, utilize risk assessment and conduct botanical surveys and NNIS assessment to determine if individuals or populations occur once activity locations are known.

☒ Communicate known site locations to IDT for avoidance (i.e., protected information for internal planning purposes only).

☒ The project design must comply with the following project design features:

- ***FLP Specific**: Known populations of T&E, Sensitive and LR plants would be protected by placement of a buffer zone around them where possible. The appropriate measures would be determined in coordination with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Georgia Department of Natural Resources.*

☒ If relevant, use space below to list additional survey needs or pertinent information to include in the Implementation Plan (i.e. additional opportunities for unique habitat work):

NNIS and other botanical surveys will be completed during 2025.

☐ Maps and visual aids have been attached. Level of detail should be sufficient to allow for adequate planning and identifcation of issues and concerns.

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☒ All activities shown in the draft plan have been reviewed for compliance with the Foothills Landscape EA or other relevant NEPA compliance and my resource. There are changed conditions or specific actions that are not in compliance. These conditions or actions are listed below.

There are changed conditions for this resource since the decision was signed:
A new IPaC list for the UCON IA was requested and received from the US Fish and Wildlife Service on 08/1/24; one additional species was added since the list was obtained in April 2021 for consideration in the project's Biological Assessment and NEPA analysis:

- Tennessee yellow-eyed grass (*Xyris tennesseensis*) is a wetland plant added to the list of plant species potentially found in the project area. There are no records of this plant in the project area, and wetlands are protected as rare communities. The UCON project would have **no effect on this species and this new information does not require any further review or NEPA analysis or consultation.** Considering these changed conditions or information and the existing analysis, this project remains in compliance with the Programmatic Environmental Assessment and the requirements set forth under NEPA, ESA, and other applicable laws, regulations, and policies.

Signature *Ruth Stokes*

Biologist

Cultural Resources

☒ Archaeologist gathers relevant cultural resources data for IA, determines maximum survey needed, and notifies tribes and Georgia State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) of proposed undertakings and cultural resources work. Tribes/SHPO have 45 days to review.

☐ Archaeologist gathers relevant cultural resources and plant species data and provide to tribes for 60-day sacred site review. **Once consultation completed, begin surveys and required mitigations.**

☐ Communicate known site locations to IDT for avoidance (i.e., protected information for internal planning purposes only).

☒ The project design must comply with the following project design features:

- ***FLP Specific****: Cultural Resources sites with an eligible or undetermined National Register of Historic Places status will be avoided and protected from project effects. The standard avoidance method will consist of a 100-foot protective buffer around each site, or as determined through consultation with the Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer and interested Tribes.*
- ***Forest Plan Standard FW- 208****: Manage heritage resources in accordance with applicable federal laws, regulations, policy, agreements, and in the public interest. Emphasize the protection of significant heritage properties, completion of the forest wide inventory, and assessment of the significance of inventoried properties. Identify opportunities for appropriate use and interpretation of heritage properties.*
- ***Forest Plan Standard FW- 211:*** *Consult with Heritage specialists in the planning stages of projects involving ground disturbance, diminished jurisdiction, or increased public use of, or access to, an area.*
- ***Forest Plan Standard FW- 212****: Responsible official will halt any project during ground disturbance activities if known or newly discovered heritage resources are encountered, regardless of whether the area has been previously disturbed, until the significance of the site has been determined by Forest heritage staff through coordination with consulting parties.*
- ***Forest Plan Standard FW- 214****: Pursuant to 36 CFR 196.18, site locations are exempt from provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. Do not disclose site locations in documents available to the public, including heritage GIS data, unless agreed to by all parties, including Native American tribes as appropriate.*
- ***FLP Specific****: All actions associated with the Foothills Landscape Project will follow the stipulations of the Foothills Programmatic Agreement.*

☒ If relevant, use space below to list additional survey needs or pertinent information to include in the Implementation Plan:

A total of 989 acres requires cultural resource survey: 639 acres to provide clearance for the proposed action, and an additional 350 acres to be surveyed *outside* of treatment areas, within designated high probability areas (a requirement of the Foothills Programmatic with SHPO). As of September 2024, 304 acres have been surveyed.

New proposed Fireline construction requiring heritage survey equals approximately 6,700 feet or 3 acres. These survey segments are not currently included in the existing heritage survey contract and will need to be added or accomplished via force account.

☐ Maps and visual aids have been attached. Level of detail should be sufficient to allow for adequate planning and identifcation of issues and concerns.

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Click or tap here to enter text.

Signature Michael Stenland
Archaeologist

Fire and Fuels

☒ Identify the existing fire condition class (FCC) and opportunities/ needs for treatment (EA Appendix F: Table 45).

☒ Identify any existing hazardous fuels and opportunities for treatment in WUI based on risk (EA Appendix F: Table 44).

☒ Identify existing Rx burn unit(s) present in the IA.

☒ Identify if new burn units need to be established. Consider the implementation needs for that new burn unit. For example, but not limited to:

- Are natural barriers present?
- Is dozer line needed? If so, resource concerns?
- Other?

☒ If relevant, use space below to list additional survey needs or pertinent information to include in the Implementation Plan:

The Upper Conasauga Implementation area has a history of human-caused wildfires and natural fire ignitions. Natural fires have the potential to occur any time of the year. The area is identified as Fire Condition Class (FCC) 3; Class 3 is characterized as having a high risk of losing key ecosystem components and a departure from historical fire frequencies. This can result in wildfires that cause dramatic changes to historical fire size, frequency, intensity, or severity. Recent wildfires include several small human-caused fires caused by vehicle fires or escaped campfires, the Ken Mountain fire (July 2012), where a small lightning strike fire occurred adjacent to the Ken Mountain Road, and the 28,000-acre Rough Ridge Fire (2016) which started with a lightning strike on Rough Ridge in the Cohutta Wilderness. The Rough Ridge fire and its effects showcased the impacts of wildfire on a landscape in FCC 3. This fire resulted in a large amount of tree mortality within the project area due to the severe drought combined with the effects from the wildfire. This tree mortality has currently resulted in a high fuel loading of snags, and dead and down materials throughout the area. Wildfires in this area are very resistant to control due to access, terrain, high fuel loadings and the ability to spot them when they are small. This area has also been prone to other weather events such as high wind events, possible tornados, and severe storms. These events have continued to contribute to high fuel loadings and limited access with tree debris and infrastructure (road) damage.

Because this area is remote and has very little access, establishing anchor points and reducing fuel loading is critical to the local community. Currently, the area has two small prescribed burn units, the East Cowpen Rx Unit and the Buffalo Rx Unit. Both were utilized as holding features to stop the Rough Ridge Fire from entering the Alaculsy Valley and private lands.

The addition of new prescribed burn units will support the same containment strategy for any future fires that might threaten private land and residences in the Alaculsy Valley. The establishment of these new units will continue to build a wall of prescribed fire units and hazardous fuels treatments along the Foothills and Conasauga River of the Chattahoochee

National Forest in conjunction with prescribed fire and fuels treatments of the Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee.

Existing Burn Units in the Upper Conasauga Implementation Area:
Buffalo Rx: This unit is approximately 26 acres and has been burned on a 3-year rotation since 1988. It burned in 2016 in the Rough Ridge Fire. All prescribed burns have been dormant season.
East Cowpen Rx: This unit is approximately 422 acres and has been burned on a 3-4 year rotation since 2010. It was burned in the 2016 Rough Ridge Fire. All prescribed burns have been dormant season.

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Click or tap here to enter text.

Signature Jeffrey Schardt
Fire Management Officer

Soils and Hydrology

☒ Check with Forest Soil Scientist/ Hydrologist to determine existing and projected Total Impervious Area (TIA) in each 6th level HUC (EA Table 48, Appendix F).

- **FLP Specific Project Design Feature**: *Watershed TIA should not exceed 10%. Impervious surfaces are those that prohibit the movement of water from the land surface into the underlying soil (ex. Roads, trails, and other compacted areas).*

☒ Identify current Watershed Condition Class and identify any Priority Watersheds (See Tables 6 and 7 in EA). If Priority Watersheds exist, work with Forest Soil Scientist and/or Hydrologist on Watershed Restoration Action Plan (WRAP).

☒ Identify Streamside Management Zones (SMZs), proper widths, and any prescriptions within the SMZ.

☒ Coordinate with Forest Soil Scientist to ensure past detrimental disturbance in combination with proposed treatment disturbance would not exceed 15% of the activity area. If 15% would be exceeded by the treatment, evaluate the area for soil restoration activities.

☒ Coordinate with Forest Soil Scientist to identify any sensitive soil types (see various hazards and ratings in soil report) and slopes greater than 35%.

☒ The project design must comply with the following project design features:

- ***Forest Plan Standard FW- 065****: On all soils dedicated to maintaining forest cover, the organic layers, topsoil, and root mat will be left intact over at least 80% of an activity area.*
- ***Forest Plan Standard FW- 06****: Water control structures necessary for the control of surface water movement resulting from soil disturbing activities will be constructed within 30 days of completion of the activity.*

☒ If relevant, use space below to list additional survey needs or pertinent information to include in Implementation Plan:

This implementation area encompasses two watersheds: Headwaters of the Conasauga and Jack's River. When the Foothills EA was written, both of these watersheds had a Watershed Condition Framework score of "functioning at risk". During the 2021 reassessment, both of these watersheds were determined to be "functioning properly". The proposed activities within this IG are within the analyzed parameters of the EA. The proposed activities and associated TIA will not exceed what was projected in the Hydrology report.

☐ Maps and visual aids have been attached. Level of detail should be sufficient to allow for adequate planning and identifcation of issues and concerns.

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Click or tap here to enter text.

Signature Taylor Hughes, Forest Soil Scientist
Soil/Hydrology Specialist

Recreation and Transportation/ Road System

☒ Identify impacts to developed recreation, designated dispersed recreation, and trails from non-recreation actions.

☒ Identify road maintenance/ improvements needed to implement proposed activities.

☒ Verify data in INFRA and correct any discrepancies.

☒ Identify any roads from the EA with ML changes identified for maintenance level reduction or decommissioning.

☒ Identify opportunities to improve the condition of NFS roads. Coordinate with Silviculture, Soils and Engineering.

☒ The project design must comply with the following project design features:

- ***Forest Plan Standard FW- 129****: During active projects, all roads, ditches, and other improvements in the project area are kept free of logs, slash, and debris. Any road, ditch, or other improvement damaged by operations is promptly repaired.*

☒ Identify the impacts to the recreation user (user experience, access, public health and safety) from both the recreation-specific actions and non-recreation actions and determine appropriate methods of notification and communication. For example, but not limited to:

- Are there any potential road closures that may impact access to recreation sites? Seasonal or temporary closures?
- Prescribed burning or vegetation management that may cause closures?
- Smoke or equipment that may conflict with users?
- Other?

☒ Identify Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIOs) and Recreation Opportunity Spectrums (ROS) for the IA and communicate with Silviculture, Soils and Engineering any concerns of not adhering to these management directions.

- ***Forest Plan Standard FW- 097:*** *The Forest SIO Maps and Tables in each prescription govern all new projects, including special uses. Assigned SIOs are consistent with ROS management direction. Existing conditions may not currently meet the assigned SIO.*
- ***Forest Plan Standard FW- 114:*** *Maintain consistency between adopted SIOs and ROS management direction (Standard FW-102, 2-29), including promptly rehabilitating firelines to appear natural in areas of High and Very High SIO.*

☐ Wild and Scenic River designation exists in the implementation area.

☐ Confirm presence of designated National Scenic, Historic or Recreation Trails. If present, coordinate appropriately.

☒ If relevant, use the space below to list additional survey needs or pertinent information to include in Implementation Plan (i.e., other Recreation actions (including Categorical Exclusion level actions) occurring in the IA, anticipated public notices/ closure order needs specify):

Within the Upper Conasauga Implementation Area:

Forest visitors may be impacted by vegetation treatments in project areas adjacent to developed recreation sites, dispersed sites, and trails. Project activities within or adjacent to developed sites, dispersed sites, or trails should be conducted outside the major use season whenever possible. Developed sites and portions of trails may be temporarily closed for visitor protection or restrictions placed on silvicultural activities during times of high use. (see PDF 8)

Some benefit to the long-term sustainability of the trails may be gained by removal of encroaching vegetation and blow-down during these road and fire line maintenance/improvement activities. Trail sections utilized as fire line and timber sale access will be rehabilitated to maintain proper trail drainage and barriers will be constructed as necessary to eliminate illegal motorized vehicle access to the trail. Trails, trailheads, and dispersed areas impacted by use as fire lines or haul roads will be rehabilitated to pre-existing conditions in coordination with local recreation staff. Where possible, improvements such as trail clearing, hazard tree removal, and debris clean-up should be conducted along trails and around trailheads. Coordinate

with local recreation staff when developed sites, dispersed sites, and trails require rehabilitation. (see PDF 7 and PDF 8)

Coordinate with local recreation staff to lessen impacts to visitors to the extent possible. (PDF 8)

Coordinate signage needs with local recreation staff. (PDF 8)

Proposed activities will affect the following roads or recreation facilities, sites, or resources:

TRAILS
The Old County Line Trail (Trail #42), in concurrence with FSR 51D, is typically used as a fire line during the East Cowpen burn. The portion of that trail co-located with FSR 51D would also act as a haul road. (see PDF 7,8, and 14)

A portion of the Horseshoe Bend Trail (Trail #43) would act as a fire control hand line in the proposed Buffalo Extension Rx. Haul roads are proposed to cross the trail to access treatment units. Access to the trailhead would be impacted by logging thru-traffic between the parking area, dispersed area, and FSR 51D. (see PDF 7,8, and 14)

The western terminus of the Conasauga River Trail (Trail #11) consists of a wooded road used as an access road for a current wildlife opening. It is proposed for use as a temporary haul road. This existing access would mitigate the need for new temporary road construction for multiple treatment areas. (see PDF 7, 8, and 14)

Access to the Rice Camp Trail (Trail #137), East Cowpen Trail (Trail #30), and Hickory Creek Trailhead (Trail #10) would be periodically impacted by FSR 51 being used by logging equipment during operations. (PDF 8)

CAMPING
The Horseshoe Bend dispersed camping area would be impacted by several treatment activities. These impacts would be limited to the duration of timber sale operations and prescribed fire activities and would include potential closure of the trails or camping area during active operations for visitor safety, and temporary impacts to the trail conditions from heavy equipment use and hauling activities. (see PDF 8)

SCENERY
The proposed areas located on both sides of East Cowpen Road (FSR 51) and along the north side of West Cowpen Road (FSR 17) are assigned a High SIO. The project would comply with Region 8 scenery guidelines and Forest Plan requirements. Please see landscape architect analysis for further details.

FOREST PLAN COMPLIANCE
The Conasauga River is a "recommended" Wild and Scenic River and as such, all areas adjacent to this river are to be managed under MRx 2.B. Portions of the Iron Mountain and East Cowpen prescribed burns occur within MRx 2.B.2. No commercial operations are proposed within MRx 2.B. No changes to current recreation facilities or trails are proposed. All actions within this area will be consistent with MRx standards for this 2.B. area.

The proposed project area falls under the Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) of Roaded Natural and Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized settings. All, but two stands fall within Roaded Natural settings. Two stands fall within Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized settings.

Roaded Natural (RN) settings are located within one-half mile of a road and usually provide higher levels of development such as campground, picnic areas, and river access point. Service level B and C roads are included – open road density less than 1.5 miles per 1,000 acres.

Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM) settings are characterized by an environment where the natural landscape has been subtly modified and where alteration, though noticeable, would not draw the attention of most users. These areas are at least one-half mile, but not further than 3 miles from all roads, railroads or trails with motorized use and generally 2,500 to 5,000 acres in size unless contiguous to wilderness (U.S. Forest Service ROS, 1986). Semi-primitive non-motorized areas may include the existence of primitive roads and trails if usually closed to motorized use. Specific activities are oriented toward both consumptive and non-consumptive use of the land and water resources of the area, including hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, and nature study. Basically, these settings accommodate dispersed, non-motorized recreation.

OTHER INFO

Some minor road and trail mapping and data discrepancies have been identified in the project area. Most discrepancies are associated with the length of road segments and have been updated or are in the process of being corrected. Planned management actions will have multiple opportunities for FSR improvement. FSR 51 will be one of the primary haul routes in the project area. Necessary improvements will include one curve widening and 4 culvert replacements and will be done through a specified road package by the purchaser. All roads used for vegetation and/or timber management will be maintained and improved to GA BMPs and Forest Plan Standards. All timber management will include road work according to GA BMPs and the Forest Plan Standards.

☐ Maps and visual aids have been attached. Level of detail should be sufficient to allow for adequate planning and identifcation of issues and concerns.

Please select one of the statements below:

☒ All activities shown in the draft plan have been reviewed for compliance with the Foothills Landscape EA or other relevant NEPA compliance and my resource. There are no changed conditions at the time of this review.

OR

☐ All activities shown in the draft plan have been reviewed for compliance with the Foothills Landscape EA or other relevant NEPA compliance and my resource. There are changed conditions or specific actions that are not in compliance. These conditions or actions are listed below.

Click or tap here to enter text.

Signature__Alan A. Orth, Acting Recreation Manager; Kevin Vasalinda, Engineering Technician
Recreation/Engineering Specialist

Vegetation

☒Review/ collect stand exam data in accordance with current policy (forest health, species composition, stand age, basal area, etc.).

☒Determine existing acres of young forest habitat (0-10 years old) in the IA using aerial imagery, remote sensing data, and/or ground truthing.

☒Work through Foothills decision matrixes for stands being considered for silvicultural treatment.

☒Confirm stands are not identified for proposed old growth or forest plan designated Table 17 in EA.

☒Do hemlock treatments exist, and if so, are any in Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs)?

☒Review operational feasibility and access. This includes, but not limited to:

- Management Prescriptions
- Identify potential roads needed based on proposed action. Coordinate with Engineering on any needed improvements (culvert replacements, road widening, etc.)
- Temporary road construction anticipated. Coordinate with Soils, Engineering, Timber Sale Administrator, and other applicable resource areas
- Slopes

☒ Determine connected actions (prescribed fire, herbicides, etc.). See EA, Table 17 and Appendix B for full list.

☒ The project design must comply with the following project design features:

- ***FLP Specific****: Forested areas greater than 1/2 mile from a road should be excluded from commercial timber harvest.*

☐ If relevant, use space below to list additional survey needs or pertinent information to include in Implementation Plan:

There are no hemlock conservation areas in the Upper Conasauga Implementation Area.

No stands in the Upper Conasauga implementation area (IA) were proposed for small block old growth designation under the Foothills EA because all 6th level HUC watersheds meet the 5% minimum as required by the Forest Plan.

Compartment 711 stand 17 is a 105-year-old chestnut oak-scarlet oak-yellow pine stand. It falls under the Xeric Pine and Pine-Oak Forest and Woodland old growth forest community type (24). The proposed action for this stand is to Restore Open Woodland Habitat. The minimum old growth age for this community type is 100 years old, so stand 17 is five years past the minimum age. The 2004 Forest Plan allows treatments that meet woodland restoration objectives in old growth types 22 and 24 that meet minimum old growth age (Forest Plan 2-18, FW-054). When implementing treatment, trees of the oldest age class and trees that exhibit woodland characteristics will be priorities for retention (FW-055).
C711 stand 15 is a 120-year-old Virginia pine-oak stand. It falls under the Dry and Dry-Mesic Oak-Pine Forest old growth community type (25). The proposed action is to Restore Oak Forests by commercially thinning (removing the Virginia pine). The minimum old growth age for this community is 120 years old, so this stand meets the minimum age. The Forest Plan directs not to implement management actions in existing old growth stands that would result in obvious human-caused disturbance that conflicts with old growth characteristics (FW-054). Southern Region old growth guidance (Guidance for Conserving and Restoring Old Growth Forest Communities on National Forests in the Southern Region, 1997) that describes these characteristics lists commercial thinning as an activity that doesn't conflict with the old growth characteristics of an area when the other characteristics of the stand are maintained (at least 40 ft^2 of basal area of the oldest age class of trees with a diameter at breast height of at least 19 inches).

There are an estimated 60 acres in the 0–10-year age class due to fire and storm damage. An analysis of the acreage allowable for new young forest habitat was completed considering this acreage and there are two situations that exceed the projected acreage permitted:

- Per CONF LRMP Management Prescription (MRx) 7.B in the UCON IA, a maximum of 24 acres of new young forest habitat is allowed and we have proposed 49 acres.
- ~~Per MRx 7.E.2, 417 acres is the maximum desired acreage for 0–10-year age class and we have proposed 690 acres.~~ (After looking back this is inacurrate. Max acres is 395 and total is 339 acres)
- However per MRx 9.H, 79 acres is the maximum desired acreage of 0-10 year age class and we have proposed 83 acres.

From local experience, it is projected that 50-60% of the proposed stand acreage will be laid out on the ground due to limitations of terrain and implementation of best management practices. Once layout is completed, treated acres will not exceed the maximums shown above to ensure compliance with MRx Forest Plan requirements.

☒ Maps and visual aids have been attached. Level of detail should be sufficient to allow for adequate planning and identifcation of issues and concerns.

Please select one of the statements below:

☒ All activities shown in the draft plan have been reviewed for compliance with the Foothills Landscape EA or other relevant NEPA compliance and my resource. There are no changed conditions at the time of this review.

OR

☐ All activities shown in the draft plan have been reviewed for compliance with the Foothills Landscape EA or other relevant NEPA compliance and my resource. There are changed conditions or specific actions that are not in compliance. These conditions or actions are listed below.

Click or tap here to enter text.

Signature William Hunter
Silviculturist

IDT Leader or District Ranger

☒ Communicate IA location to Forest Land Surveyor early so that Boundary Management policies are followed, and concerns are either addressed and/or mitigated.

☒ Verify that all resource specific maps or visual aids have been completed.

☒ NEPA for any changed conditions or activities not covered in the Foothills Landscape EA or other existing analysis has been initiated. Please review each specialist section above to identify the specific conditions or actions not covered.

☒ Besides the resource specific PDFs listed above, the project design must also comply with the following project design features:

- ***FLP Specific****: All activities should be evaluated for their potential to affect NNIS. A risk assessment (Example in Appendix A of NNIS report) should be utilized prior to implementation of any activity to determine the risks and consequences of the action on NNIS, and the necessary mitigations included as part of the activity.*
- ***Forest Plan Standard FW- 031:*** *As part of recurrent monitoring and any project inventories, include data collection on existing or potential threats such nonnative invasive species*
- ***Forest Plan Standard FW- 032****: Nonnative invasive species shall be controlled with priority given to areas where they are causing adverse effects to federally listed species, or to individuals of other species needed to maintain their population viability on the national forest. Nonnative invasive species are not intentionally introduced near these species or individuals, nor will management actions facilitate their inadvertent introduction.*
- ***Forest Plan Standard FW- 056****: When seeding disturbed soils, use only native or non-persistent non-native species per Region policy.*

☒ If relevant, use space below to list additional needs or pertinent information to include in Implementation Plan:

NNIS surveys are ongoing and will be completed no later than summer 2025. An NNIS Risk Assessment will be completed once surveys are concluded, prior to implementation of vegetation treatments. NNIS treatments are covered under existing NEPA; however, a pesticide use proposal will be completed for NNIS treatment needs within the IA. Wild pig removal efforts are ongoing within the project area.

Upper Conasauga IA is within the Cohutta WMA. The Cohutta WMA has two rifle hunts each fall (approximately 5 days each). Hunters from around the eastern half of the country travel to participate in these hunts. Timber contracts need to include a no-cut period during these hunts.

All proposed actions within the Upper Conasauga IA were considered within the programmatic Foothills Landscape Project EA and DN.

Signature William Hunter
District Ranger

Step 3: Draft Implementation Plan and Initiate Surveys

Instructions: District IDTs review data from initial field visits, surveys and inventories. The IDT works together to consider all information captured in Steps 1-2 above, identifies applicable project design features and recommend management actions needed for IA to the local Line Officer. The resulting information will be presented as a draft implementation plan (see end of this document) used to communicate the project-specific proposals for each IA to stakeholders and identify locations of remaining survey work/ data needs.

The following checklist provides guidance in completing the implementation plan attached to this document. This plan provides the baseline information necessary to comply with the overarching law, policy, and regulation while ensuring consistency with the final EA and DN. Each resource specialist is responsible for ensuring the information presented in this implementation plan is accurate and complete.

☒ All activities within the IA are fully listed and described. Please provide sheets for each project and summarize on the first page.

☒ Ensure all relevant resource maps are attched to Implementation Plan. Level of detail should be sufficient to allow for adequate planning and identification of issues and concerns.

☒ Ensure PDFs for each resource area (Step 2) have been included in the Draft Implementation Plan.

☒ Ensure that all activities (or specific conditions or activity components) that need additional analysis are clearly articulated in the Draft Implementation Plan.

☒ Determine any outstanding needs or missing data and add to the Implementation Plan.

- ☐ Conduct site-specific inventories for botanical species based on forest risk assessment direction
- ☐ Conduct site-specific inventories for NNIS species
- ☐ Conduct other biological inventories as needed
- ☐ Complete NNIS risk assessment to determine needed mitigations
- ☐ Conduct site-specific inventories for cultural resources
- ☐ Other

Use space below to provide additional information such as process for obtaining or detailed description of outstanding needs:

NNIS and Botany surveys to be completed 2025. Heritage surveys are ongoing and would be completed before actions are implemented.

Step 4: Present Draft Implementation Plan to Stakeholders (Foothills Collaborative Group)

Forest intends to engage the Foothills Collaborative Group (FCG) early and often throughout the life of the project to identify issues, concerns, and desires of its members. The FCG is a diverse, self-governing body of representatives from various interest groups and organizations who wish to assist the Forest in successful implementation of the FLP in accordance with the Final Environmental Assessment and Decision Notice.

The FCG would have opportunity to provide feedback and make recommendations on draft implementation plans prior to public notice. Utilizing collaborative input in this way allows for robust stakeholder influence throughout the life of the project. Ideally, having the FCG influence and refine draft implementation plans prior to public release will result in less controversial, more socially acceptable projects and help the agency accomplish its objectives with greater efficiency.

Summary of Comments Received:

The Foothills Annual Stakeholder meeting was held Wednesday, October 23 in Dahlonega. Comments from the FCG are attached.

Summary of how comments were incorporated into Implementation Plan:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Step 5: Public Notice and Opportunity for Input

Instructions: The Forest will hold an annual meeting (anticipated late summer/ early fall) to provide public assessment of the draft implementation plan(s), refined maps, and schedule. If planned activities are demonstrated to fall within the scope and scale of the final EA/DN, feedback received during the annual meeting will be considered by implementation teams and responsible official and used to further collaborative efforts and adjust implementation activities as appropriate. If subsequent analysis is needed due to new or changed conditions in the IA that were not accounted for in the programmatic EA/ DN, the Forest will also seek official comment in accordance with NEPA. Outyear plans may also be presented at this time with opportunity for public engagement, though in less detail.

Summary of Comments Received:

The Foothills Annual Stakeholder meeting was held Wednesday, October 23 in Dahlonega. A QR code and web address was provided to the public for the Foothills website where comments could be left. No comments were recieved.

Summary of how comments were incorporated into Implementation Plan:

No comments were received.

Step 6: Conduct Field Trip(s)/Educational Outreach

Instructions: Hold a public field trip of Jigger Creek. The Forest anticipates at least one field trip per year, depending on public interest. These field reviews will focus on pre-implementation priorities/concerns identified from Steps 2-4; however post-treatment and monitoring activities may be viewed on the same trip if desired and feasible. The FCG should help identify priorities or potential areas of concern, and subject matter experts for furthering education opportunities.

Summary of field trip details and comments received:

A field trip was held on November 14, 2024. Attendees included Robert Black, Jess Riddle, Erick Brown and Dan Kutschied. All were FCG members representing three out of five FCG working groups. Tour stops included proposed stands in the Upper Conasauga implementation area and completed treatments in the Sumac area.

One comment was received during the field trip. The suggestion was made that for future Foothills Annual Meetings, the meeting location be chosen close to the work being proposed.

Summary of how comments were incorporated into Implementation Plan:

The comment regarding Foothills Annual Meeting locations was sent to the Forest Supervisor and Foothills Project Lead for their consideration. This suggestion will be discussed prior to planning the next public meeting.

Step 7: Identify Additional Monitoring Needs

Instructions: Identify specific monitoring that may be needed. Those already listed in the Forest Plan are considered mandatory. Additional monitoring recommendations provided from the FCG will be considered. Any additional monitoring is at the discretion of the line officer.

Click or tap here to enter text.

Step 8: Finalize Implementation Plan

Instructions: The IDT will finalize the implementation plan. Update the draft plan created in Step 4 with information and revisions that resulted from public involvement and survey results. Ensure all aspects of this checklist have been completed, including signatures, before submitting for approval by the line officer (District Ranger). Ensure contracts, agreements, burn plans, or other implementation instruments are reflective of this framework. Ensure proprietary information is protected (cultural and T&E).

- ☐ Update final project acres and miles in Implementation Plan
- ☐ For each resource area, update final acres and ensure information is complete
- ☐ Finalize Silviculture prescriptions and marking guides
- ☐ Finalize prescribed burn plans
- ☐ Confirm all relevant PDFs are included
- ☐ Confirm all maps are attached
- ☐ Any additional analysis, if required, is completed and documentation is attached

Step 9: Submit for District Ranger Approval

Instructions: Submit the completed implementation plan to the District Ranger for review and approval.

I have ensured my district and SO specialists followed this guide as intended, and the resulting implementation plan and selected design features have been designed accordingly and in compliance with the final DN for the FLP. Additional information, if relevant to this review, has been documented below:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Signature _____

District Ranger

Step 10: Conduct Contract Review (if applicable)

The Timber Contracting Officer will review the contract package to ensure the applicable design features included in final implementation plan are identified within various contract C provisions.

Signature _____

Contracting Officer

Foothills Landscape Project Implementation Plan

Implementation Area: Upper Conasauga
Ranger District: Conasauga
Date: August 9, 2024

Instructions: Use the tables and template(s) that follow to summarize all actions to be implemented within the IA; drafted during Step 3 and finalized during Step 8. The Plan Summary table should list all activities selected from the checklists below, with each activity described in detail in the section that follows. When completing all project information, ensure all information is sufficient and relevant to provide a full and detailed project description. The summary table below can be used to quickly track the number of projects within the IA and the acres or miles of disturbance impacts.

Plan Summary

Activity Name (should correspond w/ Table 17 of EA)	**Location (i.e., HUC, Compartment Stand, and or Geographic Description)**	**Draft Acres and/or miles of road/trails, etc.**	**Final Acres and /or miles of road/trails, etc.**	**Anticipated year(s) implementation would begin**
Canebrake restoration	Comp 712 Stands 38, 39	9 acres		2025
Stream habitat improvements – large wood	Comp 711 – unnamed tributary (UT) to Jack's River, Comp 709, 710, 711 – Jigger Creek and tributaries, UT to Conasauga River Comp 723 – UT to Conasauga River	8.8 miles		2026-2030
Replacement of culverts, fords, or bridges to increase aquatic organism passage and function	Comp 712 – FSR 16B	1 acre		2025-2030
Continuation of prescribed burning within existing burn blocks	East Cowpen Rx Burn – Comp 711 Buffalo Rx Burn – Comp 711 Iron Mtn Rx Burn – Comp 712/714	1,619 acres		2025-2030
Prescribed fire in new burn blocks to facilitate restoration or	Buffalo Extension Rx Burn – Comp 711 Gryder Camp Rx Burn –	1,530 acres		2025-2035

maintenance of fire-adapted ecosystems or to reduce hazardous fuels	710/713 Burnt Schoolhouse Rx Burn – Comp 710			
Decommissioning of maintenance level (ML) 2 and ML 1 system roads	FSR 51C – Ken Mountain RD; final 0.4 miles of road that enters the Ken Mountain Recommended Wilderness Study Area	0.4 miles		2025
Decommission low-use trails	Murray's Lake Trail	0.8 miles		2025
Restoration of southern yellow pine forest on dry sites dominated by mid to late-successional Virginia or white pine – 2 aged regen harvest	Comp 710 Stand 10 Comp 711 Stands 14, 27, 37 Comp 712 Stand 27 Comp 723 Stands 19, 29, 32, 41, 51	251 acres		2025-2035
Restoration of southern yellow pine forest or oak forest on sites currently occupied by off-site pine plantations (loblolly or white pine) or failed shortleaf or pitch pine plantations	**2 Aged Regen Harvest – Restore Shortleaf:** Comp 709 Stand 16 Comp 710 Stands 18, 34 Comp 711 Stands 13 Comp 713 Stands 26, 33 Comp 723 Stands 30	222 acres		2025-2035
	2 Aged Regen Harvest – Restore Oak: Comp 709 Stand 8; Comp 711 Stand 12	52 acres		
	Commercial Thinning – Restore Oak: Comp 711 Stand 15; Comp 713 Stand 9; Comp 723 Stand 57	82 acres		
Maintenance of southern yellow pine forest – Commercial thinning	Comp 711 Stands 18, 28	47 acres		2025-2035
Commercial and non-commercial thinning of pine plantations to improve forest health – Commercial thinning	Comp 709 Stands 14, 21 Comp 710 Stands 1, 4, 31, 32, 51 Comp 711 Stands 19, 21, 30, 38 Comp 712 Stands 28, 32 Comp 713 Stands 2, 16 Comp 723 Stands 25, 49, 52, 55, 65	690 acres		2025-2035
Maintenance of oak forest – Commercial thinning	Comp 710 Stands 2, 3, 5, 17 Comp 713 Stand 3	206 acres		2025-2035
Maintenance of oak	Comp 710 Stands 26, 29	151 acres		2025-2035

forest – Midstory reduction	Comp 711 Stands 26 Comp 712 Stands 6, 9, 13 Comp 713 Stands 7			
Maintenance of oak forest – Expanding gap treatment	Comp 723 Stands 40, 47	95 acres		2025-2035
Canopy gap creation in closed-canopied mesic stands – Commercial thinning	Comp 723 Stands 31, 64	34 acres		2025-2035
Restoring open woodland habitats on appropriate sites	Comp 711 Stands 16, 17	22 acres		2025-2035
Create young forest (ESH) by daylighting roads and permanent openings	Road Daylighting: 3.9 miles Comps 710, 711, 723 WLO Daylighting: 9 WLOs Comps 710, 711, 723	24 acres of Road Daylighting 10 acres of WLO Daylighting		2025-2035
Create or expand permanent openings	Expand 4 WLOs: Comps 710, 711, 723	10 acres		2025-2035

Activities Implementable from Final DN: Select all that apply. See Table 17 in the EA for full description of action and connected actions.

Selected for this Project	Activities That are Part of This Project	Primary Actions	Location (ie. HUC, Compartment Stand, and or Geographic Description)	Draft Acres and/or miles of road/trails, etc.	Final Acres and /or miles of road/trails, etc.
☒	Canebrake restoration actions including overstory removal (may include commercial treatment)	Removing encroaching vegetation by commercial, non-commercial harvest	Comp 712 Stands 38, 39	9 acres	Click or tap here to enter text.
☒	Stream habitat improvements	Add large woody debris to stream channels through cut and leave operations (mechanical and non-mechanical) Maintain and enhance existing in-stream structures Stabilize streambanks	Comp 711 – unnamed tributary (UT) to Jack's River, Comp 709, 710, 711 – Jigger Creek and tributaries, UT to Conasauga River Comp 723 – UT to Conasauga River	8.8 miles	Click or tap here to enter text.

Selected for this Project	Activities That are Part of This Project	Primary Actions	Location (ie. HUC, Compartment Stand, and or Geographic Description)	Draft Acres and/or miles of road/trails, etc.	Final Acres and /or miles of road/trails, etc.
☒	Continuation of prescribed burning within existing burn blocks	Prescribed burning during dormant and/or early growing season on a recurring basis	East Cowpens Rx Burn – Comp 711 Buffalo Rx Burn – Comp 711 Iron Mtn Rx Burn – Comp 712/714	1,619 acres	Click or tap here to enter text.
☒	Decommissioning of maintenance level (ML) 2 and ML1 system roads	Close road/trail to public; may include full obliteration of roadbed, removal of stream crossing fills/ culverts with restoration of channel, crushing and burying inlets, seeding, fertilizing, mulching, drainage improvements, scattering slash, etc.	FSR 51C – Ken Mountain RD; final 0.4 miles of road that enters the Ken Mountain Recommended Wilderness Study Area	0.4 miles	Click or tap here to enter text.
☒	Decommission low-use trails (Murray's Lake Trail and Peeples Lake Trail)	Administrative removal of trails from system Update maps	Murray's Lake Trail	0.8 miles	Click or tap here to enter text.

Commercial Activities (May only occur in MRx suitable for timber production per selected Alternative (Alt 3)): Select all that apply. See Table 17 in the EA for full description of action and connected actions.

Selected for this Project	Activities That are Part of This Project	Primary Actions	Location (ie. HUC, Compartment Stand, and or Geographic Description)	Draft Acres and/or miles of road/trails, etc.	Final Acres and /or miles of road/trails, etc.
☒	Restoration of southern yellow pine forest on dry sites dominated by mid to late-successional Virginia or white pine	Two aged regeneration harvest	Comp 710 Stand 10 Comp 711 Stands 14, 27, 37 Comp 712 Stand 27 Comp 723 Stands 19, 29, 32, 41, 51	251 acres	Click or tap here to enter text.

Selected for this Project	Activities That are Part of This Project	Primary Actions	Location (ie. HUC, Compartment Stand, and or Geographic Description)	Draft Acres and/or miles of road/trails, etc.	Final Acres and /or miles of road/trails, etc.
☒	Restoration of southern yellow pine forest or oak forest on sites currently occupied by off-site pine plantations (loblolly or white pine) or failed shortleaf or pitch pine plantations	Two-aged regeneration harvest – Restore Shortleaf	Comp 709 Stand 16 Comp 710 Stands 18, 34 Comp 711 Stands 13 Comp 713 Stands 26, 33 Comp 723 Stands 30	222 acres	Click or tap here to enter text.
		Two-aged regeneration harvest – Restore Oak	Comp 709 Stand 8 Comp 711 Stand 12	52 acres	
		Commercial thinning – Restore Oak	Comp 711 Stand 15 Comp 713 Stand 9 Comp 723 Stand 57	82 acres	
☒	Maintenance of southern yellow pine forest	Commercial thinning	Comp 711 Stands 18, 28	47 acres	Click or tap here to enter text.
☒	Maintenance of oak forest	Commercial thinning	Comp 710 Stands 2, 3, 5, 17 Comp 713 Stand 3	206 acres	Click or tap here to enter text.
☒	Maintenance of oak forest	Expanding gap treatment	Comp 723 Stands 40, 47	95 acres	Click or tap here to enter text.
☒	Commercial and non-commercial thinning of pine plantations to improve forest health	Commercial thinning	Comp 709 Stands 14, 21 Comp 710 Stands 1, 4, 31, 32, 51 Comp 711 Stands 19, 21, 30, 38 Comp 712 Stands 28, 32 Comp 713 Stands 2, 16 Comp 723 Stands 25, 49, 52, 55, 65	690 acres	Click or tap here to enter text.
☒	Create young forest (ESH) by daylighting roads and permanent openings	Two-aged regeneration harvest	Road Daylighting: 3.9 miles Comps 710, 711, 723 WLO Daylighting: 9 WLOs Comps 710, 711, 723	24 acres of Road Daylighting 10 acres of WLO Daylighting	Click or tap here to enter text.
☒	Restoring open woodland habitats on appropriate sites	Commercial or non-commercial thinning	Comp 711 Stands 16, 17	22 acres	Click or tap here to enter text.

Selected for this Project	Activities That are Part of This Project	Primary Actions	Location (ie. HUC, Compartment Stand, and or Geographic Description)	Draft Acres and/or miles of road/trails, etc.	Final Acres and /or miles of road/trails, etc.
☒	Canopy gap creation in closed-canopied mesic stands	Commercial and non-commercial thinning Overstory and midstory reduction w/ variable tree density retention; gaps implemented would total <25% of stand acreage with gap size no more than ¾-acre each.	Comp 723 Stands 31, 64	34 acres	Click or tap here to enter text.
☒	Create or expand permanent openings	Remove trees Prepare site by grading and stump removal	Expand 4 WLOs: Comps 710, 711, 723	10 acres	Click or tap here to enter text.

Non-Commercial Action(s): Select all that apply. See Table 17 in the EA for full description of action and connected actions.

Selected for this Project	Activities That are Part of This Project	Primary Actions	Location (ie. HUC, Compartment Stand, and or Geographic Description)	Draft Acres and/or miles of road/trails, etc.	Final Acres and /or miles of road/trails, etc.
☒	Maintenance of oak forest	Mid-story reduction	Comp 710 Stands 26, 29 Comp 711 Stands 26 Comp 712 Stands 6, 9, 13 Comp 713 Stands 7	151 acres	Click or tap here to enter text.
☒	Replacement of culverts, fords, or bridges to increase aquatic organism passage and function	Replacement of culverts, fords, or bridges	Comp 712 – FSR 16B	1 acre	Click or tap here to enter text.
☒	Prescribed fire in new burn blocks to facilitate restoration or maintenance of fire-adapted ecosystems or to reduce hazardous fuels	Prescribed burning during dormant and/or early growing season on a recurring basis	Buffalo Extension Rx Burn Comp 711 Gryder Camp Rx Burn Comp 710/713 Burnt Schoolhouse Rx Burn Comp 71	1,530 acres	Click or tap here to enter text.

Action(s) or Conditions that Need Additional Analysis (Please Refer to Step 2 Resource Sections):

Specific Action or Condition Needing Analysis, if applicable	Analysis complete?
N/A	☐yes ☒no

Activity Name: Canebrake Restoration

Detailed Description:

Existing Condition (Need): Cane is a common plant on the Forest, scattered in floodplain habitats. However, an overly dense canopy prevents a vigorous monoculture of cane from developing into a true canebrake.

Desired Condition: Thin canopy with less than 40% canopy cover and a dense vigorous stand of cane that would provide true canebrake habitat. (Forest Plan MRx 9.F-001).

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: Stream terraces and riparian zones where there is existing cane, but it is suppressed by other vegetation.

How to Implement Change: An area on both sides of the Conasauga River at the Georgia-Tennessee line (estimated 9 acres) has good potential to restore cane. There are already dense patches of cane present but most is thinly scattered under a fairly open canopy of trees near open fields. A wide variety of treatments may be utilized in various combinations to restore canebrakes, implemented with monitoring to determine what canopy cover works best for restoration. Both overstory and midstory trees would be reduced mechanically (mastication/mowing/hand-felling) and through the use of herbicides to get sunlight to the cane. The density of canopy cover would be variable but would be reduced to less than 40% canopy with trees widely space or clustered in a mosaic pattern. In general, canebrakes would have very little canopy cover. Cane may be transplanted from a site within the project area to an area where it is sparse. In areas infested with exotic species, multiple treatments may be needed and would be completed using the existing decisions on non-native invasive species control.

Clumps of rivercane in the Alaculsy Valley, Conasauga River floodplain

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned:

Headwaters Conasauga River
HUC#031501010101

MRx(s) where activity would occur:

2.B.2 Recommended Scenic Rivers

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

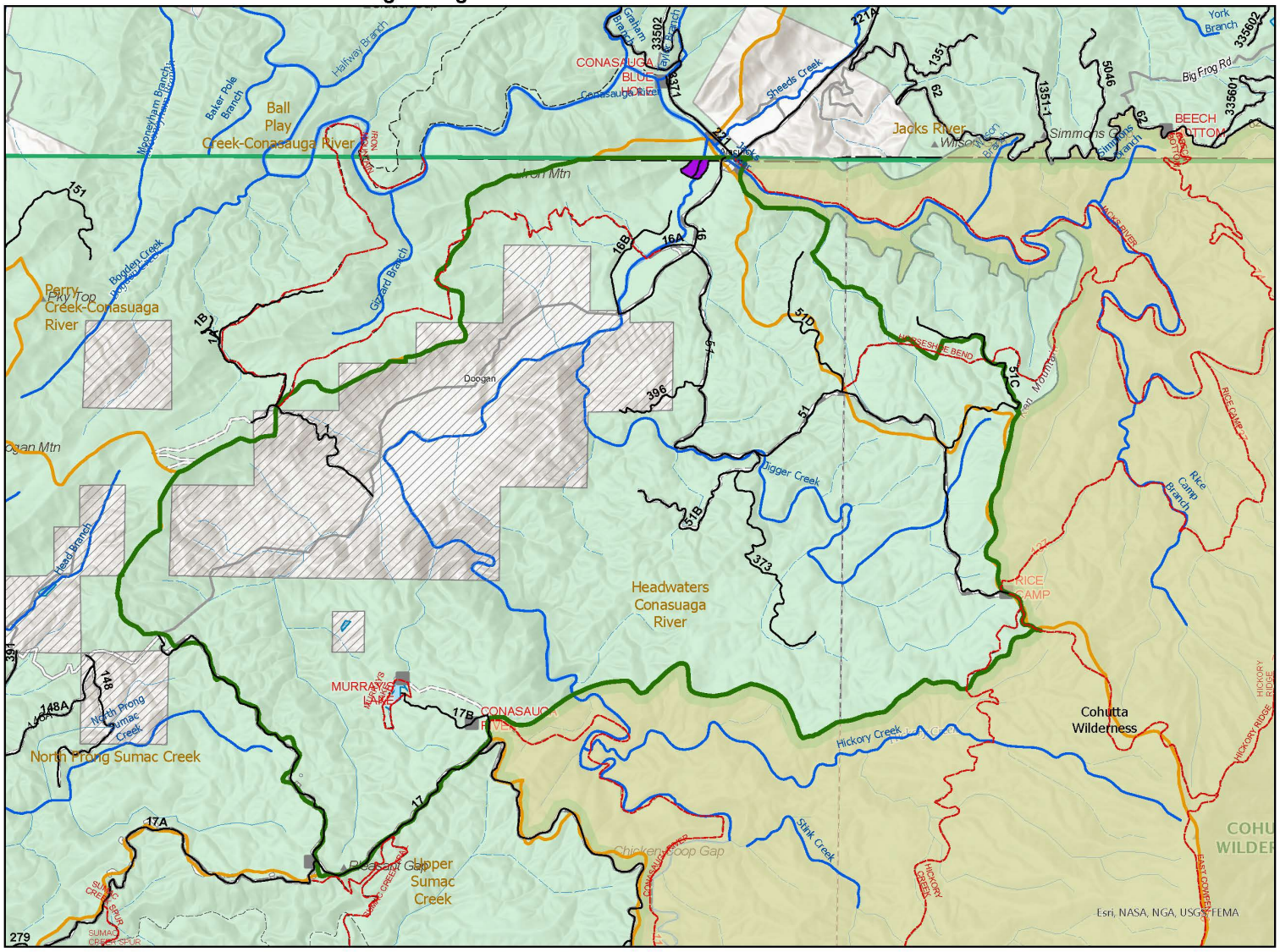
Additional Project Design Features: None

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Canebreak Restoration

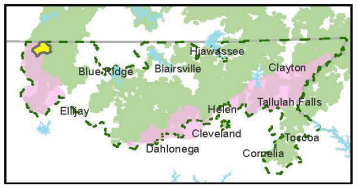


Legend

- Canebreak Restoration
- Roads
- FS Trail
- Streams
- Upper Conasauga Project Boundary
- Watersheds (6th-Level HUC)
- Non-FS Land
- Cohutta Wilderness Area

0 0.5 1 1.5 Miles

1:35,000



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Activity Name: Stream Habitat Improvements

Detailed Description:

Existing Condition (Need): Recent surveys in several tributaries to the Conasauga River (in Tennessee) indicate that large wood and habitat complexity is severely lacking in the Conasauga watershed. Large wood (LW) can slow flows and restore a more natural stream channel, while allowing passage for aquatic organisms. LW additions can retain sediment locally, build point bars, and aggrade the stream channel, bringing it closer to the historic floodplain.

Desired Condition: Increase of LW in streams (Forest Plan Goal 26). The Watershed Condition Framework defines the desired condition of a watershed as having large wood in the streams and appropriate stream geometry and bank stability. LW additions should reflect local reference conditions or an estimated 12 pieces per 100 m (200 pieces per stream mile).

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: Perennial and intermittent streams where lack of wood is impairing hydrologic and biologic processes; structure is lacking; or severe erosion occurring.

Aquatic habitats benefit from the addition of large wood to the stream.

How to Implement Change: The addition of large wood to streams in several streams in the Upper Conasauga IA is proposed in order to increase structural complexity in streams where a lack of wood is impairing the hydrologic and biologic processes of the aquatic environment. This activity would be completed by hand felling trees (or utilizing storm or insect-killed trees on the ground) into or across the stream channel, using winches and tackle to move and position felled trees, and in some locations, a farm tractor would be used to move felled trees into position. This is proposed in sections of Jigger Creek and tributaries, three unnamed tributaries to the Conasauga River and an unnamed tributary to Jack's River.

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned:

Jigger Creek and two unnamed tributaries to the Conasauga River are in the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC - #031501010101. An unnamed tributary to the Jack's River is in the Jack's River HUC - #031501010102.

MRx(s) where activity would occur: Jigger Creek and the unnamed tributary to Jack's River are in MRx 7.E.2. Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management. Two unnamed tributaries to the Conasauga River are in MRx 2.B.2 Recommended Scenic River Segment. The third unnamed tributary to the Conasauga is in MRx 7.E.1 Scenic Corridors and Sensitive Viewsheds and 9.H. Management, Maintenance, and Restoration of Plant Associations.

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

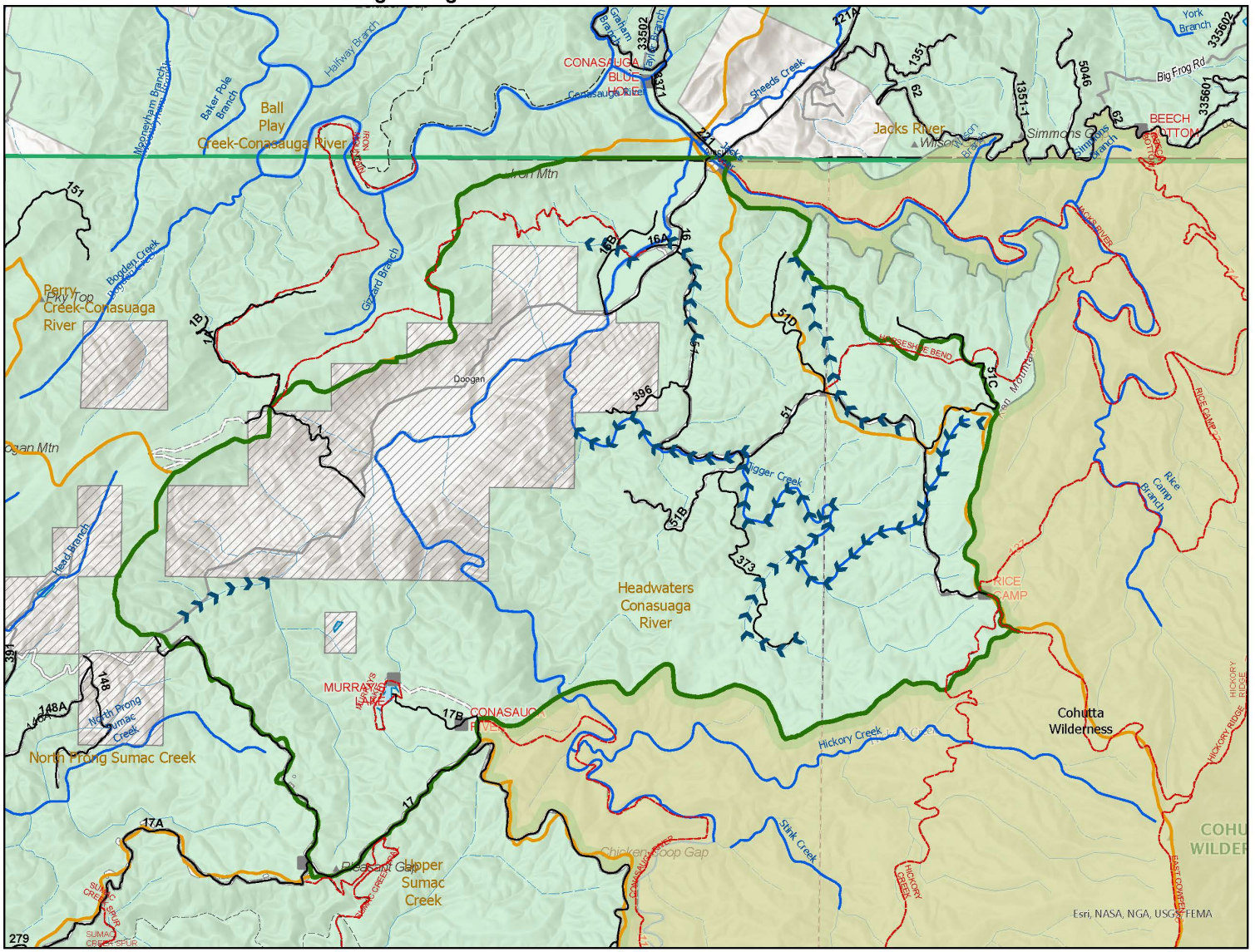
Additional Project Design Features: None

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/3/2024

Stream Habitat Improvements - Add Large Wood to Stream Channels through Cut and Leave Operations (Mechanical & Non-mechanical)



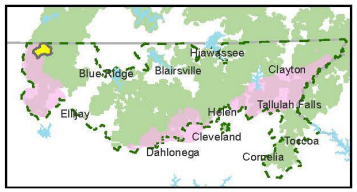
Legend

- Large Wood
- Roads
- FS Trail
- Streams
- Upper Conasauga Project Boundary
- Watersheds (6th-Level HUC)
- Non-FS Land
- Cohutta Wilderness Area

0 0.5 1 1.5 Miles

1:35,000

N W E S



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Activity Name: Replacement of culverts, fords, or bridges to increase aquatic organism passage and function

Existing Condition (Need): Culvert assessments were completed and one culvert on an unnamed tributary to the Conasauga River is severely restricting stream channel width and affecting aquatic organism passage (AOP). This culvert is on FSR 16B and within 500 feet of the Conasauga River, which has numerous important, endemic fish and mussels.

Desired Condition: Increase aquatic connectivity in cold and warm water streams (Forest Plan Objective 26.3) by decreased number of barriers to AOP.

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: High priority culvert locations with AOP barriers.

How to Implement Change: The replacement of culverts which are barriers to aquatic organism passage (AOP) with appropriate structures (bottomless culverts, bridges, or low-water fords) in conjunction with other treatments, i.e., stream habitat and road improvement projects is proposed at one location. The proposal is to remove the culvert and replace with a low-water ford.

AOP candidate on an unnamed tributary to the Conasauga River @ FS Road 16B. This barrier is within 500 feet of the Conasauga River.

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned:

The culvert is in the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC - #031501010101.

MRx(s) where activity would occur: The culvert is in MRx 2.B.2. Recommended Scenic Rivers.

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

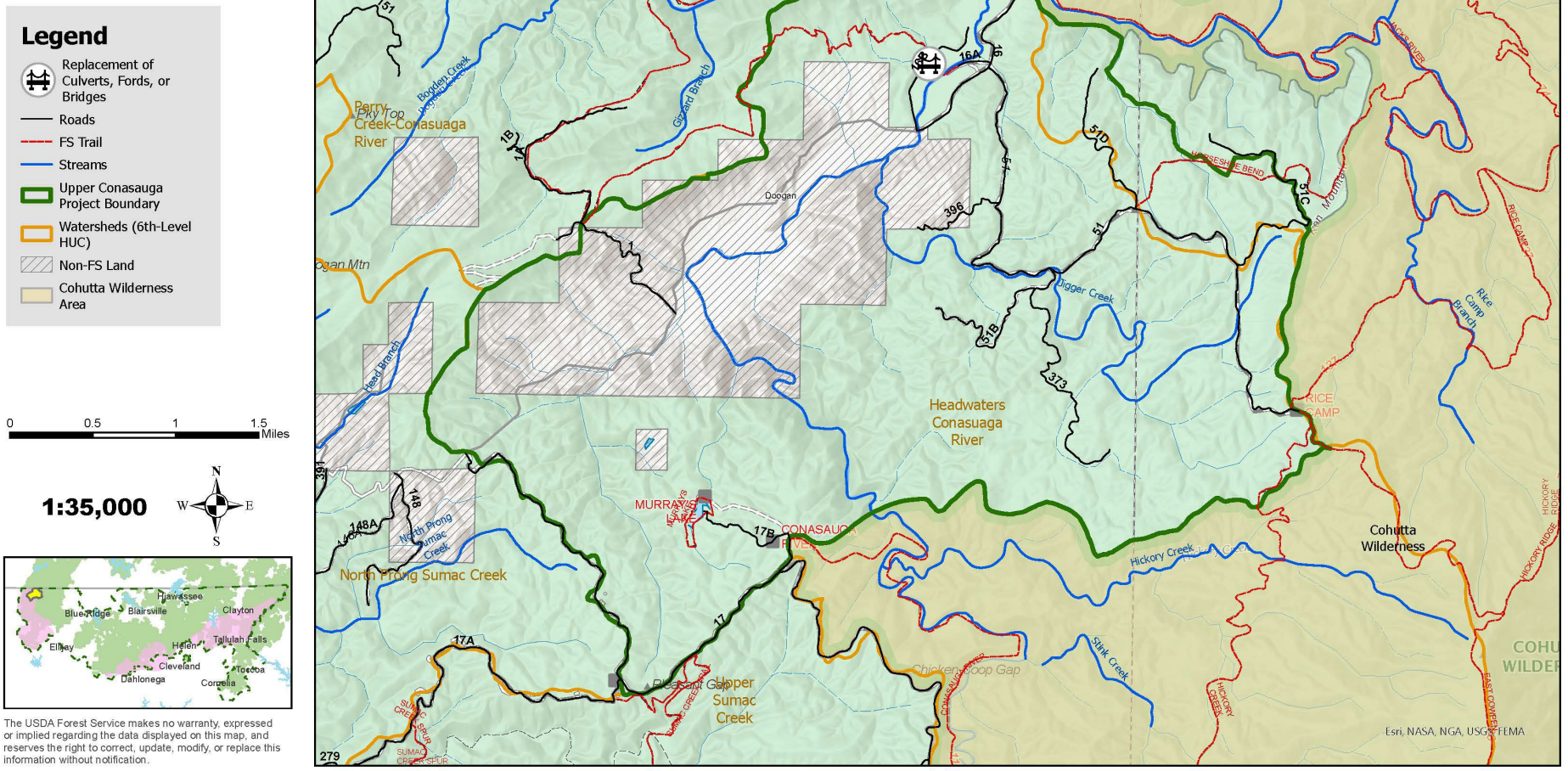
Additional Project Design Features: None

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Replacement of Culverts, Fords, and Bridges to increase Aquatic Organism Passage



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Activity Name: Continuation of prescribed burning within existing burn blocks

Detailed Description:

Existing Condition (Need): There are two existing burn units in the Upper Conasauga IA. Each have each received multiple prescribed fire treatments within the past 10+/- years, moving them from FCC 3 to FCC 2. There is a need to maintain this trend. The units still have a variety of fuel loadings ranging from heavy to moderate due to wildfires, prescribed burns, vegetation management activities, and the continued need to restore native vegetative conditions. Due to their location these burn units have served as buffer zones to prevent wildfires from burning onto or off private lands and the Cohutta Wilderness Area. This has been proven to be an effective strategy as evidenced during the drought and severe fire season of 2016. Continued burning of these units will enhance the reduction of hazardous fuels and aid in the restoration of native communities. These units have several occurrences of fire-dependent species.

Part of a third prescribed burn unit (Iron Mountain) falls within the Upper Conasauga IA, but it is a new burn unit that was included in the Mooneyham IA Process Guide/Implementation Plan and it is not described further here. It has not been burned yet due to the need for additional NEPA completed by the Cherokee National Forest.

Desired Condition: Expand the role of fire to recover and sustain healthy, fire-adapted ecosystems as much as possible, as a natural process (Forest Plan Goal 61).

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: Where prescribed burning is required or preferred to meet restoration silvicultural objectives and can be accomplished safely within existing burn blocks.

How to Implement Change: Prescribed fire plans would be prepared describing weather and fuel conditions needed to meet the desired site-specific objectives, fire intensities and ignition methods, and a risk evaluation to safely execute the prescribed fire while considering the effects of the fire on other resources, including smoke impacts. Firelines would be rehabilitated as appropriate including installing water bars, revegetation, and blocking of the 'take offs' on roads to prevent illegal motor-vehicle use.

There are two existing prescribed burn blocks in the Upper Conasauga IA. Both have established control lines and have been previously burned on a 3-to-5 year rotation to restore fire after many decades in which all fire had been suppressed:

- Buffalo Rx: This unit is approximately 26 acres and has been burned on a 3-year rotation since 1988. It has burned in 2016 in the Rough Ridge Fire. All prescribed burns have been dormant season.
- East Cowpen Rx: This unit is approximately 422 acres and has been burned on a 3–4-year rotation since 2010. It was burned in the 2016 Rough Ridge Fire. All prescribed burns have been dormant season.

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned:

East Cowpen Rx burn is in the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC - #031501010101. Buffalo Rx burn is in the Jack's River HUC #031501010102.

MRx(s) where activity would occur: The Buffalo Rx unit and the majority of the East Cowpen Rx unit are in MRx 7.E.2 Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management. The northern tip of the East Cowpen Rx unit lays within MRx 2.B.2 Recommended Scenic Rivers.

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

Additional Project Design Features: None

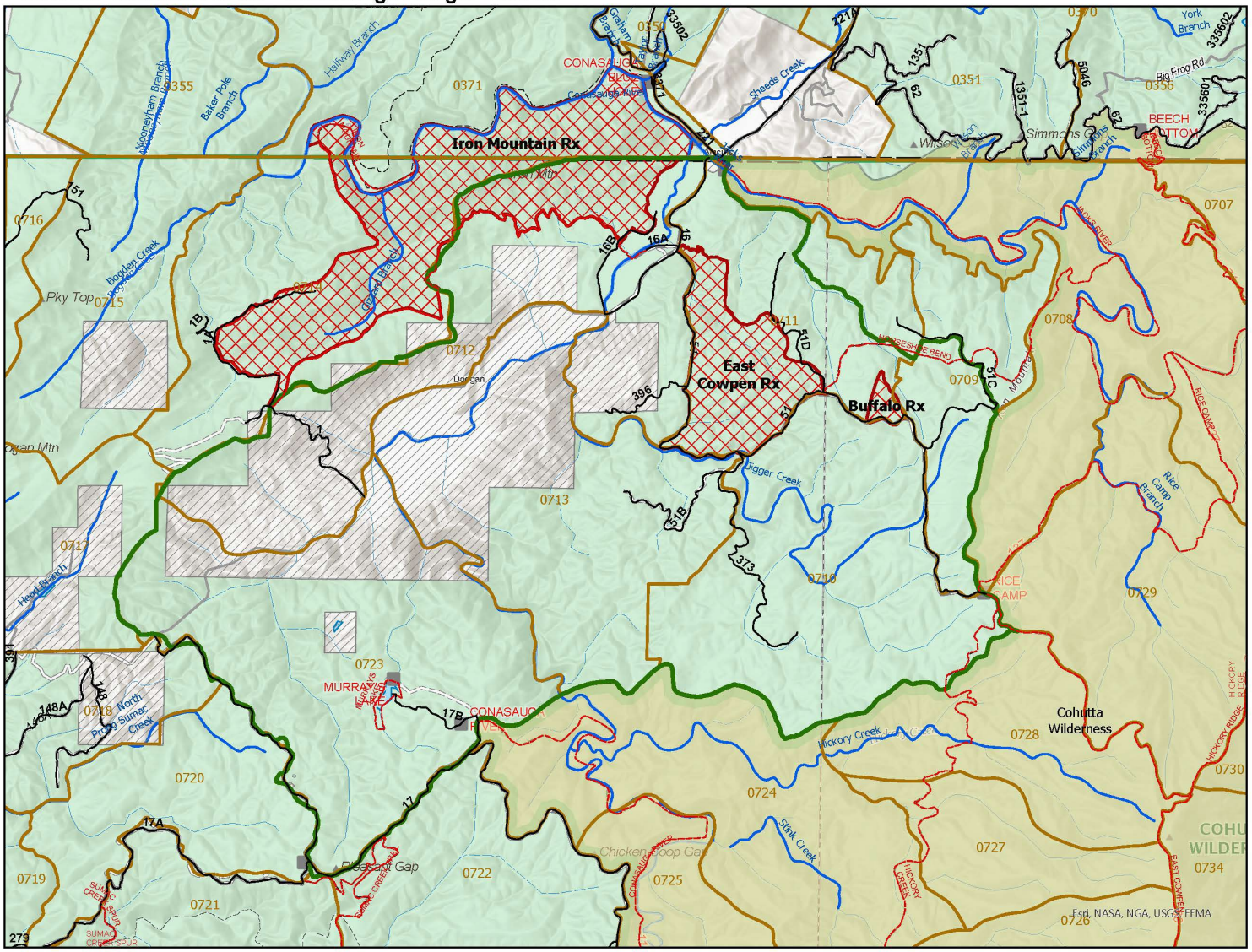
A drone used for aerial ignition of prescribed fire units. Using drones to ignite interior ridges reduces exposure to firefighters and allows burn bosses additional control over fire timing and intensity of prescribed fire.

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Continuation of Prescribed Burning within Existing Burn Blocks

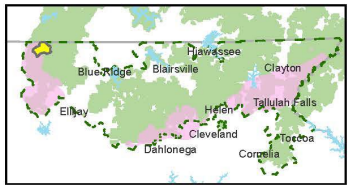


Legend

- Existing Burns
- Roads
- FS Trail
- Streams
- Upper Conasauga Project Boundary
- Compartments
- Non-FS Land
- Cohutta Wilderness Area

0 0.5 1 1.5 Miles

1:35,000



Activity Name: Prescribed fire in new burn blocks to facilitate restoration or maintenance of fire-adapted ecosystems or to reduce hazardous fuels

Detailed Description:
Existing Condition (Need): Approximately 84% of lands within the Foothills Project currently fall under FCC 3 and are characterized by fire regimes that are significantly altered from their historical range. These lands are at a high risk of losing key ecosystem components. A large majority of this area are not covered by existing burn units.

Desired Condition: Expand the role of fire to recover and sustain healthy, fire-adapted ecosystems as much as possible, as a natural process (Forest Plan Goal 61).

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: Where prescribed burning is required or preferred to meet restoration silvicultural objectives and can be accomplished safely outside of existing burn blocks.

Bob Jones Rx, on the southern border of the IA, burned in Spring of 2024

How to Implement Change: Prescribed fire would be used on the Foothills Landscape (in conjunction with silvicultural treatments when appropriate) to trend vegetation toward FCC 2 or 1 and increase resiliency of forests and reduce susceptibility to insect & disease and/or stand-replacing wildfires. All actions would be similar to using prescribed fire within existing burn blocks. New prescribed fire units may be incorporated into the Foothills Landscape based on proposed vegetation management activities. Burning in mesic stands is not considered part of this action. The proposed action does not include burning, either as a primary action or a connected action, for mesic stands (See Table 17). While a mesic stand could be included within a burn block, the burn plan objectives, and the parameters set within that plan, decrease the risk that these mesic forest types would burn inadvertently.

Three new prescribed burns are proposed in the project area (1,536 acres):

- Gryder Camp Rx – 315 acres
- Burnt Schoolhouse Rx – 1,002 acres
- Buffalo Extension Rx– 213 acres

The Upper Conasauga IA has a history of summertime natural fire ignitions. These summertime wildfires show a resistance to control and can result in mortality of the overstory. The IA contains many examples of fire-adapted vegetation, including a population of the rare eastern turkeybeard (*Xerophyllum asphodeloides*).

The Gryder Camp Rx unit is located South of FRS 51 and is bounded by FRS 373 on the east and bounded by FSR 51B on the west and north sides. A combination of streams, old roadbed, and new dozer line would comprise the remainder of control line. This unit has one oak stand and three pine stands proposed for commercial timber harvest. One of the three pine units is proposed for shortleaf restoration. This unit will generally be burned on a 3-5 year rotation and can vary between dormant and growing season as determined by district fire, timber, and silviculture staff.

The Burnt Schoolhouse Rx unit is located south and west of FSR 51 and is bounded by Jigger Creek to the south and FSR 373 on the west side. A combination of streams, old roadbed, and new dozer line would comprise the remainder of control line. This unit includes seven pine stands and three oak stands proposed for commercial timber harvest. Three of the pine units are proposed for shortleaf restoration. The three restoration units and three oak units will particularly benefit by having fire returned to the landscape. A large portion of this unit was part of a prescribed burn unit back in the 1990's. This unit will generally be burned on a 3-5 year rotation and can vary between dormant and growing season as determined by district fire, timber, and silviculture staff.

The Buffalo Extension Rx is located north of FSR 51 and is bounded on the west and north by the Horseshoe Bend Trail and on the east by FSR 51C. This unit will be burned in combination with the existing Buffalo Burn unit and may be subdivided into three burn blocks. These blocks will serve as research plots for the Southern Research Station as well as demo locations with signage for the public to display the different effects of burning seasonality and in combination with different timber and silviculture techniques. Unit 1 would utilize a combination of prescribed burning and commercial timber harvest to affect oak restoration. Unit 2 is the existing 26-acre Buffalo Rx. Unit 3 would incorporate a commercial timber harvest and early growing season burns with a 3 year burn rotation. Unit 4 would be burned in the late growing season and also have a 3 year burn rotation.

Connected actions for all new prescribed burns include approximately 3.5 miles of new fireline construction.

Most firelines will use existing roadbeds and features such as streambeds and creeks. New firelines would be bladed with a dozer to create a fuel break or leaf litter would be blown with a blower. In riparian areas, line construction is limited to hand tools and blowers. Fire lines may be improved using a masticator immediately adjacent to the line location to reduce fuel build up next to the line. All line construction will utilize Best Management Practices as outlined in Georgia Forestry Commissions Best Management Practices for Forestry Section 5 and approved prescribed fire plans.

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned:

The Gryder Camp Rx and Burnt Schoolhouse Rx units are in the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC #031501010101. The Buffalo Extension Rx is in the Jack's River HUC - #031501010102.

MRx(s) where activity would occur: All three burns fall within MRx 7.E.2 Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management.

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

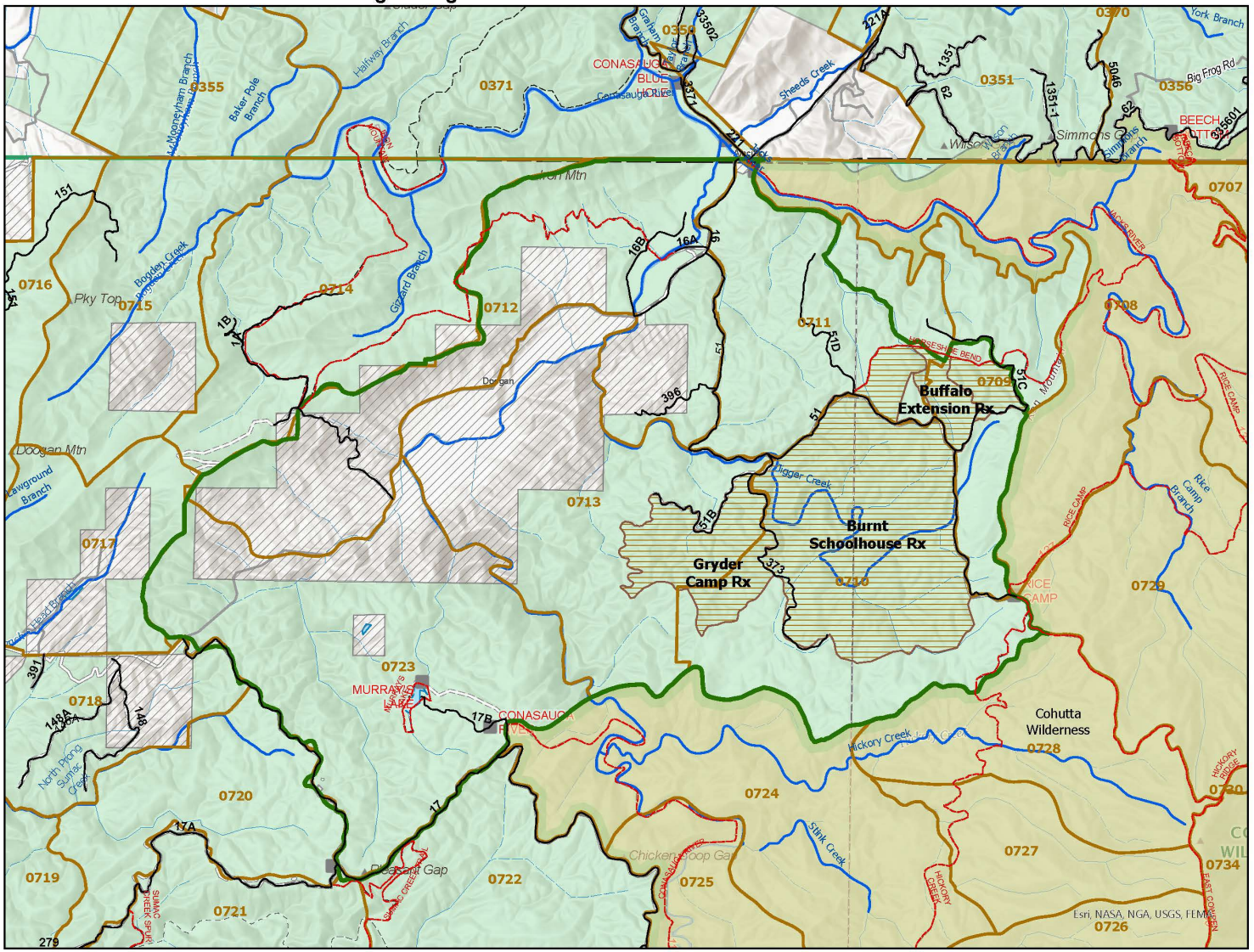
Additional Project Design Features: None

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Prescribed Fire in New Burn Blocks to facilitate Restoration or Maintenance of Fire-adapted Ecosystems or to reduce Hazardous Fuels



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Activity Name: Decommissioning of maintenance level (ML) 2 and ML 1 system roads

Detailed Description:
Existing Condition (Need): Road density on Forest Service lands is moderate to high (0.8 - >1.6 miles/mile^2) in over half of the landscape. The Forest currently does not receive enough funding or capacity to maintain these roads at their current management classifications**.** FSR 51C (Ken Mountain) from MP 1.4 to MP 1.8 is a maintenance level (ML) 2 road, closed year-round to the public, within the Recommended Ken Mountain Wilderness Study Area, and rarely used for administrative purposes.

Desired Condition: A transportation system which supplies the public, Forest Service, and other authorized users with safe, environmentally sustainable, equitable, financially sound, and operationally effective access to roaded portions of the project area. (LRMP Goal 47**)**

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: Identified roads that are not necessary for management or sustainable to maintain in their current condition.

Detailed Description: FSR 51C (Ken Mountain) from MP 1.4 to MP 1.8 would be permanently closed to vehicular traffic. An earthen barrier would be constructed. Additional actions may include reshaping the roadbed to drain water by utilizing heavy equipment to construct waterbars, fill ditches, and outslope the roadbed. Compacted soil may be loosened by scarifying the surface to the depth of up to 12 inches. Disturbed soils would be seeded with native or approved non-native seed. Slash may be scattered on the surface of the road.

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned:

The section of FSR 51C planned for decommissioning is in the Jack's River HUC - #031501010102.

MRx(s) where activity would occur: The section of FSR 1 planned for decommissioning is in MRx 1.B Recommended Wilderness Study Areas.

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

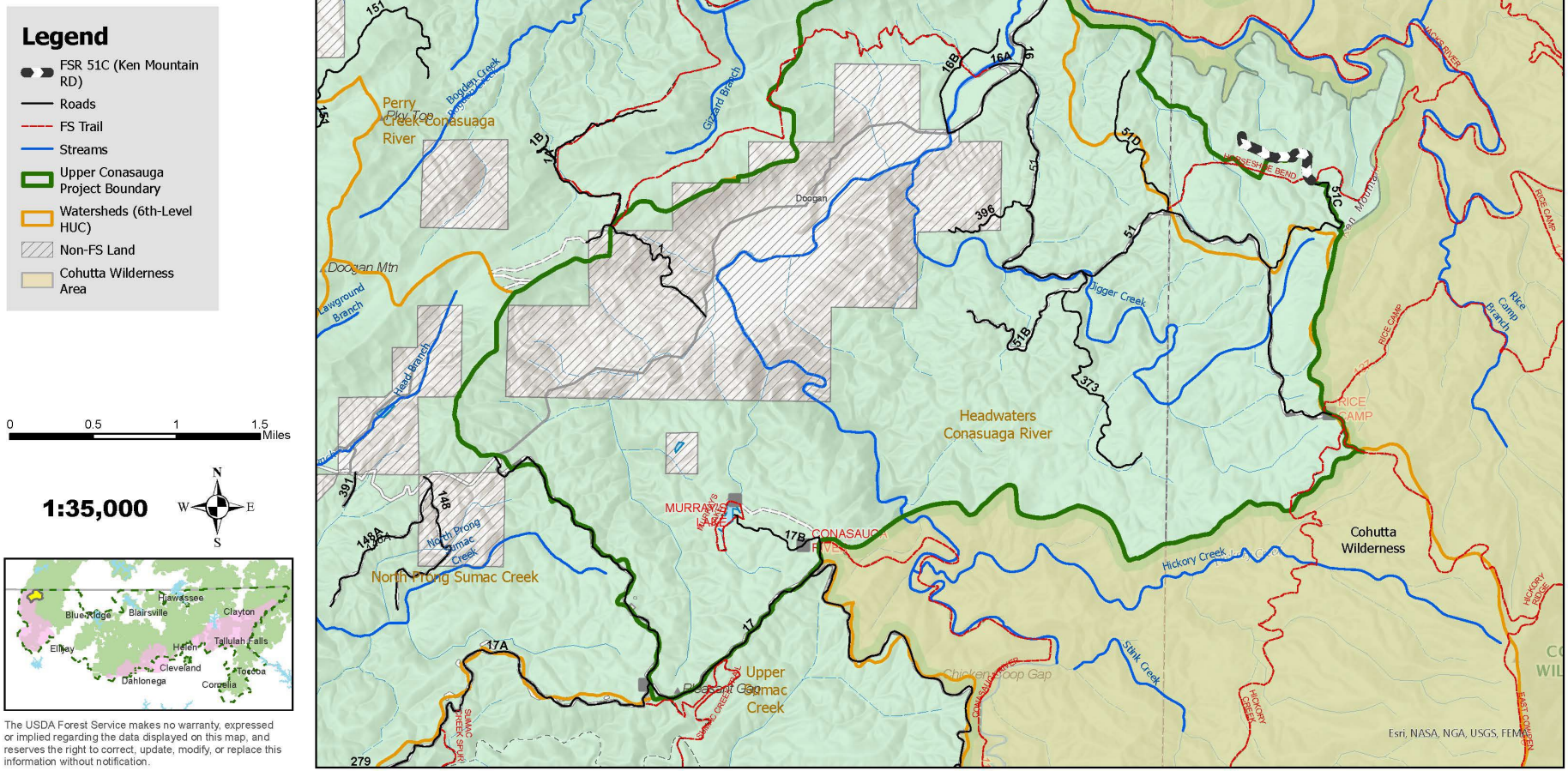
Additional Project Design Features: None

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Decommissioning of Maintenance Level (ML) 2 and ML 1 System Roads -
FSR 51C Ken Mountain RD



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Activity Name: Decommission low-use trails (Murray's Lake Trail - #182)

Detailed Description:

Existing Condition (Need): Murray's Lake Trail (Trail #182) is an 0.8 mile-long hiking trail on the FS trail system that is low use and non-maintained. It is a narrow foot path primarily used by anglers. The Forest Service does not have the capacity to maintain all the trails on the system and no volunteer group has expressed interest in maintaining the Murray's Lake Trail.

Desired Condition: User conflicts are decreased, and satisfaction increased by adding or modifying section of trails that do not adversely affect soil and water resources (LRMP goal 34). Provide a spectrum of high quality, nature-based recreation settings and opportunities that reflect the unique or exceptional resources of the Forest and the interests of the recreating public on an environmentally sustainable, financially sound, and operationally effective basis. Adapt management of recreation facilities and opportunities as needed to shift limited resources to those opportunities (LRMP goal 31).

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: A rapid assessment of trails in the Foothills Project area identified this trail as low use. It is not maintained by the Forest Service currently.

How to Implement Change: There would be no change in access for users; just an administrative removal of the trail from the system and updating of maps. The trail would not be physically blocked or obliterated.

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned:

Headwaters Conasauga River HUC12 #031501010101.

MRx(s) where activity would occur:

MRx 9.H - Management, Maintenance and Restoration of Plant Associations

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

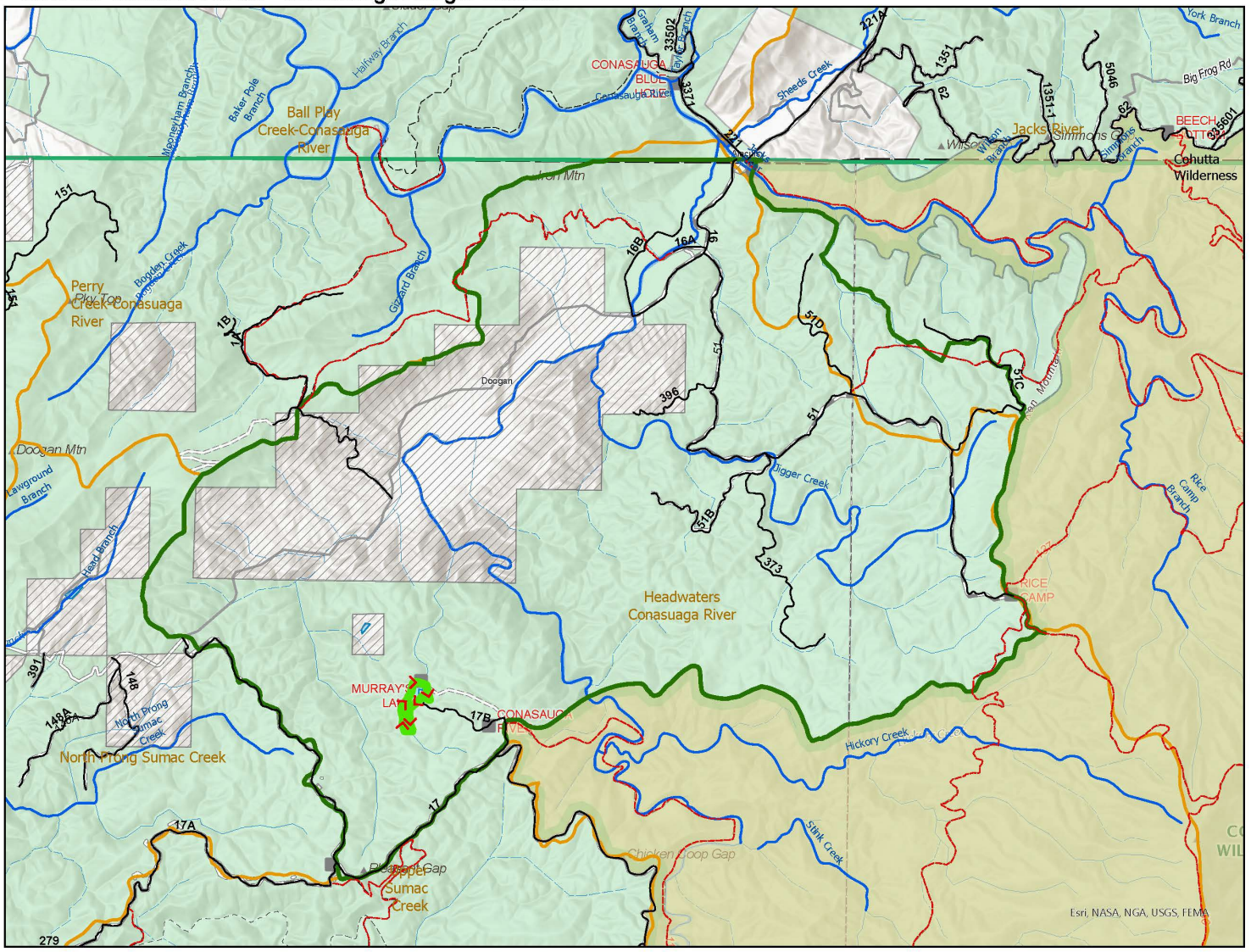
Additional Project Design Features: None

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Decommission Low-use Trails - Murray's Lake Trail (Trail 182)

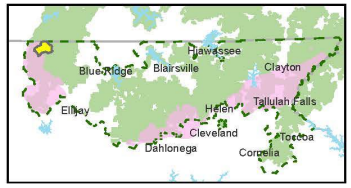


Legend

- Murray's Lake Trail
- Roads
- FS Trail
- Streams
- Upper Conasauga Project Boundary
- Watersheds (6th-Level HUC)
- Non-FS Land
- Cohutta Wilderness Area

0 0.5 1 1.5 Miles

1:35,000



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Activity Name: Restoration of southern yellow pine forest on dry sites dominated by mid to late-successional Virginia or white pine – two-aged regeneration harvest

Detailed Description:

Existing Condition (Need): Nearly a century of fire suppression has resulted in the establishment of more than 21,000 acres Virginia and/or white pine on dry sites ecologically suitable for fire-dependent shortleaf pine.

Desired Condition: Fire-dependent shortleaf pines are restored to ecologically appropriate sites and to sites where they once likely occurred (Forest Plan Objective 3.1). These treatments would also result in the creation of young forest habitats, which are generally lacking in the project area.

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: Dry sites dominated by mid to late successional Virginia pine or white pine.

How to Implement Change: Restoration of shortleaf pine would be implemented using artificial regeneration methods. A two-aged regeneration harvest would be implemented to initiate the restoration process. Under this harvest method, the majority of the overstory trees in restoration areas would be removed. This would create large, continuous openings for restoration planting for regeneration. A portion of the trees (minimum of 15 ft^2 per acre) in restoration areas would be reserved from cutting to form the two-aged condition. These trees would be retained in a non-uniform and variable distribution and would remain on-site indefinitely. Long-lived species such as shortleaf pine, white oak, chestnut oak, or hickory would be selected as reserve trees to be retained. Virginia and white pines, and other less desirable hardwood species would be harvested from the sites.

Following the harvest, restoration areas would be prepared for planting by (1) directed herbicide methods (cut-stump and foliar) to selectively treat non-desirable species persisting on the sites, and (2) a growing season site preparation prescribed burn. Once sites are prepared, restoration areas would be planted with shortleaf pine seedlings. One to three years following planting, planted seedlings would be released from woody competition (individual tree) using hand tools or a directed herbicide application (directed foliar, cut surface, or basal bark methods) depending on the species and degree of competition. Once the canopy of the restoration areas approach crown closure (approximately 7 – 10 years post planting), a thinning using manual hand tools (chainsaws or brush cutters) would be applied to reduce competition and maintain desired tree species composition. *(For more information about connected herbicide actions, see Table 41 in the 2021 Foothills Landscape Project Environmental Assessment, page B45. For more information about site prep burns, see Site Preparation and Maintenance, page B45.)*

Stands Proposed for Treatment:

Comp 710 Stand 10: 29 ac Virginia pine stand, 109 years old
Comp 711 Stand 14: 24 ac Virginia pine stand, 85 years old^
Comp 711 Stand 37: 21 ac White pine stand, 95 years old^
Comp 711 Stand 27: 37 ac Virginia pine stand, 37 years old
Comp 712 Stand 27: 19 ac White pine-upland hardwood stand, 114 years old
Comp 723 Stand 19: 22 ac White pine-upland hardwood stand, 112 years old
Comp 723 Stand 29: 22 ac Virginia pine stand, 54 years old^
Comp 723 Stand 32: 15 ac Virginia pine stand, 87 years old^

Comp 723 Stand 41: 17 ac Virginia pine stand, 82 years old
Comp 723 Stand 51: 46 ac Virginia pine stand, 82 years old
^ Trails impacted by silvicultural activities

Prescribed Burns:
710/10 falls in Burnt Schoolhouse Rx
711/14 falls partially in Buffalo Extension Rx
711/27 falls in East Cowpen Rx
711/37 falls partially in East Cowpen Rx

Comp 711 Stand 27, Virginia pine stand proposed for restoration to shortleaf pine

Proposed temporary roads to access all proposed commercial timber treatments will be a total of 10.1 miles. Use of legacy road prisms would be favored over new temporary road construction when available. *(For more information about temporary roads, see Connected Road and Log Landing Related Actions, 2021 Foothills Landscape Project Environmental Assessment, page B42)*

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned:

These stands are in the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC - #031501010101 and the Jacks River HUC - #031501010102.

MRx(s) where activity would occur: 9.H Management, Maintenance and Restoration of Plant Associations and 7.E.2 Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

Additional Project Design Features:

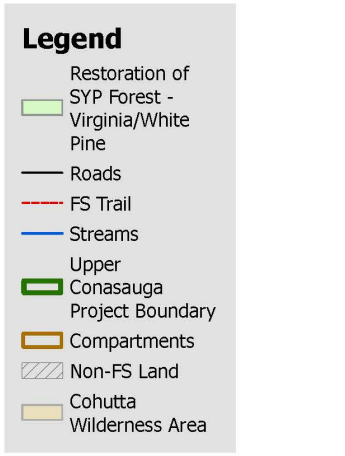
- The following stands have trails that are in or adjacent to commercial harvest units and within a High scenic integrity objective. See PDF 7 and 8 for trail condition specifications in or adjacent to harvest units. Additionally, trees will be marked on the side that faces away from the trail and edges should be feathered to create a vegetative buffer along the trail.

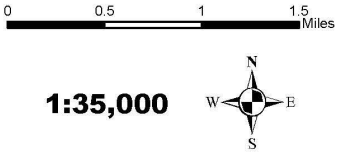
  Compartment 711 stand 14 – Horseshoe Bend Trail (Trail #43)
  Compartment 723 stand 29 – Conasauga River Trail (Trail #11)
  Compartment 723 stand 32 – Conasauga River Trail (Trail #11)

- The following stands have trails that are in or adjacent to commercial harvest units. See PDF 7 and 8 for trail condition specifications in or adjacent to harvest units.

  Compartment 711 stand 37 – Old County Line Trail (Trail #42)

Restoration of Southern Yellow Pine Forest on Dry Sites Dominated by Mid to Late-successional Virginia or White Pine: Two-aged Regeneration Harvest-Shortleaf Restoration





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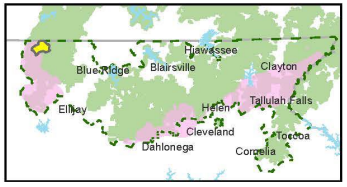
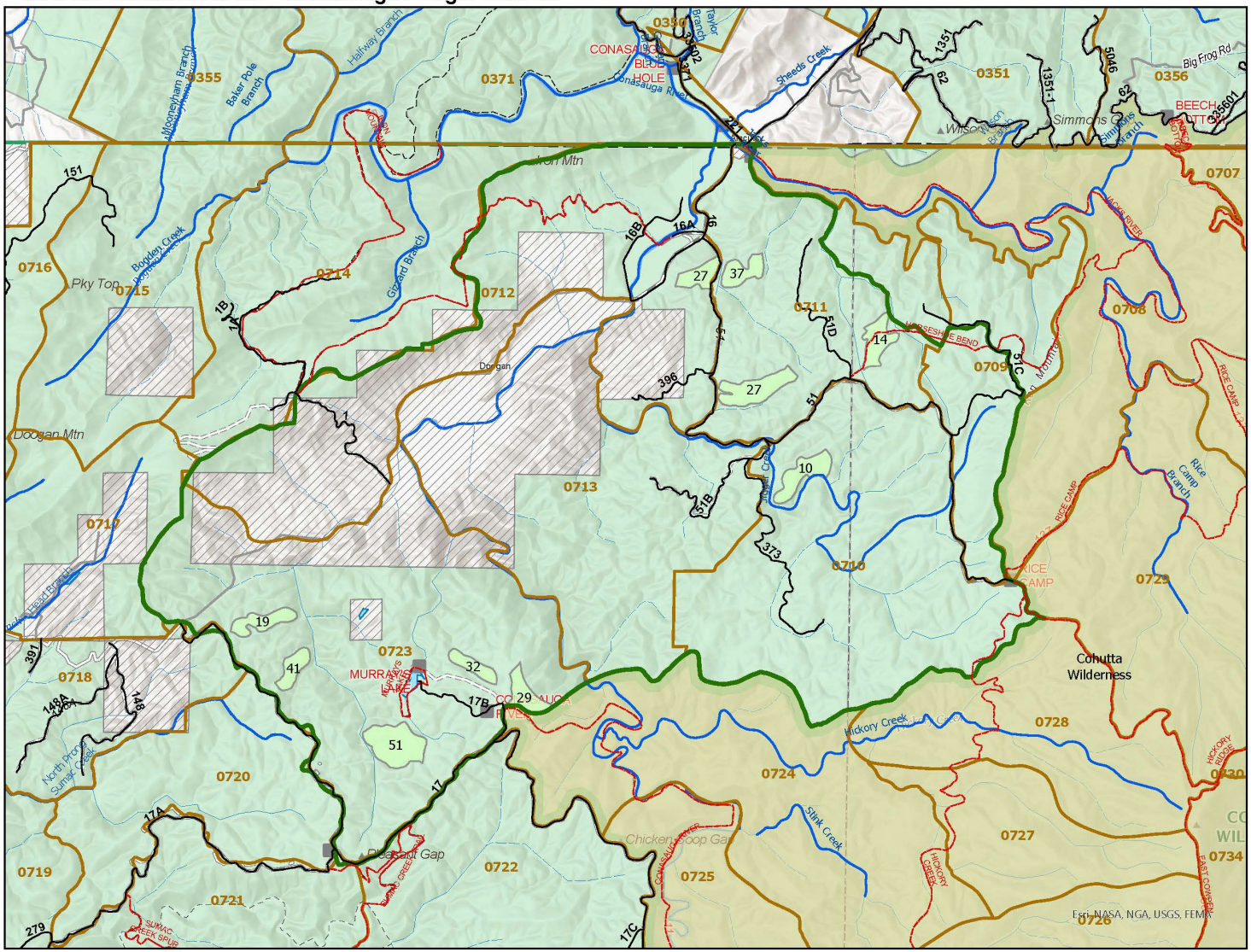




Activity Name: Restoration of southern yellow pine forest or oak forest on sites currently occupied by off-site pine plantations or failed shortleaf or pitch pine plantations – **two-aged regeneration harvest to restore shortleaf pine**

Detailed Description:

Existing Condition (Need): Previous management in the Foothills Project area resulted in establishment of over 11,000 acres of off-site pine plantations of pole-sized white pine or loblolly where regeneration to suitable southern yellow pine is desired.

Desired Condition: Fire-dependent southern yellow pines (shortleaf, pitch, table mountain pines) are restored to ecologically appropriate sites and to sites where they once likely occurred (Forest Plan Objective 3.1 and 3.2, OBJ-9.F-03).

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: Off-site pine plantations of pole-sized white pine or loblolly where regeneration to suitable southern yellow pine is desired. Some of these plantations exist on sites more ecologically appropriate for oak or mixed oak-pine forest.

How to Implement Change: Restore off-site loblolly pine or white pine plantations to site-appropriate species through removal of the off-site planted species. Actions would be similar to that described in the *Restoration of southern yellow pine forest on dry sites dominated by mid to late-successional Virginia or white pine* section above (pages 46-47), including connected actions.

Stands Proposed for Treatment:

Comp 709 Stand 16: 55 ac Loblolly pine stand, 42 years old
Comp 710 Stand 18: 51 ac White pine stand, 56 years old
Comp 710 Stand 34: 15 ac White pine-upland hardwood stand, 56 years old
Comp 711 Stand 13: 9 ac Loblolly pine-upland hardwood stand, 85 years old
Comp 713 Stand 26: 52 ac Loblolly pine stand, 42 years old
Comp 713 Stand 33: 29 ac Loblolly pine stand, 42 years old
Comp 723 Stand 30: 12 ac Loblolly pine-hardwood stand, 72 years old ^
^Trails impacted by silvicultural activities

Prescribed Burns:

711/13 falls in Buffalo Extension Rx.
710/18 falls in Burnt Schoolhouse Rx.
710/34 falls partially in Burnt Schoolhouse Rx.
713/26 falls partially in Gryder Camp Rx.

Proposed temporary roads to access all proposed commercial timber treatments will be a total of 10.1 miles. Use of legacy road prisms would be favored over new temporary road construction when available. *(For more information about temporary roads, see Connected Road and Log Landing Related Actions, 2021 Foothills Landscape Project Environmental Assessment, page B42)*

Comp 713 Stand 33: 42-year-old loblolly pine stand proposed for restoration of shortleaf pine

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned:

These stands are in the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC - #031501010101 and the Jacks River HUC - #031501010102.

MRx(s) where activity would occur: 9.H Management, Maintenance and Restoration of Plant Associations; 7.E.2 Management, Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management; 7.B management, Scenic Corridors and Sensitive Viewsheds

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

Additional Project Design Features:

- The following stands have trails that are in or adjacent to commercial harvest units and within a High scenic integrity objective. See PDF 7 and 8 for trail condition specifications in or adjacent to harvest units. Additionally, trees will be marked on the side that faces away from the trail and edges should be feathered to create a vegetative buffer along the trail.

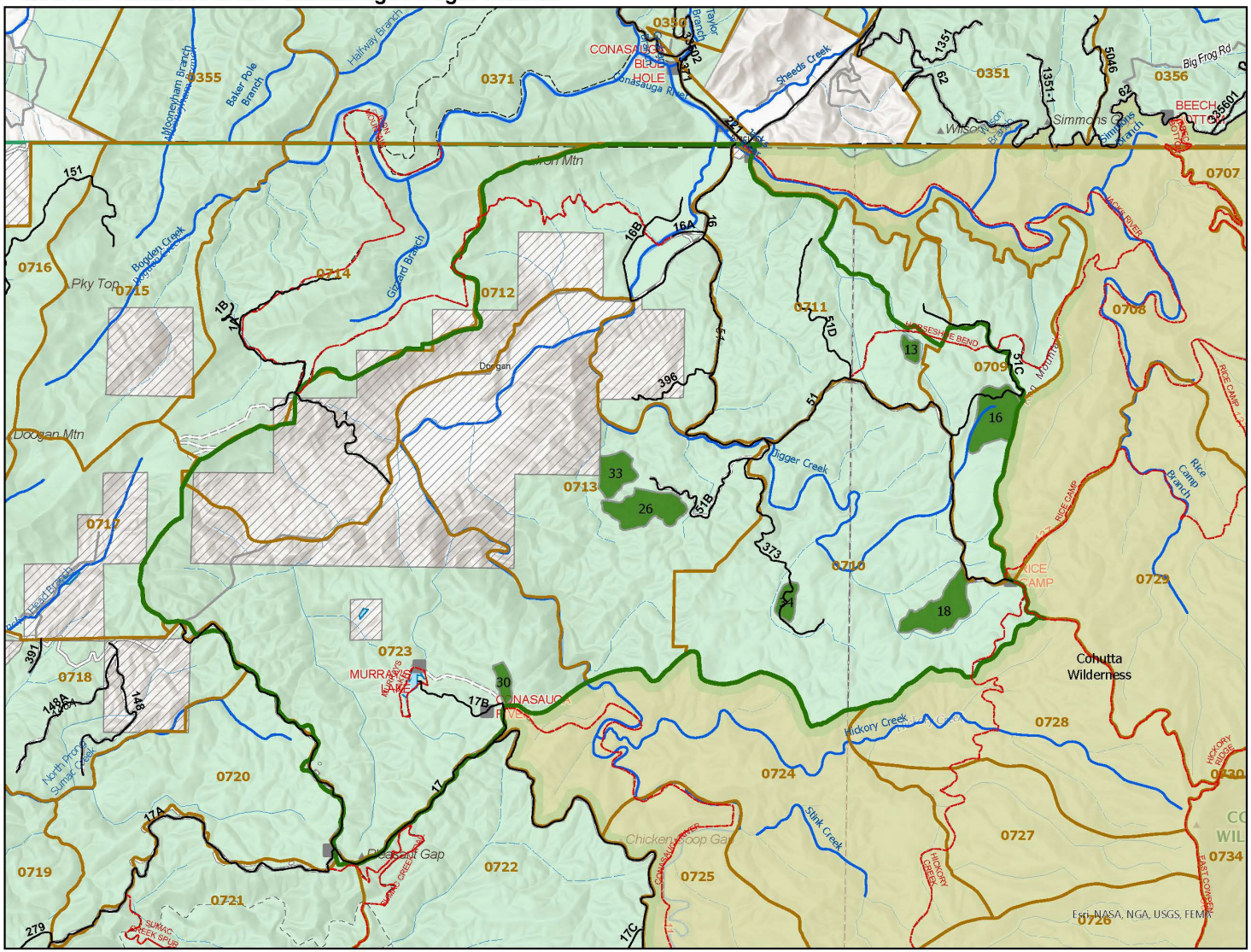
  Compartment 723 stand 30 – Conasauga River Trail (Trail #11)

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/20/2024

Restoration of Southern Yellow Pine Forest or Oak Forest on Sites Currently Occupied by Off-site Pine Plantations (Loblolly or White Pine) or Failed Shortleaf Plantations: Two-aged Regeneration Harvest - Shortleaf Restoration



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Activity Name: Restoration of southern yellow pine forest or oak forest on sites currently occupied by off-site pine plantations or failed shortleaf or pitch pine plantations – **two-aged regeneration harvest to restore oak**

Detailed Description:

Existing Condition (Need): Previous management in the Foothills Project area resulted in establishment of over 11,000 acres of off-site pine plantations of pole-sized white pine or loblolly where restoration to suitable oak or oak-pine stands are desired.

Desired Condition: Oak or oak-pine forest is restored to areas of the Foothills Landscape where it most likely existed or where it is ecologically appropriate (Forest Plan Objective 3.6).

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: Off-site pine plantations of pole-sized white pine or loblolly where these plantations exist on sites more ecologically appropriate for oak or mixed oak-pine forest.

How to Implement Change: Restore off-site loblolly pine or white pine plantations to site-appropriate species through removal of the off-site planted species. Opportunities to increase oak abundance through restoration exists within these stands. Restoration of these sites to oak would be emphasized in off-site plantations with low desired pine stocking and where adequate pre-existing oak, either in the canopy of the plantations or in the understory, is available to successfully restore the sites to an oak-dominated composition.

On sites where oak restoration is elected and oak is abundant in the understory of the off-site plantations as seedlings, restoration would include a regeneration harvest to initiate the oak restoration process. Because these sites would likely contain an overstory dominated by an off-site pine species (loblolly or white pine), the regeneration harvest would remove all or most of the current overstory, reducing the potential for the off-site species to re-seed the harvested sites. This action would result in the creation of young forest habitat because the current overstory would be removed in its entirety. Upon removal of the off-site overstory through regeneration harvest, the areas would be prepared for natural regeneration to oak by applying directed herbicide treatments (foliar and cut-stump methods). To supplement the natural oak regeneration, restoration areas could be hand-planted with oak seedlings on a wide spacing. Planted and naturally regenerating oak seedlings would be individually released from non-desirable competition one to multiple times during the first 10 years of regeneration using manual methods or directed herbicide treatments (basal bark/streamline or cut stem) to ensure oak remains competitive during early stand development.

Stands Proposed for Treatment:

Comp 709 stand 8: 17 ac Loblolly pine stand, 42 years old^
Comp 711 stand 12: 35 ac Loblolly pine stand, 38 years old
^Trails impacted by silvicultural treatments

Prescribed Burns:

711/12 and 13 falls in Buffalo Extension Rx.

Comp 709 Stand 8, loblolly pine stand proposed for oak restoration

Proposed temporary roads to access all proposed commercial timber treatments will be a total of 10.1 miles. Use of legacy road prisms would be favored over new temporary road construction when available. *(For more information about temporary roads, see Connected Road and Log Landing Related Actions, 2021 Foothills Landscape Project Environmental Assessment, page B42)*

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned:

These stands are in the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC - #031501010101 and the Jacks River HUC - #031501010102.

MRx(s) where activity would occur: 9.H Management, Maintenance and Restoration of Plant Associations; 7.E.2 Management, Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management; 7.B management, Scenic Corridors and Sensitive Viewsheds

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

Additional Project Design Features:

- The following stands have trails that are in or adjacent to commercial harvest units and within a High scenic integrity objective. See PDF 7 and 8 for trail condition specifications in or adjacent to harvest units. Additionally, trees will be marked on the side that faces away from the trail and edges should be feathered to create a vegetative buffer along the trail.

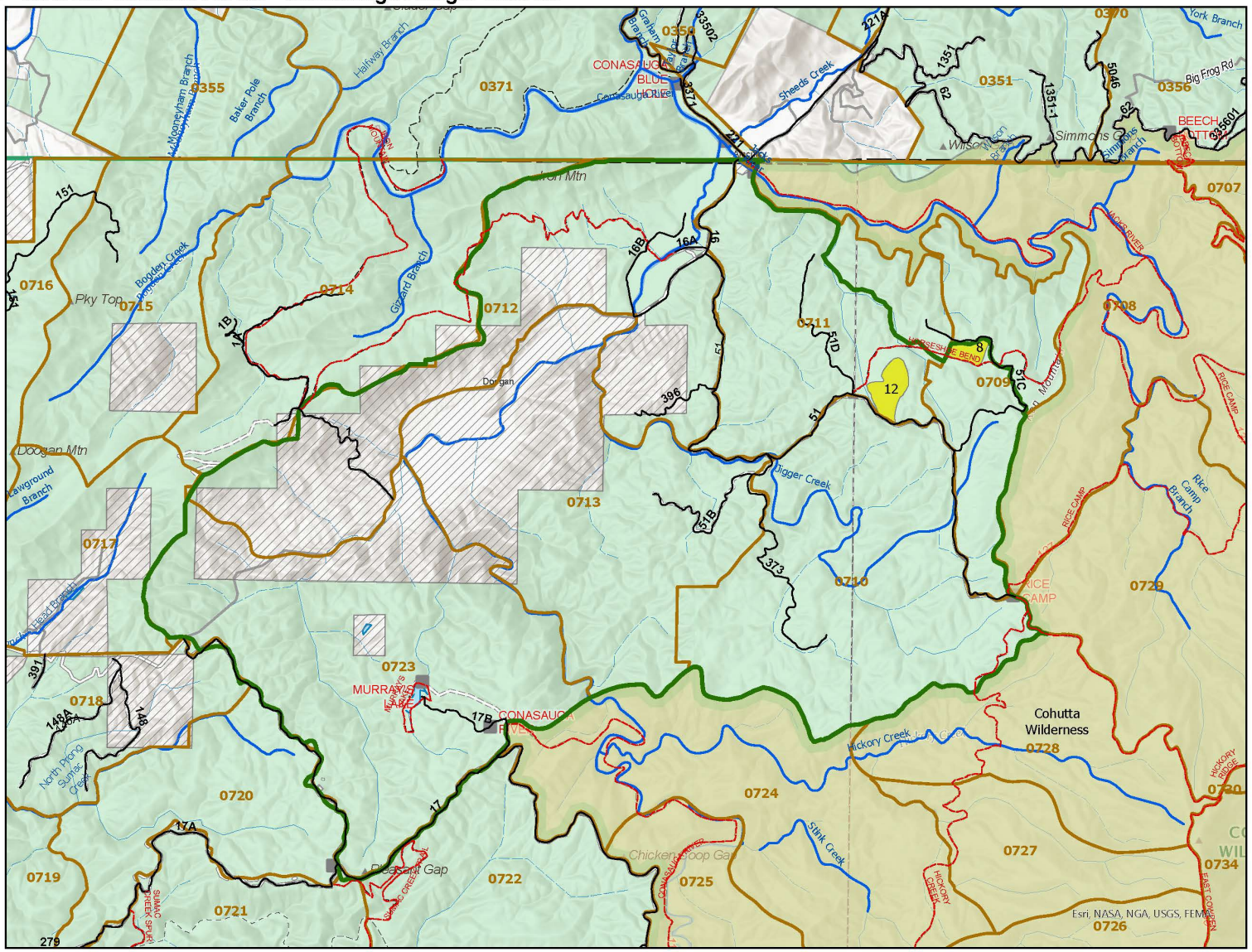
  Compartment 709 stand 8 – Horseshoe Bend Trail (Trail #43)

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Restoration of Southern Yellow Pine Forest or Oak Forest on Sites Currently Occupied by Off-site Pine Plantations (Loblolly or White Pine) or Failed Shortleaf Plantations: Two-aged Regeneration Harvest - Restore Oak



Legend

- Restoration of SYP Forest - Restore Oak through Regeneration Harvest
- Roads
- FS Trail
- Streams
- Upper Conasauga Project Boundary
- Compartments
- Non-FS Land
- Cohutta Wilderness Area

0 1.5 Miles

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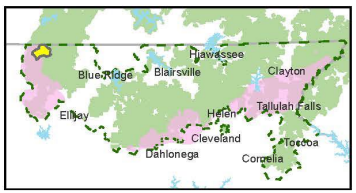

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Activity Name: Restoration of southern yellow pine forest or oak forest on sites currently occupied by off-site pine plantations or failed shortleaf or pitch pine plantations – **commercial thinning to restore oak**

Detailed Description:

Existing Condition (Need): Previous management in the Foothills Project area resulted in establishment of over 11,000 acres of off-site pine plantations of pole-sized white pine or loblolly where restoration to suitable oak or oak-pine stands are desired.

Desired Condition: Oak or oak-pine forest is restored to areas of the Foothills Landscape where it most likely existed or where it is ecologically appropriate (Forest Plan Objective 3.6).

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: Off-site pine plantations of pole-sized white pine or loblolly where plantations exist on sites more ecologically appropriate for oak or mixed oak-pine forest.

How to Implement Change: Restore off-site loblolly pine or white pine plantations to site-appropriate species through removal of the off-site planted species. Opportunities to increase oak abundance through restoration exists within these stands. Restoration of these sites to oak would be emphasized in off-site plantations with low desired pine stocking and where adequate pre-existing oak, either in the canopy of the plantations or in the understory, is available to successfully restore the sites to an oak-dominated composition.

If oak is adequate in the overstory (canopy), the proposed treatment includes an intermediate thinning of off-site pine to a residual basal area of 40 – 70 ft^2 /ac. The wide range of basal area would allow for the retention of all existing oaks and other desirable species, while removing most to all off-site pine species. This treatment would not result in the creation of young forest habitat, but simply a change in forest-typing (from pine dominated to oak dominated).

Stands Proposed for Treatment:

Comp 711 Stand 15: 22 ac Virginia pine-oak stand, 120 years old^
Comp 713 Stand 9: 29 ac Virginia pine stand, 90 years old
Comp 723 Stand 57: 32 ac Eastern white pine-upland hardwood stand, 112 years old
^Trails impacted by silvicultural treatments

Prescribed Burns:

713/9 Falls partially in Gryder Camp Rx.

Comp 713 Stand 9, Virginia pine stand proposed for oak restoration treatment via pine thin

Proposed temporary roads to access all proposed commercial timber treatments will be a total of 10.1 miles. Use of legacy road prisms would be favored over new temporary road construction when available. *(For more information about temporary roads, see Connected Road and Log Landing Related Actions, 2021 Foothills Landscape Project Environmental Assessment, page B42)*

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned:

These stands are in the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC - #031501010101 and the Jacks River HUC - #031501010102.

MRx(s) where activity would occur: 7.E.2 management, Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management; 7.B Management, Scenic Corridors and Sensitive Viewsheds.

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

Additional Project Design Features:

- The following stands have trails that are in or adjacent to commercial harvest units. See PDF 7 and 8 for trail condition specifications in or adjacent to harvest units.

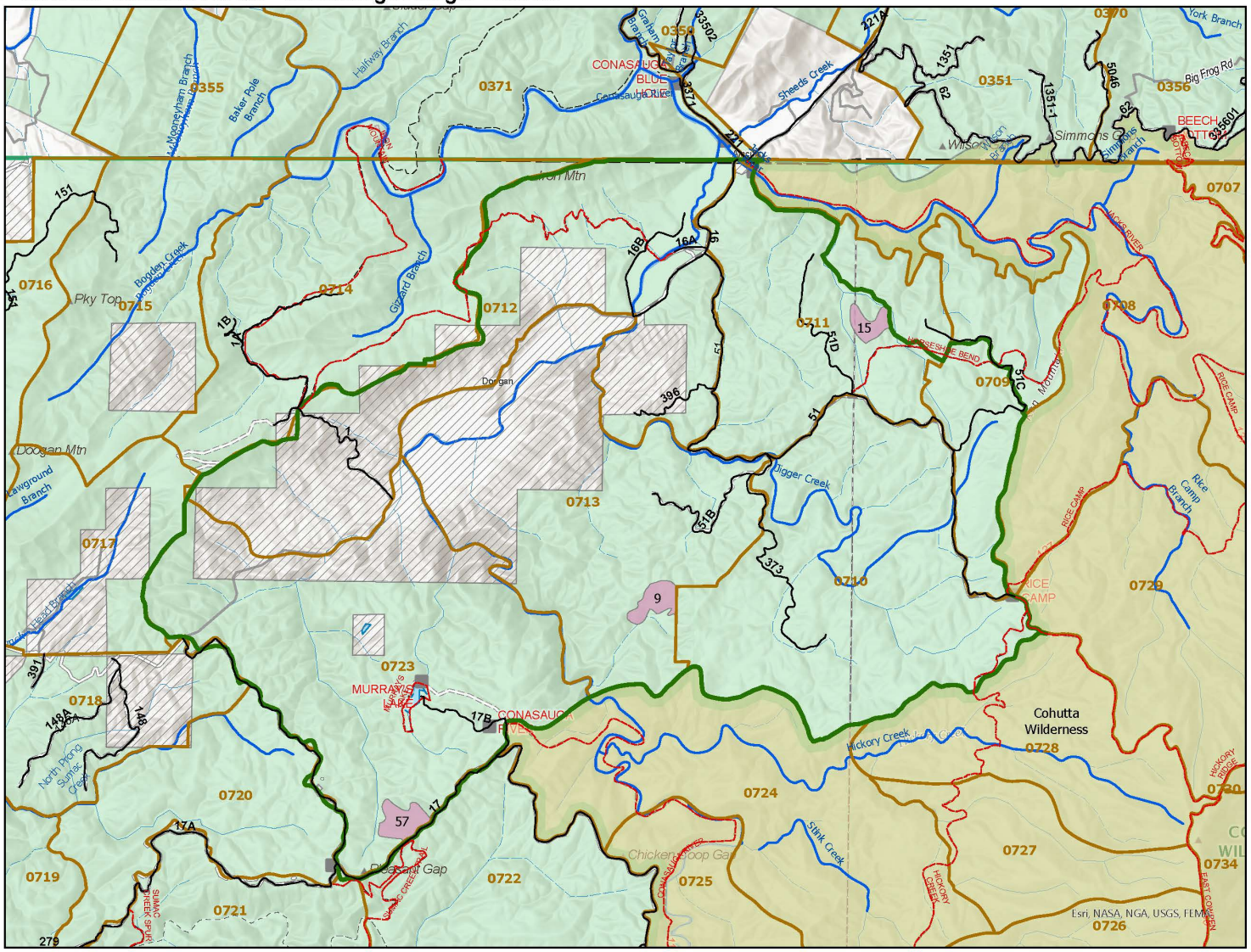
  Compartment 711 stand 15 – Horseshoe Bend Trail (Trail #43)

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Restoration of Southern Yellow Pine Forest or Oak Forest on Sites Currently Occupied by Off-site Pine Plantations (Loblolly or White Pine) or Failed Shortleaf Plantations:
Commercial Thinning - Restore Oak



Legend

- Restoration of SYP Forest - Restore Oak through Commercial Thinning
- Roads
- FS Trail
- Streams
- Upper Conasauga Project Boundary
- Compartments
- Non-FS Land
- Cohutta Wilderness Area

0 0.5 1 1.5 Miles

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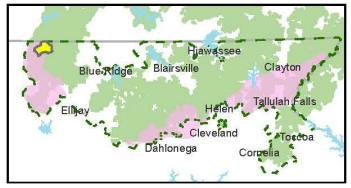
N W E S



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Activity Name: Maintenance of southern yellow pine forest – commercial thinning

Detailed Description:

Existing Condition (Need): Within the FLP area, there are more than 30,000 acres of fire-dependent, mid-late successional southern yellow pine forests that are highly departed from the open forest environment necessary for these species to maintain dominance through self-replacement (i.e., regeneration).

Desired Condition: Open stand environments and reduced duff layers that allow for these fire-dependent species to self-perpetuate on the site where they currently exist (Forest Plan Objective 8.1, 8.2, OBJ-9.F-04).

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: There are two types of conditions that would trigger restoration actions:

- Mid to late successional shortleaf pine stands and/or stands that contain pitch or Table Mountain pine where midstory conditions are prohibiting natural regeneration
- Where mid to late successional shortleaf pine stands exist but where Rx fire cannot be used regularly to achieve desired outcomes

How to Implement Change: Stands selected for treatment would be mechanically thinned to about 40 – 60 square feet per acre (ft^2/ac) of basal area to establish a more open stand condition. Shortleaf pines and upland oaks and hickories would be given preference as leave trees during the thinning treatments. Following the thinning treatments, the areas would be evaluated on the ground to determine the degree and intensity of subsequent understory treatments in order to meet desired outcomes. For example, if shade tolerant, fire intolerant understory vegetation persists after the thinning, then it would be treated using a combination of herbicides and/or prescribed fire. In most cases, initial understory treatments would be conducted by using herbicides to control anticipated undesired hardwood brush and stump sprouting vegetation persisting on the sites. Initial herbicide treatments would be selectively applied to undesired understory vegetation using directed foliar, cut stem or basal bark/streamline methods. The specific method of herbicide application would be based on the composition, size and density of the understory vegetation persisting on the sites. Details on herbicide treatments are described in the Connected Actions in Appendix B and in the Vegetation Report.

After the initial herbicide treatments, prescribed burning would be utilized to achieve site specific objectives. Site conditions would be evaluated for prescribed burning and the appropriate burning season (either dormant or growing season). Prescribed fire treatments would continue on a recurring interval (every 2 – 7 years) until the desired results are achieved, which include the reduction in the woody hardwood understory, diverse understories, and a restored and receptive seedbed. Upon achievement of the desired conditions, fire treatments would be applied less frequently. This would allow for pine seedling recruitment to be initiated in the understory.

In certain cases, mechanical mastication, followed by the above referenced herbicide and prescribed fire treatments would be used to reduce unwanted understory vegetation. This treatment option would most likely be utilized where understories are occupied by dense shrubby vegetation (i.e., mountain laurel) that would make initial herbicide treatments infeasible. In these cases, mastication of the shrubby layer would be implemented first. Follow-up herbicide treatments for to control stump sprouting vegetation and/or prescribed fire (if possible) would be

implemented following the mastication treatments to further control the undesired understory vegetation.

Comp 711 Stand 28, Shortleaf pine-oak stand proposed for maintenance of southern yellow pine forest via commercial thinning

Stands Proposed for Treatment:
Comp 711 Stand 18: 21 ac shortleaf pine-oak stand, 105 years old^
Comp 711 Stand 28: 27 ac shortleaf pine-oak stand, 117 years old
^Trails impacted by silvicultural treatments

Prescribed Burns:
711/18 falls partially in East Cowpen Rx.
711/28 falls in East Cowpen Rx.

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned:

These stands are in the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC - #031501010101 and the Jacks River HUC - #031501010102.

MRx(s) where activity would occur: 7.E.2 Management, Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

Additional Project Design Features:

- The following stands have trails that are in or adjacent to commercial harvest units. See PDF 7 and 8 for trail condition specifications in or adjacent to harvest units.

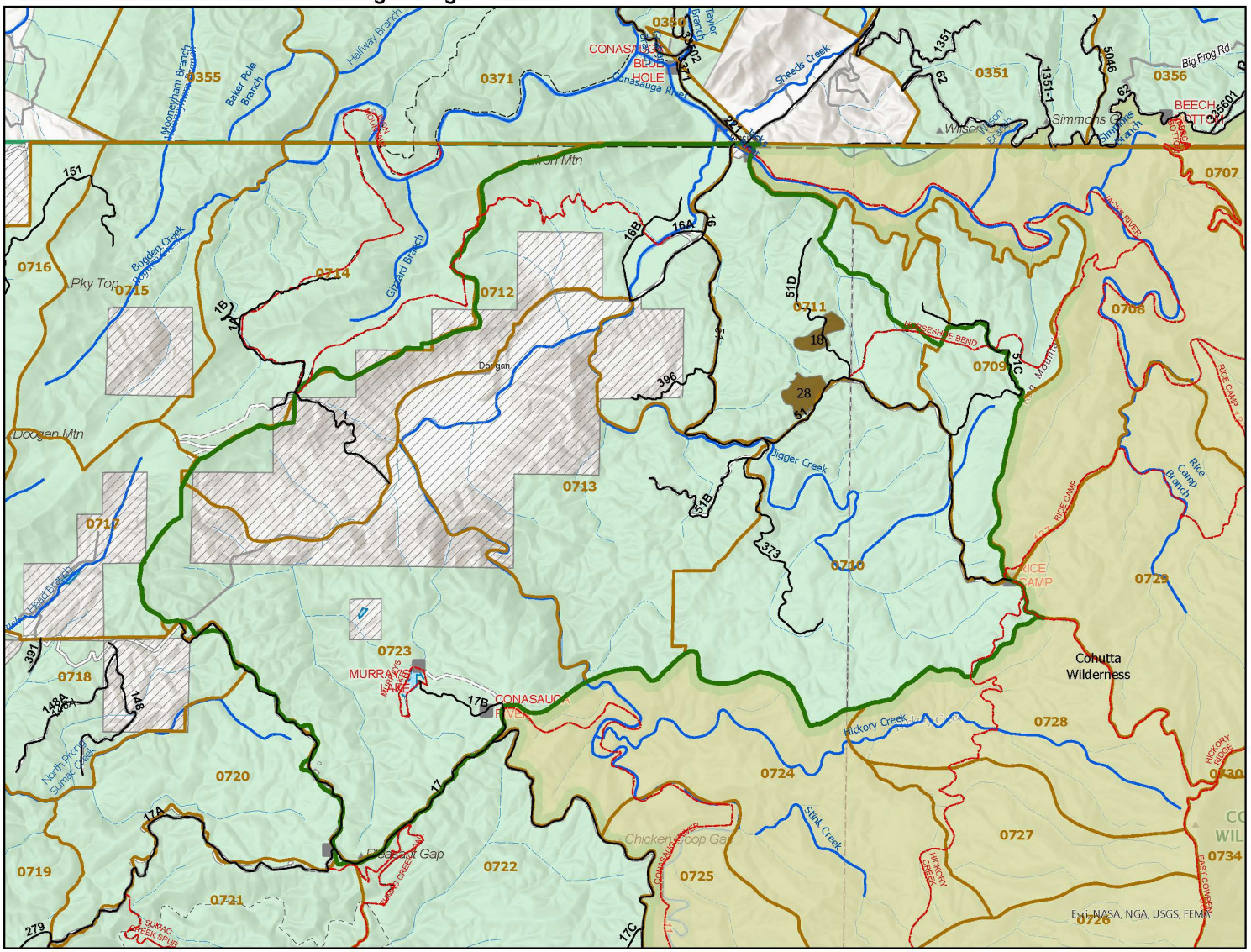
  Compartment 711 stand 18 – Old County Line Trail (Trail #42)

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Maintenance of Southern Yellow Pine Forest:
Commercial Thinning



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Activity Name: Commercial and non-commercial thinning of pine plantations to improve forest health – commercial thinning

Detailed Description:

Existing Condition (Need): Within the Foothills Project area, there are nearly 25,000 acres of immature pine plantations highly vulnerable to pine bark beetle infestations due to overstocked stand conditions (Basal Areas > 120 ft^2/acre).

Desired Condition: Stocking/density in pine plantations are reduced to levels that make them more resilient to pine bark beetle infestations (Forest Plan Objective 40.1).

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: Young, overstocked, even-aged pine stands susceptible to forest pest outbreaks (i.e. ips, bark beetle). WUI (within ¼ mile of USFS boundary at High or Moderate Risk level) would be prioritized when applicable.

How to Implement Change: The project would improve forest health in overstocked pine stands, and would focus on young, overstocked, even-aged pine stands that were established during the last half-century. These pine plantations are proposed for commercial thinning to reduce the risk for bark beetle infestations. Thinning would reduce the basal area to less than 80 ft^2/ac. Using prescribed fire (previously discussed) in coordination with thinning treatments would be applied in these areas to best meet restoration objectives.

Comp 723 stand 52, a white pine-upland hardwood stand proposed to be commercially thinned for forest health

Stands Proposed for Treatment:

Comp 709 Stand 14: 37 ac loblolly pine stand, 33 years old
Comp 709 Stand 21: 38 ac loblolly pine stand, 33 years old
Comp 710 Stand 1: 31 ac loblolly pine stand, 26 years old
Comp 710 Stand 4: 47 ac loblolly pine-hardwood stand, 50 years old
Comp 710 Stand 31: 22 ac loblolly pine stand, 28 years old
Comp 710 Stand 32: 21 ac loblolly pine stand, 30 years old
Comp 710 Stand 51: 28 ac loblolly pine stand, 30 years old
Comp 711 Stand 19: 46 ac loblolly pine stand, 38 years old^
Comp 711 Stand 21: 28 ac loblolly pine stand, 39 years old
Comp 711 Stand 30: 18 ac loblolly pine stand, 30 years old
Comp 711 Stand 38: 25 ac loblolly pine-hardwood stand, 30 years old^
Comp 712 Stand 28: 49 ac loblolly pine stand, 47 years old
Comp 712 Stand 32: 50 ac loblolly pine stand, 47 years old
Comp 713 Stand 2: 16 ac loblolly pine stand, 26 years old
Comp 713 Stand 16: 37 ac white pine-upland hardwood stand, 42 years old
Comp 723 Stand 25: 28 ac white pine stand, 54 years old^
Comp 723 Stand 49: 49 ac white pine-upland hardwood stand, 38 years old*
Comp 723 Stand 52: 42 ac white pine-upland hardwood stand, 73 years old
Comp 723 Stand 55: 46 ac white pine stand, 39 years old
Comp 723 Stand 65: 34 ac white pine stand, 41 years old

*Bat Seasonal Restriction (no tree cutting May 15 – July 31)
^Trails impacted by silvicultural treatments

Prescribed Burns:

709/14 falls in Buffalo Extension Rx.
710/1, 4, 31, and 51 fall in Burnt Schoolhouse Rx.
710/32 partially falls in Burnt School House Rx.
711/19 and 38 partially falls in East Cowpen Rx.
711/30 falls in East Cowpen Rx.
713/2 and 16 partially falls in Gryder Camp Rx.

A majority of the white pine stands have a Virginia pine component due to lack of prescribed fire. This means that as openings have occurred in the stand white pine and Virginia pine have seeded in.

Proposed temporary roads to access all proposed commercial timber treatments will be a total of 10.1 miles. Use of legacy road prisms would be favored over new temporary road construction when available. *(For more information about temporary roads, see Connected Road and Log Landing Related Actions, 2021 Foothills Landscape Project Environmental Assessment, page B42).*

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned:

These stands are in the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC - #031501010101 and the Jacks River HUC - #031501010102.

MRx(s) where activity would occur: 9.H Management, Maintenance and Restoration of Plant Associations, 7.E.2 Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management, and 7.B Scenic Corridors and Sensitive Viewsheds.

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

Additional Project Design Features:

- The following stands are within an area that requires seasonal restrictions per the Bat Conservation Strategy. Tree cutting is prohibited during May 15 – July 31.

  Compartment 723 stand 49

- The following stands have trails that are in or adjacent to commercial harvest units. See PDF 7 and 8 for trail condition specifications in or adjacent to harvest units.

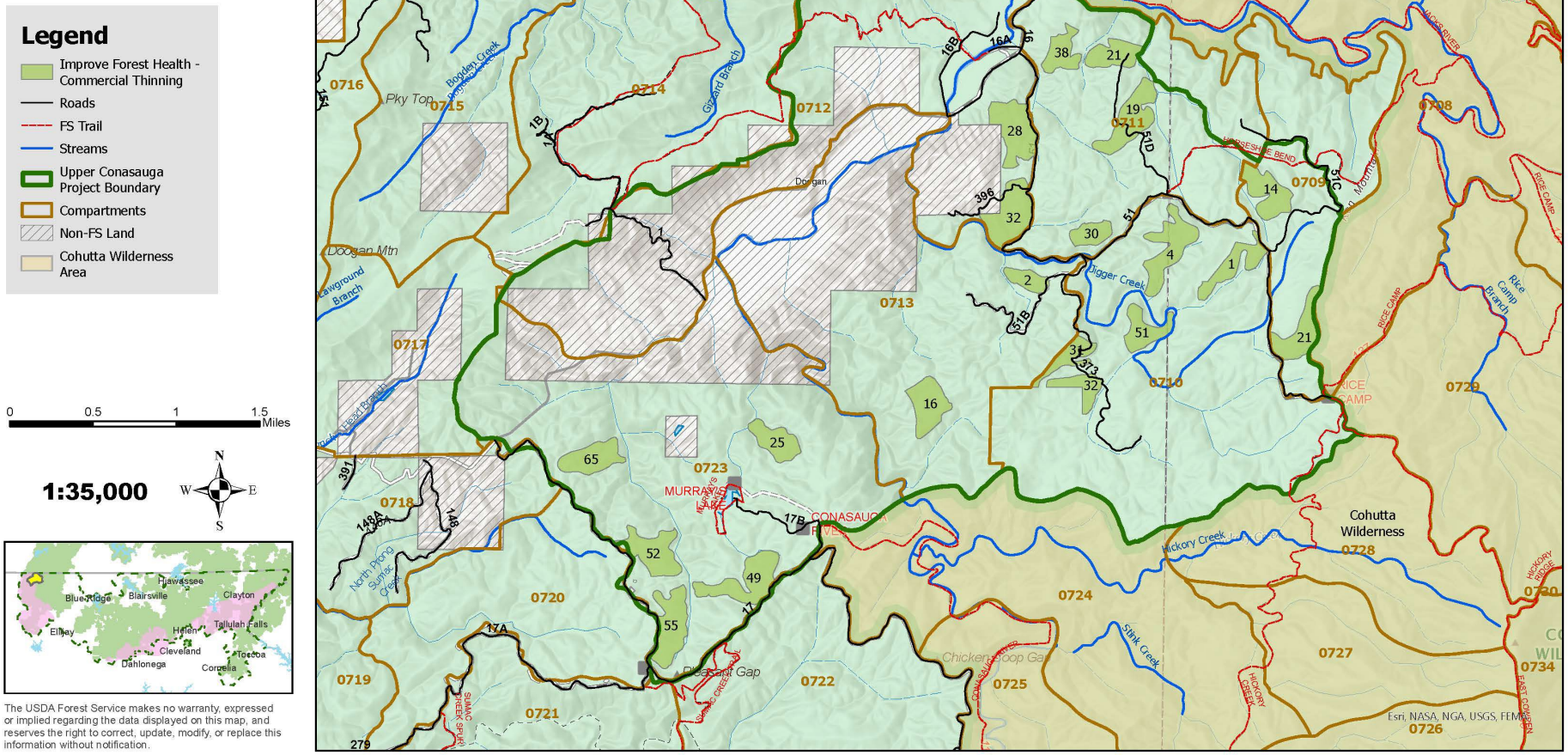
  Compartment 711 stand 19 – Old County Line Trail (Trail #42)
  Compartment 711 stand 38 – Old County Line Trail (Trail #42)
  Compartment 723 stand 25 – Conasauga River Trail (Trail #11)

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Commercial Thinning of Pine Plantations to Improve Forest Health:
Commercial Thinning



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Activity Name: Maintenance of oak forest – commercial thinning

Detailed Description:

Existing Condition (Need): Oak dominated forest types exist on more than 55,000 acres within the Foothills Project area. Over 90% of the oak forest is in late successional stage habitats. A general lack of disturbances in the oak forest community, including fire, has promoted the development of shade-tolerant, fire-sensitive species which are suppressing oak regeneration processes. This problem is most acute on the more productive oak sites but is evident in oak stands growing on lower productivity sites in many locations as well.

Desired Condition: Conditions within oak stands allow for and perpetuate natural oak regeneration processes to resume so that oak maintain dominance in the future (Forest Plan Objective 3.7).

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: Mid to late successional oak exists on low to moderate productivity sites.

How to Implement Change: On lower to moderate productivity oak sites, commercial thinning in combination with midstory reduction treatments would be implemented on mid-late successional oak stands to increase oak regeneration potential. This treatment option would be implemented where conditions indicate that current oak regeneration potential is low (i.e., oak seedlings are small, infrequent, and/or are being outcompeted by shade-tolerant competitors in the understory). In areas selected for intermediate thinning, the thinning would reduce overstory trees to 40 – 60 ft^2/ac, favoring oaks, hickories, or shortleaf pine. Following the commercial thinning, the areas would be evaluated for subsequent needs for midstory reduction treatments designed to reduce oak seedling competitors.

Comp 710 Stand 3 proposed commercial thin to maintain oak

Treatment of the midstory/understory would be employed using a combination of direct herbicide treatments and/or prescribed burning. If unwanted vegetation persists on the sites after the thinning, then initial understory treatments would likely include herbicide applications to control this competition. Herbicide treatments could include directed foliar, cut stem or basal bark/streamline methods. The composition, size, origin, and density of understory competitors would dictate the herbicide method selected. Once herbicide treatments have been applied, prescribed burning treatments, where feasible, would be used to further reduce competition and to maintain the desired understory environment. Initial prescribed burning would be conducted during the dormant season.

Subsequent burn treatments would be applied during the growing season until the desired conditions have been achieved (development of oak reproduction). Periodic burn treatments would be applied using a combination of dormant and growing season treatments and frequency would be altered to allow oak seedling to gain height and prepare for canopy recruitment.

Stands Proposed for Treatment:

Comp 710 stand 2:	36 ac white oak-black oak-yellow pine stand, 102 years old – site index 69
Comp 710 stand 3:	70 ac white oak-northern red oak-hickory stand, 102 years old – site index 70
Comp 710 stand 5:	38 ac upland hardwoods-white pine stand, 102 years old – site index 70
Comp 710 stand 17:	43 ac white oak-northern red oak-hickory stand, 102 years old – site index 60
Comp 713 stand 3:	20 ac chestnut oak-scarlet oak-yellow pine stand, 110 years old – site index 60

Prescribed Burns:
710/2, 3, 5, 17 falls in Burnt Schoolhouse Rx
713/3 falls in Gryder Camp Rx

These stands would be commercially thinned and then re-evaluated for follow up midstory treatment needs to encourage the development of advanced oak regeneration. All stands fall within proposed new prescribed burn blocks.

Proposed temporary roads to access all proposed commercial timber treatments will be a total of 10.1 miles. Use of legacy road prisms would be favored over new temporary road construction when available. *(For more information about temporary roads, see Connected Road and Log Landing Related Actions, 2021 Foothills Landscape Project Environmental Assessment, page B42).*

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned:

These stands are in the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC - #031501010101 and the Jacks River HUC - #031501010102.

MRx(s) where activity would occur: 7.E.2 Management, Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

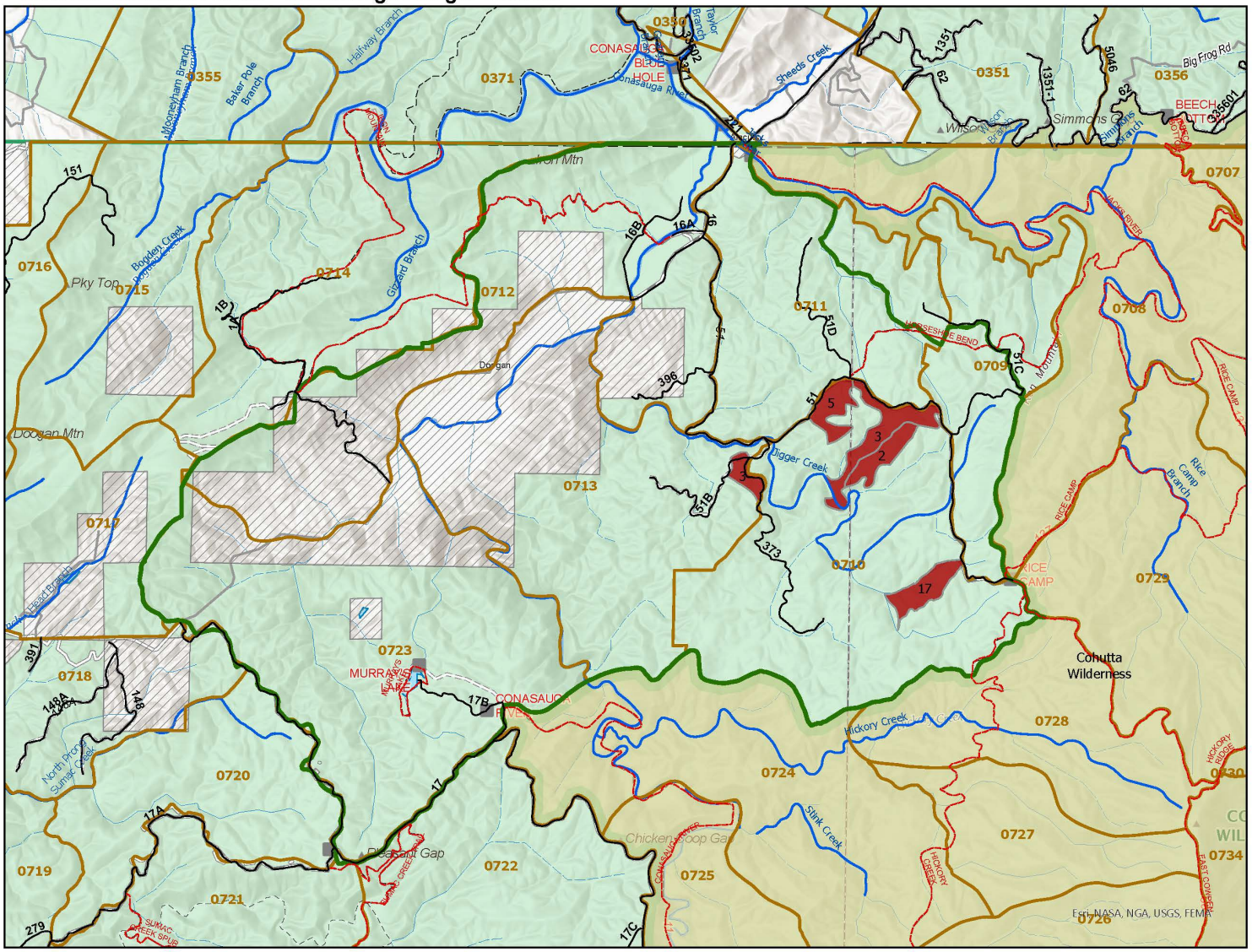
Additional Project Design Features: None

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Maintenance of Oak
Forest: Commercial Thinning



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Activity Name: Maintenance of oak forest – midstory reduction

Detailed Description:

Existing Condition (Need): Oak dominated forest types exist on more than 55,000 acres within the Foothills Project area. Over 90% of the oak forest is in late successional stage habitats. There are 0 acres of young oak (less than 10 yrs. within the landscape). A general lack of disturbances in the oak forest community, including fire, has promoted the development of shade-tolerant, fire-sensitive species which are suppressing oak regeneration processes. This problem is most acute on the more productive oak sites but is evident in oaks stands growing on lower productivity sites in many locations as well.

Desired Condition: Conditions within oak stands allow for and perpetuate natural oak regeneration processes to resume so that oak maintain dominance in the future (Forest Plan Objective 3.7)

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: There are two conditions that would trigger restoration actions:

- Where mid to late successional oak exists on low to moderate productivity sites
- Where mid to late successional oak exists on moderate to high productivity sites

How to Implement Change:

To increase/restore oak regeneration potential within existing oak stands, several treatment options are proposed (see below). These treatments are designed to alter the light environment on the forest floor to stimulate growth of oak seedlings while controlling oak competitors in the understory. Treatments would result in development of larger and include more competitive oak seedlings, increasing the regeneration potential in existing mature oak stands. Stands with higher regeneration potential can maintain species dominance because adequate/competitive seedlings are available to replace parent overstory trees.

Comp 711 Stand 26 Proposed for oak midstory treatment to cultivate advanced oak regeneration

Increasing Oak Regeneration Potential with Midstory Reduction on Moderate to High Site Productivity, Mid-Late Successional Oak Sites:

On moderate to highly productive oak sites within the landscape, midstory reduction treatments would be implemented on existing mature oak stands to increase oak regeneration potential and meet maintenance objectives. These treatments would be carried out by mechanical mastication and/or targeted herbicide

treatments applied to trees below the main canopy. Herbicide application methods would include directed tree injection and/or basal bark treatments. Oak and hickory species would not be treated with herbicides or during mastication treatments. Treatments would be tailored to the site based on site productivity, with the level or intensity of the midstory reduction decreasing as site productivity increases. This treatment would enhance the light environment in the understory, allowing small oak seedlings to slowly develop into more competitive size classes. Because the treatment is applied to trees below the main canopy, large gaps in canopy are not created, preventing the rapid establishment of shade-intolerant species like yellow poplar from invading and dominating the understory.

Stands Proposed for Treatment:

Comp 710 Stand 26: 10 ac white oak-northern red oak-hickory stand, 105 years old – site index 91
Comp 711 Stand 26: 9 ac white oak-black oak-yellow pine stand, 113 years old – site index 71
Comp 712 Stand 13: 34 ac bottomland hardwood-yellow pine, 80 years old - site index 88

Prescribed Burns:

710/26 falls in Burnt Schoolhouse Rx
711/26 falls in East Cowpen Rx
712/13 falls in Iron Mountain Rx

Proposed treatment includes herbicide application to midstory vegetation ≤ 8" DBH. Roads and existing/proposed fire line locations will be buffered so as not to be affected by this treatment.

Increasing Oak Regeneration Potential with Midstory Reduction on Moderate to Lower Productivity Mid-Late Successional Oak Sites:

Treatment of the midstory/understory would be employed using a combination of direct herbicide treatments and/or prescribed burning. Initial understory treatments would likely include herbicide applications to control this competition. Herbicide treatments could include directed foliar, cut stem or basal bark/streamline methods. The composition, size, origin, and density of understory competitors would dictate the herbicide method selected. Once herbicide treatments have been applied, prescribed burning treatments, where feasible, would be used to further reduce competition and to maintain the desired understory environment. Initial prescribed burning would be conducted during the dormant season. Subsequent burn treatments would be applied during the growing season until the desired conditions have been achieved (development of oak reproduction). Periodic burns would be applied using a combination of dormant and growing season treatments and frequency would be altered to allow oak seedling to gain height and prepare for canopy recruitment.

Stands Proposed for Treatment:

Comp 710 Stand 29: 21 ac chestnut oak-scarlet oak-yellow pine stand, 105 years old – site index 64
Comp 712 Stand 6: 43 ac white oak-northern red oak-hickory, 96 years old – site index 60
Comp 712 Stand 9: 13 ac white oak-northern red oak-hickory, 96 years old – site index 70
Comp 713 Stand 7: 21 ac chestnut oak-scarlet oak-yellow pine, 115 years old – site index 66

Prescribed Burns:
710/29 falls in Burnt Schoolhouse Rx
712/6,9 falls in Iron Mountain Rx
713/7 falls in Gryder Camp Rx

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned:

These stands are in the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC - #031501010101 and the Jacks River HUC - #031501010102.

MRx(s) where activity would occur: 7.E.2 Management, Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management and 2.B.2 Management, Recommended Scenic Rivers

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

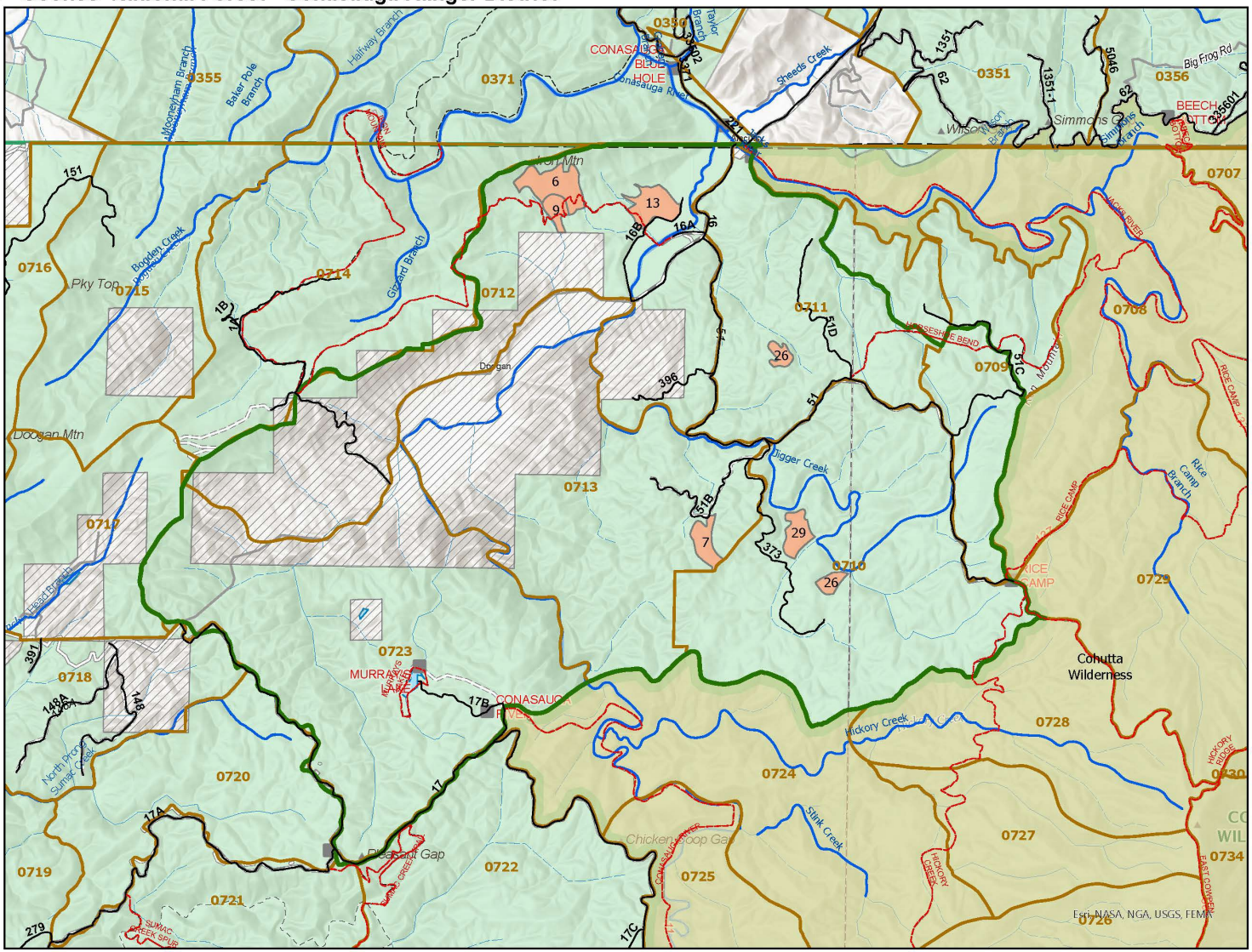
Additional Project Design Features: None

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Maintenance of Oak Forest: Midstory Reduction



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Activity Name: Maintenance of oak forest – expanding gap treatment

Detailed Description:

Existing Condition (Need): Oak dominated forest types exist on more than 55,000 acres within the Foothills Project area. Over 90% of the oak forest is in late successional stage habitats. There are 0 acres of young oak (less than 10 yrs. within the landscape). A general lack of disturbances in the oak forest community, including fire, has promoted the development of shade-tolerant, fire-sensitive species which are suppressing oak regeneration processes. This problem is most acute on the more productive oak sites but is evident in oaks stands growing on lower productivity sites in many locations as well.

Desired Condition: Conditions within oak stands allow for and perpetuate natural oak regeneration processes to resume so that oak maintain dominance in the future (Forest Plan Objective 3.7).

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: There are four specific conditions that would trigger restoration actions:

- Where mid to late successional oak exists on low to moderate productivity sites
- Where mid to late successional oak exists on moderate to high productivity sites
- Where mid to late successional oak exists but where prescribed fire cannot be used regularly to achieve desired outcomes
- Where immature oak exists in competition with itself or less-desired species

A natural gap provides the right environment to produce advanced oak regeneration. The proposed expanding gap treatment creates a similar light environment.

How to Implement Change: Multiple treatment options are included under this proposal to meet oak maintenance objectives within the landscape - each designed with consideration for site productivity, presence of existing oak regeneration, stand age, and whether connected prescribed fire treatments could be feasibly implemented. The treatments are intended to either: (1) increase oak regeneration potential within existing mid-late successional oak-dominated stands or (2) increase the dominance of

oak in existing immature oak stands. These conditions would help to establish a buffer against mass oak decline and the potential for gypsy moth invasion.

Increasing Oak Regeneration Potential in Mid-Late Successional Oak Stands Where Prescribed Fire Cannot Be Implemented Using Expanding Gap Method:

In oak and oak-pine stands where fire cannot be used regularly, an expanding gap silvicultural method would be used to improve oak regeneration potential in mature oak stands. This method would be implemented on existing mid to late-successional oak stands within the project area. The expanding gap method is being proposed in collaboration with the Southern Research Station. Gaps would be created in the stands by removing overstory trees to create up to ½ acre openings. Initial canopy gaps would be located where advanced oak regeneration exists or where a need for structural diversity is determined and recruitment of oak regeneration is anticipated. After the seedlings are able to compete with surrounding vegetation the gap would be ready to expand by another one to two tree lengths around the perimeter by removal of over story. The surrounding stand would be thinned to a basal area of 50 – 70 ft^2/ac. The treatment areas would be treated with herbicides, hand tools, or mechanical mastication to reduce the competition with undesired species.

Stands Proposed for Treatment:
Comp 723 stand 40: 29 ac white oak-northern red oak-hickory stand, 107 years old
Comp 723 stand 47: 66 ac white oak-black oak-yellow pine stand, 82 years old* ^
*Bat Seasonal Restriction (no tree cutting May 15 – July 31)
^Trails impacted by silvicultural treatment

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

These stands are in the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC - #031501010101 and the Jacks River HUC - #031501010102.
MRx(s) where activity would occur: 7.B Management, Scenic Corridors and Sensitive Viewsheds; 9.H Management, maintenance, and Restoration of Plant Associations

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

Additional Project Design Features:

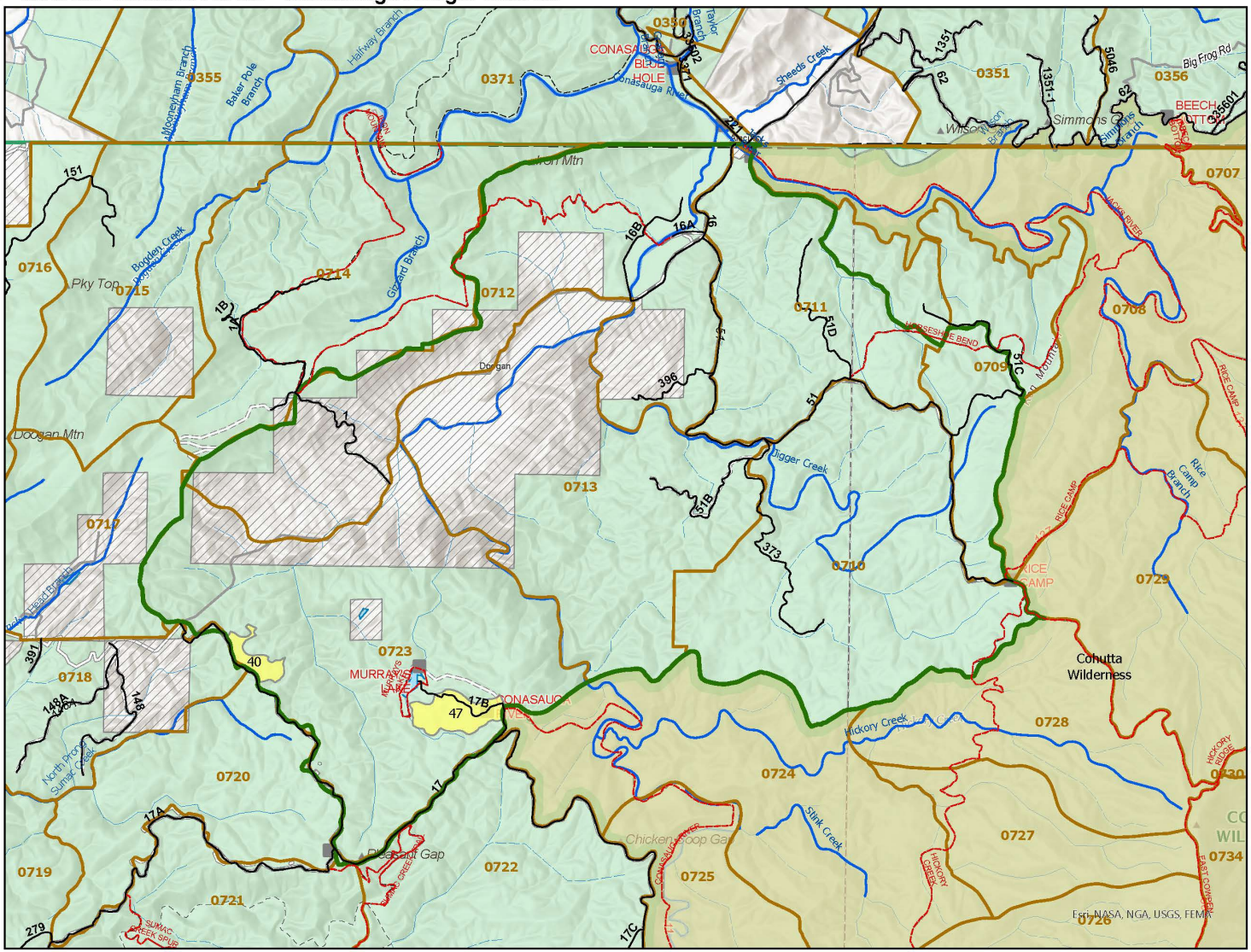
- The following stands are within an area that requires seasonal restrictions per the Bat Conservation Strategy. Tree cutting is prohibited during May 15 – July 31.
  Compartment 723 stand 47
- The following stands have trails that are in or adjacent to commercial harvest units and within a High scenic integrity objective. See PDF 7 and 8 for trail condition specifications in or adjacent to harvest units. Additionally, trees will be marked on the side that faces away from the trail and edges should be feathered to create a vegetative buffer along the trail.
  Compartment 723 stand 47 – Conasauga River Trail (Trail #11)

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Maintenance of Oak Forest: Expanding Gap Treatment



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Activity Name: Canopy gap creation in closed-canopied mesic stands – commercial thinning

Detailed Description:
Existing Condition (Need): Approximately 21,143 acres of mid-late successional mesic deciduous forest with closed canopies and low vertical structural complexity within the Foothills Landscape results in habitats that lack preferred conditions for breeding migratory songbirds.

Desired Condition: Manage forests to maintain or restore composition, structure, and function within desired ranges of variability (Goal 7). Increase structural diversity by creating canopy gaps within closed-canopied mid-and late-successional mesic deciduous forest (Objective 7.1).

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: Mid to late-successional mesic deciduous stands (yellow poplar dominated stands and more mesic oak stands) with closed canopies and little vertical structure.

How to Implement Change: To increase structural diversity in mid-late successional mesic deciduous forests, canopy gap treatments are proposed in two stands in the project area. Yellow poplar-dominated stands and high-productivity oak stands with closed canopies and little vertical structure would be targeted for this treatment. Gaps in the canopy of selected stands would be created by retaining variable tree densities. To provide for the desired diversity in vertical structure, trees would be selectively removed from all crown positions (upper, mid and understory levels) and tree sizes, resulting in a patchy, irregular canopy. Gaps in the canopy would be small (up to 0.75 acre) and implemented at relatively low intensities (less than 25% of the stand). Additional structural diversity would be obtained through intermediate thinning between gaps, retaining 70 – 80 ft^2/ac basal area in the thinned portion of the stand.

Stands Proposed for Treatment:
Comp 723 stand 31: 19 ac chestnut oak-scarlet oak-yellow pine, 117 years old^
Comp 723 stand 64: 15 ac yellow poplar-white oak-northern red oak, 93 years old^
^Trails impacted by silvicultural treatments

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6^{th}-level HUC) where activity is planned:

These stands are within the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC - #031501010101.

MRx(s) where activity would occur: Both stands are in MRx 9.H Management, Maintenance, and Restoration of Plant Associations

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

Additional Project Design Features:

- The following stands have trails that are in or adjacent to commercial harvest units. See PDF 7 and 8 for trail condition specifications in or adjacent to harvest units.

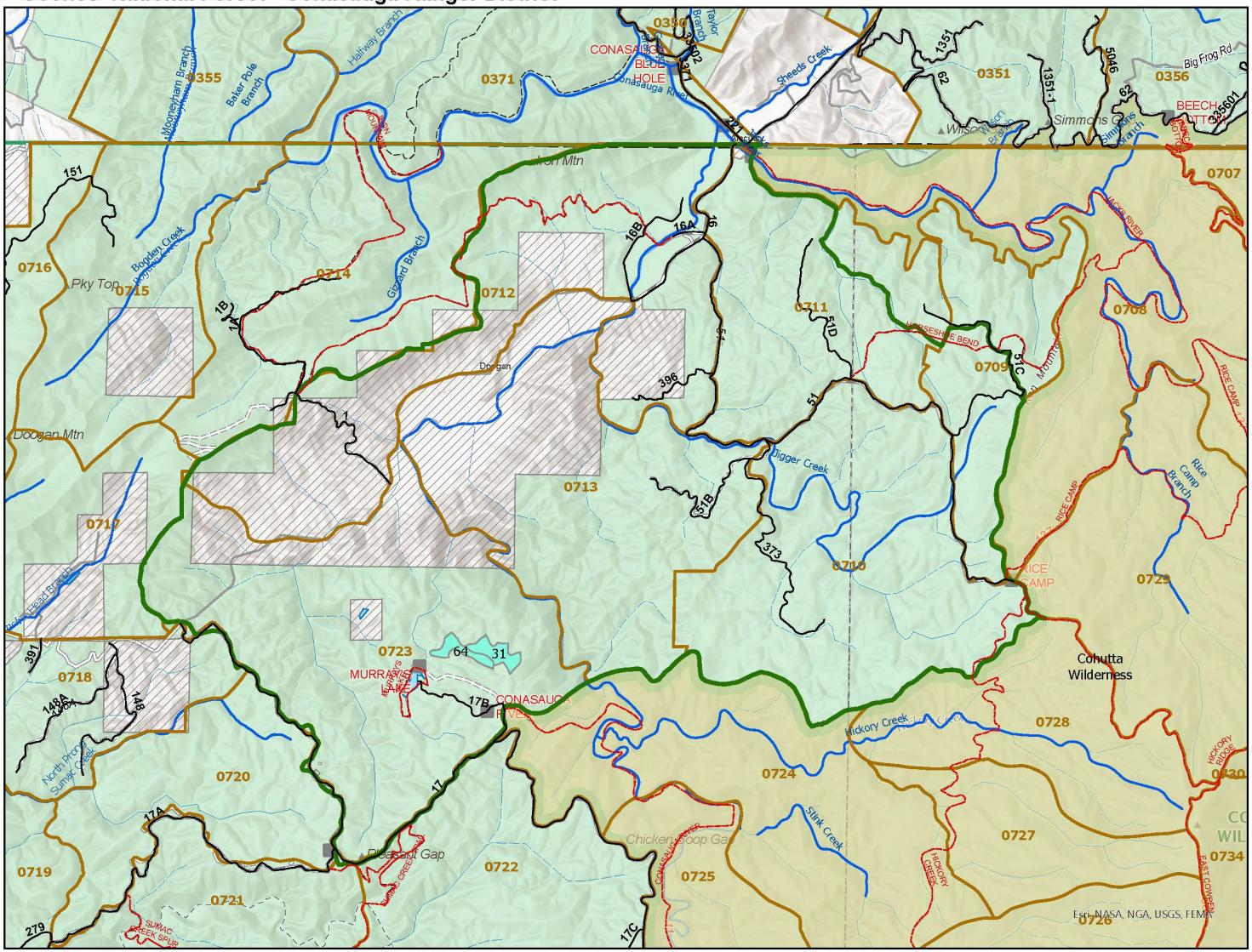
  Compartment 723 stand 31 – Conasauga River Trail (Trail #11)
  Compartment 723 stand 64 – Conasauga River Trail (Trail #11)

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Canopy Gap Creation in Closed-canopied Mesic Stands: Commercial Thinning



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Activity Name: Restoring open woodland habitats on appropriate sites

Detailed Description:

Existing Condition (Need): Due to a lack of fire and active management, woodland communities have been invaded by off-site, shade tolerant species that are not fire adapted. Off-site species have resulted in a closed canopy and dense midstory, suppressing regeneration and shading out herbaceous ground cover. Shade tolerant species quickly occupy any canopy gaps and displace fire adapted, woodland species.

Desired Condition: A thin canopy with 20 – 60% canopy cover consisting of fire dependent hardwoods and yellow pine with a well-developed and diverse herbaceous ground cover. (Forest Plan Objective 3.4).

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: Where woodland species persist (long-lived canopy trees serve as indicators for relic woodland) and combined with desired aspect, elevation, and ability to use prescribed fire.

How to Implement Change: Open woodland blocks would likely require both partial overstory and midstory removal, with a residual basal area of 20 – 40 ft^2 per acre, as well as prescribed burning, to start the process of transitioning them from their current conditions to a desired open-habitat type. The need for fire to maintain the woodland structure would necessitate that each woodland block is within a prescribed burning unit, and the site is able to be frequently burned, during both the growing season and dormant season over the life of the treatment. Herbicide application to control the woody vegetation may also be required if prescribed burning alone is not adequate. Herbicide applications would be directed at undesired woody vegetation and would include a combination of foliar, cut stem, or basal bark/streamline methods.

The stands proposed for this treatment are Compartment 711 stands 16 and 17. These stands are adjacent to each other and fall within the existing East Cowpen Rx unit. Both sites exhibit woodland characteristics such as low site indices, long lived canopy trees, and herbaceous components in the understory. They have been burned on a three-year rotation since 2010. These stands also burned in the fall of 2016 in the Rough Ridge Wildfire after being prescribe burned in spring of 2016. They have been burned in 2010, 2013, 2016, 2021, and 2024.

Stands Proposed for Treatment:

Comp 711 stand 16: 12 ac shortleaf pine-oak, 105 years old – site index 68^

Comp 711 stand 17: 10 ac chestnut oak-scarlet oak-yellow pine, 105 years old – site index 56^

^Trails impacted by silvicultural treatment

Prescribed Burns:

711/16, 17 fall in East Cowpen Rx

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned: These stands are within the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC - #031501010101.

Comp 711 Stand 17 proposed for restoring open woodland habitat

MRx(s) where activity would occur: Both stands are in MRx 7.E.2 Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management.

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

Additional Project Design Features:

- The following stands have trails that are in or adjacent to commercial harvest units. See PDF 7 and 8 for trail condition specifications in or adjacent to harvest units.

  Compartment 711 stand 16 – Old County Line Trail (Trail #42)
  Compartment 711 stand 17 – Old County Line Trail (Trail #42)

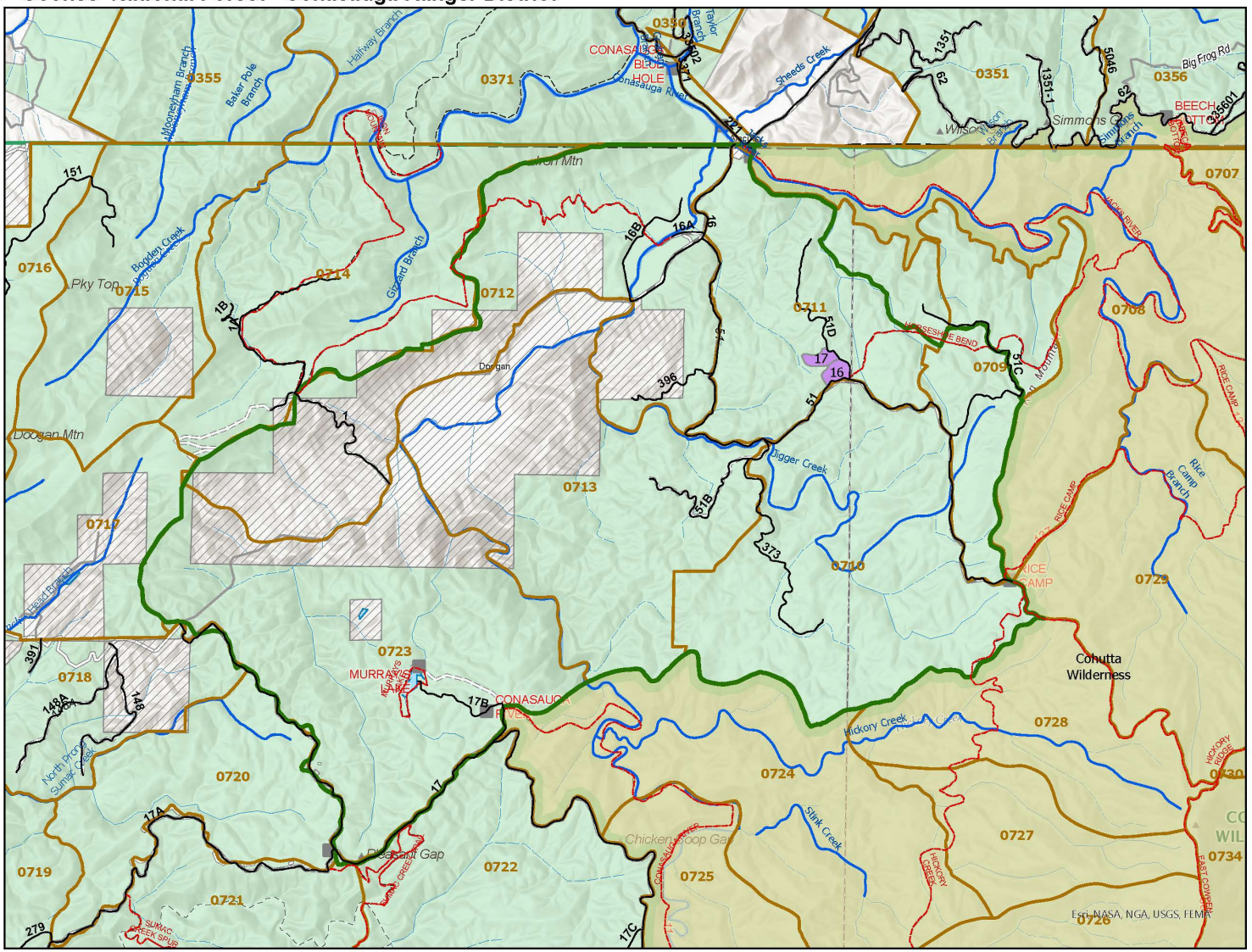
- Trees of the oldest age class and trees exhibiting woodland characteristics will be retained where they fit into the residual basal area to comply with FW-54 and 55 standards to enhance the overall woodland characteristic of the stands.

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Restoring Open Woodland Habitats on Appropriate Sites: Commercial Thinning



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Activity Name: Create young forest by daylighting roads and permanent openings

Detailed Description:

Existing Condition (Need): Mid-late successional forest dominates the Foothills Landscape (99%) while valuable young forest habitat which is a benefit to wildlife is extremely limited (less than 1%).

Desired Condition: Improved successional stage diversity and distribution of young forest habitats across the landscape on a variety of slopes, elevations, aspects, and forest types. A diversity of habitat will be provided for the full range of native and other desired species (Forest Plan Goal 2).

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: This type of treatment would occur in areas, such as the boundaries of permanent openings (wildlife openings, utility corridors, and selected road segments), where opportunities for other young forest treatments are limited, but where the slopes are gentle enough to complete the work.

How to Implement Change: There is an opportunity to create young forest and improve habitat for wildlife by "daylighting" several roads in the project area. Daylighting is the practice of removing the overstory tree canopy within a certain distance from a road or other permanent opening to create young forest and improve road conditions by allowing sunlight to reach the road surface. This type of habitat benefits pollinators as well as many songbirds and other wildlife.

This project would include commercial timber harvest of trees within an average of 25-feet of the selected roadbeds, in segments where the commercial operation is feasible. A follow-up treatment to slash down non-commercial stems would be completed if needed. Approximately 3.9 miles of various roads would be treated, creating approximately 24 acres of young forest habitat. The majority of these roadbeds would be planted with a preferred forage vegetation seed mix after project activities are completed. Maintenance of the daylighted roadsides would occur as funding and workforce capacity permits. The following roads are proposed for daylighting (see attached map):

- FSR 51D (Horseshoe Bend Camp Rd): 0.9 mile[#]
- Non-system roads west of FSR 51D: 0.4 and 0.7 miles[#]
- Non-system roads south of FSR 51 (East Cowpen Rd): 1 mile and 0.3 miles
- Non-system road north of FSR 17B, accessing Murray's Lake dam: 0.6 mile*

*Bat Seasonal Restriction (no tree cutting May 15 – July 31)
[#]Slash Treatment Zone

There are also several permanent wildlife openings in the project area that are suitable for daylighting (see attached map). This treatment improves the value of the opening by allowing sunlight to reach the entire opening as well as adding diversity for wildlife dependent upon young, dense, brushy habitat including pollinators. Approximately 10 acres of young forest habitat would result from this treatment.

The openings proposed for daylighting include:

- Three openings north of FSR 17 (West Cowpen) in Compartment 723.
- Five openings on the non-system roads west of FSR 51D in Compartment 711 (roads also proposed for daylighting).
- Two openings on the non-system roads south of FSR 51 in Compartment 710 (roads also proposed for daylighting).

Daylighted roads benefit wildlife by creating young forest habitat and improve road conditions by allowing sunlight to reach the road surface.

☒ **Map(s) Attached Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned**:

The majority of the roads and openings proposed for daylighting are in the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC - #031501010101. A small percentage are within the Jacks River HUC - #031501010102.

MRx(s) where activity would occur: One road proposed for daylighting (non-system road north of FSR 17) is in MRx 9.H Management, Maintenance and Restoration of Plant Associations. Three wildlife openings proposed for daylighting (those in Comp 723) are in 7.B Scenic Corridors and Sensitive Viewsheds. The remainder are in 7.E.2 Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management.

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

Additional Project Design Features:

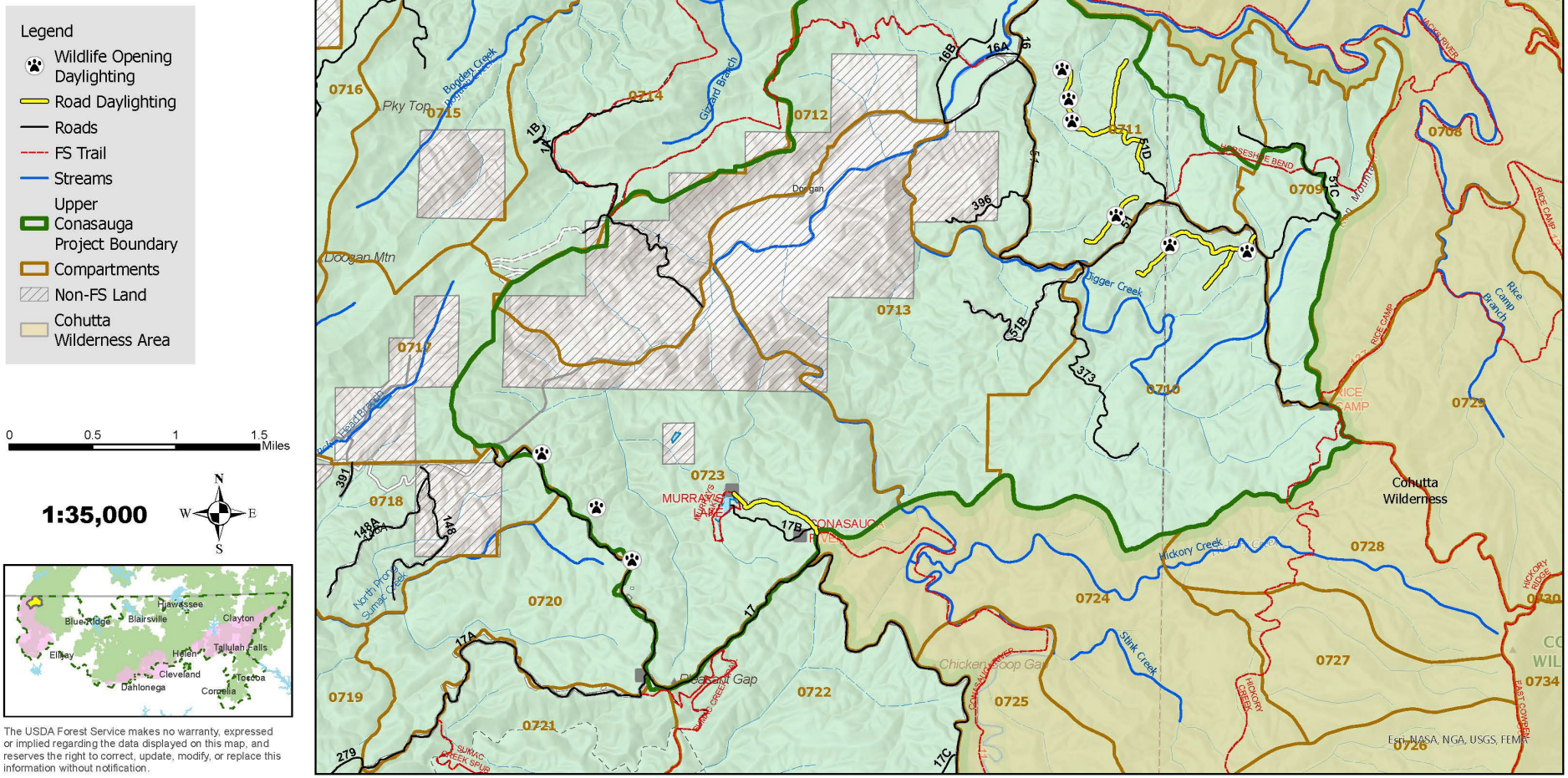
- The following road proposed for roadside daylighting falls within an area that requires seasonal restrictions per the Bat Conservation Strategy. Tree cutting is prohibited during May 15 – July 31.
  Non-system road north of FSR 17 (West Cowpen Road), accessing Murray's Lake dam – 0.6 mile
- The following roads proposed for roadside daylighting falls within an area that requires a slash treatment zone to reduce the amount of slash along firelines.
  First 0.5 miles of FSR 51D (Horseshoe Bend Camp Rd) - 0.5 mile
  Northernmost non-system spur road west of FSR 51D - 0.7 miles
- The following roads proposed for roadside daylighting fall within an area that could affect trail conditions.
  FSR 51D and the northernmost non-system spur road west of FSR 51D would impact Old County Line Trail (Trail # 42)

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/23/2024

Create Young Forest (ESH) by Daylighting Roads and Permanent Openings



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Activity Name: Create or expand permanent openings

Detailed Description:

Existing Condition (Need): Mid-late successional forest dominates the Foothills Landscape (99%) while valuable early-successional habitat, which is a benefit to wildlife, is extremely limited (less than 1%). There are currently approximately 27 acres of permanent openings within the Upper Conasauga River IA (on National Forest). Permanent openings managed as grass/forb, shrub, or pollinator habitat provide a valuable element of diversity.

Desired Condition: A diversity of habitat will be provided for the full range of native and other desired species…early successional habitat will be well distributed in all forest types, elevations, aspects, and slopes including riparian corridors (Forest Plan Goal 2). Restore 10,000 acres of woodlands, savannahs, grasslands on the Chattahoochee (Forest Plan Objective 3.4).

Known Conditions that Trigger Restoration Actions: Where opportunities exist to create or expand openings. New permanent openings are prohibited in riparian corridors. Estimated size would be approximately 1 – 3 acres/ each, and primarily connected to harvest activities.

How to Implement Change: There is the potential to create or expand permanent openings on up to 1% of the area within each 6th level HUC unit (sub-watershed) in the Foothills Landscape. This would result in a well-distributed network of permanent openings across the landscape. The creation of new permanent openings would be primarily connected to timber harvest activities. New openings would range in size from 0.5 – 3 acres and could be managed in a variety of ways: as grass/forb habitat, either as “food plots” (high-quality clover mixes) or native grasses and forbs, shrub habitat, or as pollinator habitat, with specific plantings for birds and butterflies, such as monarch butterfly. The edges of the openings would be feathered into the adjacent forest stands for additional value as cover and a food source.

Four wildlife openings in the project area are proposed for expansion. All are less than 0.6 acre and are within stands proposed for vegetation management and are likely to be utilized as log landings. These 4 openings may be expanded to approximately 10 total acres:

- Two openings on the non-system roads south of FSR 51 in Compartment 710
- One opening on a non-system road near Murray’s Lake in Compartment 723 stand 30

- One opening on the non-system roads west of FSR 51D in Compartment 711 stand 30

☒ **Map(s) Attached**

Watershed(s) (6th-level HUC) where activity is planned:

All of the openings proposed for expansion are in the Headwaters Conasauga River HUC - #031501010101.

MRx(s) where activity would occur: One wildlife opening proposed for expansion (near the access road to Murray's Lake dam) is in MRx 9.H Management, Maintenance and Restoration of Plant Associations. The remainder are in 7.E.2 Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management.

Resource Project Design Features: Do project activities follow all listed resource-specific PDFs in Step 2?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No** (If no, document if additional analysis per NEPA is triggered and if so, analysis is referenced and/or attached prior to finalization.)

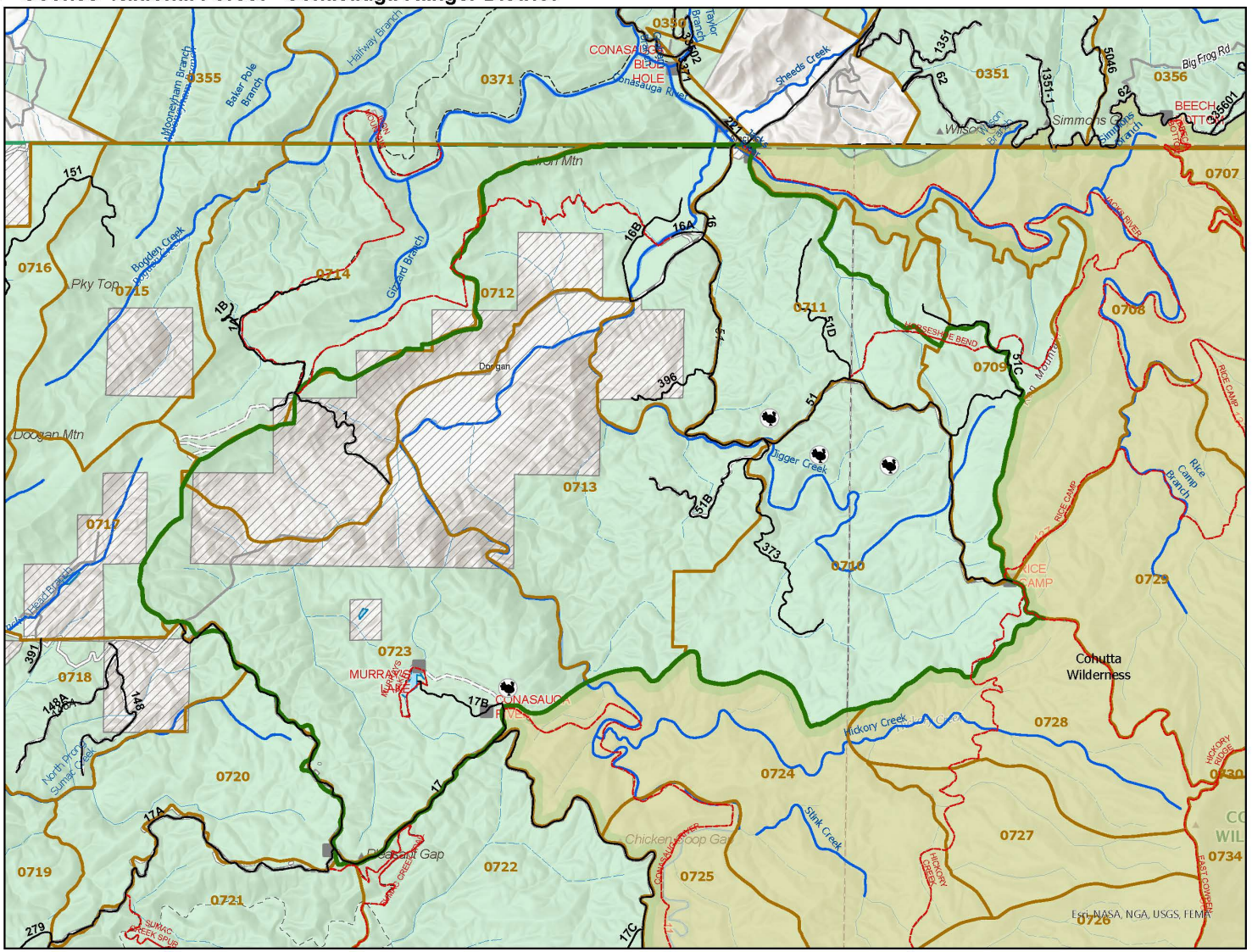
Additional Project Design Features: None

Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Expand Permanent Openings



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Attachment A: Project Design Features

PDF Number: Location or Condition	Project Design Features, Best Management Practices, and Standards	Origin
PDF 1: All Restoration Actions that Use Herbicides	No herbicide is ground applied within 100 feet of lakes, wetlands, streams, except for aquatic-labeled herbicides to prevent significant environmental damage	Forest Plan Standard FW-022
	Herbicide mixing, loading, or cleaning areas in the field are not located in sensitive areas as identified in the project decision document, or within 200 feet of private land, open water, or wells (or ephemeral streams FW-024)	Forest Plan Standard FW-023
	No soil active herbicide with a half-life longer than three months is broadcast within 25 feet of ephemeral streams. Selective treatments with aquatic-labeled herbicides are allowed. Such areas are clearly marked before treatment so that applicators can easily see and avoid them.	Forest Plan Standard FW-025
	Site-specific analysis of proposed management actions will identify any protective measures needed in addition to Forest Plan standards, including increasing the width of protective buffers where needed.	Forest Plan Standard FW-029
	Milkweed species would be avoided during herbicide spraying.	FLP Specific
	Pesticide Use – See Appendix B, Attachment 1 of the Vegetation Specialist Report	FLP Specific
PDF 2: Old growth stands, at the time of implementation, that meet minimum age criteria for old-growth based on Old-Growth Type	Non-conserved "possible old-growth", defined as stands meeting the minimum age criteria for their respective Old-Growth Type that are not currently conserved by Management Prescription or through small block allocations associated with this alternative, would be assessed prior to implementation of project activities within these areas to determine if they meet the other defining criteria for old-growth conservation. If so, these areas would be conserved for old- growth. Management actions that conflict with old-growth characteristics, as described by the Forest Plan, would not be permitted in areas conserved. The exception would be for Old-Growth Types 22 and 24.	Forest Plan Standard (FWS – 046 FWS – 054)
PDF 3: All vegetation management actions in all conditions	During all vegetation management activities, dogwoods and other soft-mast producers would be reserved from treatment, where practicable and to the extent compatible with meeting treatment objectives	Forest Plan Standard (FWS – 008) and FLP Specific
PDF 4: All vegetation treatments that include Oak regeneration (2,000 acres) or mesic hardwood regeneration (500 acres) treatments	Oak-dominated forest types on mesic sites would not be converted to pine-dominated cover types, but could be managed as mixed oak-pine forest types	Forest Plan Standard (FWS – 004)
	For areas proposed for mesic hardwood regeneration to create young forest habitats, regeneration treatments would be limited to yellow poplar-dominated stands or stands dominated by other non-oak cover hardwood associates. This would include Forest Types 50, 56, 58 and/or 41.	FLP Specific
PDF 5: All vegetation treatments that include regeneration harvests (yellow pine restoration, oak restoration, oak regeneration, mesic hardwood regeneration)	When regeneration treatments are applied, sites would be regenerated to native tree species that commonly occur or historically occurred naturally on ecologically comparable sites within the same ecological section.	Forest Plan Standard (FWS – 001)
	Stands dominated by Eastern hemlock would not be subject to regeneration treatments.	Forest Plan Standard (FWS – 002)
	Even-aged or two-aged regeneration areas in or adjacent to deciduous or mixed forests must include a 50-foot zone along mature forest edges in which intensity of silvicultural treatment decreases, resulting in a feathered edge.	Forest Plan Standard (FWS – 007)

PDF Number: Location or Condition	Project Design Features, Best Management Practices, and Standards	Origin
	The maximum size of an opening created by even-aged or two-aged regeneration treatments is 40 acres. For yellow pine, 80 acres is permitted if restoration requires larger openings.	Forest Plan Standard (FWS – 086)
	Openings created by even-aged regeneration or two-aged regenerations harvest units shall be separated from each other by a minimum of 330 feet (5 chains). However, such openings may be clustered closer than 330 feet as long as their combined acreage does not exceed the maximum opening size (40 acres). An opening created by regeneration harvest would no longer be considered an opening when the re-established stand reaches five years in age.	Forest Plan Standard (FWS – 087)
	Regenerated stands shall meet the minimum stocking standards for the intended/desired forest type within five years after final harvest cut, as listed in the Forest Plan Table 2-5.	Forest Plan Standard (FWS – 089)
	In even-aged and two-aged regeneration, retain all snags unless they are an immediate hazard. Sales would be designed to avoid snag removal if possible (skid trails, landings). Retain (or create) five snags per acre: near the forest edge if possible. In even-aged and two-aged regeneration stands larger than 10 acres, maintain a minimum of 15 sq. feet of basal area. These could be arranged in clumps, corridors, or feathered edges. In stands over 10 acres treated as seed tree or shelterwood, maintain a minimum of 20 sq. feet of basal area. Retain all trees within 20 feet of five snags per acre for windthrow protection and snag recruitment	Forest Plan Standard (FWS 091).
PDF 6: All Prescribed Fire in all Conditions	When necessary, to include mesic deciduous forests within prescribed burning blocks as part of burning other adjacent fire-dependent forest types, only low intensity fires are permitted, except when prescribed burns are designed to encourage oak regeneration in mesic oak forests. Exclude such mesic areas lacking a significant oak component from burn units, unless by doing so, it would result in: (1) failure to meet other prescribed fire objectives, or (2) more than 30% increase in plowed or bladed fire-line construction per burn unit.	Forest Plan Standard (FWS – 191 and FSW – 0190)
PDF 7: All mechanical vegetation management	Skidding would not occur within riparian corridors, except for at designated crossings.	GA BMP
	No heavy equipment, other than mechanical fellers, would be allowed to operate within the riparian corridors during harvest activities. The exception to this would be at designated crossings.	GA BMP
	Once the temporary roads, log landings, and skid trails are no longer needed, they would be closed to normal vehicle traffic so that illegal use is discouraged. The closures may include installation of an earthen barrier, re-contouring, decompaction, placement of logging debris along the road surface, seeding or placement of boulders.	FLP Specific
	Log landings and skid trail locations would be evaluated and approved by the Forest Service prior to harvesting in order to ensure that they are placed in locations with adequate drainage and away from sensitive soils or riparian areas as per the Georgia State BMP recommendations.	FLP Specific
	Skidding and decking would be limited to designated and approved routes along ridges and gentle slopes to protect sensitive soils. Skidding would not be allowed on sustained slopes over 35%. Coordination will be completed when skid trails and decking coincide with system trails.	FLP Specific

PDF Number: Location or Condition	Project Design Features, Best Management Practices, and Standards	Origin
	No tree removal may occur within 0.25 mile of a known NLEB hibernaculum at any time of the year (NLEB 4d rule) unless agreed to during consultation with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	FLP Specific (ESA Consultation)
	No tree removal may occur within a 150-foot radius of known, occupied NLEB roost trees during June or July each year (NLEB 4d rule) unless agreed to during consultation with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	FLP Specific (ESA Consultation)
	Protect known Indiana bat or other endangered bat roosts from cutting or modification until they are no longer suitable as roost trees.	Forest Plan Standard FW-233
	Snags are not intentionally felled from April 1 through August 31 (exceptions may be made for safety, insects, and disease).	Forest Plan Standard FW-235
	Non-silvicultural projects removing trees or snags (fireline construction, rec projects, hazard tree removal) should be completed during September 1-March 31. This applies to the parts of the forest that provides "suitable" habitat for Indiana bat roosting (GIS analysis).	Forest Plan Standard FW-236
	In all silvicultural treatments, retention priority is given to the largest available trees with favorable characteristics as bat roost trees (yellow pines and oaks with crevices, cracks, or hollows).	Forest Plan Standard FW-237
	Compliance with standards FW-90, 91, 233-237 will be monitored and report submitted annually to USFWS. Report will include acres of timber harvest and prescribed burning; time of year accomplished.	Forest Plan Standard FW-238
	Mature forest cover is maintained within 100 feet from the top of cliffs and 200 feet from the base of cliffs.	Forest Plan Management Prescription 9.F-017
	Vegetation management activities would not utilize existing trails as access routes without a review by recreation staff. Trails used would be restored to the original trail width and characteristics if determined appropriate per sustainable recreation objectives. Blaze trees that define the trail corridor would not be cut unless to mitigate safety concerns.	FLP Specific
	Layout of regeneration areas would incorporate a no-harvest zone between unit boundaries and open Forest system roads that have a HIGH scenic integrity objective.	FLP Specific
	Layout of regeneration areas by design would leave areas un-harvested along prominent ridgelines and/or sites of higher elevation that have a HIGH or MODERATE scenic integrity objectives to reduce "sky-lighting" effects and to obscure areas of lower elevation in regeneration.	FLP Specific
	Logging equipment must be inspected and found to be clean (free of vegetative debris) seed, soils, etc. upon arrival to timber sale areas.	FLP Specific
	Known NNIS infestations must be shown on timber sale area maps. Ensure that equipment washing clauses are included in all ground-disturbing contracts and sales documents, and that clauses are discussed in pre-work conferences.	FLP Specific
	When possible, significant infestations of NNIS along planned access routes would be pre-treated systematically within timber sale areas in order to prevent the spread of NNIS into new areas.	FLP Specific
	Skidding through known populations of NNIS should be avoided to reduce the potential for spread.	FLP Specific
PDF 8: All mechanical vegetation and prescribed fire treatments	Coordinate with district recreation staff to post advance notices when trails or recreation sites are to be closed during harvest operations and prescribed burning.	FLP Specific
	Trails treads, roads, or facilities would be rehabilitated to pre-existing condition if damaged during project operations, in coordination with district recreation staff.	FLP Specific

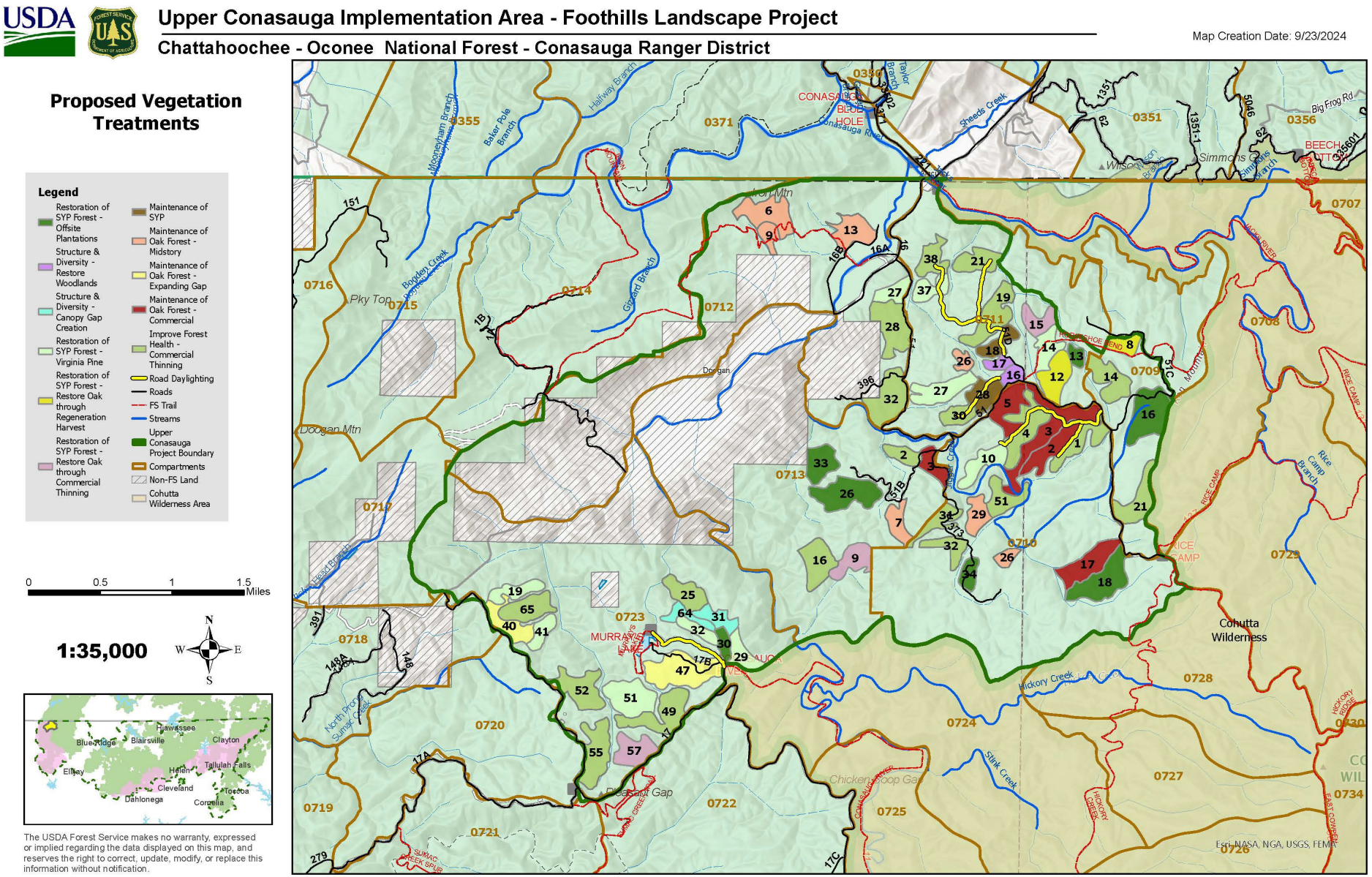
PDF Number: Location or Condition	Project Design Features, Best Management Practices, and Standards	Origin
	Vegetation treatments that occur within or adjacent to developed sites, dispersed sites, or trails would be coordinated with local recreation /facility staff to protect facility and lessen impacts to visitors to the extent possible. Project activities that occur within or adjacent to developed sites, dispersed sites, or trails would be conducted outside the major use season whenever possible, with the understanding that most facilities are open year-round. Developed sites will be temporarily closed for visitor protection during active operations. Portions of sites and trails may be temporarily closed for visitor protection or possible restrictions placed on silvicultural activities during times of high use.	FLP Specific
	Where possible, while implementing proposed treatments, make improvements within recreation sites and along system trails. Examples include cleaning up logs and debris from past projects, removing hazard trees surrounding developed sites, and/or cutting existing stumps to less than six inches.	FLP Specific
	Harvest facilities such as temporary roads and landings, and fireline construction will be assessed for continued use to meet other resource needs (i.e., additional trailhead parking, loop trails, wildlife openings, etc.)	FLP Specific
PDF 9: Prescribed Fire Treatments in all Conditions	Minimize the amount and concentration of smoke entering populated areas; prevent/ minimize public health and safety hazards, including impacts to sensitive sites (schools, hospitals, etc.), visual impacts on highways, airports, etc. (both day and night); avoid exceedances of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS); and protect visibility in Class 1 areas	USDA Forest Service Southern Region's Smoke Management Guidelines
	All activities will meet the requirements of applicable regulations established in pursuit of state or federal air quality goals. While the Forest Service cannot unilaterally guarantee the quality of air (generally, or at a specific point) within an airshed, it does ensure that its management activities would be conducted with full adherence to pollution control methodologies and technologies prescribed by air quality regulatory agencies.	Forest Plan Standard FW-230
	In leases and other agreements that permit other parties to use Forest land or resources, the Forest Service will require the permittee to meet the requirements of all applicable regulations established in pursuit of state or federal air quality goals.	Forest Plan Standard FW-231
	The Forest Service will assess relevant aspects of air quality within the Forest, either through its own efforts, in cooperation with other agencies, or by review of the results of other agency monitoring in/near the Forest.	Forest Plan Standard FW-232
	Adhere to Forest Service Manual 5100 Wildland Fire Management, Chapter 5140 Hazardous Fuel Management and Prescribed Fire, Chattahoochee-Oconee Supplement, as amended, regarding parameters to consider when developing a prescribed fire burn plan. Parameters include, but are not limited to: fuel moisture, relative humidity, wind speeds, Keetch-Byram Drought Index (KBDI), days since rain, temperatures, and probability of ignition.	Forest Service Manual 5100 Wildland Fire Management, Chapter 5140 Hazardous Fuel Management and Prescribed Fire, Chattahoochee-Oconee Supplement R8-5100-2009-1
	Basic mesic forests are excluded from prescribed burning blocks where this can be accomplished without large increases in fireline construction. When necessary, to include mesic deciduous forests within burning blocks, direct firing will not be done within these communities unless necessary to secure control lines. In these cases, only low intensity fires are allowed.	Forest Plan Management Prescription 9.F-016
	Locate and construct firelines to minimize mineral soil exposure by utilizing natural barriers, installing firebreaks along the contour, installing proper water diversions, and using gradual grades as outlined in the Forest Plan and Georgia's BMP Handbook. Establish a vegetative	GA BMP

PDF Number: Location or Condition	Project Design Features, Best Management Practices, and Standards	Origin
	cover as soon as possible to reduce erosion and sedimentation.	
	Prescribed burn plans written for areas near caves or mines that contain bats identify these sites as smoke sensitive targets and plan to avoid smoke entering cave or mine openings when bats are present.	Forest Plan Standard FW-034
PDF 10: All activities within Ephemeral Zones (the area within 25 feet on either side of ephemeral streams)	Implement current Georgia Rules and Regulations for Water Quality Control (Chapter 391-3-6) for all projects as a minimum to meet water quality objectives. GA BMPs for Forestry would be met or exceeded to meet water quality objectives for all activities. Consistent with GA BMP (2019 p. 21), silvicultural activities should: • Minimize soil disturbance, litter layer removal, and avoid high-intensity fire within ephemeral areas. These activities can increase the possibility of introducing pollutants to intermittent or perennial streams. • Cover inadvertently exposed soils with logging debris, grass, or mulch. • Minimize equipment trafficking within and around ephemeral areas. Should trafficking be justifiable due to site constraints, take precautions to minimize soil disturbance and litter layer removal. Placement of logging debris or logging mats in traffic areas may be appropriate. Debris, mats, and other soil protecting structures should not interfere with the natural flow of water. • Avoid direct tie-in of turnouts and outfall of water bars/breaks to ephemeral areas. Extra care should be taken where a skid trail crosses an ephemeral area.	Forest Plan Standard FW-070, GA BMPs
	Motorized vehicle use in ephemeral stream zones is restricted to designated crossings. Motorized vehicles are allowed outside designated crossings on a case-by case basis when vehicle entry would create less ground disturbance than cable winching.	Forest Plan Standard FW-077
	Partial suspension is required when yarding logs over ephemeral streams, unless an improved crossing is used, e.g., culvert or bridge.	Forest Plan Standard FW-079
	Temporary culverts or bridges will be used to cross ephemeral streams where needed to protect channel stability or minimize erosion or scouring. Culverts will be removed when activities are completed, and the ephemeral stream zone will be restored to a natural condition. Stabilize disturbed soils at crossings.	Forest Plan Standard FW-082
	Recreation trails, campsites, and other permanent recreational developments are located, designed, and constructed outside the ephemeral stream zone (25 feet on each side). Those causing unacceptable resource damage will be closed and/or rehabilitated.	Forest Plan Standard FW-083
	Use fuel-break construction and/or mitigation methods that: (a) leave the root mat intact; (b) do not leave bare mineral soil exposed, and © do not create landforms that will drain directly into ephemeral streams for 25 feet on either side of ephemeral streams. Such methods include wet lines or use of existing constructed or natural barriers. If fuel-break construction results in breaking the root mat and thus exposure of bare mineral soil and connection to an ephemeral stream, restore the fire break for 25 feet on each side of the stream with re-shaping the soil surface and placing a soil cover in a timely manner to minimize erosion.	Forest Plan Standard FW-084
PDF 11: All heavy mechanical equipment use in parking lot activities	Operators should drive, operate, and store heavy equipment only within the proposed development footprint or the disturbed corridors of the surrounding roads and parking areas, so as to limit soil compaction and vegetation cover loss in the surrounding area. Additionally, bulldozer debris and excavated material from grading and digging operations should not be pushed into the surrounding natural forest areas. Construction should be designed and completed with no additional impacts to the riparian area.	FLP Specific
PDF 12: All heavy mechanical	Soil rutting should be kept to a minimum.	Regional soil standard

PDF Number: Location or Condition	Project Design Features, Best Management Practices, and Standards	Origin
equipment uses	Compaction in an activity area should not exceed a 15% increase in bulk density in the upper 8 inches of the soil.	Regional soil standard
PDF 13: Mastication activities	The operator should try to move in a straight direction. Pivot turns should be kept to a minimum and turns should be conducted in a broad arc as the surrounding terrain and timber would allow in order to minimize soil disturbance. Care should be taken to avoid moving over the same piece of ground more than three times or use areas that have already been compacted through other activities.	FLP Specific
PDF 14: Temporary road construction	Temporary roads would follow the general contour as practical and would generally not exceed sustained grades over 10%.	GA BMP
	The travel way of temporary roads would generally not exceed 14-16 feet except at turnouts and landings.	GA BMP
	Drainage structures, such as outsloping and waterbars, would be installed along temporary roads when the use of the road is no longer needed.	GA BMP
	Temporary roads would be constructed on previous existing routes (old woods roads, skid trails, system trails) where possible to minimize the need for new temporary road construction.	FLP Specific
PDF 15: Timber harvest activities within the riparian corridor	Establish Streamside Management Zones (SMZ) on both sides of designated trout streams and tributaries according to the following options: Option A: For perennial trout streams and tributaries, a minimum 100-feet SMZ that includes a no-harvest zone within the first 25-feet of primary or secondary trout streams. Timber harvests within the remaining 75-feet of the SMZ should leave an average of 50 square ft of basal area per acre or at least 50% canopy cover. Option B: For perennial trout streams and tributaries within the 100-ft. SMZ, leave an average of 50 square feet of basal area per acre evenly distributed throughout the zone to provide shade. Option B may be selected if a qualified professional is consulted. Option C does not apply to CONF. The minimum CONF riparian corridor is 100 feet.	GA BMP
PDF 16: All activities within Riparian Corridor	Major actions that create long-term impacts are prohibited in the riparian corridor. Examples are roads or trails (excluding designated crossings), recreation sites and facilities, log landings, and permanent wildlife openings. Existing examples of the above are permitted if not causing environmental damage.	Forest Plan Standard 11-001
	Minor actions that create short-term impacts are permitted in the riparian corridor with appropriate mitigation and monitoring of impacts. Examples of minor actions include silvicultural activities needed to meet resource objectives for riparian-associated species, bank stabilization, temporary road construction and stream crossings associated with these activities.	Forest Plan Standard 11-002
	For all projects, additional protection, such as wider riparian corridor distances, higher residual canopy cover, restrictions on activities, etc. will be identified through site-specific inventories and surveys, site-specific biological evaluations, and site-specific mitigations identified in project NEPA documents.	Forest Plan Standard 11-003
	Silvicultural activities conducted within the riparian corridor will be conducted to meet or exceed compliance with the current edition of GA BMPs for Forestry	Forest Plan Standard 11-022
	Tree removals may only take place (in the riparian corridor) if needed to enhance the recovery of the, rehabilitate disturbances, provide habitat for T&E, RFSS, or riparian-associated species, reduce fuel buildup, provide for visitor safety, or for approved facility	Forest Plan Standard 11-024

PDF Number: Location or Condition	Project Design Features, Best Management Practices, and Standards	Origin
	construction/renovation	
PDF 17: Culvert and/or bridge maintenance, removal, or modification	Culverts and bridges (and any other man-made structure) would be surveyed for roosting bats before they are removed or modified, and if significant bat roosting is found, the structure would be maintained, or alternative roosts made available prior to removal or destruction	Forest Plan Standard FW-035
	Culverts that are barriers to stream biota passage in waters of aquatic Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive species have priority for replacement over culverts in waters without Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species.	Forest Plan Standard FW-042
PDF 18: Timber sales	In salvage timber sales, all live den trees and an average of 5 of the largest suitable snags (snags with exfoliating bark) per acre will be retained. Snags in early stages of decay should be favored over older snags for retention. Snags should be clumped if possible.	Forest Plan Standard FW-090
	In even aged and two aged regeneration, retain all snags unless they are an immediate hazard. Sales will be designed to avoid snag removal if possible (skid trails, landings). Retain (or create) 5 snags per acre, near the forest edge if possible. In even-aged and two-aged regeneration stands larger than 10 acres, maintain a minimum of 15 sq. feet of basal area. These can be arranged in clumps, corridors, or feathered edges. In stands over 10 acres treated as seedtree or shelterwood, maintain a minimum of 20 sq. feet of basal area. Retain all trees within 20 feet of 5 snags per acre for windthrow protection and snag recruitment.	Forest Plan Standard FW-091
PDF 19: Activities around caves and/or mines	For caves and mines suitable of supporting cave-dependent species, a minimum buffer of 200 feet is maintained around portals. Prohibited activities within this buffer include use of wheeled or tractor vehicles (except on existing roads or for cave protection and maintenance), mechanical site prep, vegetation cutting, rec site construction, tractor-constructed firelines, herbicide application, and new road construction, skid trails, and log landings.	Forest Plan Management Prescription 9.F-021
PDF 20: All vegetation treatments that create young forest habitats (10,100 acres)	Within individual project areas to be implemented within the Foothills Landscape area, an assessment of existing acres of young forest habitats (stands less than 11 years old) would be made prior to implementation to determine the maximum amount of young forest that could be created. Such assessments would be tiered to the applicable Management Prescription allowances contained within each individual project IA. Young Forest habitats would not be created in excess of the maximum amounts allowed by each Management Prescription singly or combined.	FLP Specific (MRx compliance)
PDF 21: Any ground-disturbing activities	Botanical surveys would be completed in accordance with Forest risk assessments in suitable habitats for T&E and Sensitive species prior to any ground disturbing activities.	FLP Specific
	All activities should be evaluated for their potential to affect NNIS. A risk assessment (example in Appendix A of NNIS Report) should be utilized prior to implementation of any activity to determine the risks and consequences of the action on NNIS, and the necessary mitigations included as part of the activity.	FLP Specific

Attachment B: Additional Maps



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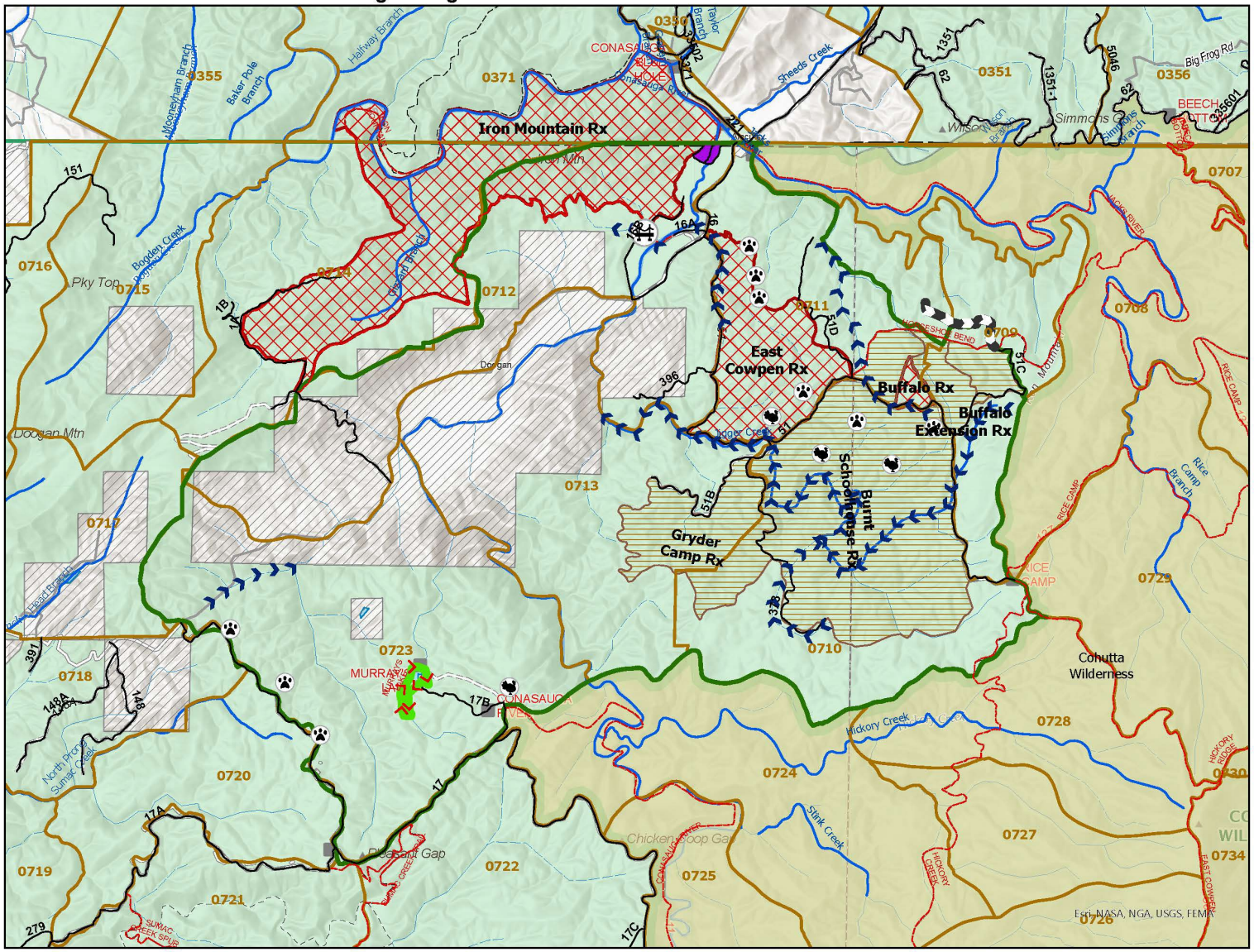
Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 9/5/2024

Non-Vegetation Proposed Actions



Legend

- Wildlife Opening Daylighting
- Wildlife Opening Expansion
- Canebreak Restoration
- DECOMMISSION: FSR 51C (Ken Mountain RD)
- DECOMMISSION: Murray's Lake Trail
- Existing Burns
- New Burn Blocks
- Large Wood
- Replacement of Culverts, Fords, or Bridges
- Roads
- FS Trail
- Streams
- Upper Conasauga Project Boundary
- Compartments
- Non-FS Land
- Cohutta Wilderness Area

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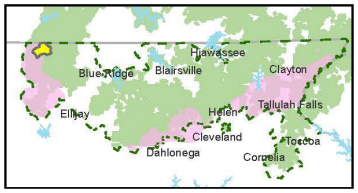

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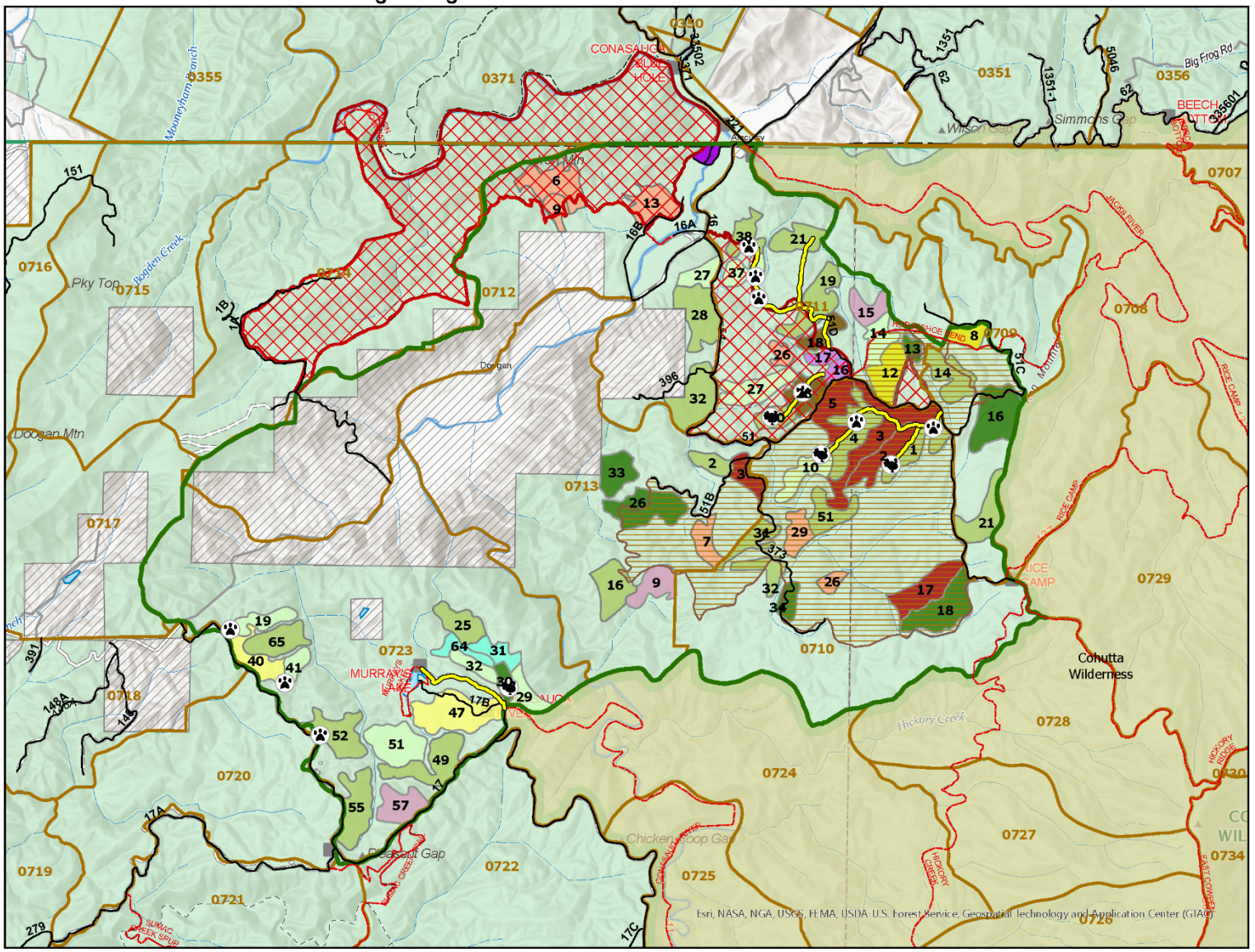
Upper Conasauga Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forest - Conasauga Ranger District

Map Creation Date: 12/12/2024

Proposed Vegetation Treatments and Prescribed Burning



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Attachment C: Monitoring Plan for Upper Conasauga Implementation Area

Resource Assessed	Monitoring Question/Objective	Frequency	Field Method/Data Collection	Documentation Format	Primary Responsibility
Soil Productivity & Water Quality	Are Best Management Practices (BMPs) being implemented through timber sale contract provisions, and according to Forest Plan standards?	During operational periods (timber sales, site prep, road construction and maintenance)	Evaluate implementation of BMPs and timber sale contract provisions. All timber sale units are evaluated for implementation.	Timber sale inspection forms, filed in timber sale contracts, reviewed by FSR	District Timber Sale Administrator, Harvest Inspector, Forest Service Representative (FSR)
Soil Productivity & Water Quality	Are the Best Management Practices and applicable Forest Plan standards effective in meeting soil productivity and water quality standards?	During operational periods and within one year after operations end	Field evaluation of the effectiveness of BMPs to meet Forest Plan standards. Random sample of harvest units using line transects & point samples	Field inspection forms, filed in S.O.	Interdisciplinary Team (Forest personnel in hydrology, soils, timber)
Best Management Practices Implementation – Audit by GFC	Were Best Management Practices implemented per Georgia's Forestry BMP Handbook and effective in protecting water quality?	During operational periods and within one year after operations end	Field evaluation of randomly selected harvest units and prescribed burns by Georgia Forestry Commission water quality personnel. This occurs across the state on federal land as well as state and private ownership.	Completion of GFC Best Management Practice Audit Form, filed in state database	Georgia Forestry Commission Water Quality personnel

Resource Assessed	Monitoring Question/Objective	Frequency	Field Method/Data Collection	Documentation Format	Primary Responsibility
Revegetation of Disturbed Areas	Were the prescribed revegetation efforts on disturbed sites such as skid trails, landings, and fire lines implemented and effective in establishing ground cover and erosion protection?	Within one growing season of revegetation operations	Visual evaluation of disturbed areas that have been revegetated to assess that sites have been seeded and rehabilitated to ensure revegetation is successful.	Field visual inspection of random sample of revegetated areas, documented on timber sale inspection reports	Timber Sale Administrator
Non-Native Invasive Plants	Are NNIS populations present within planned harvest/activity areas prior to treatment?	During project preparation/lay out	Field inventory and mapping of NNIS populations	Inventoried populations will be mapped and treatment planned. Populations identified though risk assessment process prior to implementation may be added to Sale Area Map as required by Foothills NNIS Risk Assessment	District Silviculturist, District Timber Management Assistant (TMA), Presale Forester, District Wildlife Biologist
Non-Native Invasive Plants	Identify NNIS in treated areas as required by Foothills NNIS Risk Assessment and treat new infestations	Up to five field seasons after harvest activities have been completed as required by Foothills NNIS Risk Assessment	Field inspections to identify establishment or spread of NNIS as required by Foothills NNIS Risk Assessment	Inventoried populations will be mapped and treatment planned.	District Silviculturist, District TMA, District Wildlife Biologist
Rare Plants	Are rare plant protections adequate to protect populations?	During timber sale layout and operational periods	Field inspection of known rare plant populations.	Timber sale inspection reports	Timber Sale Administrator, District Wildlife Biologist

Resource Assessed	Monitoring Question/Objective	Frequency	Field Method/Data Collection	Documentation Format	Primary Responsibility
Timber	Are timber harvest activities adhering to applicable Forest Plan standards?	Throughout the life of the timber sale contract	Field inspections through all phases of harvesting to ensure contract provisions are being met and implemented in compliance with the Forest Plan.	Timber sale inspection reports	Harvest Inspector, Timber Sale Administrator, Forest Service Representative, District Wildlife Biologist, District Timber Management Assistant
Reforestation	Are harvested stands regenerated and restocked within five years of harvest?	One and three years after planting trees, and at 5 years or later after site preparation has been completed with natural regeneration	Field evaluation of sample plots and/or field inspection will be used to determine stocking, composition and condition of regeneration.	Report documented in FACTS database	District Silviculturist
Heritage	Are Forest Plan standards effective in protecting cultural and heritage resources?	During and immediately after harvest activities	Field inspections of sites to ensure the protection or avoidance of heritage resources.	Timber sale inspection reports	Timber Sale Administrator, Archeologist

Attachment D: Upper Conasauga Project Feedback/Response

Conservation Working Group

Road decommissioning process: What measures are taken? Recontour, planting, turn into trails, etc.?

The portion of the road proposed for decommissioning (Ken Mountain Road) is already blocked. No additional actions are planned; this is primarily an administrative action. See Upper Conasauga IG pg.50.

Daylighting roads: NNIS monitoring (especially on road planned to be daylighted right up to a Cohutta Wilderness Area boundary)?

Per Project Design Feature #21 (see page 105 of this document), an NNIS risk assessment would be completed prior to implementation of this and all project proposals. Roads proposed for daylighting will be surveyed for existing NNIS and pre-treated at least once prior to vegetation removal. Follow-up treatments would be completed as needed. Note: none of the roads proposed for daylighting are concurrent with, begin, or end at the wilderness boundary. The non-system road to Murray's Lake dam begins approximately 270 feet from the closest wilderness boundary which is 66 feet east of FSR 17B. It appears much closer due to the scale of the map on page 95.

Wildlife openings: How are decisions being made for which openings are food plots and which are pollinator habitat?

Those decisions will be made in cooperation with Georgia DNR after commercial timber operations are concluded in those areas, based on site characteristics and acreage after expansion. It is possible that both types of vegetation could be provided in some openings.

What is the NNIS pressure right now in the project area?

Botanical surveys have not been completed yet, so we don't have mapped locations of NNIS plants. There are some known NNIS infestations in the project area: 1) an autumn olive infestation in the Alaculsy Valley area, where the species was planted as a wildlife food decades ago. There are no vegetation management treatments with the potential to spread the species planned in that area, other than cane restoration, which will include ongoing herbicide treatments of autumn olive. 2) two kudzu patches which need ongoing treatment. No ground disturbing treatments are planned in the vicinity of the kudzu patches.

What is the strategy for monitoring areas for pollinators, and what are the maintenance schedules/commitments of hired crews who maintain these areas? Can the half or partial mow technique be considered?

As described in the discussion about monarch butterfly above on page 6, many of our proposals in this project area incorporate conservation measures which benefit pollinators: https://www.fws.gov/project/monarch-conservation-georgia. Monitoring pollinators is beyond our capacity.

Maintenance of wildlife openings by the Forest Service or Georgia DNR, whether by mowing, disking, prescribed burning, or replanting, based on site conditions and funding levels, is typically completed on an annual basis. Larger openings are conducive to maintaining a variety of vegetation types (grasses and forbs, briar thickets, shrubs and trees). This can be achieved by partial mowing, for example (not mowing 100% of an opening each year).

What are the monitoring plans for restoration projects? Will there be photo monitoring of vegetation? Herbaceous monitoring, not just of woody vegetation? Careful attention to changes in the understory diversity?

See page 71 of the Implementation Guide for monitoring restoration stands post-harvest. Within the first year of planting, first-year survival surveys will be conducted, and again at three years post-planting. These are required per FSM 2472.4. Additional monitoring beyond our required surveys is not within our current capacity. Volunteer assistance is encouraged and accepted.

How were the sites selected for the expanded canopy gap/femelschlag areas?

Stands selected for expanding gap treatments are mid to late successional oak stands with no advanced oak regeneration in locations where prescribed fire is not currently an option, per the Foothills Landscape Project decision matrix. The purpose of this treatment is to regenerate oak in an incremental manner, by controlling the light environment in the stand.

Stands that were selected for canopy gaps are mesic deciduous (cove) stands with closed canopies and low vertical structural complexity (see description in FLP EA, pg. B14). Unlike the expanding gap treatment described above, the purpose of this treatment is to increase structural diversity as vegetation regenerates in the gaps. The Forest Plan and Foothills Landscape Project have objectives for managing forest structure as well as species composition.

Restoration of southern yellow pine forest on dry sites dominated by mid to late-successional Virginia or white pine – two aged regeneration harvest stands:

a. **Comp 710 Stand 10: 29 ac Virginia pine stand, 109 years old**
b. **Comp 712 Stand 27: 19 ac White-pine-upland hardwood stand, 114 years old**
c. **Comp 723 Stand 19 22 ac White pine-upland hardwood stand, 112 years old**

These stand ages suggest these stands predate fire suppression. If that is the case, then the Virginia pines would not be offsite and the intended treatments would not in fact be restoration. We suspect the stand ages reflect averaging of older hardwoods and younger pines or are otherwise misleading. However, the evidence we currently have contradicts the assumption the treatment is bases on, so more information about the condition of the stands would be helpful.

The assumption that the provided stand ages are misleading is correct. In each case, the provided stand age of the stand reflects the presence of a cohort of older hardwoods. In Stand 723/19, the 112 year old hardwoods make up around 40 ft^2 of basal area (BA), while the remainder is 70- year-old white pine. Several trees were cored in this stand and it was determined that the white pines were of a different age cohort. We have modified the prescription to reflect the removal of that white pine while leaving the oaks in the overstory. This will fall under the commercial thin prescription (thin 40-70 residual BA) to retain existing oaks and promote desirable species.

Comp 710/10: this stand age is also misleading. The stand is comprised primarily of immature Virginia pine timber. There is also a small cohort of mature oaks in this stand. Per the Forest Plan, 15 ft^2 residual basal area will be maintained in units proposed for restoration. These older oaks that are scattered throughout the stand will be left as the residual trees.

Comp 712/ 27: there are some older hardwoods in the stand, but a majority of the stand is comprised of young white pine and Virginia pine. Like Comp 710/10 above, where mature oaks are scattered throughout the stand, they will be retained as residual basal area.

We would also like more information about Stand 711-15 that is scheduled for restoration of southern yellow pine forest or oak forest on sites currently occupied by off-site pine plantations or failed shortleaf or pitch pine plantations – commercial thinning to restore oak. The stand is listed as a 120-year-old Virginia pine-oak stand, which means it would meet the old-growth age requirement for that forest type. At the meeting, the Forest Service said the thinning would not change the stand's old growth status, so the treatment could proceed. The real issue is whether or not the stand is exceptional whether the impacts of a commercial harvest may not be appropriate for it. Those questions will likely be difficult to resolve without seeing the stand in the field.

A field visit was held by the Forest Service in November of 2024, and this stand was included in the stops. While the data shows that this stand is typed as a 120-year-old Virginia pine stand, on the ground observations conclude that much of the stand is of a different age-cohort and is comprised of younger Virginia and white pines. The age of this stand can be attributed to the older-age class of scattered oaks. It was generally agreed on by the members of the field trip that this stand does not meet old-growth stand characteristics. During implementation, the older cohort of hardwoods would be retained, and the younger cohorts of Virginia and white pine would be the target species for removal.

Would it be possible for the Forest Service to use forest simulation software to compare the expanding gaps/canopy gap treatment with and without the associated thinning? Ideally, the simulation would provide information on light levels in the gaps after treatments and provide a visualization of canopy cover after treatment. We appreciate William and Luke taking the time at the meeting to patiently and clearly explain the logistical constraints for those treatments and why they believe the thinning component is a practical necessity. There is some remaining concern that the thinning will alter the treatment such that they no longer do the fundamental thing it was created to do. We would like to find a solution that allows those treatments to move forward while functioning as described in the scientific literature. Simulation results would help clarify the issue.

For expanding gap treatments:

Forest Vegetation Simulator (FVS) is the nationally recognized growth and yield model for the Forest Service, and while FVS can provide many outputs, it does have some limitations. While it can simulate forest management actions, it is unable to show results spatially (it is an individual-tree, distance-independent, growth and yield model.) Additionally, it does not model light levels. Instead, it models percent canopy cover and can show matrix stocking levels with various treatments. This includes residual basal areas and trees per acre in the respective stands.

When a thinning treatment is modeled, like in the matrix of the expanding gap treatment stands, there is a reduction in canopy cover. By removing some of the trees in the matrix, the desirable species such as oaks will receive the traditional benefits of a thinning – increased growing space and tree vigor. Thinning is also necessary operationally to access the expanding gap areas with harvesting equipment.

When modeled with FVS, this results in a residual canopy cover of 39% in the thinned portions of the stand.

The "gaps" in the expanding gap treatment will be 0.5 – 1 acre openings. Research from Raymond and Bedard (2017) suggests that 30% light transmittance is beneficial for oak regeneration. In the expanding gap treatment, the edges of the gaps are where we expect to see 30% light transmittance. While FVS does not model light levels, we can conclude from the research paper, "Light and regeneration patterns following silvicultural gap establishment in Quercus dominated stands of the northern Cumberland Plateau, USA" that light levels are ideal for oak regeneration on the edges of the gaps (~90% light transmission in the center of the gap, ~35-45% on the edges of the gap, and ~ 15% in the matrix between gaps.) (Patterson et. al 2022).
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378112721009622)

While light levels and percent canopy cover are not the same metric, we think it's reasonable to conclude that thinning the matrix to the proposed 60-80ft^2 residual basal area will not adversely affect the edges of the gaps (see graphic below) where we hope to see advanced oak regeneration. We expect that, despite increasing the amount of light in the thinned matrix, that light levels will not increase to a point where we see advanced oak regen in the matrix, or to the extent that we will see shade intolerant species such as yellow poplar and shortleaf pine. The thinning treatment may continue to give a competitive advantage to red maple in the matrix, but red maple already has the advantage and the gaps will be site prepped with a cut-stump treatment to address red maple competition after gap-creation.

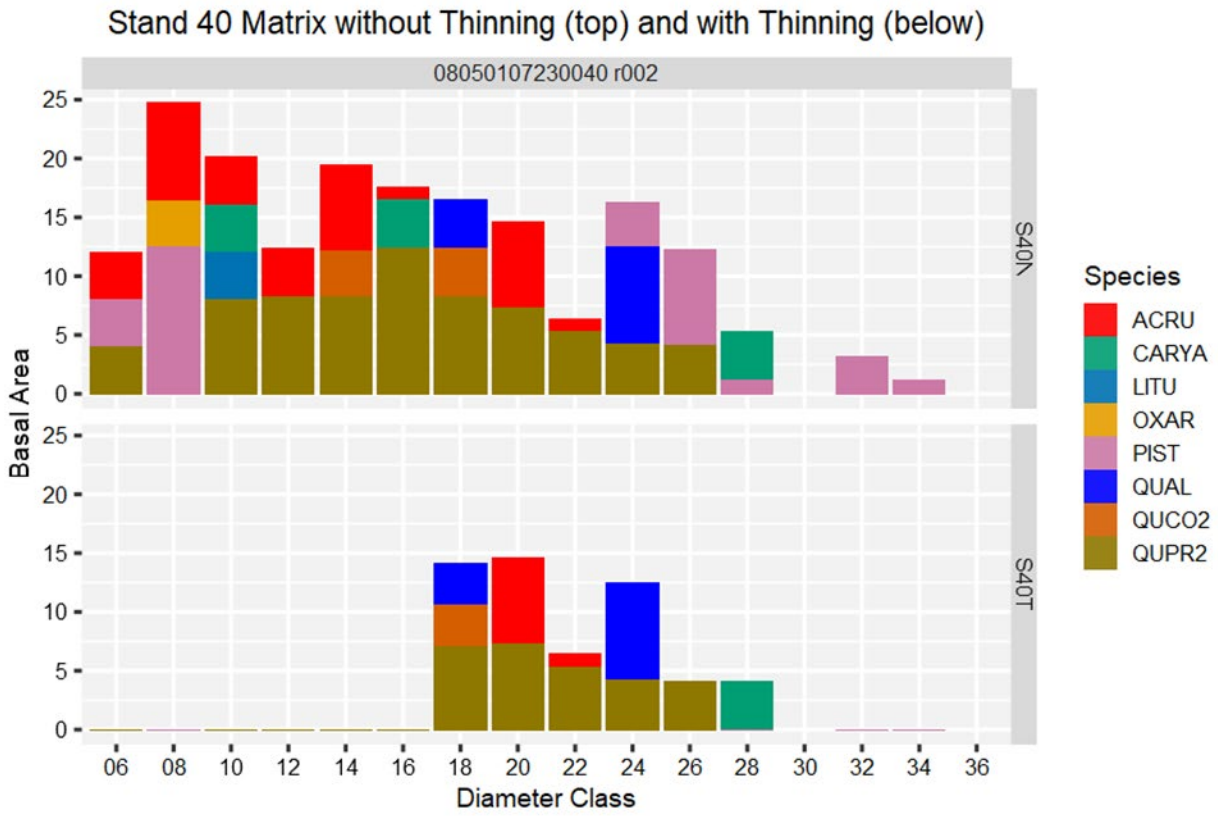
The figure below is an output from FVS. It models Compartment 723 Stand 40. This stand is proposed for expanding gap treatment. From the stand exam data, the stand is currently stocked at 691 trees per acre and with the associated thinning, the model shows an estimate of 483 trees per acre. The current percent canopy cover is 82 and with the associated thinning the model predicts 39 percent canopy cover. These numbers can be correlated with light levels, as more gaps in the canopy will be created, thus increasing the light levels. See visualization output below. This model also shows the diameter distribution of species throughout the stand with and without the thinning.

Compartment 723, stand 40: FEME with and without matrix thinning

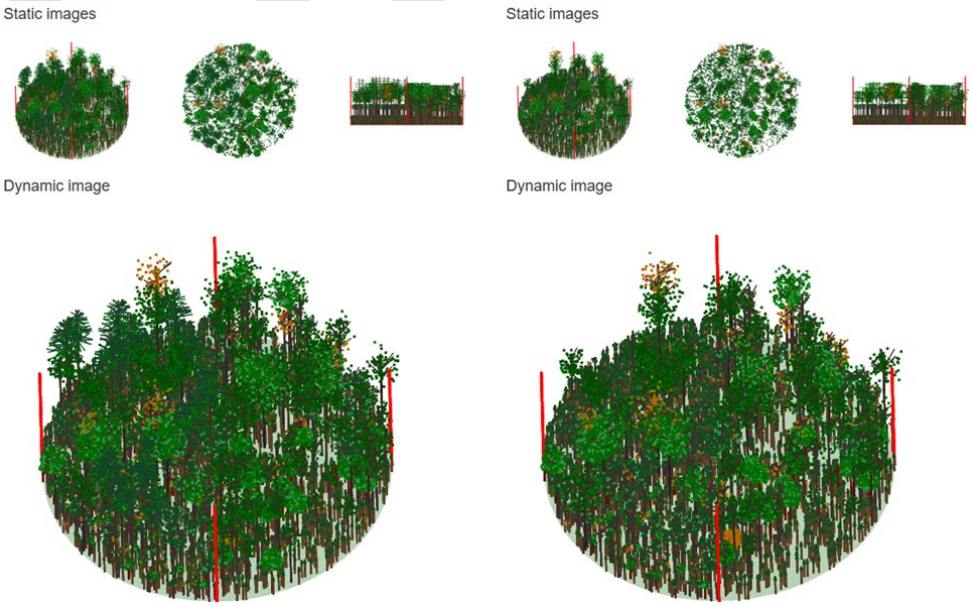
Matrix trees per acre (TPA), basal area per acre (BA), and percent canopy cover (PCC) without and with thinning.

Stand - Treatment	TPA	BA	PCC
S40 Matrix without Thinning	691	194	82
S40 Matrix with Thinning	483	64	39

Matrix diameter distribution by species without and with thinning.



Matrix visualizations without (left) and with (right) thinning.



For canopy gap treatments:

In canopy gap treatments, the purpose of the treatment is to increase structural diversity (complex, multilayered forest) to improve wildlife habitat (for breeding songbirds, primarily). The stands targeted for this treatment are mesic deciduous stands (mostly yellow-poplar and some mesic oak stands) with closed canopies and little structural diversity. Thinning the entire stand is essential to facilitate the harvest operation and doesn't negatively affect the purpose of the treatment (increasing structural diversity). Producing oak regeneration is not an intended outcome of this treatment.

I'd like to see some diagrams and schematics explaining the different types of forest management treatments. Helpful diagrams that show area and canopy densities, and size of cuts, thinning/clearing designs etc. Assume a forestry professor is lecturing to first year forestry students about different practices.

It could, of course, be accomplished with slides, but a dry-erase board or easel might also be useful.

Thank you for your comment. A Forest Service-led field trip was held in November 2024 to showcase real world examples of the specific treatment types that have been proposed. The field trip also included stops within the Upper Conasauga Implementation Area proposed actions to explain current and future states as well as why the management activity was selected.

The Forest Service has prepared an additional presentation to be given at the next FCG meeting scheduled in spring 2025. The intent of the presentation will be to clarify the different types of forest management treatments.

Wildlife/Hunting/Fishing

Can you clarify the proposed acres versus where work will actually occur in the implementation area at our next meeting?

In the commercial treatments, actual operable acres are typically less than the proposed acres. Generally, we can expect to see around 50% less treated acres than proposed on the east side of our district. This is due to steep slopes (FLP Specific PDF – skidding would not be allowed on sustained slopes over 35%), streamside management zones, and other inoperable areas.

In stands proposed for noncommercial treatments, the acreage typically reflects the proposed treatments though some will be lost due to the same issues as the commercial stands. However, since logging equipment is not used in these stands, the operability specifications are not as limiting.

Can you provide more detail about what follow up treatments will look like and how you plan to conduct those treatments and at what frequency?

Detailed descriptions of all proposed activities begin on page 36. Please refer to the sections labeled "How to Implement Change" within each activity for a breakdown of the follow up treatment details.

I believe the wildlife table had asked for a map overlayed with the burn units. Is that possible to get? Apologies if this has already been shared.

Requested map has been added to Attachment B: Additional Maps

Local Working Group

Many proposed FLP activities are based upon assessments of "Desired Forest Conditions" which, in turn, make use of historical "ecologically appropriate" conditions in sites where such conditions "once likely occurred." Thus, current assessments are largely based upon past forest conditions. Given ongoing climate change, we would like to know whether or not "ecologically appropriate" conditions may have changed in such a way that historical forest conditions are no longer desirable (or achievable). Using the current proposed Collaborative Action (Upper Conasauga) as an example, it would be advantageous for the FCG to hear a critique from an outside scientific expert (with suitable expertise in Forest Ecology/Forest Stand Dynamics) on the current assessments of Desired Forest Conditions in the face of climate change.

Thank you for your comment. Please direct to FCG leads.

Similarly, many proposed FLP activities make extensive use of herbicide treatments. Recognizing that the science of herbicide use has evolved, it would be helpful for the FCG to hear a critique from an outside scientific expert (involved in current research on herbicide use) on the current planned usage (noting that specifics are contained outside the current draft plan) in relation to the state-of-the-art science recommendations.

Thank you for your comment. Please direct to FCG leads.