



Forest Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

# **Foothills Landscape Project Annual Stakeholder Meeting October 5, 2023**

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Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest

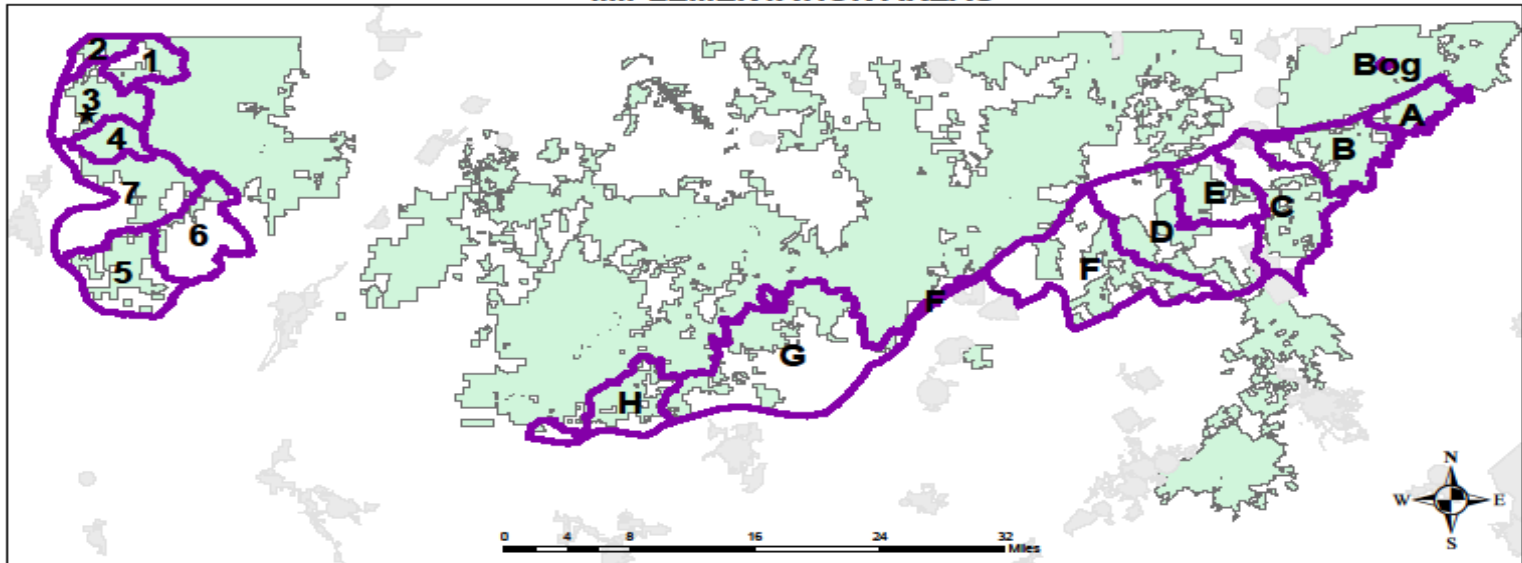
# Foothills Landscape Project

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- FLP as a 157,625-acre integrated resource management and landscape restoration framework
- 39 proposed actions to achieve Forest Plan goals and objectives across 16 implementation areas.
  - Restoration of southern yellow pine forest
  - Maintenance of southern yellow pine forest
  - Maintenance of oak forest
  - Commercial and non-commercial thinning of pine plantations to improve forest health
  - Create young forest (ESH)
  - Creating young oak forest (ESH)
  - Restoring open woodland habitats on appropriate sites
  - Canopy gap creation in closed-canopied mesic stands
  - Create or expand permanent openings
  - Replacement of culverts, fords, or bridges to increase aquatic organism passage and function
  - Prescribed fire in new burn blocks
  - Reduce hazardous fuels in the WUI
  - Bog improvement actions
  - Canebrake restoration actions
  - Small-whorled pogonia improvement
  - Non-commercial release of hemlock trees
  - Designate small blocks of old growth
  - Stream habitat improvements
  - Continuation of prescribed burning in existing burn blocks
  - Decommissioning of maintenance level (ML) 2 and ML1 system roads
  - Implement changes to system road ML and/or use restrictions
  - Reconstruction of existing roads that are causing sedimentation to streams, particularly within watersheds with 305b and 303d listed streams

# Foothills Landscape Project Implementation Areas

FOOTHILLS LANDSCAPE PROJECT  
IMPLEMENTATION AREAS



CONASAUGA		BLUE RIDGE		CHATTOOGA RIVER	
1	Jigger Creek	G	Three Sisters	A	Sarah's Creek
2	Mooneyham	H	Jones Creek	B	Warwoman - Chattooga
3	Sumac - North Prong			C	Lower Chattooga
4	Mill Creek - Rockflat Branch			D	Tallulah River
5	Rock Creek			E	Tiger
6	Bear Creek			F	Soquee River
7	Holly Creek			Bog	Hale Ridge

# Foothills Landscape Project

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- **Where We've Been:**

- Initial public involvement effort began in 2016
- Signed Decision on Environmental Analysis April 2022
- Formation of Foothills Collaborative Group (FCG) 2023
- Finalized first integrated project (Mooneyham) April 2023
- Implemented first stand-alone projects 2023

- **Where We Are Now:**

- Interacting with FCG
- Planning projects for FY 24 and beyond

# Foothills Landscape Projects

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- Implementable
  - These projects are implementable from the Decision
  - Sufficient site specificity within EA
- Collaborative
  - Need additional site-specific information
  - Standalone and Integrated Projects

# Implementation Guide

**Step 1:** Forest identifies all management opportunities within implementation area

**Step 2:** Complete initial field reviews and validate thresholds for proposed action

**Step 3:** Draft implementation plan and initiate surveys

**Step 4:** Present draft implementation plan to stakeholders (Foothills Collaborative Group)

## 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 (forthcoming). 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.

### Planning Steps:

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Step 2: Complete Initial Field Reviews and Validate Thresholds for Proposed Action .....	6
Aquatic and Terrestrial Wildlife .....	6
Botanical and Rare Communities (T&E and Sensitive*, NNIS) .....	10
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Soils and Hydrology .....	16
Recreation and Transportation: Road System .....	18
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# Moving from Programmatic to Site Specific Implementation cont.

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## **Step 1: IDT identifies all management opportunities within implementation area**

- Current forest stand conditions vs. desired future conditions outlined in Forest Plan
- Impaired streams, known sedimentation issues
- Existing threatened and endangered (T&E) species/rare plants
- Existing and needed prescribed burns
- Current road inventory vs. desired futures state
- Current recreation needs
- Heritage and vegetation survey needs

# Moving from Programmatic to Site Specific Implementation cont.

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## Step 2: Complete initial field reviews and validate thresholds for proposed action

Checklist in the implementation guide for each program area

- Aquatics and Terrestrial Wildlife
- Botanical and Rare Communities (T&E and Sensitive\*, NNIS)
- Cultural Resources
- Fire and Fuels
- Soils and Hydrology
- Recreation and Transportation/ Road System
- Vegetation



# Moving from Programmatic to Site Specific Implementation cont.

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## Step 3: Draft implementation plan and initiate surveys

- Draft Implementation Guide for the Implementation Area
- Contracting process for vegetation and heritage surveys



# Moving from Programmatic to Site Specific Implementation cont.

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- **Step 4: Present draft implementation plan to stakeholders (Foothills Collaborative Group)**



# Implementation Guide- Next Steps:

- Step 5: Public notice and opportunity for input
- Step 6: Conduct field trip(s)/educational outreach
- Step 7: Identify additional monitoring needs
- Step 8: Finalize implementation plan
- Step 9: Submit for District Ranger approval
- Step 10: Conduct contract review



Foothills Landscape Project  
Pre-Implementation Process Guide and Checklist

**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:**

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**Summary of how comments were incorporated into Implementation Plan:**

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# **Implementation Area Updates**

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- **Mooneyham Implementation Area**
- **Sarah's Creek IA- Earls Ford Project**
- **Holly Creek IA- AOP Project**
- **Future Implementation Areas**

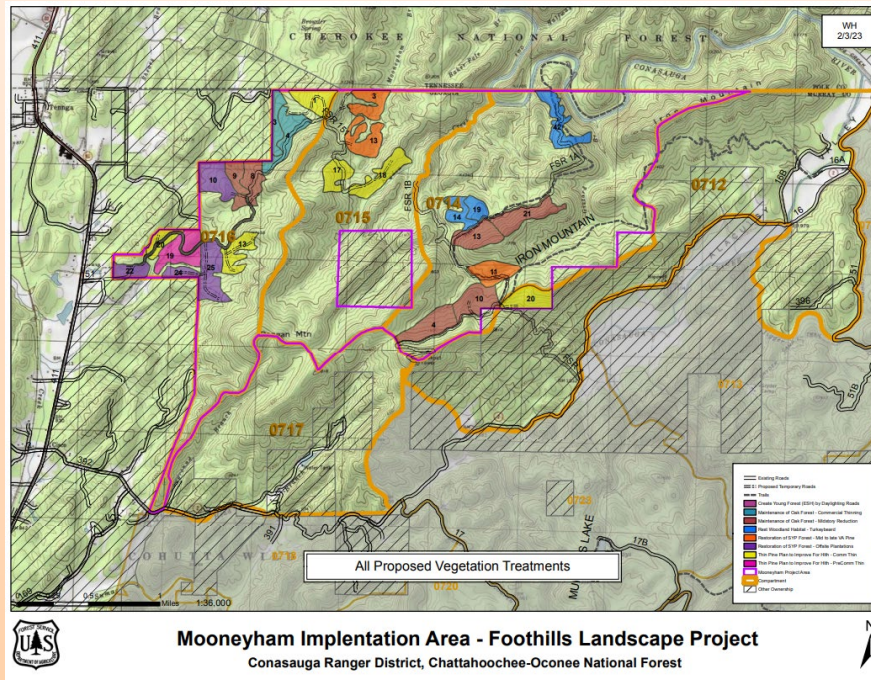
# CRD - Mooneyham Project Implementation

- Stream habitat improvements – large woody debris
- Continuation of Prescribed Burning within Existing Blocks
- Prescribed fire in new burn blocks to facilitate restoration or maintenance of fire-adapted ecosystems or to reduce hazardous fuels
- Decommissioning of ML2 and ML1 system roads
- Implement changes to system road ML and or use restrictions
- Restoration of southern yellow pine forest on dry sites dominated by mid to late-successional Virginia or white pine – 2 aged regen harvest
- 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 – 2 aged regen harvest
- Commercial thinning of pine plantations to improve forest health
- Non-commercial thinning of pine plantations to improve forest health
- Maintenance of oak forest – commercial thinning
- Maintenance of oak forest – non-commercial midstory reduction
- Create young forest (ESH) by daylighting roads and permanent openings – two aged regen harvest
- Restoring open woodland habitats on appropriate sites – noncommercial thinning
- Replacement of culverts, fords, or bridges to increase aquatic organism passage (AOP) and function



# CRD - Mooneyham Project Implementation

- Non-commercial oak midstory treatment – planned implementation in FY24 underway, partnering with Ruffed Grouse Society to collect data and develop a contract to do the work.
- Existing Turkeybeard prescribed burn planned for spring of 2024

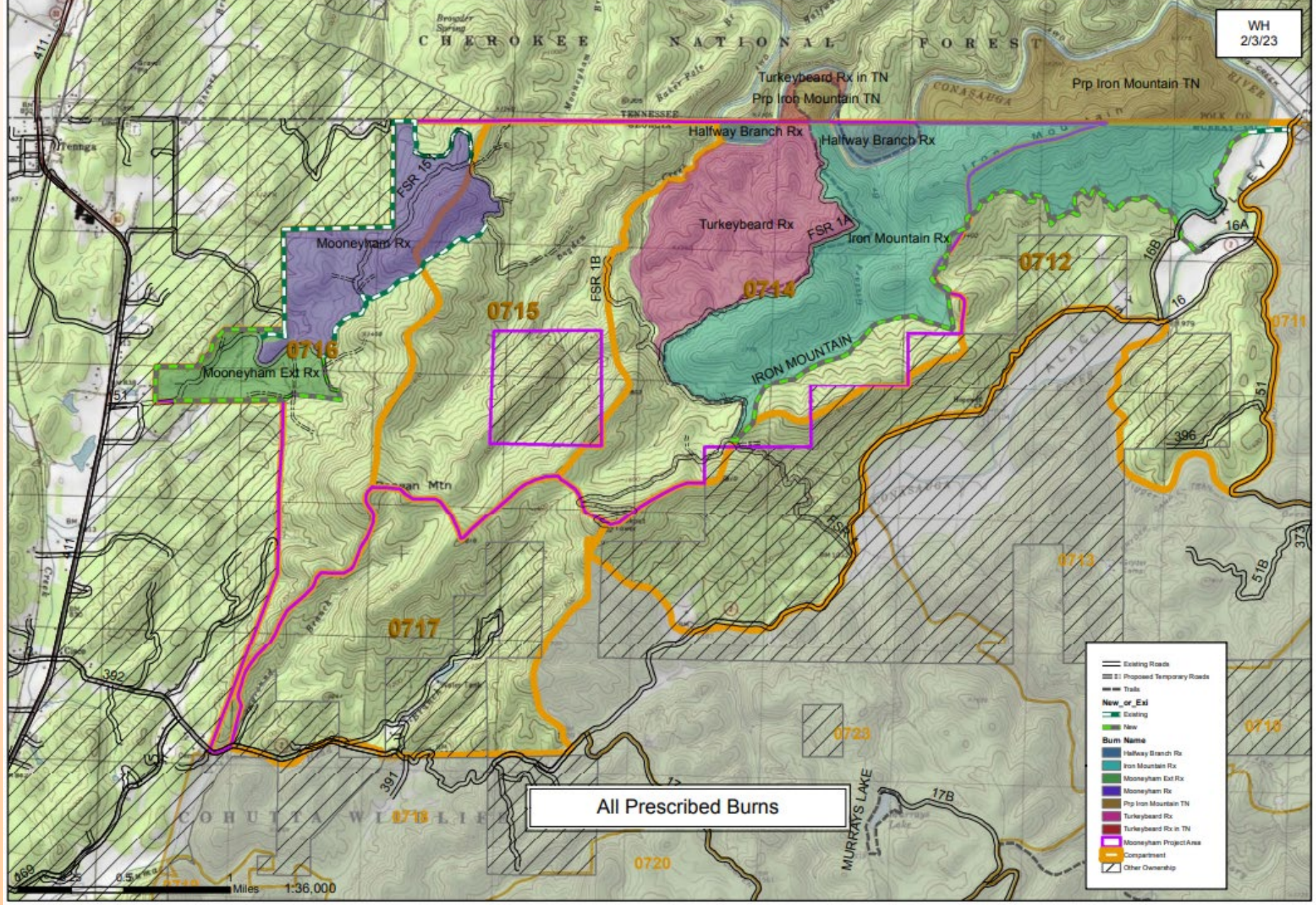


Mooneyham Implementation Area - Foothills Landscape Project  
Conasauga Ranger District, Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest



- Mooneyham timber sale is currently being cruised and marked, planned advertisement in FY24
- Some road maintenance has been done to FSR-151, including gravel placement, repair of a washout and replacement of several culverts.





# Mooneyham Implentation Area - Foothills Landscape Project

Conasauga Ranger District, Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest





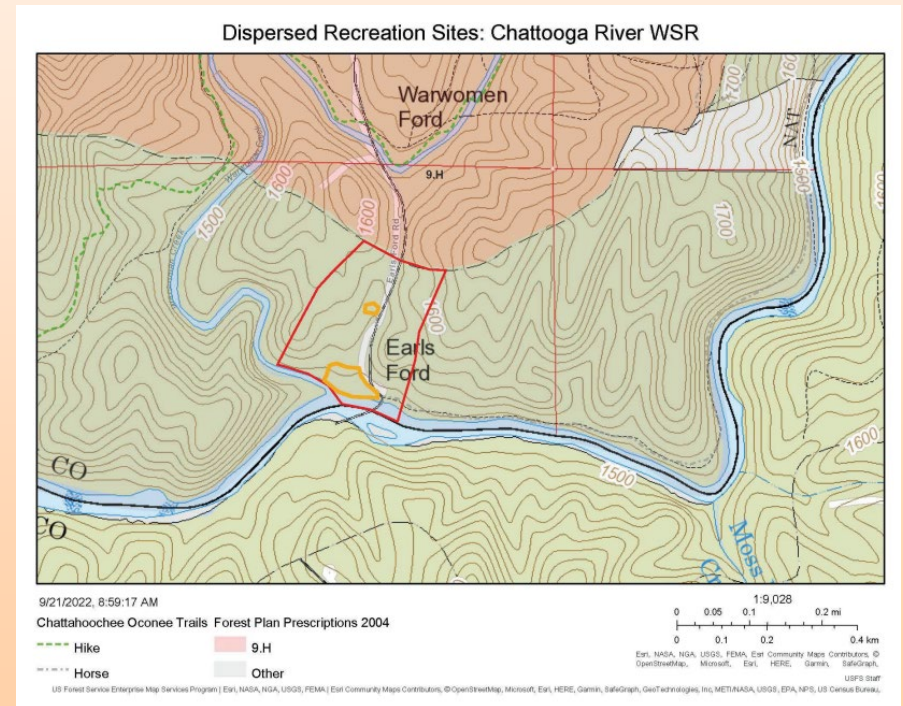
# 2023 Accomplishments

District	Implementation Area	Action	Units Accomplished
CRD	Mill Creek/Rockflat Branch	Convert the Rocky Flats OHV trail back to a system road	3.36 miles
CRD	Upper Conasauga	Continuation of Rx burning - Buffalo Rx Unit	26 acres
CRD	Mill Creek/Rockflat Branch	Continuation of Rx Burning - Rocky Flats Rx Unit	77 acres
CRRD	Tallulah River	Continuation of Rx Burning – Slick Shoals Rx Unit	1,943 acres
CRRD	Tiger	Continuation of Rx Burning – Stonewall Rx Unit	338 acres



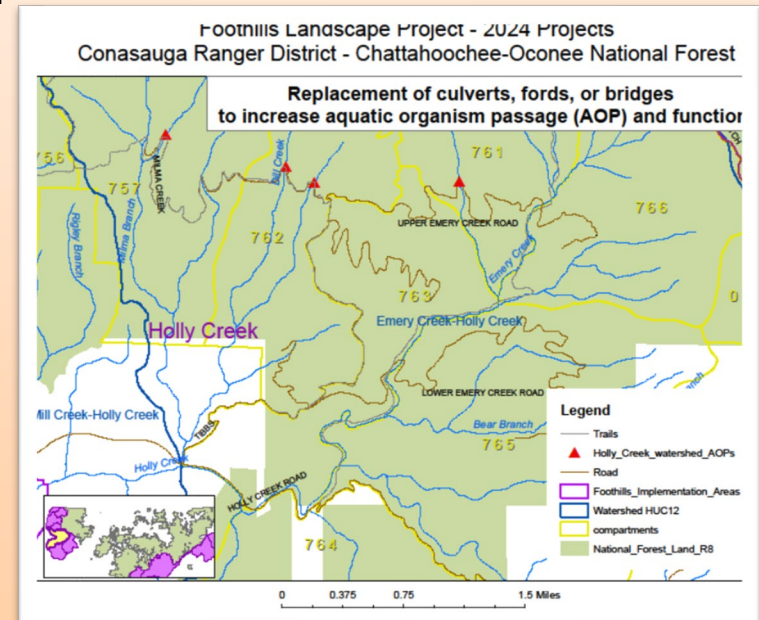
# CRRD Sarah's Creek IA Earls Ford Project

- Eliminate ability for motorized vehicles to operate outside the established Earls Ford Road prism, and onto NFS lands within the WSR Corridor:
- Rehabilitate 1.0 acres of riparian habitat within the SMZ of the Chattooga River that has been impacted.
- Achieve desired watershed and riparian restoration objectives within the WSR Corridor



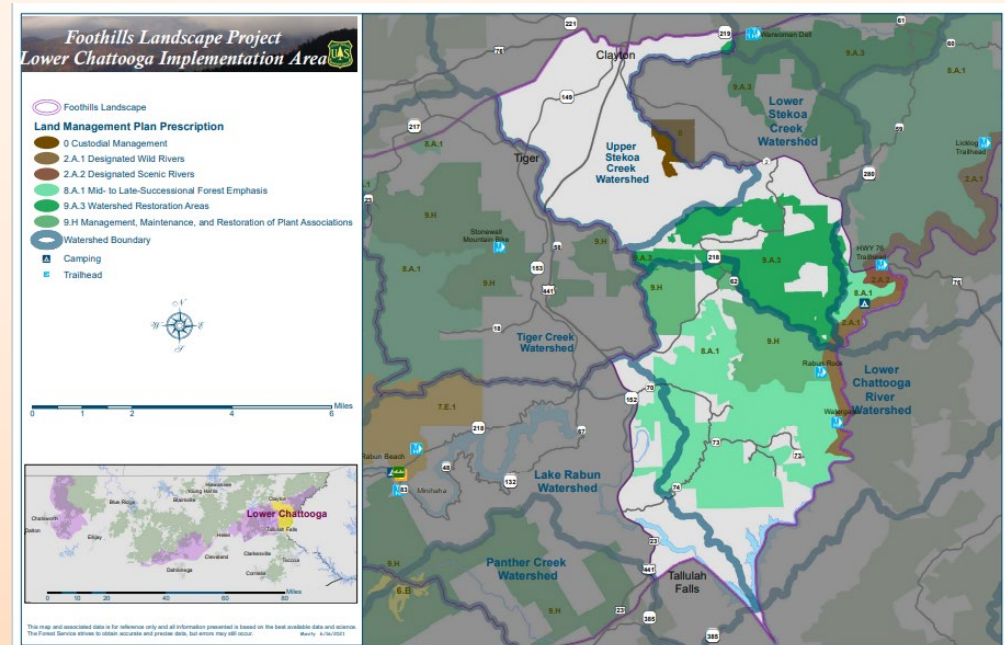
# CRD Holly Creek IA Aquatic Organism Passage Project

- Culvert assessments were completed on multiple culverts in the Holly Creek watershed during 2022.
- There are 4 culverts that are complete barriers to aquatic organism passage (AOP). Emery Creek, Milma Branch, and Dill Creek
- All three streams are Holly Creek tributaries with important endemic fish fauna.
- Increase aquatic connectivity in cold and warm water streams by decreased number of barriers to AOP.
- 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.



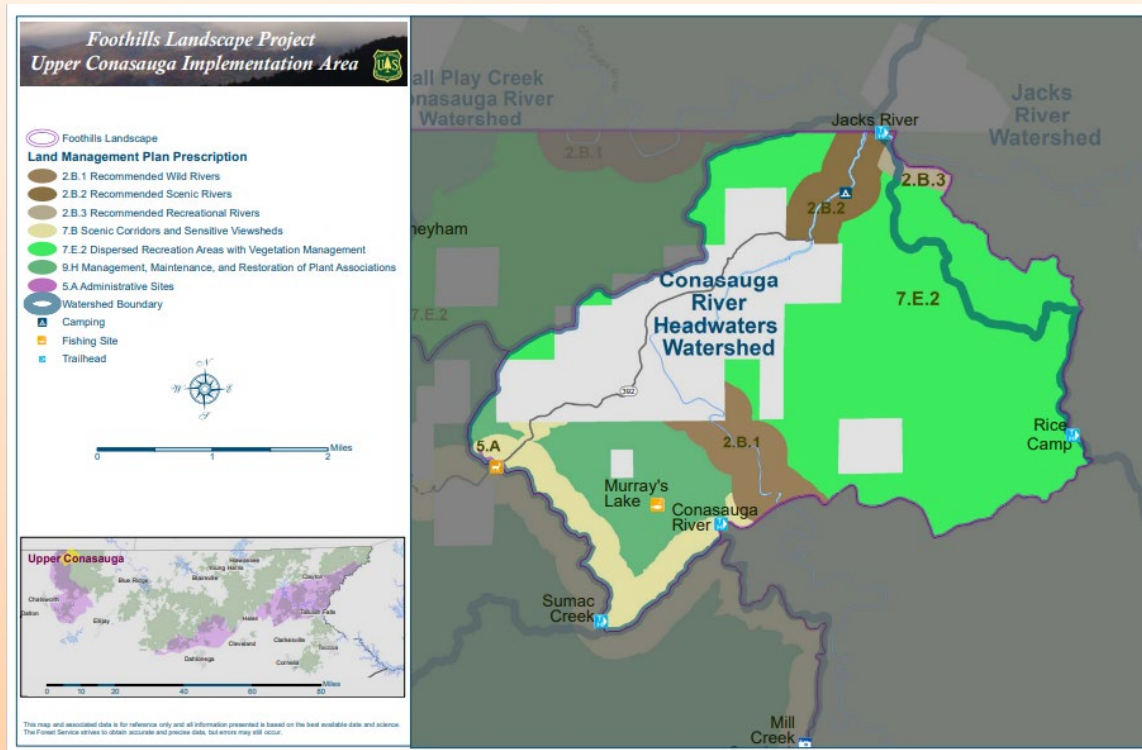
# CRRD - Out-year Planning

- For the Chattooga River Ranger District, the next interdisciplinary, collaborative project will be in the Lower Chattooga implementation area.
- Planned presentation to the FCG in FY24.
- Stand inventory is currently ongoing.
- Proposed vegetation treatments will involve a variety of southern yellow pine maintenance and restoration, woodland restoration, and oak/pine maintenance.
- Many of these treatments will be accompanied with prescribed burns which will also assist in reducing hazardous fuels in the WUI.
- Dispersed recreation management opportunities and improvements to the existing road system for soil and water quality.
- The Lower Chattooga IA was chosen for the first entry on the CRRD due to good accessible and operable roads for vegetation projects, a multitude of overstocked stands in need of restoration and maintenance, and for soil and water quality improvement, as the watershed condition is functioning at risk and feeds directly into the wild & scenic Chattooga River corridor.



# CRD - Out-year Planning

- For the Conasauga Ranger District, the next interdisciplinary, collaborative project will be in the Upper Conasauga implementation area (described in Foothills EA as “Jigger Creek” IA).

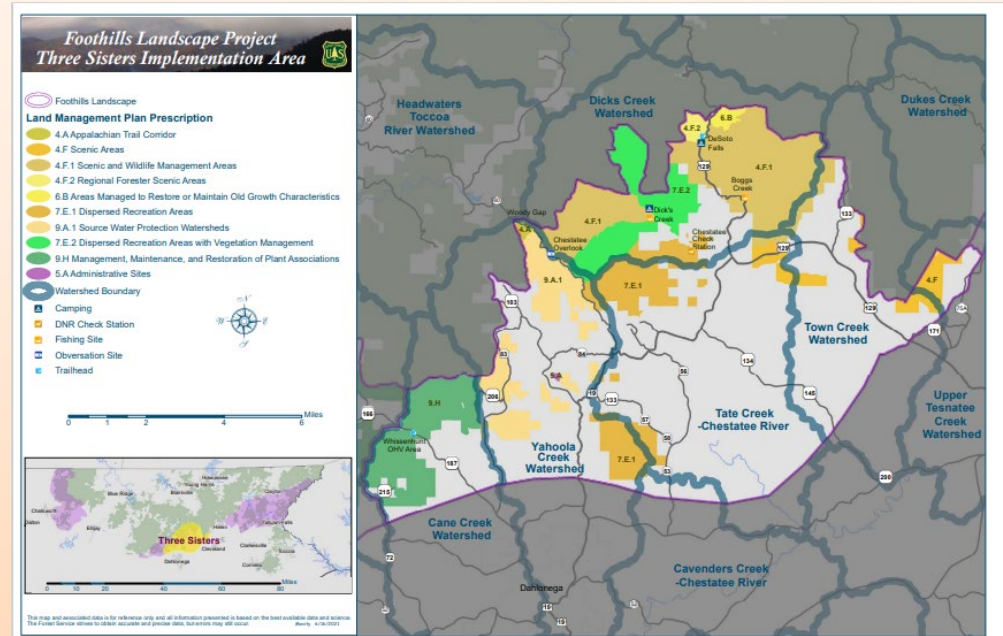


- Planned presentation to the FCG in FY25. Field recon has begun - expect a similar suite of actions as adjacent Mooneyham.
- The Upper Conasauga IA was chosen because of adjacency to Mooneyham IA and ongoing work there, critical aquatic habitat in the Conasauga River watershed, good access via the existing transportation system and known management needs.



# BRRD - Out-year Planning

- For the Blue Ridge Ranger District, the next interdisciplinary, collaborative project will be in the Three Sisters implementation.
- Planned presentation to the FCG in FY25 or FY26.
- Limited field recon has occurred.
- The BRRD is partnering with GA DNR to identify focal areas and treatments to increase habitat for nongame and game wildlife species adjacent to known populations.
- Treatments may include prescribed burning, noncommercial vegetation management, vegetation management through commercial timber sales, expanding and / or feathering the edges of existing wildlife openings, road daylighting, establishing linear wildlife openings on some existing road segments.
- The Three Sisters area was chosen due to the proximity of recent treatments under the Forest Health Stewardship EA, the ability to work collaboratively with DNR under the Good Neighbor Authority, and the opportunity to improve habitat for a wide variety of wildlife species in the Chestatee WMA.



# Thank you for your engagement with this process!

Visit [www.fs.usda.gov/goto/Foothills](http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/Foothills) for project information and updates.

Email your feedback to [sm.fs.Foothills@usda.gov](mailto:sm.fs.Foothills@usda.gov)

Register for updates on the Foothills Landscape Project [www.fs.usda.gov/conf](http://www.fs.usda.gov/conf)

